

LETTERS - AND - ART

ART AT THE COUNTY FAIRS

COULD MICHELANGELO ever be expected to dislodge *Mutt and Jeff* and the other comic-supplement heroes as an object of popular interest? The director of the Milwaukee Art Institute, Mr. Dudley Crafts Watson, thinks he could if the right methods were employed to assist.

attractive arbor of vines over it and chairs for about two hundred. In good weather we went out there for the demonstrations, and when it rained we moved the platform inside. This is, briefly, the way we 'performed.' It is so simple that it could be done in every community, or at least in every State where there are artists who can demonstrate with a few lines the ways

and the means to go about creating a picture. It could also be done in sculpture and in some of the crafts. I believe these demonstrations have proved in Minnesota one of the most effective ways to remove the mystery of art and make the people believe it is a part of their own expression. In the first place, we posed the model upon the platform, showing how to get an attractive pose, and then made a large drawing of the figure in fifteen minutes. The audience loved to see the work done; it meant more to them than all the talking about the pictures did. We started with the young woman and then took an old man and then a little child, and varied the program each day. We would pose the young woman straight ahead with the head in this stiff position, making a very rapid sketch life-size and then show how by simply loosening one side of the figure and relaxing it we could gain informality and grace.

"We had one delightful old soldier with a grizzly beard and many brass buttons, and we demonstrated that the beard and the buttons were non-essentials. Then we would show with the young lady what the photographer does to-day. To-day the country photographers have all become art photographers, and they make the model 'look pleasant,' or agonizingly 'graceful,' and we

showed how silly that was. Then we would follow that with a landscape. We found to our surprise that they were not really as interested in the figure as they were in landscapes. We would draw a large landscape with a red barn in the middle and a road cutting the corners of the picture and the trees planted at regular intervals and would show how awkward that was, and then we would demonstrate the proper planting of trees leading up to the house and the arrangement of buildings on the farm-grounds pictorially. We would rearrange the composition, move the barn over, and illustrate the general principles of composition and beauty. Occasionally we would follow that by taking one of the pictures in the exhibition and draw it, to show them the restful spaces, the unity of the composition, and it was surprising how rapidly they gleaned the sense of these terms."

At last it was found necessary to invite those who had seen the demonstration to leave, so that others could come in; and before long an extra guard had to be summoned to take care of the people. The account continues:

"We would often take crowds into the gallery and point out the same principles of the demonstration in the pictures and the works of sculpture. From six to half-past seven of each evening the galleries were so jammed that we had to make two tours, and we found that the same people who had been there during the day came back for the gallery tours in the evening. The first of the week the wives and daughters were there, but later the farmers themselves came in as great numbers as the women.

"The first day a woman asked if we gave the talks every day of the fair. She said: 'I have a daughter who has recently been married and who always wanted to paint and wanted to



Courtesy of "The American Magazine of Art."

AN OUTDOOR ART CLASS.

Before the art-craving attendants of the county fairs in Minnesota an artist shows the uninitiated how men of his profession draw from a model.

A hint is taken from the way systematic buyers of the records of the music-reproducing instruments proceed almost by their own impetus. They begin with "Pretty Baby" and various dance records, and in two years they arrive at the classics. Chopin, Beethoven, and Verdi are in the shops to be tried out, and these in the end are better liked than the poor stuff. Mr. Watson contends that if the great mass of the American people could be reached with pictures as vigorously as they are being reached in music, it would be found that an advance in the appreciation of art would not be "altogether a matter of education," but would come simply by opening people's eyes and giving them a chance to see. The Chicago World's Fair is declared to have done more to enlighten the masses in the United States on the subject of art than all the museums combined have been able to do. Hence Mr. Watson sees a chance to reach every year "possibly 40,000,000 of people through their own conclaves known as county and State fairs." Some efforts have been made in many States, chiefly in the way of little side-shows which attract few visitors, but the scheme which is regarded as most promising of results is that introduced by Mr. Maurice I. Flagg, director of the Minnesota Art Commission. In addition to the "real hand-paintings, no two alike," which the posters endeavored to bait the public with, Mr. Flagg introduced "intimate" talks and demonstrations such as we see described in *The American Magazine of Art* (New York):

"Mr. Flagg had prepared an outdoor studio with a platform and easel, and the landscape gardener had arranged a very

take lessons. She lives three hundred miles away, but I am going to telegraph her to come.' And the next afternoon the daughter and her husband were there. I have had three pictures sent me by the daughter since she went back, and she never touched a bit of painting before then except in a very amateurish way.

"There are innumerable instances of that sort. One day a little girl and her father stayed a whole day; she was about twelve years of age, and when I went to speak to them she was extremely shy and hid behind her father. I asked him if she enjoyed art. He said: 'I do not know what is the matter with her; she won't go anywhere else in the grounds. I tried to take her to the show and to the automobile race, but she doesn't want to go.'

"At the end of a third day a minister in a community of seven hundred came about two hundred miles. He said: 'You won't mind if I stay here? I have always had a notion that if I could draw a little bit I could make my people come to church on Sunday evenings.' Of course we gave him all the help we could.

"One of the most interesting experiences was the end of the fifth day. The manager of the 'Pike' came in, and I recalled I had seen him in the audience four or five times, and he said: 'I begin to understand now why it is we are not doing any better business on the "Pike."' He asked us to move the studio down to the 'Pike' the next year. The director of the commission had guaranteed to the board that we would make it just as interesting as the air-ship flights. I thought it was a pretty large order, but on Friday afternoon the hour of the air-ship flights was changed; we had the place jammed when the aeroplanes went up; not a person budged from his seat, altho they could all hear the whir of the motors. Fortunately, the secretary of the fair was there and saw the result."

One who listens among the hundreds of silent, gaping "open-eared" to the foolish and futile, when it is not unpatriotic and blasphemous, oratory of our soap-box speakers in the great cities wonders why this method could not be employed by competent artists to interest some of these willing listeners in a subject which did not aim simply to convince. The *New York Evening Post*, after noting the account of Mr. Watson's efforts, is inspired to this comment:

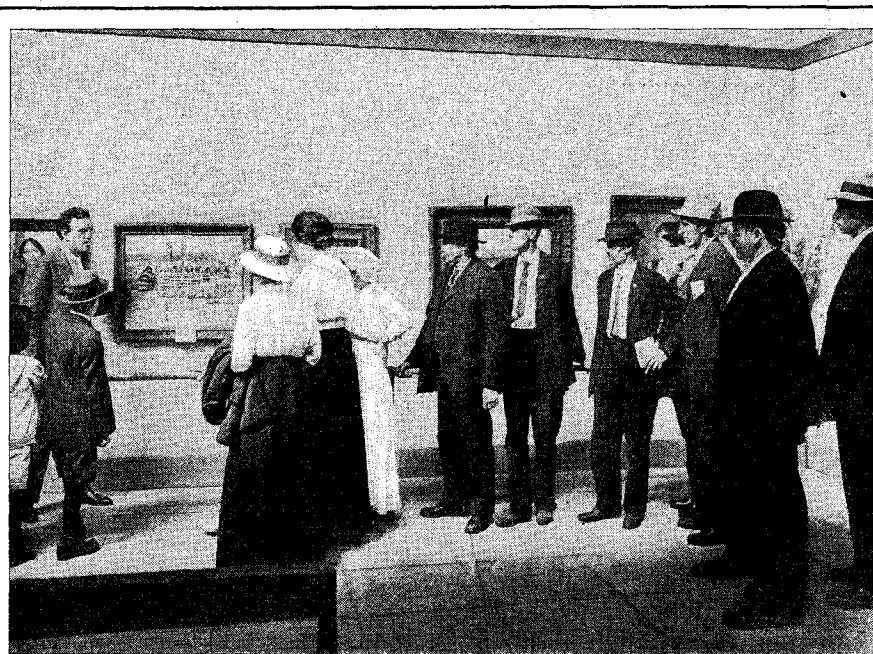
"Certainly nothing will ever begin without a beginning. Art probably never has anywhere come of itself, by spontaneous combustion. Dante and his circle fed on inferior Provençal literature. 'I claim my goods wherever I find them,' said the poet. America must deliberately do the same. In the process the egg of somebody's sensibilities is sure to be broken, so that the *omelette soufflé* of American art may swell magnificently. Old Latin-speaking scholarship was shocked when Dante deliberately chose a vulgar dialect for his 'Divine Comedy.' He forced art to be democratic, and thereby persuaded democracy to be artistic. If democracy and art are ever to be wed, then always the latter must go a-courting of the former in the tongue of the people. Mr. Watson and his friends are courageously bridging over the awkwardness of the first few tongue-tied moments of meeting."

WHERE ARE THE COLLEGE BOYS?—Ten to fifty per cent. fall is noted in the enrolment of the Eastern and Middle-Western colleges. The *New York Evening Sun* notes several meanings:

"It shows how quickly the flame of patriotism has leapt up among the young men of the country at perhaps the most impressionable period of young men's lives. It shows that the drain upon the student body is disproportionately greater than upon any other separate set or class of young men. And it should also serve to show clearly the folly and falseness of the unintelligent or insincere charge—not so often heard of late—that the 'laboring classes' are to be exploited in this war, while the well-to-do reap the benefits."

POETRY AND ART TO REPAY THEIR DEBT TO ITALY

POETS AND SINGERS of America have begun to realize that they owe a debt to Italy as the source of much of their inspiration, and efforts are on foot to organize an ambulance service on the Isonzo front. Aside from the desire to assist an ally in her need, says the *New York Times*, the poets of America are moved by "the sheer love and sentiment which English-speaking poets have always had for a land made dear to them by Shelley, Keats, Byron, Browning, Landor, and others who found in Italy their richest field of inspiration." The plan of the poets is to place at least fifty ambulances, to



A GALLERY TOUR IN A COUNTY FAIR,

Where the artist criticizes the pictures sent for exhibition, and finds that his informal talks enthrall the farmers who listen.

cost \$2,000 each, on the Italian front within a few months. Two of these ambulances were practically paid for by ten contributors. At the end of the first week ten ambulances were assured from the contributions collected. We read further:

"The raising of this fund will be the first step in a general scheme to make the American Ambulance service in Italy assume at least something of the proportions that it has achieved in France. The American Ambulance in France has furnished 1,000 ambulances and 2,000 drivers on the French front. The total number of ambulances on the French front is about 64,000. The work of the American Ambulance organization in France has now been taken over by the United States Government; but as there are no American troops in Italy as yet, it is necessary, according to the statement made by the chairman, Robert Underwood Johnson, that the American effort on that front shall be promoted and stimulated by voluntary organization.

"General Cadorna, chief of the Italian forces, has given full approval to the work of the American Ambulance in Italy. Promoters of the movement learned last week from an agent of the American Ambulance in Italy that the activities on the northeastern front had made it highly essential to place at the disposal of the Italian forces at once a great number of ambulances.

"Several members of the Italian Embassy have written letters of appreciation to the American Ambulance in Italy for the work that it is doing. From Beverly R. Myles, head of the American Ambulance in Italy, Chairman Robert U. Johnson, of the Poets' Committee, has received the following letter:

"My dear Mr. Johnson: I wish to take this opportunity of thanking the Poets' Committee for taking the lead in raising the funds for the American Ambulance in Italy. From many authentic sources I have received assurances of the vital need of ambulances to be placed on the Italian front immediately.