

I do not mean to suggest that Dr. Williams' ideas ever obstruct the dramatic movement of his stories; they do not. But they are always there, the implicit meaning of his pictures, his actions. And this awareness of the meaning of lives of men and women as they are really being lived prevents him, on the one hand, from wandering off into the fragmentary and neurotic dream experiences of the "fable makers," and, on the other, makes his realistic method significant. For his is not the old bulky, directionless realism of a Dreiser or a Farrell; it is realism directed always by a keen intellectual and emotional perception,—realism, therefore, as sharp as a surgeon's knife.

J. C. PAGE.

## Anti-fascist Magazines

THE FIGHT, *American League for Peace and Democracy*. 10 cents.

PHOTO-HISTORY, No. 4, *China Reborn*. 25 cents.

THESE two publications dramatize the menace of fascism and imply the cure: united resistance.

The *Fight* has devoted its April issue to the war in Spain. These are desperate days for the government in its struggle against the overwhelming supplies and the thousands of troops that have been rushed to Franco by his German and Italian allies. *Fight* reveals the possible results of this aid, results that have far wider implications than the terror indicated by the photographs of bombings and slaughter. They imply more than the menace to what James Waterman Wise calls Spain's "quenchless will to freedom." They imply—and this is the lesson that overwhelms the reader—that the agony of Spain can become the agony of the world.

*Photo-History*, No. 4, entitled "China Reborn," attempts to present the background and history of the growing unification of China and the resistance to Japanese invasion. Most of the photographs are interesting and well-presented, but the editor's eagerness to cover a wide field has weakened the contents.

*Photo-History* treats the Chinese war against military fascism without sufficient stress on the international importance of this struggle to defend the integrity of China against foreign domination. One picture and brief mention of the international boycott against Japan, a sentence on collective security, serve to narrow the significance of the international resentment against Japan's adventure. While *Fight* so clearly portrays the threat to world peace, *Photo-History* barely intimates this danger. There is no stress on the immediate necessity to prevent the spread of war through concerted action by the democracies. "China Reborn" remains a picture book with some fine scenes of Soviet China, interesting charts and some excellent descriptive text.

BRUCE MINTON.

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# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

## Housing Exhibit and Harriton's Art

**R**OOFs for forty million Americans, jobs for half as many—these are crying needs of our time. One-third of a nation housed in sub-standard dwellings; only 2 percent of the housing of New York City fit for human habitation by the criteria of modern sanitation and city planning; a quarter of the country's homes without tubs or showers (to take the optimistic figures of the Real Property Inventory), 17 percent without private indoor toilets, 30 percent without gas for cooking, half without furnaces or hot water boilers—this is housing in the land whose billboards boast, "The American standard of living is the highest in the world." These are incontrovertible facts, the very fabric of life of the American people.

The forty million who live in sub-standard dwellings know the facts only too bitterly: the exorbitant rents, the leaking ceilings, the dark "railroad" and "dumbbell" flats, old buildings where fire is an ever-present menace or where the walls may collapse any moment (as they did in Staten Island and more recently on the East Side), filthy toilets in public halls, bathtubs (if any) in kitchens already overcrowded, the three-shift sleeping arrangements of the Harlem "hot bed" system. The list continues: sordid with foul air, dirt, and filth, polluted water supplies, breeding of disease, plus the degradation of human beings deprived of privacy and decent shelter for home and family life. Make no mistake—housing is a major problem of our civilization.

From time to time, various agencies have considered the problem, as shown by the Museum of Modern Art's housing exhibition and the benevolent gesture of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in installing a typical slum tenement in its apse. The character of such enterprises has sometimes been highly specialized and often discouraged in tone beforehand. The title "America Can't Have Housing?" is symptomatic.

Now a new approach has been made to the problem; artists in coöperation have turned their eyes—and their brushes, chisels, print-makers' tools, and cameras—on this cancer of American life. The result is certainly not pretty, and some of it may not be art. But we submit that the exhibition "Roofs for Forty Million," being held at Rockefeller Center under the auspices of An American Group, Inc., for the next two weeks, is one of the most hopeful signs of the American artist's new awareness of reality.

The reason for hope is twofold. First, that artists see the urgency of the housing problem and understand that it is as much a theme for art as a surrealist landscape. Second, that

the spirit of the work shown (whether good, bad, or indifferent, and not all the work can be classed as first-rate esthetically) is affirmative and positive. We have had paintings, prints, sculptures, photographs which set forth the facts of social decay. But often the artist stopped there. He recorded a condition, but with an effect of enjoying the rotting timbers, the caved-in roof. To be sure, the efflorescence of decay does possess a strange, morbid beauty. However, to stop with contemplation of this decadent phenomenon is not enough for forward-looking creative workers. They must not only see the abominable fact, but must move on from that point to a program of action.

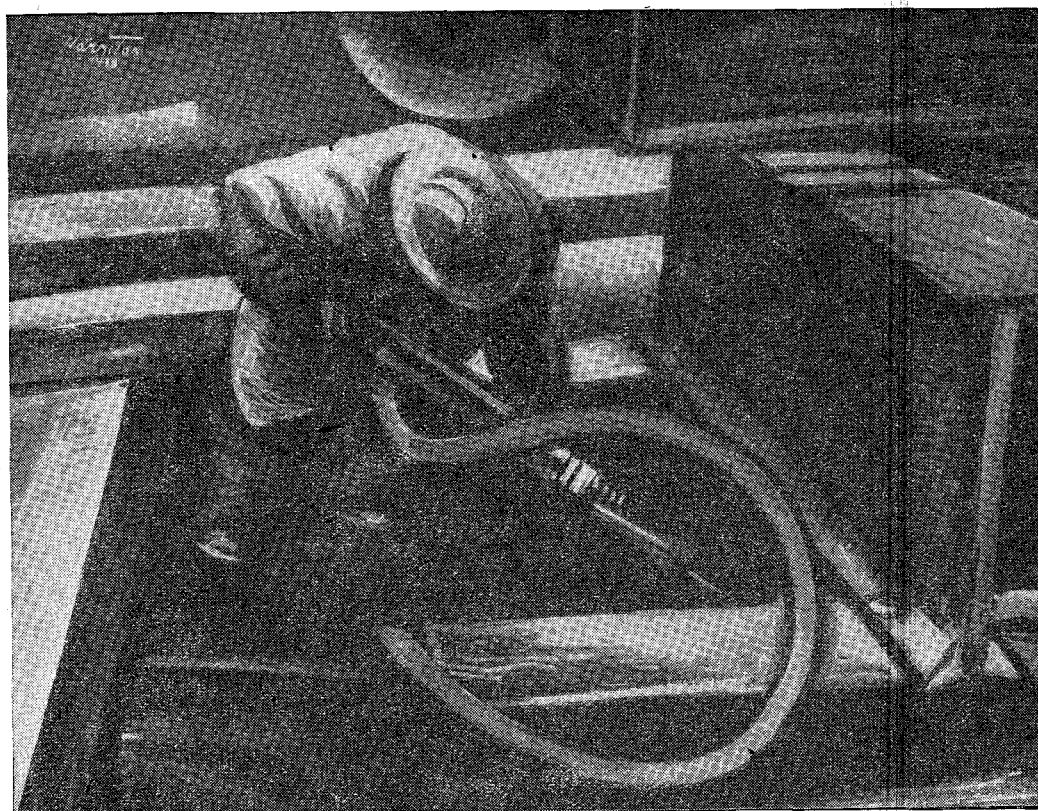
Generally, the emotion aroused by the hundreds of exhibits included in "Roofs for Forty Million" is strong and passionate protest against the evils portrayed. Not "how horrible this is!" but "I must do something about this!" is the reaction of the onlooker. Used in this spirit, art can really function as a weapon.

It is impossible to speak specifically of works in the exhibition. However, a number of admirable features should be mentioned. First of all, the exhibition has been organized, financed, and installed by the coöperative efforts of a fairly large group of artists. Second, the exhibition looks remarkably well, especially in view of the tremendous amount of material gotten into the seventh-floor galleries of La Maison Francaise, 610 Fifth Ave., New York City. The simple composition board façade at the entrance is effective, and

the small room for photographs is particularly happy in design. Third, the exhibition is democratic; no entry fees have been exacted of exhibitors, but expenses are being taken care of by the small admission fee of fifteen cents. For years, artists have argued that the public willingly pays admission to the theater and the movies; why not to exhibitions? Now they have a chance to try out the principle.

A footnote may be added, one trusts, without seeming ungracious. Social subject matter is necessarily realistic and objective. This being the case, the photographs as a group come off better than the other media; they are more concrete and tangible, more dreadful indictments of the horrors of housing in an unplanned society. One does not always feel that the paintings, drawings, prints, and water colors are based on an equal amount of observation. Here, when the artist enters a new field, he incurs new obligations, especially the obligation to discipline himself to a kind of esthetic reëducation. The whole feeling of "Roofs for Forty Million" is so positive and creative that one is confident this step will be taken in the artists' stride.

THE WORK of Abraham Harriton, at the A.C.A. Gallery till April 23, is not as pyrotechnical as that of some of our contemporary social artists; it is probably, for just that reason, far sounder painting. There is nothing in either his oils or gouaches that shouts to attract attention; the pictures speak with a still, small



*Driller*

Painting by Abraham Harriton (A.C.A. Gallery)