

a figure of speech that represents the sum total of art itself. It is painting that is the genius of the painter, poetry of the poet—and a person is a creative artist to the extent that he participates in that genius.

Harold Rosenberg and John Berger are the only true art critics writing in English today, that is, the only two who raise reviewing and discussion of the visual arts to the level of creative discourse of the best literary criticism. Like Berger, Rosenberg has a magnificently active and intelligent eye—but in his case doctrine does not blind that eye or blunt that intelligence.

His book, although clumsily titled and not very "attractively" produced (a positive advantage

¹⁰ *Art Without Boundaries 1950–1970*. Edited by GERALD WOODS, PHILIP THOMPSON and JOHN WILLIAMS. Thames and Hudson, £2.50, paper £1.50.

¹¹ *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*. By GREGOIRE MÜLLER. Pall Mall, £2.25.

perhaps in an art book today) is the best he has published, a tremendous demonstration that "the new" can only be dealt with adequately in critical terms and that no international survey of current trends is any use at all. Information is uncritically presented, as for instance in *Art without Boundaries: 1950–70* by Gerald Woods, Philip Thompson and John Williams,¹⁰ which attempts to "package" graphic design, film, concrete poetry, prints, happenings as facets of a many-sided whole, each given a double spread and reduced to the significance of a Ryman's catalogue. At least this is relatively innocuous homogenisation compared with Grégoire Müller's soft sell *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*¹¹, which is obnoxious—PR masquerading as criticism, each artist taken at his own evaluation. Unfortunately this is what generally passes for criticism in the world of art today.

The Flight from Romanticism

Picasso's Great Harlequinade—By ANTHONY POWELL

AS THE RICHEST, the most popular, perhaps the most naturally talented painter the world has ever known moves into his tenth decade, these three books offer an excellent field for examination of what Picasso has done to achieve his unique position.

In some ways the first publication on the list, the painting book¹—coloured reproductions of Picasso pictures one side, their outlines in black on the opposite page, to be tinted by the possessor—is not the least significant, in its comment on Picasso's position in the contemporary scene; in a sense, too, on his own painting. Has this ever been done before? Perhaps it has. Yet one cannot quite imagine a copybook called *Paint with Titian*, *Paint with Rubens*, *Paint with Goya*, *Paint with Renoir*, even, if it comes to that, *Paint with Braque*. There is no reason why not. Painting books based on the great masters, past and present, might well provide an excellent exercise. Somehow the personality of Picasso seems peculiarly adapted to an experiment of this kind. The pictures chosen, for copying their colour, range

between 1917 and 1962; the earliest, the Chinese Conjuror's costume for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; the latest, *Woman wearing a hat*, now in the Picasso Museum, Barcelona. Of the former, one risks the irreverent opinion that Bakst might have done a more amusing job for what was required.

Jean Leymarie's book² covers the whole field of Picasso's work. It is especially useful for following the incessant changes that have taken place in—not to say haunted—the artist's career. The whole story is laid out up to date. Before considering this panorama, chronology suggests investigation of Juan-Eduardo Cirlot's *Picasso: Birth of a Genius*, chiefly concerned with the painter's early work, on the whole more or less naturalistic.³ M. Cirlot's book (with an Introduction by the Director of the Barcelona Art Museums) is largely based on paintings and drawings, come to light fairly recently, from the collections of the artist's family.

Here we are confronted immediately with the astonishing ability to draw displayed by Picasso as a child. Musical prodigies of an early age are comparatively common; in painting, or writing, rare. One has only to think of the crudity of the schoolboy drawings of Beardsley (with whose work Picasso, as a young man, appears to have been familiar) to appreciate the power and sophistication of what Picasso himself was doing

¹ *Paint with Picasso. A painting and colouring book*. Created by FRANÇOISE MESURÉ. Angus & Robertson, 95p.

² *Picasso: The Artist of the Century*. By JEAN LEYMARIE. Macmillan, £12.

³ *Picasso: Birth of a Genius*. By JUAN-EDUARDO CIRLOT. Paul Elek, £12.

at fourteen or fifteen years of age. The Hercules, the bullfighters, the doves (signed "Pablo Ruiz", their subject to endure throughout the history of Picassan imagery), all executed at the age of nine, could not point more clearly to a professional painter's career.

By the age of fifteen Picasso was painting with complete mastery in the academic manner of the epoch. The *Self-portrait* of this period is interesting, not only on account of its facility and adroit naturalistic comment—it could well be by, say, Jacques-Emile Blanche—but also for the maturity of the features portrayed, which might belong to a man of twenty-five. Of this same period, *The First Communion* presents an absolutely straight academic "subject" picture, almost insistently uninteresting in design. In the following year (1897), comes the slightly more adventurously composed *Science and Charity*, a doctor at the bedside of a patient (resembling Virginia Woolf), beside whom a nun, holding a child, offers a cup. It could easily have been the Picture of the Year at Burlington House.

One cannot help wondering, too, whether this pair of canvases were not, as academic offerings, made deliberately flatfooted, Picasso's tongue fairly well into his cheek, because contemporaneous with them are several marvellous drawings of the artist's sister, Lola, which show the influence of Degas, and Steinlen. In these naturalistic drawings, is there already a hint of Cubism? In any case, we are now approaching deeper waters. The pages that follow in M. Cirlot's book take the breath away, both in their originality, and, at the same time, their willingness to borrow, capacity for pastiche: Goya to Van Gogh; Corot to Lautrec; Rembrandt to Greco. It is impossible not to pause for a moment to consider whether this power to master any, and every, style is not a terrible burden for a painter to bear.

Picasso: The Artist of the Century is naturally rather less extensive for studying the youthful work, for the whole course of the Painter's life takes a tremendous gallop over the fences—some of these obstacles of the utmost height and complication for jumping—which lead down to the present day, when, in his ninety-second year, Picasso shows not the smallest sign of faltering. A generalisation, that might perhaps cover the later days, is that the work settles down to a fairly consistent, if also fairly acid, frivolity. This is appropriate to the autumn of a great man's age, work less brutal in feeling, on the whole, than that produced, for instance, in the 1940s and '50s.

M. LEYMARIE has interesting remarks to make about Harlequin, "with whom Picasso com-

plaisantly identified himself in his early days." I think the translator may have got this wrong. Surely he means "complacent" (self-satisfied), rather than "complaisant" (obliging, polite). Anyway the cockedhatted figure, in ink and watercolour, seated against a pink background in 1905, very obviously the Painter himself in a sad and disgruntled mood, becomes in due course Picasso's son, Harlequin, running through various avatars, until he reaches the "enigmatic and blustering" figure of 1969, who brandishes a club.

THESE VOLUMES make one reflect a lot on Picasso's life and art. When one considers the naïvely sentimental boyhood pictures, like *The First Communion* and *Science and Charity*—even if they were deliberately naïve and sentimental—and the equally sentimental—though sophisticated—groups of the Pink and Blue periods, one cannot help wondering whether violent experiment was not vital for Picasso, to avoid becoming trapped in personal emotions less profound than his actual skill as a painter. A parallel might possibly be drawn with Joyce, fleeing from his earlier naturalism, in order to save himself from artificialities and elaborations of the late 19th century, which clung to him in "plain writing." This may be seen in *Portrait of the Artist*, where (among much of the author's best work) occur pomposities of phrasing that nothing short of *Ulysses* would cure. In somewhat the same manner (on a vastly larger scale), did Picasso turn to Cubism, Africa, all the experiments that followed, to control an innate sentimentality and romanticism, which, to some extent, breaks out again years later in the Minotaur drawings and clownlike painter with his chocolate-box beauty of a model?

M. Leymarie's book includes a great many of Picasso's own apophthegms regarding painting. These gnomic sayings—which, torn from their context, perhaps also lose by translation—are rather a mixed bag, though on the whole less pretentious and more intelligible than some of the other painters quoted. Painters, on the whole, are probably better away from too explicitly expressed theory. For example:

"How can you expect an outsider to experience my picture as I have experienced it? A picture comes to me from far away. Who can say from how far away I have divined it, glimpsed it, made it, and yet the next day I cannot myself see what I have done. How can anyone penetrate into my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts, which have taken a long time to work themselves out and come to light? Above all, can anyone grasp what I have added to all that, perhaps involuntarily?" (1935)

But, of course. So what? Whoever supposed anything else? To a greater or lesser degree, this is true of all art, and all artists, in whatever medium

they operate. If all the knotty questions mentioned by Picasso had to be settled before any picture was to be appreciated—anyway admired—why bother to look at a Piero di Cosimo, or a Breughel, or a Blake, or indeed any painter? We don't really know what Constable felt before a hayfield, or Gainsborough before a fashionable beauty, or the artist of the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii about Isis. The best you can say is that to make a statement of that sort reveals something of Picasso's own personality.

WHAT WE COME BACK TO, as we turn the pages of these books, is that Picasso, in the course of his life, has, in truth, produced something for everybody. It is almost impossible to imagine anyone, who liked pictures at all, not finding at least one work by Picasso to his taste.

Beginning with the genre pictures, mentioned earlier, the depressed acrobats, every known variety of naturalistic drawing, all forms of Cubism, a few of Surrealism, portraits of almost every kind, caricatures, personal images, which (as Picasso himself states above) defy analysis.

Among this galaxy, I should like to say a word for the outline drawings of friends in the art world, mostly done during the first World War and soon after. Bordering on caricature, while stopping just short of that, formidably resembling the sitter (one feels certain), they include Apollinaire, Stravinsky, Satie, Diaghilev, Derain, and several others. They seem to embody one of this great artist's happier, less tortured phases, where he, so to speak, holds out a hand to the other Arts, almost in the manner of a humorous Ingres.

“Christ or a Saucepan”

The Baleful Indifference of Roger Fry—By DERWENT MAY

THE QUIET ROOMS of the Courtauld Gallery are the best place in which to begin this story. There—without a visitor near them for long hours each day—hang some of the great paintings by Cézanne about which the conventional art world grew apoplectic 60 years ago. In the finest of them, the Mont St Victoire looms cold and violet-grey over a landscape where, closer to us, the blocks of mountain stone are softened by dry greenery, or are wrought into austere but solid dwellings. A branch on a foreground pine seems to curl tenderly round the mountain peak, then the illusion of their nearness to each other vanishes, and the bleakness of the mountain reasserts itself. Shadowed outline and suggested space together tell a haunting tale of men's pleasures and hardships, needs and fears.

In the next room is the collection of paintings made by Roger Fry, who in the years just after Cézanne's death in 1906 did more than anyone to get his work accepted in England. Some of Fry's own paintings are in this collection. The landscapes—scenes in France and Sicily—are no more than nets of black wire, round which soft colours meaninglessly cling. The portraits insist on a more human reference, but even the ebullient Bohemian figure of Nina Hamnett dwindles in Fry's vision

to little more than a kind of stretched string-bag. I do not draw the comparison to belittle Fry's paintings: his talent was what it was, and he used it diligently. The interest of his paintings lies in the fact that he was a critic whose ideas about painting became extraordinarily influential, and who was trying in his painting to produce work in correspondence with those ideas. From Cézanne, through Fry, as I see it, a road runs clear to the boring acres of cleanly- or roughly-drawn circles and squares that art critics have since escorted on to the walls of galleries throughout the world.

The history of Fry's development as an art critic is recorded clearly for the first time in his newly-published letters.¹ Previously, the fullest knowledge of Fry was to be had from Virginia Woolf's biography, published in 1940. Virginia Woolf gives a touching portrait of the man, but she does not dwell much on his ideas about art and I seem to detect a sceptical note in her voice when she does. She remarks that “there were all the aesthetic problems roused by the Post-Impressionist painters to be discussed” when Fry went off on a holiday with Clive and Vanessa Bell, but she seems only too glad to be able to leave that particular discussion to them.

Fry first took an interest in art when he was at Cambridge in the middle 1880s. He had gone there to read science, but found his friends among

¹ *Letters of Roger Fry*. 2 vols. Edited by DENYS SUTTON. Chatto & Windus, £8.