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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1936

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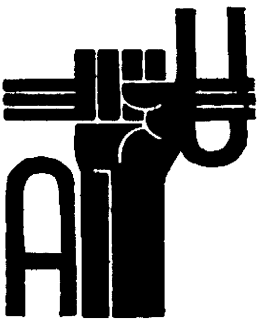
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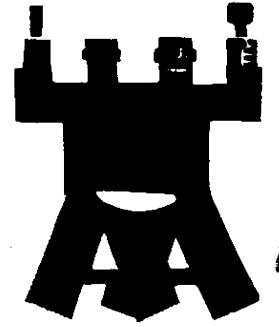
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# ART FRONT

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER  
1936



## PREVAILING WAGES FOR ARTISTS

**T**HE efforts of the Artists Coordination Committee in New York have been successful in establishing a precedent of great importance to artists throughout the country.

On a production basis, the artist has now won a minimum wage scale of \$1.60 per hour, recognized by the Administration in New York. A campaign is now under way to establish this scale throughout the country.

The original demand of \$2.00 per hour, with a minimum 15-hour week on the projects has not been surrendered by the New York union. A ruling by the President made a wage increase impossible, and as the only alternative, too great a decrease in hours might cripple production on the projects, the compromise of \$1.60 per hour for 15 hours was accepted by the Coordination Committee for approval by the membership of the various organizations involved.

One determining factor in the acceptance of the compromise was the fact that the Administration was about to put into effect a much less attractive wage scale in New York, and that in some parts of the country working hours were actually increased and wages cut under so-called prevailing wage arrangements. Baltimore, for instance, with a wage scale of \$86.10 with hours increased to 123. In the agreement the New York Union reserved the right, under changed conditions, to press its demands for the \$2.00 per hour wage scale.

The following brief prepared by the Coordination Committee and submitted to the Administration, will give a clear picture of the method used in arriving at a prevailing wage for artists:

The only way to establish a prevailing wage rate for the Federal Art Project is to refer to already established prevailing wages in organized labor bodies of the American Federation of Labor whose membership consists of creative artists

and artist-craftsmen. The following are the wage rates of some of these unions:

New York Sign Writers Local No. 230 of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paper hangers of America:

Advertising designer, \$18.00 a day, 7 hour day outdoor letterer, \$14.70 a day, 7 hour day; theatrical showcard artist, \$14.55 a day, 7 hour day.

Modelers and Sculptors of America Membership engaged in creating original designs in sculpture and ornament for buildings, monuments, gardens, etc.:

Daily wage scale from \$15.40 minimum to \$31.40 maximum, dependent on their individual rating within the union.

United Scenic Artists, Local 829, B. P. & P. 11 of A. Membership composed of creative designers and artist craftsmen engaged in the creation and execution of theatre sets:

Art director, \$250 per week; charge-man, \$3.12½ per hour, 8 hour day; journeyman, \$2.25 per hour, 8 hour day.

Teachers Union, Local 5, A. F. of L., American Federation of Teachers:

Art teachers in high schools—approximate average wage \$45 per week.

On the basis of these established rates in private industry, the creative artists, artist-craftsmen and art teachers on the Federal Art Project are demanding:

1. A minimum wage of \$2.00 per hour.

2. A minimum wage of \$2.50 per hour for all artists engaged in supervisory capacity in the direction of art work.

3. A minimum work week of 15 hours.

The quantity and quality of the work produced on the Federal Art Project is primarily dependent on a feeling of confidence by the artist workers that the Art Project Administration has a real concern about the quantity and quality of production.

The establishment of the prevailing wage as above outlined will inspire this confidence and work for the best interests of the project.

As a basic wage scale for all artists working on a production basis, whether

on projects or not, this precedent should be valuable. Artists doing work for the World's Fair, for example, thus find themselves equipped with a recognized minimum wage scale.

## UNIONS, ARTISTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

### PITTSBURGH, PA.

Artist Union formed rapidly growing in membership—discussion at present centers around following points:

The Federal Arts Bill.

The economic status of the artist under fascism.

Reports of the first American Artist Congress.

Other similar subjects.

For information write Robert Brown, 37 Miller St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

### NEW ORLEANS, LA.

A branch of the American Artists Congress has been formed in New Orleans—it is active in supporting issues raised by other artists organizations.

For information write Myron Lechay, 906 Royal Street, New Orleans, La.

### BALTIMORE, MD.

Artists on project receiving \$86.90 for 96 hours work were cut July 1, to \$86.10 and had their hours increased to 123—this amounts to about a 25 per cent rate cut. Only 17 artists on project—7 on non-relief quota. The threat of the W.P.A. Administration to cut the non-relief quota from 25 to 10 per cent which was hinted might mean the actual discontinuation of the project in Maryland, was met with sharp objection by Baltimore Artists Union and has not been carried through, the Union has presented its list of unemployed artists and demanded an immediate extension of the project to provide jobs for all those in need of work. It is also carrying on negotiations for a wage increase and is prepared to fight to win an adequate project at decent wages and hours. It is

practically impossible to obtain relief in Baltimore. The Union is prepared to fight.

For information write Mervin Jules, 402 St. Paul St., Baltimore, Md.

#### BOSTON, MASS.

State Conference of Artists Union called in Boston on August 6, 7. The Springfield, Provincetown and Boston Unions met with a representative from Rockport—the delegates discussed the problems of state-wide organization—an agreement was reached on the formation of a state council having delegates from each local and meeting periodically to coordinate action taken on the project—a state organizer elected to establish locals in Worcester, Hartford and other cities—other points taken up included statewide coordination between the Union and non-union organizations, the possibility of a travelling exhibition for New England to be drawn from the Unions—the rental policy—Federal Arts Bill.

For information write James Pfeuffer, 6 Boylston Place, Boston, Mass.

#### NEW MEXICO

The Taos Artists Association writes in to inquire the proper procedure for the association to become a member of the Artists' Unions. It is hoped by the next issue of ART FRONT to have more news about this group.

For information write: Emil Bistran, Secretary, Taos Artists' Association, Taos, N. M.

#### CHICAGO, ILL.

Artists Union of Chicago is fighting reactionary administration—collective bargaining is a principle not respected by this administration. The F.A.P. Administrator, Mrs. Increase Robinson, denies many benefits to the artists intended by the Administration in Washington, by refusing to enforce ruling now in operation in other sections of the country. Confronted by intimidation and the refusal to grant any of the Union demands, the Chicago Union picketed the offices of the Administration. Other white-collar organizations contributed funds and members for the picket line, police attempts to stop legal picketing brought the support of the Chicago Federation of Labor. The Chicago Federation of Labor will back the Artists Union to the limit in its fight to picket. Despite these strenuous activities the Union still finds time to fight for the prevailing wage.

For information write Sidney Loeb, 2818 Sheridan Road, Chicago, Ill.

#### NEW YORK

The artists coordination committee gained an important point and established a precedent when it won a prevailing wage rate of \$1.60 per hour for artists.

Reorganization of ART FRONT magazine being planned with wide artists representation to make the magazine the most important in the field of contemporary art.

Union pushing for expansion and permanency of Art Projects. To this end the Union is enlisting the active support of the local communities.

Preparing campaign to push Federal Art Bill which is nearing its final stages of completion.

#### NEW JERSEY

New Artists Union formed with assistance of New York Artists Union will eventually cover entire state with different locals in various districts of state. In three weeks time membership has doubled. This is a young but active organization.

For information write New York Artists Union, 430 Sixth Avenue New York City.

#### PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Present activities of the Philadelphia Artists Union:

Rental policy.

Active in fighting interests of progressive painters.

Fighting for prevailing wages.

For information write Herbert Jennings, 12 Walnut Street Philadelphia, Pa.

## PHOTOGRAPHER AS ARTIST

by Berenice Abbott

**M**ORE than a hundred years have passed since Nicéphore Niépce and Louis J. M. Daguerre made the discoveries from which modern photography has evolved. In that century of experimentation and technical development, the machinery of photography has been tremendously improved, with the invention and perfection of lenses, shutters, cameras and sensitive materials making possible photographic achievements undreamed of in the medium's early days. Faster lenses with better optical correction have resulted in ever greater speed, as have faster plates and films. Here in the compact neat box of the camera and in the precise scientific procedure of the dark-room is the real 20th century medium.

Speed—that is the characteristic which differentiates the 20th century from preceding centuries. Speed of transportation, speed of communications, speed of

technological evolution, speed of manufacturing processes, these tangible applied scientific expressions of speed have as their intangible psychical counterpart the speed with which history in our time has accelerated its tempo. Speed is, therefore, the first quality that the art of the 20th century must possess. Practically, photography with its present ultimate of the f. 1.5 lens is able to catch the tangible and physical aspects of speed, by which the intangible and psychical aspects may be suggested. No other medium has this capacity for instantaneous observation, this all-seeing eye which (in comparison with the painter or draftsman) seems to function with the speed of light.

It is a cliché that 19th century painting had to turn away from representationalism because the emerging technic of photography could do the representational thing far better than could the brush or

pencil. In art (by which was meant the plastic and pictorial arts, but not the photographic) there was no place left for the artist to go but toward abstract and experimental manners. Today having for the time being exhausted the exploration of these abstruse and cerebral areas, art must turn again to realism for the sustenance of solid subject matter. The trend away from romanticism, of whatever sort, whether of the emotions or of the intellect, creates the need for a medium which can deal adequately and faithfully with the complexity of 20th century life, which can convey with fervor and completeness the present's social and documentary emphasis.

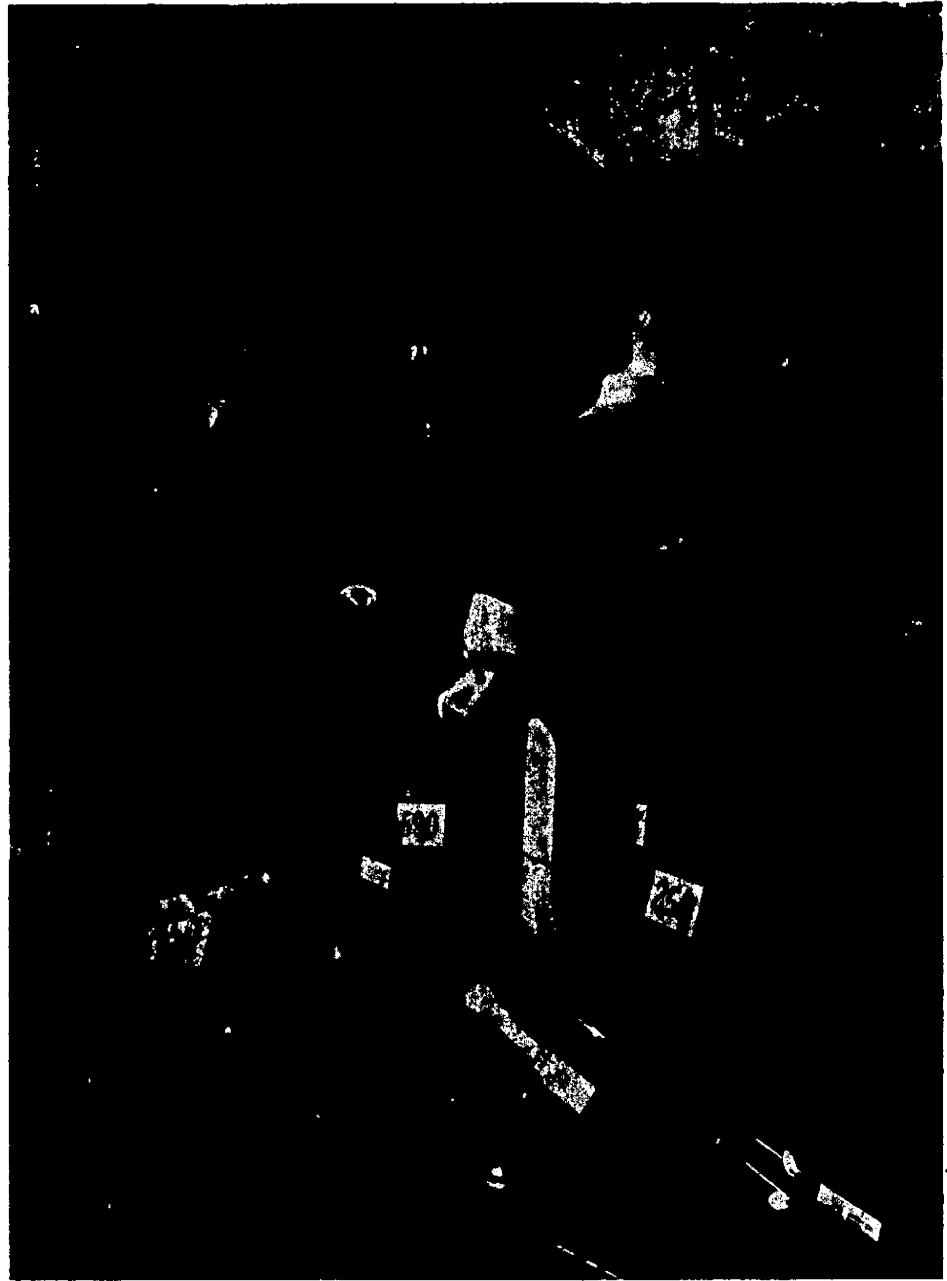
Yet, although photography is technically equipped for its 20th century role, there is no general acceptance of the medium, certainly not by the lay public and regrettably often not by practitioners

of the older art mediums. If anything would make an honest woman of photography, one would think it would have been the unquestioned esthetic achievements of pioneers like Nadar, David Octavius Hill, Brady and Atget. The work of these early photographers attained a high degree of excellence, not only in a documentary sense but also in a formal sense. Their prints show, whatever the limitations of early photographic equipment, a profound concern for composition, organization of forms, and textures. By virtue of the simplicity and directness enforced on them because of the limits of 19th century photographic apparatus, i.e., slowness of lenses and plates, they preserve in their work the qualities of the great pictorial tradition, arrangement within an area, occupation of two-dimensional space, etc. If photography never went beyond Atget, it would still have left enduring monuments of art.

As implied above, photography today has far greater technical capacities than it had during its first century of life. The anastigmatic lens, the compound shutter, the bellows camera, the color-sensitive film, all collaborate to widen the photographer's horizon. This self-evident truth is understood and accepted by some present-day photographers and critics. However, a wider public acceptance is necessary before photography can completely fulfil itself as the twentieth century medium.

In the evolution of photography as an art there is a clear and continuous tradition. The early daguerreotypes (the first latent images on a sensitive emulsion) often possess that intellectual and esthetic addition made by the artist to his subject which we say constitutes the difference between art and nature. The portraits of Nadar and of Hill, the latter originally a painter, the powerful Civil War scenes of Brady, the vast Parisian panorama of Atget, these are the sources of an authentic photographic tradition for contemporary workers in the medium. Here we have masterpieces of art equal in quality and merit to the oils, water colors and prints of the times in which these men lived and worked. Already it has been demonstrated that photography is an art. This is all the more notable because a century is an extremely brief period of time for a new invention to achieve a form and personality of its own. Now it remains for photographers to go forward from the point reached by their nineteenth century forebears.

In applying photography to the problems, historical and artistic, of the twentieth century, the photographer can, however, be greatly aided by a glance, even



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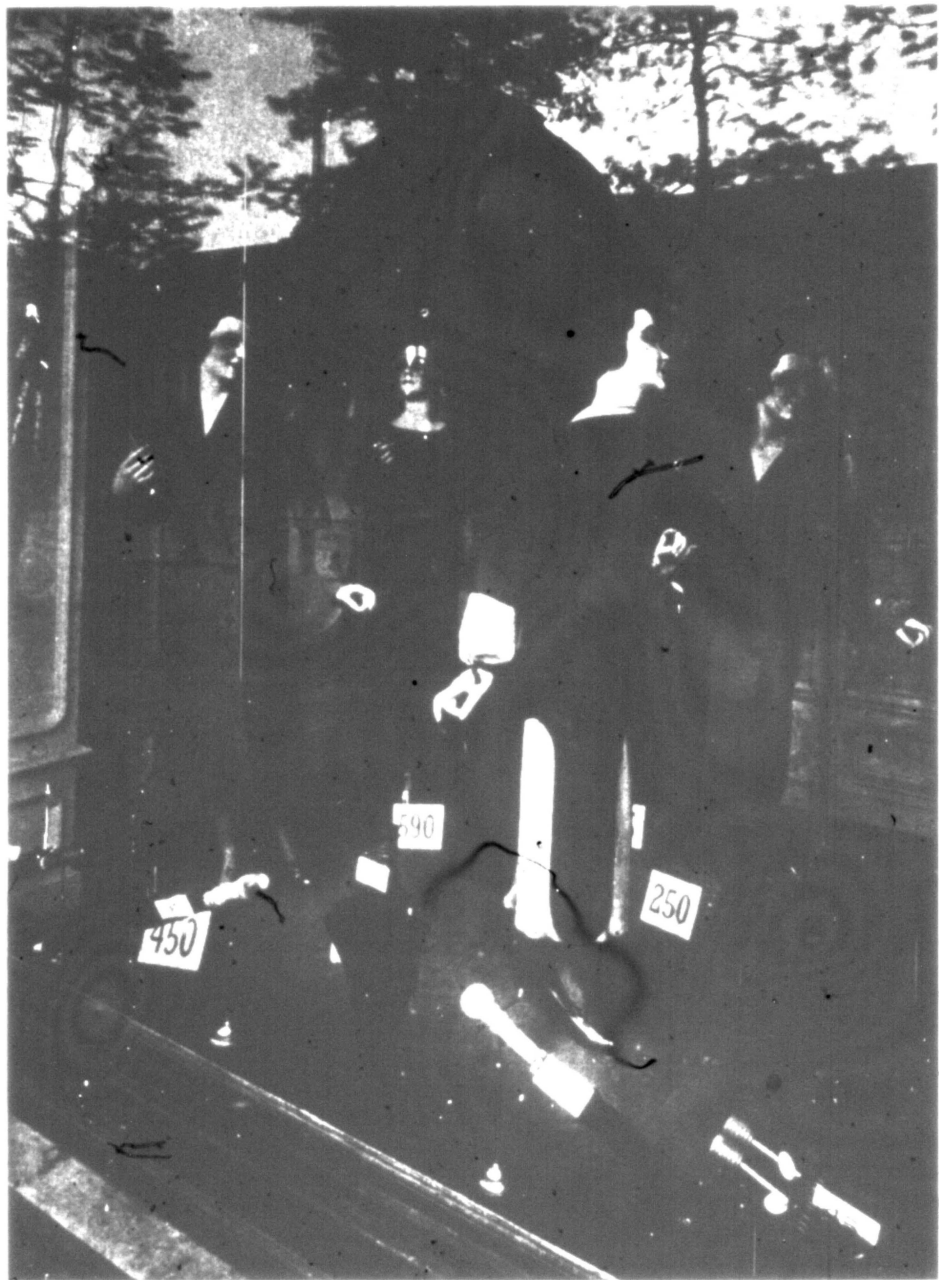
Atget

*Courtesy Collection Berenice Abbott*

if but cursory, at the work of these pioneers who emancipated photography from its slavery to painting and thereby set the standards for it to function as an independent art. From the earliest announcements of the new chemico-physical process discovered by Daguerre and Niepce in 1839, there was an immediate appreciation of its potentialities for art. Daguerre was himself a painter and lithographer; Niepce had experimented with lithography. Thus when the scientists of Paris came to examine the new invention, it was but natural that we should find them saying as did the physicist, Dominique, and the chemist, Gay-Lussac, that the most significant contribution of the daguerreotype was its "usefulness for

art" and the daguerreotype was a means of "representing still life with a perfection unattainable in the usual procedure of drawing and painting, a consummateness like Nature's own."

To the scientists' enthusiasm was added that of the painter, Paul Delaroche. Photography, he said, would be "of infinite service to the arts," "it so far realized certain essential requirements of art" that it would eventually "become an object of study and observation for even the most distinguished painters." Today with Siqueiros painting in duco in photographic enlargements and with every other easel painter possessing himself of a miniature camera, these are certainly words of prophecy. Delaroche's last



word on the subject was: "From today, painting is dead." A few years later, the Frenchman, Disderi, and the Englishman, Robinson, wrote treatises on "Photography as a plastic art" and sought to found an esthetics of photography.

The real fathers of photography as an art were not, however, the men who wrote critically or scientifically of its possibilities but the pioneers who utilized those possibilities, Daguerre, David Octavius Hill, Matthew Brady, Nadar (pseudonym for Gaspard Felix Tournachon) and Atget. The daguerreotypes often possess great beauty of form and quality as well as historical value. They were, nevertheless, limited, especially by the fact that but a single copy could be made. Almost simultaneously with Daguerre and Niepce, the Englishman, Fox Talbot was experimenting with the camera obscura, which he first used as an aid in drawing landscapes in Italy. Ultimately he invented the calotype, printed from paper negative on silver-chloride paper. And from this invention came a notable body of work, the portraits of Hill.

In Hill's history we have an extraordinary example of how science saved a man from oblivion. A second or third rate painter, Hill became a master photographer. Starting his photographic career because he wanted to paint a large historical canvas of a Scottish religious assembly, an affair of some 57 square feet with 500 faces, he found himself carrying on, as it were by a miracle, the tradition of English portrait painting. His calotype portraits, ranging in tone from a delicate violet to sepia and dark brown, are a national gallery of the middle class of his time. They possess, besides their documentary significance, great formal and pictorial merit. Here we have, as we have later in Atget's case, the spectacle of an artist who seemed determined to torture himself with the limitations of his machine; for Hill never took advantage of later discoveries in lenses and processes, but continued with his simple lens, which required that sitters would have to hold a pose from three to six minutes. Here again we have the sense that these physical limitations were welded into form by the will and conscious intention of the photographer.

With Nadar also photography proved itself as a medium for portraiture. In one year, 1859, a series of inspired portraits came from his studio, representing the whole intellectual life of Paris,—Berlioz, Ciceri, Daumier, Dore, Gautier, Guizot, Millet, Philippon and many others.

But it remained for other men to widen the field of photography, notably the American Brady, best known for his



Wonders of Our Time

Ida Abelman

Courtesy Federal Graphic Art Project

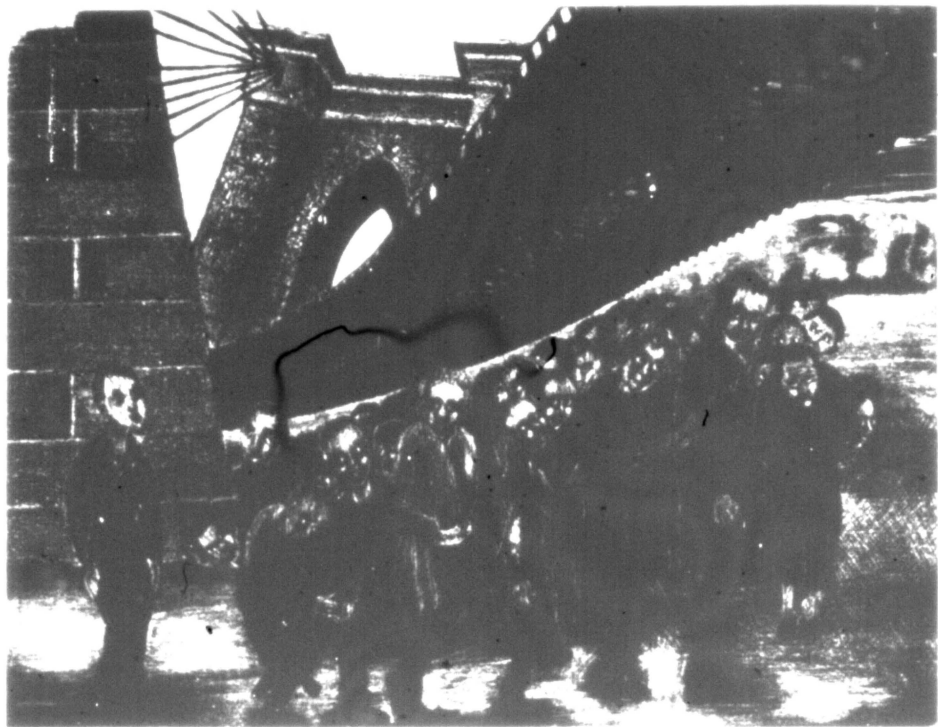
Civil War scenes. A boy of 16 he had begun his experiments in the same year that Niepce's and Daguerre's invention was announced. At 19 he set up a studio at the corner of Broadway and Fulton; and his portraits quickly won him fame, as well as blue ribbons at various world's fairs. In 1850 he published "A Gallery of Illustrious Americans," equally successful. In 1855 he took up the newly invented wet plate process and widened his business activities, opening a second studio in New York and one in Washington. It was the financial proceeds of this very American enterprising which enabled Brady to make his really remarkable photographs of the Civil War. He bankrupted himself in this adventure. But the world is richer by the first great documentary photographic record, though unfortunately the archives of the War Department in Washington is scarcely the place for a national artistic monument.

Here photography had reached out to picture the world of action. There was no posing of dead men, no stage setting for battle scenes. It was reality he photographed, the objective world, a world which in this case happened to be a world of war and death. Here in a sense was the birth of the moving picture, the emerging mood which made it necessary for science to create ever faster and faster photographic apparatus with which to capture the accelerating tempo of history.

Atget, coming a quarter of a century later, did not find himself confronted with war as his theme: His theme was society, its facades and bourgeois interiors, its incredible contrasts and paradoxes. It was the vast scope of this world, the changing 19th century world, that Atget sought to imprison in his photographs. Because of the extreme sensitiveness and beauty of his conception, one cannot but state unequivocally that in the creation of the tradition for photography no one man has played a greater part.

Eugene Atget died in 1927, for all practical purposes unknown and unsung. Working for over 30 years with primitive equipment, critically handicapped by lack of funds, Atget nevertheless produced a vast bulk of work, the most beautiful photographs yet made. Armed with a crude dix-huit et vingt-quatre camera, heavier and less compact than the standard 8x10 of today, having only one lens, a rectilinear which gave depth of focus at the cost of loss of speed, Atget worked within the limits of his machinery, transmuting these very limitations into positive esthetic virtues, whether by intuition or by conscious intention we cannot dogmatically state. However, the internal evidence of his prints leaves no doubt that he was a great master:

A provincial actor till he was 40, Atget set himself up in Paris with a shingle which read "Documents pour artistes." Since he was almost totally unrecognized





in his lifetime, it is hard to speak with authority of his real motives and ideas; he did not speak, in his old age, of what he sought in his work; he only did the work and left it to speak for itself and him; and indeed, his work is the best source book for knowledge of his principles. One cannot say, therefore, whether this sign contained an ironic note as well as a utilitarian one. The fact remains that many well known Parisian artists did buy photographs from Atget, to include them as details in their canvasses, among their number being men as far apart in their styles as Utrillo and Braque.

The sale of documents for artists was, however, only an incidental occupation for Atget. His real business, after he belatedly found his metier, was to create an incomparable photographic portrait of Paris, its architectural monuments, its palaces, its fountains and grilles, its markets and street-vendors, its "boutiques" and brothels, its petit-bourgeois interiors and rag-pickers' huts, trees in the parks of St. Cloud and Versailles, plows and peasants' carts in the outskirts of the city. To carry on this work, Atget was compelled to sell his photographs for a few

francs apiece—when he could—thereby securing funds to buy more plates and printing paper. But, from the fury and passion with which he devoted himself to his self-appointed task, it is clear he knew very well in the depths of his own heart that he was creating a body of work of great value and importance. In his old age he was a silent man, who did not expose either his work or his heart to the world. But he worked away unrelentingly, producing thousands of photographs which except for a miracle would have been lost to the future.

One cannot say of Atget that his work has influenced contemporary photography to any great extent. His work was barely known when he died a decade ago; it is little known now, unfortunately. Yet the values that control his creative effort are standards which should be basic in that tradition for 20th century photography of which we are speaking. These values are a relentless fidelity to fact, a deep love of the subject for its own sake, a profound feeling for materials and surfaces and textures, a conscience intent on permitting the subject photographed to live by virtue of its own form and life, rather

than by the false endowment of memory or sentimental association.

To carry these principles into effect, Atget used legitimate devices of the artist. Distortion, not in a self-conscious intellectual fashion, but in an intuitive and visual sense, was one of these devices. Plainly Atget deliberately makes use in some of his pictures of the distortion forced upon him by the inadequacy of his one lens, a rectilinear which (while it gave great sharpness of definition to his images) had many shortcomings, such as lack of coverage, curvature of the field and lack of speed. But aside from this rationalization of his handicaps, Atget had a strong esthetic awareness, manifested for example in the way in which his photographs express the very air of Paris, gray and moist. Here he presented a physical fact which had a wider significance than the mere visually observed object; only through selection of such significant facts can the artist create reality; and this reality Atget did indeed create in his work, which becomes thereby the demonstration of photography as art and the foundation of the tradition for photography.

# NEW HORIZONS

by Elizabeth Noble

**T**HE Federal Art Project, completing its first year of activity, is now presenting the results in one bang-up, comprehensive exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. It is too much to hope that Hearst and the other gentlemen of the press who have been so fond of hurling "boondoggling" charges at the arts projects will take the time to visit "New Horizons in American Art" or even that if they did, they would be of the temper and intelligence to understand what it proves. It does prove, however, that the government was more than justified in extending aid, even though meager and restricted, to artists and that artists have been more than justified in their militant fight to retain and expand that assistance.

The Federal Art Project got under way in August, 1935. Its voyage since has been at all times a stormy one, with

constant threats of layoffs and complete stoppage, with incessant struggle by the workers to maintain minimum rights. And even the recent gain by the artists of the 15-hour week at the same wage previously paid for the 30-hour week does not lessen the strain created by events contemporaneous with the opening of the exhibition on September 16,—the presence of policemen at the New York City Art Project headquarters, the threat of drastic curtailment in the quota of non-relief workers, the effort to compel non-relief workers to go through the painful and unnecessary machinery of certification of need, and the refusal of the government to grant Labor Day as a holiday. These events do not create the greatest happiness among workers; and it is therefore with inevitable mental reservation that one looks at "New

Horizons in American Art." The new horizons will never be very rosy until they can be looked forward to with assurance that the Federal Art Project is on a permanent and non-political basis.

Yet, despite these obstacles which would seem insuperable in view of the delicate and sensitive nature of the creative process, the Federal Art Project has more than paid its way. The several hundred items on view at the Museum of Modern Art, ranging from sketches and cartoons for murals, easel paintings, sculpture and children's work to the meticulous water color plates and renderings of the Index of American Design, constitute an exhibit which can not be dismissed, either by cynical reactionaries or by precious intellectuals. It has been the claim of the promoters of the project, at the top as well as at the bottom, that

America has a great unrevealed wealth of talent and that it would be a more than crime to permit this talent to waste away unused. Now this talent is being used, to the number of over 5,000 men and women throughout the nation. A year is a short time to breed a renaissance; and perhaps the 20th century should not think of anything remotely resembling a renaissance, since that word connotes the historical value of the 15th century, not of the present. But already the artists of America have demonstrated that there are new horizons to be discovered, once let society make an organic place for the artist.

Three and a half floors at the Museum of Modern Art have been devoted to the Federal Art Project exhibition. It is interesting to wander through the displays, with memories of other exhibitions which have been seen in the same setting, abstractionists, surrealists, Europeans, African Negro art. But when one remembers that in 1932, the Museum of Modern Art held a splendid exhibition of American folk art, called "The Art of the Common Man in America," and that that exhibition was assembled by Holger Cahill, now national director of the Federal Art Project, the presence of government-supported and American art in the museum does not seem so strange. If the artists of America can now look homeward without fear or indeed live and work at home, that trend was evident several years ago. The economic crisis and the resulting programs to aid cultural workers have only given clearer direction and form to an already emerging tendency.

How that tendency expresses itself in esthetic values is harder to say. One cannot know what pictures or sculptures one is not seeing. One cannot tell what designs for murals have been rejected, which might have been better than those accepted. One cannot be sure how much the individual artist, unconsciously no doubt, may have yielded to his Freudian censor when it came to choosing a subject, social or not. Perhaps generally there has been an effort to make the conceptions and designs as affirmative in mood as possible. This is natural enough, since the creative spirit does not thrive on constant thoughts of death and frustration. The result in the case of the works of art shown is that they seem gayer and less socially critical than one might have expected in a world where an artist plies his brush and mallet at the price of possible blows from a cop's billy.

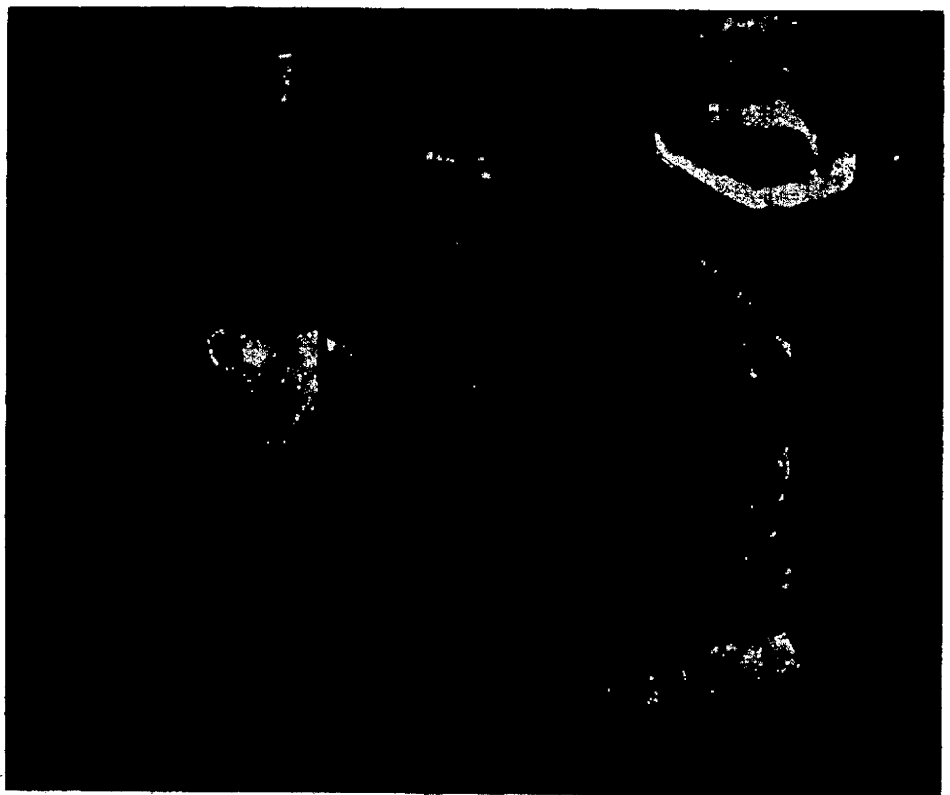
There are 5,300 workers on the Federal Art Project for the whole country, almost half of them in New York City. About 49 per cent are working in the

fine arts, murals, easel painting, graphic arts, sculpture and photography. The other half are employed in various projects, such as teaching, both of adults and of children, in the Design Laboratory and in the surveys of the Index of American Design. Again, almost half of these art workers, in whichever category, are employed in New York City, as would be but natural, since when the tide of art set in strongly to these shores a few years ago, the metropolis became the art capital of the world. Second in numbers and in importance is Chicago, where the native artistic tendencies flourish with less influence from European styles. California also is a center of art activity, as is Massachusetts, home of a half dozen art colonies. But all parts of the United States are fairly and thoroughly represented in the work of the Federal Art Project, and in the items selected for inclusion in "New Horizons of American Art."

Murals, a major section of the fine arts division, cannot be perhaps as abundantly displayed as easel paintings, since a mural in *situ* is not susceptible to exhibition purposes. In this section to date over 434 murals have been completed throughout the country, while some 54 more are in progress of execution, with sketches for many more in preparation. This group in the exhibition is a relatively small but representative group of designs, cartoons and panels. The other fine arts are more

comprehensively exhibited, with the score reading 48 oil paintings, 66 water colors, 52 prints and about 40 works, paintings and sculptures, by children. Sculpture by the adult artists suffers from the same handicaps as do murals, it is in *situ* and therefore only a few examples are shown. On the other hand, the researches of the Index of American Design, which to date has completed 3,500 water color and black and white plates of all types of original American design in the useful arts, are thoroughly canvassed, with especial emphasis on the sternly beautiful Shaker handicrafts and the Spanish colonial tradition carried on in the New Mexican santos and bultos.

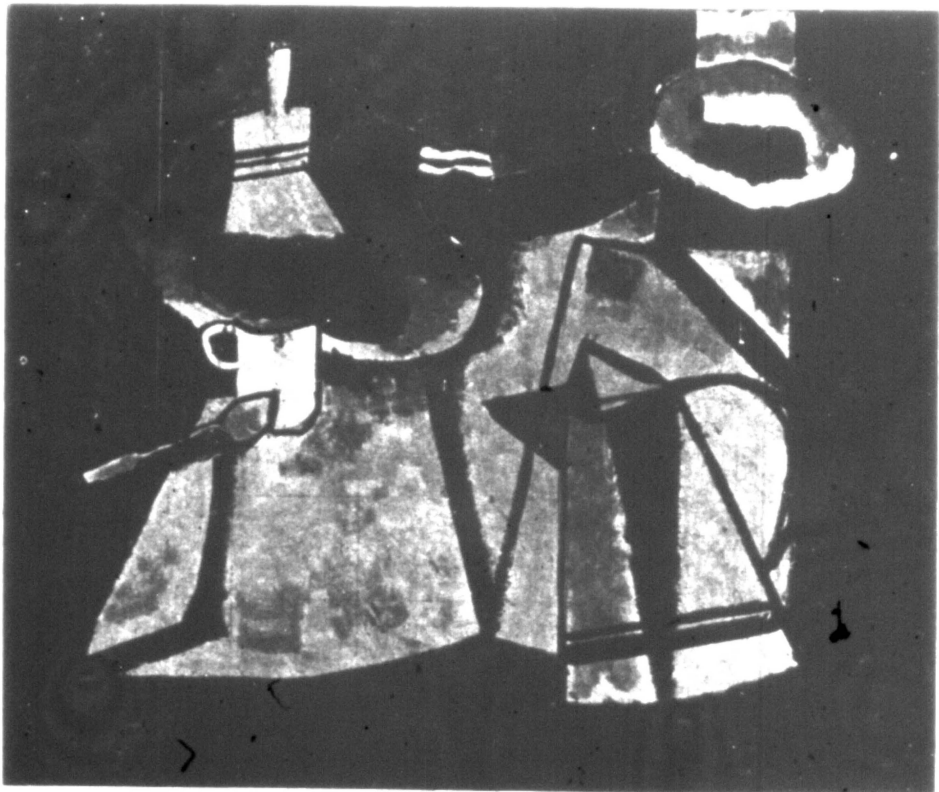
This is indeed a representative cross-section of the work of the Federal Art Project. On its record of achievement the Federal Art Project must stand or fall, unless too many extraneous political and social factors enter the equation. If the casting up of accounts as made by "New Horizons in American Art" were to decide the question whether or not the Federal Art Project is to continue and as a permanent structure, the answer would have to be "Yes" on the basis of actual merit and of promise for the future. For that is the outstanding feature of the exhibition, its astonishingly high level of achievement. There is no question that artists need support as much as any other type of worker. The validity of artists' claims to government aid in



Duck Decoy

Karl Knaths, Massachusetts Artist

From Federal Art Project Exhibition at Museum of Modern Art



Duck Decoy

Karl Knaths, Massachusetts, Artist

the form of work relief is beyond cavil. But what needed to be proved and has not been proved is that the artists are more than worthy of their hire, that in fact the government is getting a bargain, a statement made many times before but not conclusively attested in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

The mental reservations, above stated, need clarification, however. It is not enough to assume that when a painting or a sculpture or a design for a mural has been through the mill, it thereby becomes "good" art. Good art is not born from government ukase or legitimized by government stamp. It would be a deep tragedy for the future of American art, for those horizons of which the heads of the Federal Art Project speak so eloquently, if the art produced under its auspices were to become merely "official" art. There are enough examples of what "official" art is in fascist Italy and in Nazi Germany for free-born, liberty-loving Americans to shun that fate. The alternative to such a possibility is more artist control of art, and less bureaucratic machinery for its creation.

The artist must have freedom to create. And freedom means economic security and permanence of jobs, freedom from needless interruption and diversions of energy, freedom from the mental uncertainty that constant threats to the Federal Art Project cannot help but generate, and most of all freedom freely to observe and record the world. If it is a world of bitter struggle and conflict that the artist observes, he has a right, no, rather he has a duty, to set down the world he sees, not some imagined idyll. This means that if an artist wants to represent war as horrible, he should be free to do so. If he wants to expose the shame and hypocrisies of present day institutions, courts of law, education, medicine, or what he will, he should be permitted to do so, regardless of what art commissions may think proper and polite themes for walls of public buildings. Until the artist has this real freedom, the new horizons of American art will continue to be dim and distant.

*Ed. Note:* "New Horizons in American Art," clothbound, with 176 pages, 102 plates, a catalog of the exhibition, and a 33-page introduction by Holger Cahill, National Director of the Federal Art Project and editor of "Art in America," was published simultaneously with the opening of the exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art and may be obtained there for \$2.50, half price to artists represented in the exhibition. (*Better check on this fact with Museum*). It will be reviewed in next issue of *Art Front*.

## THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SPAIN

by Angel Flores and Ben Ossa  
of the Critics Group

ONE fact has come out patent and clear from the great Spanish upheaval: that the Spanish artist immediately knew who were his allies and who his enemies. The Spanish artist knows the nature of the struggle now raging in Spain. Acquainted with the cultural retrogression which inevitably accompanies fascism, he cast his lot with the progressive, democratic forces represented by the People's Front. As one could have anticipated, artists of the stature of Helios Gomez and Quintanilla, who had suffered in the hands of reaction and spent bitter days in dark prison cells, were not the men destined to write or paint at this crucial hour. Helios Gomez rushed out into the streets of Barcelona, where he was at the time, and after a series of heroic deeds of valor, captured a machine gun from the enemy and with it expressed his pent-up hatred for fascist reaction which to him, as to all intelligent artists, symbolizes the annihilation of art. Quintanilla, too, changed his brush for a gun, and marched on with the workers' army to the Guadarrama mountains. Before leaving for the front he helped with the organization of the heroic women's battalions. The well-known painter, Chicharro, so admired by the Gomez de la Serna's group, is at the front, while the graphic artists Alonso, Peinador, and Puyol have taken charge of the art department of *Milicia Popular*, the army newspaper.

As for the others—for the hundreds of militant artists in Spain, the Spanish newspapers bear eloquent testimony: the Artists Unions of Spain (Union de Dibujantes, Sindicato de Escenógrafos etc.), are taking care of the work of propaganda and education by means of posters and illustrations organizing fighting units, etc., in brief, showing by deed rather than with words, their urgent participation in the defense of democracy.

But the Spanish artists are not alone in their fight. They have numerous allies. They have received stimulating messages of solidarity from the artists of most of the European countries. France, for instance, has spoken especially through two art critics at present in Spain: Elie Faure and Jean Cassou.

After expressing his love for Spain and mentioning his numerous writings on Spanish art and life, Faure broadcasted the following message: "I thought I knew Spain thoroughly . . . but this true Spain of today surpasses in every respect my expectations. I was familiar, of course, with Spain's constant heroism, which could be called innate heroism, but I did not expect my country to be acquainted with it too. This is due to the fact that my country is beginning to understand Spain. On facing the problems of the hour, the vast majority of French citizens feel one with the Spanish People's Front; they realize that the victory of the Spanish fascists will place France—and I am not thinking of Republican France only but of France at large—in a situation much more tragic than that of 1914. Personally I am convinced that the triumph of fascism in Spain would signify death to my country now so threatened on all fronts, whereas the victory of Republican Spain will constitute its strongest bulwark. A few minutes ago a young Spanish woman was telling me anguishingly: "Each young woman, each young man, killed by the fascists in Spain represents one soldier less in the struggle for world liberation."

Cassou, who headed the French anti-fascists delegation to Spain, said: "From an international point of view the case of Spain has paramount significance. If the Rebels are victorious, a similar revolt will break out in France. . . . We have come from France to help in strengthening the unity and militant functioning of the Spanish People's Front. Today more than ever that unity will have to be accomplished. We live at a time when the future of mankind is being decided in Spain."

It is high time that the American artists become fully aware of the world significance of the Spanish struggle. The American artist must express his solidarity. The American artist must help his Spanish brothers in a struggle which, in the last analysis, is his own struggle.

# "FIVE ON REVOLUTIONARY ART"

by Charmion von Wiegand

Pamphlet published by  
Wishart, London

**D**ESPITE their wide political and esthetic differences, the five authors who contribute to the pamphlet are agreed that art grows out of the social environment and is an expression of the society and the class which produces it. Even Eric Gill's brief for Catholicism, soberly defends the social basis of art and affirms that "art is propaganda." Insisting that the artist cannot escape responsibility, that everything he creates must of necessity have value "for or against a cause," Gill exclaims: "Am I saying that a Catholic novelist has got to have creed sticking out on every page of his book so people can use it instead of the Penny Cathecism? Of course, I am not. But I am saying that to be a really good novel from a Christian point of view, it has got to be such that no one but a Catholic could have written it."

Is this not the core of the argument over art and propaganda? I mention Gill first because he is a practicing artist and a famous etcher and his stand for the Church Militant places him somewhat apart from his four collaborators, who have attempted to apply Marx's lessons in the field of art on a critical level much above what is usually written on the subject in the United States. The definition of the problems peculiar to the plastic arts is of immediate importance for all artists everywhere. The agreeable surprise is that the English artists and critics are arriving at a stage in theory, which the Mexican artists who have made history have attained in fact.

During his visit here to the Artists Congress, Orozco, the leading painter in Mexico today, said to me: "It is a vulgar notion that an illustration with a slogan constitutes revolutionary painting. Actually it has nothing to do with art. We have reached a new stage in revolutionary art where we recognize that the painter has the right to be an artist first. We social revolutionary painters need above all now to define our problems within the field of art itself."

Herbert Read in his essay "What Is Revolutionary Art?" occupies himself with this very problem. He expects an affirmative answer to his question: Is not a painter who makes revolutionary experiments in his own craft more revolutionary than a painter who paints revolutionary subjects in a reactionary technique? With this premise, Read takes

up the cudgels for abstract art as the only living art today whose forms are proper to be taken over and filled with the new wine of social content for the future socialist society. Beginning with architecture, Read puts forth Gropius and the former German Bauhaus as "the concrete expression of the life of our epoch" and seeks to find its parallel form in modern painting. Accordingly he repudiates the "anecdotal and literary art" of Diego Rivera and the official surrealists and offers Miro and Mondrian as the only "true revolutionary artists."

This, of course, is not the method of dialectic materialism but rather old idealistic generalization. A revolution in technique does not automatically constitute a revolution in values. Whoever is in control of a technical innovation determines its social function. Radio has revolutionized the technique of communication evolving new forms, but in the hands of Big Business it remains an instrument of reaction. Orozco in discussing revolutionary art was referring to Mexico, where the revolution has won wide concessions to popular demands. It was a revolution in which the Mexican artists actively took sides. In the present moment in Mexico it is correct for the artists to devote themselves to the technical problems of their craft in order to more perfectly express the new content created by the social changes there.

But the situation in England and the United States today is quite different. If the forces of reaction win in the tremendous social struggle now being waged, the very existence of all culture and of art is doomed. Therefore when Herbert Read puts forth a program of watchful waiting for the artist in the ivory tower—albeit with a fresh coat of red paint—he is advocating in a new guise the same old passive social attitude for the artist.

Read defines all modern art as *intentionally* revolutionary. He says abstract art is plastic, objective, and ostensibly non-political—and surrealism is literary, subjective, and actively Communist. Surrealism he credits with the destructive but necessary task of "the disintegration of the academic concepts of reality begun by Picasso and Braque", while to abstract art is reserved the honored task of keeping "inviolable and alive the universal qualities of art, those elements which survive all changes" for the new society

which is coming in the future. But during the violent interim of social change, the abstract artists have the right to go on "perfecting their formal sensibility" like scientists in a laboratory far away from the dust and heat of combat in the streets, in order that their esthetic discoveries may be ready for active use after the revolution is won. Such a notion of the artist as the custodian of the formal values dedicated to the future socialist society, smacks strongly of the sanctity of art and the theory of values, whose passive effect has been to esthetize the British intelligentsia to social issues and dangers, and which Mirsky so brilliantly exposed in his book "The British Intelligentsia".

Ignoring for the moment the question of the value of abstract art per se for the new society, we must face another question: If the present generation of artists should decide that a remote but friendly neutrality in the class struggle was consistently revolutionary conduct, how could it, in the isolation of the artistic laboratory, learn the needs and demands of the proletariat? How would it create for a class whose experiences it had not shared on the plane of reality? While I have no notion what Read's latest phase of political development is, the fact remains that his advocacy of splendid isolation is on a par with his former notion that Major Douglas's gilded mirage of social credit is the essential core of communism and that "frankly a revolution of the kind which the prophet (i.e. Karl Marx) envisaged is no longer necessary and will never be desired by a coherent proletariat in this country." Spain's present conflict destroys the dream that the old class is willing to relinquish one iota of its power without a bitter struggle with every means at its command.

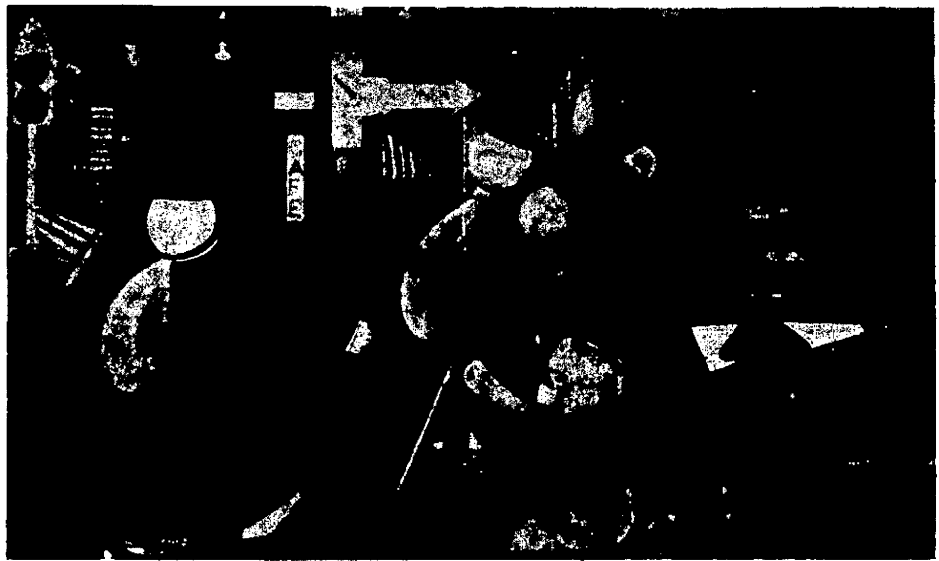
As regards abstract art, it is obvious that forms cannot be set aside like empty jars in a cold storage plant to be filled later with a new content. Splitting the two is idealism. If the forms of abstract art are to have relevancy for the future society, they must inevitably undergo profound changes during a period of social revolution. The Catacomb paintings are the classic example of a new ideology of exploited classes embodied in the outworn forms of Roman art. If the socialist ideas should employ the forms of abstract art in this way, until the collective effort of artists working in the new society produces an entirely new form, this would be the work of generations. It took about five centuries for early Christian art to flower in the form of Byzantine art. Such a possibility offers no back door out of the immediate struggle in which the contemporary artist

along with everyone else is involved.

Those Siamese twins—form and content—are more directly dealt with in Dr. F. D. Klingender's essay, whose title *Content and Form* significantly reverses the usual order. Dr. Klingender, who is the author of an able study, "The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain," scotches the idea of supporting any particular school of modern painting as the annointed favorite of the revolution and seeks to relate "the content-form unity called art" to the wider reality of social existence. Briefly he points out that art is *a form of social consciousness* and that only an historical analysis which interprets each manifestation of art in relation to the *specific* social group it derives from can arrive at any concrete conclusions. Striking even deeper, he states that art is more than a mere reflection of social life; it is primarily "a revolutionary agent for the transformation of that reality". Despite the fact that, as long as there are various social classes, there can be no single set of esthetic values binding for the whole of society, Dr. Klingender's definition does yield a standard by which the working class of today can evaluate the art of the past and select its progressive contributions for its own use.

Dr. Klingender does more than generalize. He takes France as the "blue print" for the development of modern capitalism and produces concrete examples of the historical method in criticism. For instance, he relates the work of the painter David to the French Revolution, demonstrating how the changing social scene had its effect on certain specific paintings of the artist. He briefly summarizes the historic relationship between the Commune and the most progressive artists of that time; between the era of rentier prosperity and the painters of impressionism and post-impressionism; between imperialist expansion and the escape of the artist from reality.

The objective interpretation of nature, Dr. Klingender points out, ceased to be the main theme in art at a moment when the conquest of nature, which was the primary task of capitalism, had been won. From then on the proletariat took over the progressive role in history and assumed as its task the solution of the problem of human relationship in society. The next step in art logically becomes then the active transformation of social reality. He seeks to prove that while modern art has made great technical discoveries, the destruction of content has led inevitably to the destruction of form itself and cites Malevich's white square on white square as an example. Even more tragic is the case of such artists as



Puppets and Marionettes

Max Spivak

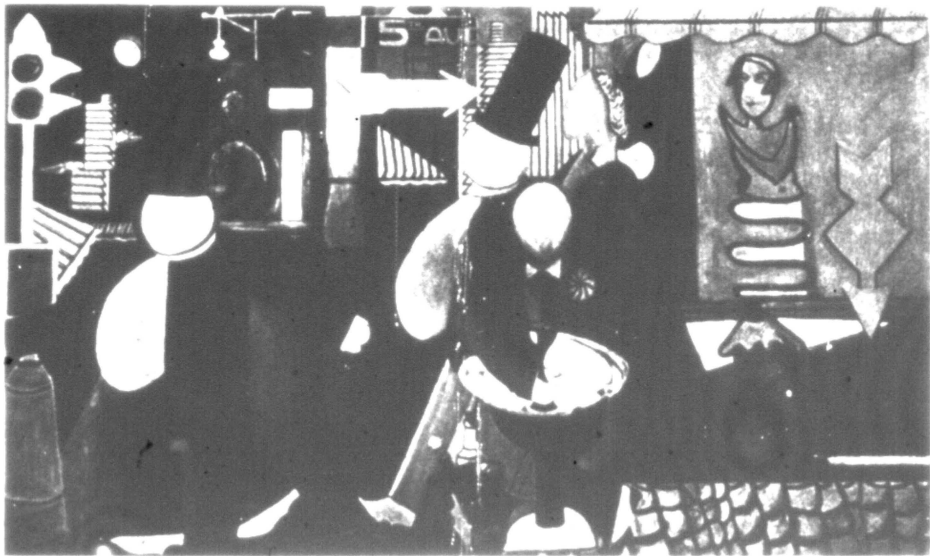
Mural in Astoria Library, From Federal Art Project Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art

Picasso and Chirico. It is only new social content, he says, which can transform art and use its technical achievements in the service of the progressive class in history. Dr. Klingender bases many of his stimulating comments on the work of the German critic, Hildebrandt.

A. L. Lloyd's essay, which deals with Modern Art and Modern Society, leans heavily on the work of the French critic, Max Raphael, whose study Marx-Proudhon-Picasso is well known. In some instances Lloyd has translated sections of the Picasso essay. The points are well made and deserve more analysis than can be compacted in a paragraph. Lloyd traces the split between economic production and intellectual production which was caused by the division of labor in the 19th century, and which led art away from reality to develop its own autonomy, the complete detachment of art from life. He feels this was due to the death of the Christian myth, which once acted as the intermediary between the economic basis and the ideological superstructure. The transition to monopoly capitalism with its increasing regimentation is the cause of the corresponding dehumanization in the pictorial arts. The replacement of the organic human body in art by abstract and mechanist forms actually parallels the same replacement in industry. Abstract art has its true parallel in the supremacy of non-productive commerce whose means of exchange deals more and more in abstract figurations—modern banking with its elaborate paper security system.—In short, the appearance of abstract art is a reflection of the growing abstract nature of bourgeois society itself. Lloyd insists that just as the new social order must take over the ma-

chinery of production, it is necessary for the new school artist to take over all that is valid and technically superior in bourgeois art, which in its social isolation has developed an unprecedented sensibility and technical skill.

In the essay on "Abstract Criticism", Alec West deals more specifically with literature. He uses Coleridge to illustrate how one author's progressive tendencies may be distinguished from reactionary trends and how his progressive ideas may be extracted for future use. He attacks Professor I. A. Richard's study "Coleridge and the Imagination" and its idealistic treatment of the subject. West maintains that Professor Richard's theoretical position in criticism is directly due to his "desire to be left in the non-existent No Man's Land between the army of Socialism, which is not what it should be, and the army of Fascism, which is madness." Asking if the same decay from Coleridge to his commentators lies behind the manifestations of abstract art, he allows that the latter has a higher quality than abstract criticism and a "greater awareness of the disintegration of capitalist forms". West points out, however, that its central fear of action is what causes the projection of secret fears, desires, and hopes into forms which disguise their object. Realistic content, he says, is present in negation and the tension between the apparent absence of content and its *felt* presence in negation is what gives abstract art a greater depth and richness than mere ornament. In short, the existence of abstract art presumes "indecision in social reality", the class which has to change social reality in theory and in practice must turn away from it and become concrete in criticism and creation.



# ON THE PORT CHESTER SOLDIER

EDITOR, ART FRONT:

Before taking up this controversy of the Spanish American Doughboy for Port Chester I wish to say a word about Will Owen, Supervisor for the Artists under W.P.A. of New York. He has been placed in a very awkward position. He had the choice of backing the local Westchester supervisor or standing by me. When he inspected my figure he apparently liked it with one or two exceptions. These exceptions, because of my respect for Will Owen as an artist and as a man, I agreed to change, which could easily have been accomplished in the plaster model. And that was that and I left for my farm on the Vineyard. But I had reckoned without my host. No sooner had my back been turned than a real cabal began. Salvatore Ancello, whose enmity I'd incurred, visited every politician in Port Chester with the result that everyone knows. When politicians assume the role of art critic it's time for artists to take a definite stand. It is safe to say that in Westchester there are not three recognized artists on the payroll. The great mass of "artists" are either amateurs or badly frightened art students. These are glad to get their monthly stipend. These people were docile and readily submitted to Mr. Ancello's "suggestions." Because of Mr. Ancello's background—or let us say—lack of background, I couldn't very well accept his criticism or take it seriously. I believe he dabbles in art himself. He paints like a fifth rate Lucione. He knows nothing of art and his only qualification as a supervisor is his splendid talent as a bookkeeper. So naturally I relegated him to this position. I believe that because the world is as it is today regimentation is not only necessary but essential and, broadly speaking, beneficial. The one exception is art. Art can never be regimented. A sincere artist would never submit to regimentation. The very premise of any governing body, such as W.P.A., acceptable to the artists is the suggestion of subject matter and the assigning of the finished work to its final location or site. In addition to this, the governing body should see that the artist fulfils his time schedule and that he receives his pay check promptly. When I started work on the big Portchester job I assumed that provided I didn't do anything ridiculous or obscure, I had carte blanche. My work was distinctly modern in feeling and to my great delight the veterans approved it. Being a veteran myself, we had much in common. These

veterans of Portchester are intelligent. We don't want any more war. My Big Soldier portrayed war in all its ugliness and its conception was that of a sodden brute. I consciously modeled an inglorious monster. Naturally the politicians and bankers wouldn't subscribe to such a statue. It made war appear as it is and as the good mayor of the town exclaimed,



Helio Gomez

"It makes war distasteful to our children."

But I did as I felt though my primary object was to create a piece of sculpture—a granite carving. W.P.A. appointed a jury. They rejected my work on aesthetic grounds. I was given no voice in the selection of the jury. Paul Grunewein was one of the jury. He is a fine sculptor. His work is nationally well known. But does that qualify him to

## WITH THE ARTISTS IN CATALONIA

"WE are certain that we will triumph!" Tona, secretary of the Graphic Artists Union (Sindicat de Dibuxants Professionals, UGT) was explaining to me the work of the Union. Any one who has been in Catalonia during the last weeks will agree that they must triumph. A more determined, heroic and enthusiastic people has never existed.

A group of artists surrounded me. They tried to tell me what they were

pass on the work of another sculptor whose philosophy and attitude toward art are entirely different from his own? Another jury would have found differently. W.P.A. did not like my work. That was their prerogative. So it was rejected on aesthetic grounds. I know that Will Owen and his colleagues are absolutely sincere. Wishing to please everybody and not wanting to hurt me—they rejected My Soldier on aesthetic grounds.

W.P.A. is doing a great service. It is unearthing some fine talents. It should be encouraged by all of us. And we can best cooperate by correcting its faults. Its virtues can take care of themselves.

KARL ILLAVA

Note: The Portchester Soldier was rejected by the New York Art Administration presumably on aesthetic grounds, but obviously because of its indictment of war. ART FRONT has always opposed (1) censorship of subject; and (2) inadequate artist representation on art juries. On this basis, we support Mr. Illava's grievance. The administration must not be permitted to censor a work of art merely because it tends to create a repugnance towards war.

We regret, however, the individualist confusions which have prompted Mr. Illava to interpret his grievance in terms of personal plots, and the lack of support of his fellow artists as a result of their amateurishness or lack of reputation. Had there been a well organized section of the Artists' Union in Mr. Illava's, such a situation would never have been tolerated. We also take strong exception to Mr. Illava's remarks about the need and the benefits of regimentation for everyone but artists. The least that can be said is that Mr. Illava would be no better off if the audience of his art were regimented so as to make impossible their reception of his message.

by Margaret Duroc

doing, but I found it difficult to follow their rapid speech. Tona had to translate their questions and statements into French for me.

"Would you like to see our house?" Roca, who fortunately spoke German, asked me.

"Of course!"

The government has handed over to the Artists Union the confiscated mansion of the fascist, Marquis Barbará. The



marquis seldom lived in his beautiful home. It was still filled with the stuffy odor of a closed house. I was led through the huge parqueted rooms, lighted by cut glass chandeliers, and filled with fine furniture and soft rugs.

"We will move out all this furniture," Roca said. He seemed to have a very lively distaste for the old fashioned furniture. "Here, in this chamber we will have a class." Class rooms, conference rooms, assembly rooms, work-rooms and offices are displacing the dining rooms, salons, bed-chambers. Perhaps even a gas or electric stove will replace the reactionary old fashioned coal stove in the kitchen.

I thought of our Artists' Union at home, of how cramped they are for space. How they would envy the patio! The large internal court in which a fountain was bubbling, and where rich green plants and flowers made it easier to chatter and rest after work! The mansion even had a tower. We mounted it, and looked down at Barcelona. Barcelona, where the people were already erecting a new and higher culture.

Back again in the office, I asked, "How are you helping the revolution?"

"In the first days," Tona said, "we fought on the barricades. Our president, Helios Gomez, is a captain on the Balearic front. (I had an appointment with Gomez for the evening, but he could not keep it, he flew to Majorca, where the Catalans were opening up a new offensive.) "Practically all of our members belong to the militia, but we are not all at the front. We immediately put ourselves at the disposal of the government, and now we are doing very necessary publicity and educational work."

They proudly told me of the trains which they had painted. On the exterior walls of the trains, they painted revolutionary designs and slogans, calling upon the workers to fight fascism. The government was pleased with their work, and ordered the immediate execution of three hundred more.

"We also make posters," broke in Bofarull. And he brought me some copies of them. I had seen these, plastered throughout the city. In the workroom, I watched one artist put the finishing touches on a design for a new poster which called for the protection of the peasants.

Even during the high tension of the July days the artists expressed in their painting their passion for the cause of the democratic revolution. While I was in Barcelona they held an exposition of this work, fifty percent of the proceeds going to the militia.

It is indicative of the close unity which

exists between the Union and the government, that the minister of culture, Gassols—the militant poet who was wrenched from a thirty year prison term by the Popular Front—attended the exposition, and had several works purchased for the Catalan Museum.

The Graphic Artists Union includes all the graphic artists and all the commercial artists. It existed before the democratic revolution started. During the last month their membership quadrupled. On the other hand, the painters and sculptors were completely unorganized. The Catalan artists of the division of painting and sculpture lived in the greatest isolation, devoting themselves completely to the ideal of pure art. They have now started to form a union, and are helping to fight fascism. They too have started to work on posters. They are also busy preparing material for a large exposition to be held in Paris and London for the aid of the Spanish Republic. But far more important than this activity, is their work in

preserving the artistic heritage of Spain. At the government's request they have formed committees which accompany the militia to the front and point out the artistic treasures which must be preserved. Minister Gassols is very proud of his people. There has not been a single instance in which the art committees indicated a treasure, that it has not been tenderly treated.

It was difficult to tear oneself away. Still more difficult to leave Barcelona. I too wanted to join the militia. Not recruits are needed, but cannons and airplanes.

"Bring to the artists of America our greetings! Tell them that after we have defeated the fascist rebellion, we will continue the revolution on the spiritual plane. All our strength will be dedicated to the winning of liberty and to the making of that liberty everlasting!"

"Salut, comrades!"

"Salut!"

## WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH SCULPTURE

by Isamu Noguchi

First. Its subject matter, whether imaginative or realistic, has no relation to life of today.

Second. It is usually not finished by the artist and therefore does not reflect the occupation of man with matter and space, is therefore essentially not sculpture at all.

Third. It lacks color, an element

which greatly enhances its appeal to the average man. The appeal of texture is at best a precious one.

Fourth. Because of its indirect and unscientific method of procedure, the finished object involves a terrific waste of time and money. This not only prevents its popular consumption, but restricts the artist to producing the safe and tried,



History as seen from Mexico in 1936

Isamu Noguchi



History as seen from Mexico in 1936

varm. T. 1936

prevents the imaginative and experimental.

In answer:

First. Let us make sculpture that deals with today's problems. Draw on the form content so plentiful in science, micro- and micro-cosmic; life from dream-states to the aspirations, problems, sufferings and work of the people.

Second. We must become familiar with the modern ways of handling plastic and crystalline matter (the spray-gun, pneumatic hammer, etc.). For any given work we should use that precise material best suited to its size, to cost and durability.

Third. Be not afraid to be even "vulgar" in the use of color. Study how color can enhance rather than detract from form. Like harmony in music, color plays with its other aspect form.

Fourth. The scientific method is necessarily the cheap method. The cheap and quick method will rescue sculpture from preciousness. Why not paper or rubber sculpture?

In conclusion, it is my opinion that sculptors as well as painters should not forever be concerned with pure art or meaningful art, but should inject their knowledge of form and matter into the everyday, usable designs of industry and commerce. This necessitates their learning why things are the way they are, why

the bend of a road, why the streamline of airplanes.

The sculpture here reproduced of the wall which was made in the Mercado Abelardo L. Rodriguez, was made in cement mixed with color applied on a built-up and cut brick base. It is part of the general artistic embellishment of the market by ten workers in the arts. All designs required approval by the group and was more or less cooperative in layout although not in conception or execution. In my case, I am especially indebted to suggestions and advice as to color given me by Antonio Pujol and Paul O'Higgins.

First, the sketch was enlarged onto the brick wall. Then bricks built in where thickness was required, then carved in and out. This took about two months. After this, cement, large marble aggregate, and lime was thrown on and the forms defined. The final coat contained fine aggregate color and cement mixed dry to assume accurate color when applied with a trowel and polished. The job was completed seven months after starting.

It is 22 meters long, 2.2 meters high, and in parts as much as 60 cm. thick.

The subject matter is the general one of "against war and fascism," specifically, "History as seen from Mexico in 1936."

new development; simply repeating the use of much color and impasto in broadly built landscapes.

For his handling of paint and use of color in this style, a painter named Savery stands out. Two of his five things, however, were obviously done after looking long at Van Gogh. Antocarte, who has been seen in the Carnegie Internationals shows some over-stylized, posterlike oils, ranging from the semi-religious to a circus painting of story-book character: all very carefully done in an assumed, free palette-knife technique.

A few painters are very feeble trying to build up their landscapes from Pieter Brueghel and other Flemish masters but getting nowhere.

The next building houses the paintings sent by Switzerland. This is really a disheartening exhibition. Not one of the painters represented here shows the least desire to go any further than is necessary to just cover a canvas with paint. The result is a very inferior brand of sweet landscapes and sugary portraits.

The Dutch contribution is difficult to evaluate in comparison with the others because of an absence of oils. I cannot understand why Holland has limited its showing to black and whites, because I saw some interesting example of contemporary Dutch painting this spring in The Hague.

This show contains every known type of etching, lithograph, woodcut and drawing. There are many boat subjects, landscapes, people in native costume, etc. A few are interesting but most are just very competent jobs. One artist J. Dyck, comes surprising close to Van Gogh's portraiture of peasants in several bold and well-designed woodcuts on yellow ground, in which the lines of the cutting are done in the stacatto style of Vincent's brush work; almost too closely to be accepted as original works.

The first glance at the Spanish exhibit reveals a wild mixture of sexy-looking nudes, pretty landscapes and portraits of Spanish dancers, but on closer inspection a few very interesting paintings can be found. After seeing the rest of the exposition, I realized that this is the only country showing examples of surrealist art. There is one painter, Bernol, who, with a little more effort could become a fairly good follower of Dali. He shows a manacled figure suspended in a black sky, headless and decomposing. Another painter, Gregorio Prieto, shows three large oils done in deep rich color . . . fragments of statuary in dark settings. These paintings are exciting even though the subject matter is a little repetitious.

The liveliest contributions to the show

## THE VENICE EXPOSITION

### A letter from Italy

**W**HEN I arrived at the gates of the exposition, a guard was informing a group of visitors that they would have to wait before being allowed in, because Il Duce has just "dropped out of the sky" and was paying a visit to the show, incognito. Il Duce left in fifteen minutes, which I consider record time, and we were allowed to enter. I spent the next eight hours viewing the exhibition.

Knowing French painting better than I do the rest of European art, I decided to visit the French pavillion first in order to get some idea of the character of the representation one could expect at this show.

The first of a long series of disappointments came when, in the large room, in which I had expected to find any one of at least ten of the most interesting and representative French contemporary painters, the wall was covered with about fifteen of the very worst examples of early brown and white Degas. Sharing honors with Degas, were two other painters, each showing over a dozen canvasses. One of them named Blanche,

is an academician of no importance, and the other, Maurice Denis (is he dead?) shows a group of canvasses which at their best, are picture post-card paintings of Jesus with a bright orange halo. The bulk of the French showing consists of a pitiful group of undeveloped painters who have looked as far as Segonzac in his most conservative works and let it go at that. Three canvasses by Gromaire, in their limited way, try to show the direction of French painting since the beginning of the century, and three others by Marie Laurencin complete the show.

As I was leaving the pavillion I asked the guard if he had seen Il Duce that morning, he answered, "I was hoping he would come in here but he went right past me and stopped only at the German exhibit. You know—France, right now—nix.

I went on to see what Belgium had to offer. This is, most likely a better representation of Flemish art than the French was of French painting.

Here was painters springing from Gézanne and Van Gogh, yet reaching no

are some pen drawings by a surrealist, José Caballero who uses a pen with vigor and sensitivity and whose subject matter, though difficult to grasp, is convincing. There, at least, are a few painters who are aware of some of the developments of modern art.

The notes I made on Denmark consist of a very few words which I think are sufficient. One painter represents that country with two very bad "modernist" canvasses. The rest is sculpture of an entirely uninspired calibre.

Czechoslovakia is also represented by one painter, V. Benes, who shows some very academic landscapes and water colors.

The Greek exhibit is the most impossible hodge-podge of painting I have ever seen.

The German show is divided into two very opposite halves. On one hand, there is a group of painters whose works, for style and content are suitable only for the illustration of children's books. In contrast, there is an equal amount of the limits of traditional landscape paintings which, though keeping within ing, are vigorous and colorful. Again here, there is no sign of the experimental German painters seen so often in the Carnegie International.

The sloppiest show in the Exposition is, undoubtedly, that of Austria. It is lacking in direction, content and any desire to create a work of art. Herbert Bockl gets the big place with eleven oils which go from the usual nude to a painting of St. George and the dragon with the madonna and child thrown in—all without the slightest change of raucous orange and blue color piled on who gives a damn how.

Hungary exhibits a group of romantic landscapes of which the best are by Aba Novak, who is an extremely clever draughtsman using a technique which combines all the best qualities of fine commercial illustration. Novak, if he so desired, could become a top-notch in the field of advertising art. The Italian pavillion has more space and works than all the other nations combined, with an additional building devoted entirely to the Futurists of Fascism. The painting shows a predominance of gay, high-keyed color and most of it is purely representational. The Italian painters seem to have heard of something called "modernism" but haven't gotten any direct information as yet.

The Campigli canvasses, although not his best, as seen in New York last winter, show again that he is the only Italian painter who has bridged the gap (and what a gap!) from the fine paintings of the fourteenth century to a live contem-

porary form.

Antonio Donghi, whose paintings a few years ago, were of some interest, has deteriorated to the stage of painting photographically finished oils: polished to the last highlight on the high hat which the prestidigitator, in the purple skintights is balancing on the end of his De Nobili cigar.

Mr. Ettore Tito, who is honored with a special room for his paintings, is as bad a society portrait painter as even society has ever fostered.

The only spark of life in the exhibition comes from an artist named Usellini, who aside from using some unusual design shows a sense of humor in a sombre little picture of a parachute jumper landing in the courtyard of a nunnery.

C. Beneglieri contributes a few small unassuming paintings, intense in color, slightly naive in drawing and, in all, showing a taste for simplicity, rare in Italian painting.

Although he shows some excellent designs for book covers, Gino Severini becomes confused and childish in his oils of doves and overloaded still lifes.

It is interesting to note that only in the Italian exhibit is there any painting dealing with political propaganda. Here are many paintings of soldiers marching to war and numerous portrait of Il Duce. (His Majesty the King seems to be cornering the market on portraits of Il Duce.)

The Futurists of Fascism, significantly housed now in what used to be the Russian pavillion, are with few exceptions, painters of fascist propaganda. This "Futurism," as shown here, is a vulgarization of cubism used to glorify in illustration, war scenes, airplanes dropping bombs, the church and Mussolini.

Another exhibit of propaganda is a roomful of heroic frescoes: pastoral scenes of plenty, in one of which is, again, Il Duce, this time dressed in farmer's clothes, playing the shepherd of his flock. These frescoes are pitiful to behold, especially after having seen the rich heritage of fresco painting left by Giotto.

A I left the Italian pavillion, I stopped at the press department to ask some questions. The answers were: that of the three countries not exhibiting for the first time since the beginning of the Biennial Exposition, two of them, England and Russia, were not invited. No reasons given. The third country, the United States, was not represented because of some difficulty over the matter of a rental fee which was demanded by the American artists.

Using the Carnegie International again as reference, I should disqualify the exhibits of all the nations but Italy as

being unrepresentational, and give the "remains" another title—a bit long, perhaps, but very explanatory: The Exposition of Italian Propaganda In Art For International Visitors To Venice.

GREGORIO PRESTOPINO

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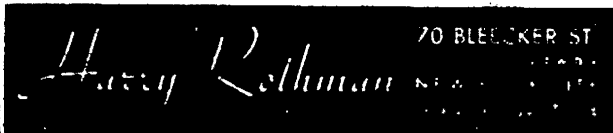
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