

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

The Paris Commune again in a Soviet film— Art from Greenwich Village and points west

NEW YORK's Cameo Theater is now showing *Paris Commune* (Amkino), which is one of the most ambitious historical films to come from the Soviet Union. Its importance to us and its contemporary significance cannot be underestimated. It is thrilling to contemplate the reaction of the people of Madrid and Valencia to *Paris Commune* when it is shown there, where the theaters have become social-discussion centers. The connection between the struggle of the Spanish workers to defend their liberty against fascism and that of their Parisian brothers who sixty years ago defended themselves against the reactionary-imperial Thiers government aided by the Bismarckian invaders, makes this new Soviet film important for all of us.

The historical care given the production is impressive. Director Gregory Roshal presents not only an emotional and melodramatic film, but an exposition of the political structure of the Commune, portraits of the leaders, and a discussion of the "tragic mistakes" of the Commune. From an emotional or physical point of view the *Paris Commune* may fail, but it is not that aspect that is important.

This, of course, brings to mind the Kozintsev and Trauberg early effort on the Paris Commune called *New Babylon*. That film, as you may recall, was beautifully conceived and executed. Moskvina's wonderful photography contributed in no small measure to the total effect of the film, which was built on the romantic idea of *Sturm und Drang*. That may have been more exciting, but less valuable. *New Babylon* had virtuosity and emotional impact, but it gave no indication of the political character of the Commune.

Roshal has made every effort to avoid this style. On the other hand, he had the difficult problem of popularizing the story. To this end, he introduced the love element. It is here that he fails. But not to the extent indicated by many of the New York film reviewers. *Paris Commune*, with all its mistakes, with all the things that fail to come off, is a distinguished film and, I repeat, an important one.

It may be unconventional to discuss the opinions of other critics, but the case of Frank S. Nugent of the New York Times deserves notice. He had every right to think *Paris Commune* tedious and dull. But he had no right deliberately to defame the heroic French workers—to say that the "film-makers charitably ignore the debauchery, brutality, and vandalism of the commune, which did, after all, set fire to public buildings, massacre hostages, destroy the palace of the Tuileries, the Thiers library, and the Vendôme column—it is unable to hide . . . inklings of the stupidity, ineptness, and confusion of the revolution's leaders." There hasn't been anything like this since the infamous articles in *Harper's Weekly* during the last century and the vile and stupid

lies of the Times's own William Carney writing from Spain today. How appropriate, in this connection, is Marx's letter to Liebknecht in which he says, "You must not believe a word of all the stuff you may see in the papers about the internal events in Paris. It is all lies and deception. Never has the vileness of bourgeois journalism displayed itself more brilliantly."

PETER ELLIS.

THE FINE ARTS

WHILE the galleries around New York's 57th Street are rapidly closing their doors for the summer, down in Greenwich Village new activity is apparent.

On MacDougal Street and under the windows of MacDougal Alley's expensive studios, the artists have been holding their spring outdoor exhibition and sale. The fact that dozens of artists are still forced to hawk their paintings like street peddlers is proof that the W.P.A. Federal Art Project has not been able to take care of all the artists, and that further curtailment would cause havoc among those who have in the last years had a small measure of security.

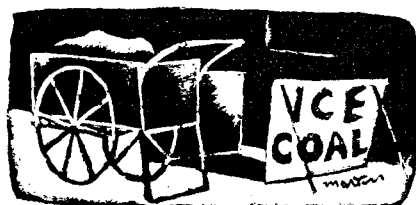
Even the Summer exhibition of the permanent art collection opening at the Whitney Museum reinforces this fact. The artists represented include the leaders of American painting today, yet many of them are even now working on federal projects. A new purchase is Louis Ribak's *Home Relief Station*, which furnishes an excellent example of the transition of contemporary painting from static recording to active social criticism.

A comparison of this permanent collection with the new show of midwestern artists, just opened at the A.C.A. Gallery in New York, reveals great changes in American life in the last decade. A fundamental cleavage, brought about by the crisis of 1929, distinguishes the new generation from the preceding one, which received its training, for the most part, in Europe. The post-war generation, even after its return from Europe and its exultant rediscovery of the American scene, was occupied chiefly with aesthetic problems and their application to American subject matter rather than to any new interpretation of American life. Their emphasis on sensuous values and compositional organization raised the aesthetic standard of American painting.

The new generation of painters is intent on analyzing and criticizing American life. The rise of regionalism in painting, while in many respects reactionary, has had the good effect of directing attention toward artists in other parts of the United States. In the past, there prevailed a snobbish indifference to American art outside of New York, along with the fashion for French modernism in the art galleries. Now there is an awakened interest in our American forebears in painting. In the long run, however, I believe that Stuart Davis's calligraphic interpretations of American streets will be judged as completely American in expression as are the illustrations of American life by John Stewart Curry and Grant Wood. But until quite recently, artists in both currents of influence have approached life statically, or at most satirically.

A new feeling pervades the vigorous work of the twenty-one mid-Western artists at the A.C.A. Gallery. These painters hail from Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa; nine of them are from Missouri. But they are here not so much to be shown as to show us. They demonstrate that Joe Jones, represented by two water colors, is no lonely phenomenon. His candid observation of the world he lives in is no personal idiosyncrasy, but the expression of a growing consciousness of a whole group of mid-western artists, acutely sensitive to their environment and to the social factors which produce it. The names of Joseph Meert, Margaret Mullin, Syd Fossum, George Josimovich, Aimee Schweig, Lawrence Adams, Bernice Singer, and Bob White may be little known in these parts, but they sound a new note in their direct and uncompromising realism. Aesthetically, they are nearer to Grant Wood and Thomas Benton than to the more sensuous and subtle painting of Max Weber. Their marked feeling for illustration and satiric caricature runs parallel to American advertising art, magazine illustration, and the comic strip. This seeming backward aesthetic step gives them a base for real mass popularity. Their paintings belong to a totally different world from that of the regionalists.

Something of the American pioneer spirit imbues these canvases with a harsh integrity; something of puritan tradition lurks in the rejection of sensuous values for literal fidelity to detail. A splendid portrait like that of James B. Turnbull's *Flood Refugee* carves out a new segment of reality akin in feeling to that reality captured by the Soviet films. This portrait of the indomitable grandmother reflects the unflinching pioneer spirit face to face with a tragic contemporary situation. Such depiction of character in plastic terms is utterly American and, at the same time, revolutionary. Nor is this attitude merely personal, for it exists in Tandler's *Blacksmith*



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(although not on the same plastic level), in Joseph P. Vorst's flood pictures, and even in Criss Glasell's spoofing of Grant Wood.

Landscapes like Norman MacLeish's *Illinois Prairie*, Thalinger's *Bum's Hangout*, or Adelyne S. Cross's interesting backyards of Chicago are pervaded by an attitude of revolt rather than the slow sinking into disintegration which Arnold Blanch used to record so consummately. In Charles Allen's black-and-whites, the labor struggle is set down vividly. Certainly this exhibition makes us want to see more from the West. That this new spirit is not isolated in any geographic region, but is rather part of a new awakening in America, is proved by the series of water colors, also at the A.C.A., done by Iva Helford, which vividly record the somber country of Panther Creek Valley in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania.

CHARMION VON WIEGAND.



Forthcoming Broadcasts

(Times given are Eastern Daylight, but all programs listed are on coast-to-coast hookups)

William Allen White. "Obligations of Democracy." Sat., June 12, 5 p.m., C.B.S.

Unemployment. Dr. Charles Stelzle, director of the Good Neighbor League, Mon., June 14, 6:15 p.m., C.B.S.

Questions before Congress. A representative discusses current issues Wednesdays at 3:30 p.m. and a senator on Thursdays at 5 p.m., C.B.S.

Recent Recommendations

MOVIES

The Last Night. A vivid Soviet film of the night of Oct. 6, 1917.

(We are omitting the listing of recommended American films for the duration of the strike in the Hollywood studios.—THE EDITORS.)

PLAYS

Room Service (Cort, N. Y.). Very funny nonsense about a penniless Broadway showman, ably directed by George Abbott.

Babes in Arms (Schubert, N. Y.). Pleasant and talented cast of youngsters in an amusing, tuneful Rodgers and Hart musical.

Excursion (Vanderbilt, N. Y.). Thunder on the left in comic vein by Victor Wolfson.

Power (Ritz, N. Y.). The Living Newspaper's powerful and amusing attack on the utilities racket.

Professor Mamlock (Daly, N. Y.). Family of German-Jewish physician caught in the maelstrom of the Nazi regime.

THE DANCE

How Long Brethren? and *Candide* (Nora Bayes, N. Y.). Tamiris, José Limon, and other members of the Federal Dance Theatre in two fine performances.

PHONOGRAPH RECORDINGS

Mozart. Gieseking and the Berlin State Opera orchestra give a hitherto unrecorded E-flat major piano concerto (Columbia Set 291).

Beethoven. The Lener Quartet with William Primrose on second viola in a new rendition of the quintet in C-major (Columbia Set 294).

Beethoven. Egon Petri gives a magnificent performance of the F-sharp major piano sonata (Columbia 68939 D).

Nicolai. Beecham presents a fresh slant on the overture to the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Columbia 68938 D).

Handel. Ethel Luening, with flute, harpsichord, and cello accompaniment, sings the superb chamber cantata *Nell Dolce Dell' Oblio* (Musicraft).

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*AMERICAN STUDENT UNION TOUR. Leader: James Wechsler. For students only. Social inquiry in France, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, England. Sailing July 3. 8 weeks..... **\$499**

RUSSIA

*GENERAL SURVEY TOUR. Leader: Robert Magidoff. Literary worker in Moscow since 1935. Sailing July 3. 8 weeks..... **\$399**

*A TRAVEL "COLLECTIVE." Leader: Dr. Joshua Kunitz, journalist, now living in Moscow. Sailing July 3. 8 weeks..... **\$543**

*THEATRE FESTIVAL TOUR. Leader: Will Geer of The New Theatre League. 5 weeks in Russia including Theatre Festival. Sailing July 28. 8 weeks..... **\$595**

*JULIEN BRYAN'S SIXTH ANNUAL TRIP through the highways and byways of the Soviet Union. Sailing June 19. 9 weeks..... **\$694**

*A PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEY. Leader: John A. Kingsbury, co-author "Red Medicine." Program arranged by Commissariat of Public Health. Sailing July 10. 9 weeks..... **\$797**

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