

The Artist's Point of View

Some Evidence of Our Indestructible Native Contact with Creative Art

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IN SPITE OF all the adverse psychological and practical conditions in society today which smother the creative mind, people still do use art. Some use it naturally. For some its use is fragmentary, in patches of rudimentary, unkillable instinct. For others, like Andrew Mellon, the conflicts of the day result in queer, distorted contradictions of the natural way which are sure evidence of an unhealthy condition. This month I want to list a few positive examples.

Government subsidy of art. Even though this happened as a relief measure, the epochal fact that public money has been spent to pay for the production of works of art for public use is the greatest single evidence of a normal contact with art which has occurred in American history.

Rockefeller Center's commissioning of many artists to carry out its entire decorative scheme was a private acknowledgment of the functional use of living artists typical of what would happen normally in a civilized nation. In spite of confused standards, a last-century hangover in taste, and much nonarchitectural work, the fact of the commissions was an important application of art to life.

City, State, and national parks, with their preservation of natural beauty, their improvement of nature to create a planned beauty, their usually honest functional architecture of native materials, are works of civilized art.

Bridges of simple functional design are increasingly of good contemporary architecture and thereby evidence of an assimilated art.

Architecture. All buildings whose design grows out of contemporary needs and uses, from a silo to a skyscraper (without Gothic encrustations) or a modern factory are evidence of the normal functioning of the creative mind.

Machines and tools — autos, airplanes, streamlined trains, tugs, sailboats and ocean liners, pistols, refrigerators, the hand phone, a propeller, a hammer, a wood screw — all are things of beauty which man has created nor-

mally, without *art* consciousness, to do a job and appear well to the observing eye.

Art museums, as we over-revere them, are monuments to our wistful wishing for a conscious art in the finer brackets, i.e., pictures, sculptures, and furnishings. In these fields, because we are unconscious of our inherent creative powers and so do not trust and use them, we give an absurd degree of veneration to the achievements of past ages which, relatively, are little, if any, "greater" than our own actual or potential productions. So judged, art museums mainly testify to our divorce from the arts. They can be included here, however, as gestures of compensation for a deep and unsatisfied aesthetic hunger.

The above are public or group examples; here are a few personal ones.

Everyone "loves" color and likes pictures. Though there may be no *art* in colors or pictures as such, still this predisposition to interest is at least a physical contact.

Good taste in choosing colors or designs, in changing the position of a bed or chair or window because it "looks better" is a valid passport into the world of creative art (when native taste is not corrupted by the false commercialized standards of conventional "interior decoration").

Women's dress, at its best with the ten per cent of American women who achieve *style* instead of *styles*, shows what can happen here if we will. Perhaps the relative creative success in this field occurs because adornment is a functional process like the building of machines, hence the art applications are unconscious and healthy.

Love or practice of other arts are also effective passports. Participators in one art can participate in another.

So much indicates our inborn creative powers. Next month I shall list some of the negations which prevent our realizing them more widely.

RALPH M. PEARSON

A Page for Poets

Conducted by Henry Goddard Leach

President, Poetry Society of America



We Are All Poets

by ELIOT KAYS STONE

I HOPE the title of this piece has so surprised or even possibly shocked you that you will continue to read, for, no matter how contemptuous your attitude toward poets or how lofty your disdain for all their ways and works, I iterate and reiterate that we are all poets, yes, even you, though you may not be able to write two consecutive lines with rhythm and rhyme.

I don't mean that you are a poet all the time or that you make your living (or attempt to make it) by writing poetry or by talking about it or by reading it; but you do have your moments that are truly poetical and during those moments you are truly a poet.

If there is the least bit of manhood or womanhood in you, the least spark of humanness, and you are not simply a mental adding machine (and even if you are), I think you will remember moonlight nights when something happened to cause poetic thoughts to well up in your bosom. And you will remember those magnificent sunsets which you watched from a mountain peak or from the seashore, when the whole western sky was a blaze of glory, and the thoughts that thrilled and, perhaps, nearly choked you. But, no matter what those thoughts were or what occasioned them, as you look back on those moments you treasure them as the loftiest, the most inspiring, you have ever lived.

We are all born poets and at moments are poets whether or not we affect to despise poets and poetry. We are inevitably poets, as it will take me only a few minutes to demonstrate to you. We live, as we say, in a universe of law. Now this law, in so far as it has been tracked down, is simply *rhythm*. Scientists call it vibration, but that is merely another name for rhythm.

Everything in the universe, everything in this world, every conceivable article about you, is in rhythmic motion, even if our senses are too dull to distinguish that motion. Any scientist will tell you that. The chair upon which you are so comfortably and securely seated is not solid. It only seems to be so to the two of the five senses that can get at it —

the senses of sight and touch. We say the chair looks solid, and it feels solid. For all practical purposes it is solid but in reality it is an aggregation of atoms quite widely separated from each other, and in each atom is a certain number of electrons revolving around the central nucleus, the proton. Each atom is really a less than microscopic solar system, with the central nucleus, its sun, and the electrons, its planets. And these tiny planets, smaller than anything of which the imagination can actually conceive, are separated from each other and from their sun by as sweeping planetary distances as our earth and her sister planets are separated from each other and from our sun — that is, in proportion to the size of the electrons in the atom — while each atom, in proportion to its size, is as distant from its fellow atoms or infinitesimal suns as all the suns that we call stars are distant from each other. So the chair is an infinite number of such suns, rapidly revolving, their tiny planets whirling around them, all in constant rhythmic motion on so miniature a scale that not even through the most powerful of our microscopes can we glimpse this tiny universe.

Marvelous, isn't it?

But it is not necessary to follow the physicists and the chemists in their researches and investigations and experiments to know that in truth and in reality we live in a rhythmic world and are attuned to its rhythms. There are the rhythms of the seasons, of day and night, and of the ebb and flow of the tides. There are the rhythms of music and of the dance, of line and mass, and of color. Light is rhythm, heat is rhythm, electricity is rhythm, and without rhythm there would be none of these forces or of the wonders which these forces make it possible for our scientists to give us. In this highly mechanized age, the machinery which surrounds us is in rhythmical motion. The motion must be rhythmical, or the machine cannot function. How long does it take you to detect a false note in the rhythm of your motor? There is even a rhythm in our walk, the carriage of the head and

of the body, and in the swing of the arms; and no rhythm is more inspiring than the march of trained troops. We are the creatures of habit, of rhythm, our very existence depending on it — in the rhythmic respiration and expiration, to and from our lungs, of the atmosphere that surrounds us; in the systole and diastole of our hearts; while metabolism is but the rhythmic balance, within our bodies, between the forces which build up living substance from the food we eat and those which break down the living tissues into inert matter.

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WE live, I repeat, in a rhythmical universe and we enjoy its rhythms, all of them, that is, except poetry. We have no use for poetry. It is a lot of unpractical balderdash. And so, my friend, was the atom unpractical, until the physicists and the chemists between them seized on it and split it into its protons and its electrons. Now they have even discovered two other somethings in it — the neutron and the neutrino. What these are I do not know; I doubt if any scientist knows precisely; but I suspect that one or the other of them is satellites for the electrons, so that these tiny planets have their still tinier moons. The big and the little, the infinitely large and the infinitely small — the same law working throughout cosmos and microcosm.

All children like poetry, and I know whereof I speak, because I have taught in the lower grades for several years of my life and have come in direct and intimate contact with young children of various nationalities whose parents occupied very different positions in society. All of us have heard a young child singing some little song he has improvised, over and over with the greatest gusto, his little body or his hands keeping time to the beat of his tune. Many of the games that have been popular with children, generation after generation, are accompanied by such jingling tunes as, "Here we go round the mulberry bush," and "London Bridge is falling down." When I was a wee child, barely able to walk, I toddled around with a *Mother Goose* under my arm, making life miserable for all grownups whom I encountered, by pleading with them to read to me. And they had to read the jingles correctly. Woe unto them if they left out a word or mis-