

Le Cahier Rouge. Ma Vie. 1767-1787.

Journal Intime. Published 1895 by Meligari.

De l'Esprit de Conquête et de l'Usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la Civilisation Européenne.

Adolphe. Anecdote trouvée dans les Papiers d'un Inconnu.

Mémoires sur les Cent-Jours: en forme de lettres.

De la Religion, considérée dans sa source et dans ses formes, et ses développements.

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GEORGE DOWNS

WHY DO I PAINT?

I TOOK up painting by chance, and as I could not afford to attend an art school I had to teach myself.

By origin I am a worker. My childhood was unhappy. My father was a barman and my mother a waitress. I had hardly any home life because of the long hours my parents worked. When I was nine years of age my father died, and I was sent to a convent school for Catholic children, along with my three sisters and two brothers, and remained there until I was thirteen years old.

When I was fourteen I started work as a Reuter's telegram boy for ten shillings a week. But I could not settle down and I wandered from job to job: tricycle messenger boy, carpenter's apprentice, and labourer in several munition factories during the last war. After the war I started work as a comi-waiter, that is a learner, and eventually became a full-fledged waiter and worked in many London hotels and restaurants.

I was still very restless, searching for I knew not what.

Later I worked as a waiter in a West End Corner House for sixty-five hours a week to support a wife and two boys. The house only paid me ten shillings a week, and I had to depend on charity (politely called tips) for the rest.

I became friends with a waiter, an ex-schoolteacher from Newcastle who had fallen out with his people, and worked as a waiter rather than be on the dole. He was a Freud fan, and we had many discussions on the subject. During one of our arguments he provoked me into saying that I believed I could paint better than So-and-so, naming a waiter who worked on our shift. He laughed at my assertion, and I made up my mind to prove to him that I could paint better than the other fellow.

So I came to take up painting seriously, and, starting from scratch, I encountered many obstacles which often discouraged me. But I kept on trying. From the very first my imagination was fired by this new world where I could express myself and be free, as I then thought. Every spare moment I had, mostly during my rest period in the afternoon, I visited the picture galleries, museums, reading rooms, and dealers' shows: studying and drawing; soaking myself in everything connected with painting. This new stimulation to all my faculties made my job as a waiter seem lighter, and yet at the same time made me more dissatisfied. At last I had something creative to do. I lived, dreamed and talked painting, and craved to give more time to it.

As a means of securing more time for art I managed to save a few pounds, and with the help of a friend I started a one-man business. I bought drapery goods and set up a stall in Caledonian Market. There I mock-auctioned my goods, and got away from the market as soon as possible. I simply detested the whole business, and perhaps that is why I failed after three years. But during that period I had more time for study than I had had working as a waiter. Next I tried working as a commercial traveller, but the war put an end to that, and now I am in the A.R.P.

All my paintings have been done while earning a living working at something else. Only during brief periods of economic stability was I able to concentrate on painting as a creative artist should be free to.

I found that as a painter I had to study everything related to

art, and this 'everything' was really the society in which I lived. I plunged into the study of the historical development of painting, drawing and technique, interested myself in the philosophies of the East and the West, in psychology, biology, physiology, sociology, and arrived at Marxism, which supplied me with an evolutionary and dynamic explanation of nature and society. From groping among a welter of confusion and contradictions I gradually reached the point where I was able to see clearly the objective world I lived in. Armed with this outlook I could pursue my creative work, seeing things free from the subjective haze which had hitherto hampered me. As my perception developed, so did my painting. No longer handicapped by merely superficial impressions of external reality, I was able (to the extent my mastery of the technique of painting allowed) to put on canvas the subjects I chose in all their complexity and inter-relationships. The long voyage of discovery (which is rather difficult to make others understand) resulted in my work becoming more dynamic.

Chardin was my first real love, and Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin brought added joy. Modigliani, Braque and Picasso confused me at first, but they excited and encouraged me later. The grandeur of Chinese painting, its sweetness and intimate quality, aroused the desire to emulate this contemplative art, in many of its aspects so restful, so silent, strong and encouraging.

Other discoveries (remember I worked completely alone) were Hokusai, the daring and imaginative, and Uccello, naïve, poetical and charming. All these fitted in with my idealistic and individualistic attitude at this time.

During the first six years of study I worked alone; the only contacts I had being those I met in the course of earning a living. It was the encouragement of Julian and Ursula Trevelyn and Tom Harrisson, with whom I became acquainted by chance, that helped me to survive a most difficult period. I remember well their advice: 'Paint your own life, George, your experiences; use that for your subject-matter.' And I did.

This saved me from becoming a shadow of Braque, Picasso, Gauguin or Van Gogh. I have an infinite amount to learn from them, but all I have taken I use for my own purpose, hoping my work gains in simplicity and directness of statement, depth and vitality, and retains poetry and lyricism.

Then came the war, which aroused me from my individualist dreamland. What a struggle I had to overcome the inertia of a subjective, idealistic consciousness, to a new consciousness of social realities, and the responsibility of the artist to the community. I see so many of my fellow artists overcome by this inertia, drugged by misconceptions, while the people are waiting for support and inspiration that only artists can give.

There are many things that can be said in the language of painting and graphic art. The things said by Daumier, Goya and Breughel have the greatest of all qualities—popular expression. These artists have realized their true function, to become the voice of the people, instruments of collective and communal expression. This gives their work popular quality.

Popular art is great art. The best work of Breughel is the highest form of popular painting. We have a qualitative change, from one-sided quantity to many-sided quality. Breughel's painting, 'Murder of the Holy Innocents', symbolized and made conscious the oppression of the peasants by their feudal lords, and the whole is expressed poetically and lyrically. I emphasize these last two qualities, because there seems to be a widespread misconception that by popular art we mean an uninspired and unimaginative realism. Popular art requires a deep social awareness, and the fusion of emotion and intellect by the imagination will provide that poetry and lyricism which appeals to the heart as well as to the mind. This is the art that changes reality in a progressive and dynamic way.

The new popular art that is coming into being will have for its subject-matter the people and social life in its many-sided realities, and will make conscious for the people their ideals and aspirations in a positive way. It will be a profoundly humanist art, such as Shostakovich's 'Leningrad Symphony', which is devoted to the ordinary Soviet citizens who have become heroes of this patriotic war, Chaplin's 'Dictator', Clifford Odett's 'Awake and Sing'. These are manifestations of popular art which most easily come to mind. I would add Picasso's 'Guernica', except that its terms of expression are, I feel, too unrealized and esoteric. Popular art does not require uninspired realism, but that realism be made more profound, that is, many-sided. Exaggeration and magnification is justifiable if we are to change reality.

By "many-sided" I mean the difference between an academic painter or realist and a painter like Pieter Breughel.

I would say that the academic painter's mind was like a sieve with a few large holes in it. He stands before an object or scene, the subject penetrates his mind and literally drops out the other side, and we have a literal, natural presentation: the subject has not been held up on the way.

But Breughel, whose mind is like a very fine sieve, with hundreds of meshes, has a many-sided consciousness; when the subject-matter passes through a mind of this quality the subject becomes changed: a whole host of associative images adhere, and we get a profound realism. This is the realism I define as popular realism, or art. Popular, also, because it has subject-matter pertaining to the people, as opposed to painting, which is mainly formal composition.

I do not use the word in the sense of immediate acceptance by the people: there is bound to be a time-lag, which will vary according to given social conditions.

In the words of Gorky: 'Popular art is art that returns to its source—the people, natural and healthy relations are restored between the artist and the people.'

The artist's sympathy for the people gains the sympathy of the people for the artist. The popular artist forgets his own individualistic dreams in making real the dreams of the people.

Just as social reality is a many-sided whole, so the functions demanded of the artist are many and varied:

To arouse the deepest layers of sensitiveness in the people.

To inspire, to brighten life, to express one's faith in the people.

To use his art to fight the greatest and most infamous enemy of the people and culture—Fascism.

You can think of many more tasks we have to perform. I feel our greatest satisfaction lies in solving the problems set us by society, and retaining our sincerity and integrity by tackling the most urgent problem: the winning of this war and the defeat of Fascism. On these things depends our freedom, our freedom to live and to create. This is what I have been searching for all my life.

No longer is it *I*, it is *we*—the people—who battle for freedom, without which all is dust and ashes. The artist has the inspiring task of using his art to win this greatest of all prizes: security from want and freedom for the people.

DIANA GARDNER

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

I

IN the largest cabin of the *Florian*, in which one could scarcely stick one's elbows out, Macnab sat, with his plimsolled feet on the flap table.

'Lone Atlantic Crossing on Home-made Cutter', he read savagely. 'At this moment a neat 40 ft. cutter is lying in the harbour. It was designed, built, and is to be sailed across the Atlantic by one man: Charles Macnab, aged thirty-eight, one time solicitor's clerk, stoker on ocean liner, and dish-washer. He plans to start his trip tomorrow, the 13th, despite the associations of the date, and to reach New York in three months' time. The boat is amply stocked with provisions. When I asked the boat-builder, captain and crew rolled into one, what made him contemplate the trip, he answered: "I plan on getting a rest from civilization for a while."' "

Footsteps rang on the deck above and a moment later the writer of the article—a man named Protheroe—thrust his bland face through the hatch:

'Have you finished your supper?'

Macnab got to his feet. He was short, with a large head. 'I thought I told you I didn't want publicity,' he stormed.

Unabashed, Protheroe climbed down into the cabin. 'How about farewells at the Blue Peter?'

Macnab shook his head. 'At five-thirty, I've to be away on the morning tide.'

Protheroe sat on the edge of the bunk.

'Very well, we'll drink here.'

Macnab went ungraciously to the locker and brought out brandy. After that it was a simple matter to get him to the Blue Peter at the end of the quay.

Some fishermen and a yachtsman in a peaked cap greeted them cheerfully as they entered. 'So you're off at last,' said an old salt. 'Glad I'm not in your boots.' The yachtsman clapped him on the back. 'Didn't know until I read my *Western Argus* that you loathed the sight of us.'