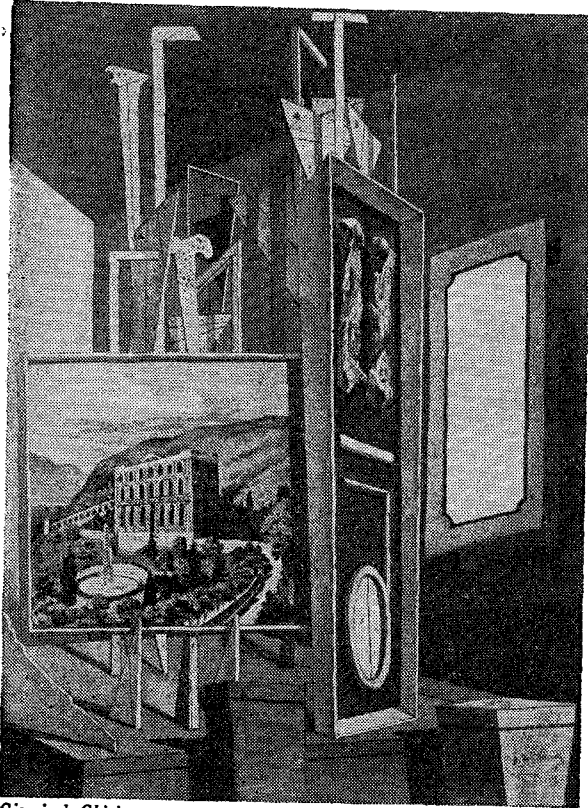


The Artist's Point of View

Surrealism, Dada, and Abstract Art



Giorgio de Chirico

Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art

INSANE," "crazy," a "pain in the neck," "communistic," "daily torment" — these and many similar outraged comments have swirled about the exhibition of surrealism, Dada, and abstract art recently closed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and now about to tour the country. All such comments merely mean that the good people who make them, like the carriage horses of 40 years ago, are wearing preventative blinders which cut out the aesthetic side roads of life's practical journey. But the joke is on them, because their blinders are voluntary obscurations of potential experience.

The movement called Dada, which ran from 1914 to 1921, was a deliberate appeal to the irrational and absurd, in a profound and sincere protest against the ghastly irrationalities and absurdities of war. From this primary revolt it grew in various countries of Europe into

a protest against other accepted conventions, mimicking their grotesqueries with the most outlandish possible grotesqueries of its own. So to challenge accepted faiths is to contribute a refreshing and vitalizing experience which certainly should be welcome to all adventurous souls.

Surrealist art grew out of Dada and is frankly a plumbing of the mysteries of the subconscious mind. As a picturing of the irrationalities of that mind, which exist in all of us, it should be welcome as an extension of daily experience into new fields. Some of its products are private phantasy with no recognizable meaning to others. Some have social significance. Either of these classes may merely report imagined facts and so lack the essentials of the art of the picture or either may combine phantasy with the plastique of painting and so achieve the pictorial art of the ages. Chirico, one of whose paintings is shown herewith, does achieve such a synthesis, his work consequently taking its place among the significant art of our time.

Abstract art in general has a very important challenging value to our matter-of-fact habit of looking at pictures and reading in them only subject meaning.

It eliminates or distorts subject, shifting the emphasis, in the hands of a modern, design-conscious artist, to the excitements of sensing color, space, and form harmonies for their aesthetic emotional meanings. It is these excitements which we lack in "normal" living. It is the assimilation of the experiences involved which would free us from our present fears of creative doing and our pathetic, compensating escapes to the safety of worshipping, buying, and using "antique" and foreign expressions of the creative spirit of other days. It is knowing these experiences which would give us courage to be ourselves.

To decry these various challenges is to insulate oneself from life.

RALPH M. PEARSON

The Scarlet Crab

Conclusion of a Mystery

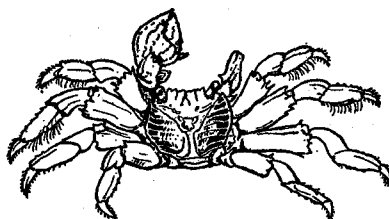
by CLIFFORD KNIGHT

Benny Bartlett, amateur ornithologist, and his friend Huntoon Rogers sail for the Galapagos Islands on a scientific expedition aboard Carlos Lanfrey's palatial yacht, where Bartlett is promptly captivated by the staff artist, a blonde vision named Alice Wilmer. Her friend, Photographer Jack Quigley, disappears at sea after getting in a row over a dice game with members of the crew. His loss is believed an accident, although other suspicions remain. It is discovered that Quigley was the son-in-law, estranged from his wife, of Dr. and Mrs. Gorell, two misanthropic souls who have already quarreled bitterly with the naturalists French and Ardleigh. Then, on Indefatigable Island, Gorell is found dead, ostensibly from a fall on rocky ground. Also on Indefatigable is a castaway named Knutsen, whom the party returns to the settlement on Chatham Island, after which the course is set for Panama, to transship Mrs. Gorell and her husband's body. Jay Cranston, Captain Lanfrey's nephew and a constant troublemaker, is exposed trying to blackmail Mrs. Lanfrey over a supposed guilty tryst with Quigley the night of his death. Dark suspicions of foul play in the two deaths linger, and Mrs. Gorell, who appears terrified for her life, hints that the captain is a murderer. The morning after a violent storm at sea, French finds Mrs. Gorell in bed with her throat cut. A knife from the galley; a coat belonging to Starr, the steward; and the scarlet rock crab which was the ship's pet, crushed on the floor, are in her cabin. Starr and the cook deny any guilt in the crime; and, in face of the knowledge that a triple murderer is on board, the scientists determine to return to the islands to finish their work.

XXXVIII

HUNTOON ROGERS closed the stateroom door behind us, and we advanced into the room which earlier that day had held the ghastly body of Mrs. Gorell. All evidence of the murder had been removed.

"Why does one human being kill



Drawings by Helen Damrosch Tee-Fan

another, Benny?" asked Rogers earnestly. "What are the motives, aside from the hot blood of a quarrel or the homicidal mania of an insane person?"

"Revenge is one," I answered.

"Yes, revenge is most elemental — it's hot blood turned cold and premeditative and nursed upon a deep sense of injury."

"Both money and women — and jealousy. Hatred, I suppose, too."

"Any of the baser passions, Benny, might result in murder. Then there's the murder of necessity."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that, when one life has been taken, the slayer in order to make himself secure against detection is obliged to take the life of another one or two or three — perhaps more — who may have knowledge of his crime or strong suspicions of his guilt. Mrs. Gorell's death may have been a murder of necessity — possibly Dr. Gorell's was too —"

"Assuming that Gorell knew who killed Quigley?"

"Yes."

"I believe Gorell would have told me that day on Indefatigable if he had known."

"Perhaps."

"What do you think might be the motive in Quigley's death?"

"Just for the sake of the argument, Benny, and not because I believe it's true — for I certainly do not — but suppose Carlos had killed Quigley. Going back to Gorell's statement that Mrs. Lanfrey kept a late rendezvous with Quigley, we would have the motive — jealousy or the incensed husband or however you want to classify it. Then, on the ground that Gorell was discovered to know too much, he would have

to be removed; and, further, because Mrs. Gorell so persistently stated her husband had been murdered and seemed to want to fasten the blame on Carlos, her death was inevitable. However else we may speculate about Quigley and Gorell, there's no question that Mrs. Gorell was killed because the slayer was afraid of her. A repeating killer may kill for one reason and kill again and again for still other reasons. Since he can die but once, he becomes coldly calculating, for subsequent crimes cannot increase the penalty."

"You're probably right, Hunt —"

"I'm sure I am."

"You can reason the same way by substituting Starr or Cranston for Lanfrey, except that the original crime would have a different motive. The motive would be money — passions aroused by the gambling. Cranston was the lookout that night. He might have seen Gorell wandering about at three o'clock in the morning and feared he had been seen committing the crime; or the same with Starr —"

"Of course," interrupted Rogers, "Cranston's being locked up last night takes him out of the picture."

"It does. But — let's clean up this job Lanfrey asked us to do and get out. I can think of more cheerful places to be."

There was a large amount of personal effects, all of which we went through, itemizing and packing them away in the two trunks and the three pieces of hand luggage.

"Do you believe Starr is guilty?" I asked Rogers as we worked.

"If he murdered Mrs. Gorell he is either the most stupid of killers or else a very clever one. His jacket was either left on the bed because he was too stupid to realize what he was doing, or else he left it there because he wanted us to think someone else killed Mrs. Gorell and had endeavored to incriminate him."

"Starr is clever," I observed.

"I think so too. The knife, of course, is of no value as a clue," Rogers went on. "Even if we were qualified to deal with fingerprints, so many hands have