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and Russian, an appropriate device in such a remarkable picture. The cameraman, Claude Renoir, has done magnificent work with his material. The story was constructed from Renoir's interviews with veterans of German prison camps. Jean Gabin, Pierre Fresnay, Dalio, and von Stroheim give performances which can confidently be called perfect. In her small footage, the diminutive actress Dita Parlo registers still another great performance.

THE first work in years of the famous Soviet director, Pudovkin, is distinctly not his best. *Mother and Sons* is a tale of Soviet aviation with the veteran character actress, Korchagina-Alexandrovskaya (who is, I believe, also a member of the Supreme Soviet), enacting a mother of two flyers, one of whom is forced down on a stratosphere flight around the world. The other son is anxious to join the hunt for his brother but is cautioned by his superior officer to think of his mother, who could not afford to lose two sons. But mother is the new Soviet model and she tells the officer a thing or two about trying to scare her boy with such talk. Brother finds brother in the Bering Sea, and the picture ends with a great fete at the Moscow airdrome when the rescue expedition returns. Alexandrovskaya gives one of the year's outstanding performances as the doughty old lady, but the script contains no other opportunities for telling performances, being pretty much filled with heroic flyers rather than well realized characters. The good things in the picture also include some stunning photography of the sea, reminding you of Pudovkin's old silent masterpieces, a good deal of genial Soviet humor and satire, and a clever mixture of newsreel shots of Soviet leaders used in the celebration at the end. The montage is fumbling and Zharki's scenario doesn't give Pudovkin half a chance.

*Mother and Sons* comes in a period when the picture industry in the Soviet Union is geared with the defense program. It is designed to boost the morale of the Soviet people facing the madmen at their borders, to reaffirm the cheerful, reliant sense of discipline among the Socialist masses. As such it does not come to us with immodest claims of being great art. There is plenty to be done immediately to ready the defenses of the USSR, and the movie industry has taken the lead by reminding the people of the interventionist days (*Ski Battalion*, *The Defense of Volochayevsk*), of the war plots of fascism (*If War Comes Tomorrow* and *In the Far East*), and the films about the triumphs of aviation (*At the North Pole* and *Mothers and Sons*). *Mothers and Sons* is a good picture in this group—and you mustn't miss Alexandrovskaya.

I'LL go completely overboard for the curtain-raiser at the Cameo—a four-reel film version of Chekhov's bravura comedy, *The Bear*. Zharov, who played the Czar's faithful aide in *Peter the First*, enacts the quixotic booze-fighter, Grigori Stepanovitch Smirnov, who

comes to collect a gambling debt from Elena Ivanova Popova, the widow of an old crony. Chekhov can give lessons to the American playwrights who have been obsessed with "screwball" people. The zanies of czarist Russia provided Chekhov with the material of tragi-comedy, not, as our dramatists have done with a similar class in America, material for a series of daffy gags and shallow political soliloquies. Androvskaya as the widow and Zharov play it with the stops full out and I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed this welcome change from the underplaying of most films. It is acting with bombastic assurance and yet never crude or thoughtless.

CHICO with no piano and Harpo with no harp, even (alack!) no blondes, would seem to doom the new Marx brothers' extravaganza, *Room Service*. Tain't so, for the excellent farce by John Murray and Allen Boretz has enough stuff in it to cow even the ebullient Marx boys. They haven't done a thing to Groucho except give him a plot—a very suspenseful farce plot because it is built on economics. The adventures of a chiseling producer trying to bring his play to the boards without money beats love all hollow as the apprehensive element of farce. Once you've swallowed the shock that the junior Marxes are working without their usual props, you will enjoy this volume of the Marxes' work as much as its predecessors. Groucho is funny enough as Gordon Miller, the shoestring producer in danger of losing his shoestring, to make you wish his brothers would get out of the way and retire to a place on the Marx managerial staff along with the unlamented Zeppo. Harpo's few laughs come from funny props, a rueful note from this wild mime. Morrie Ryskind has adapted the play well, adding a comical scene from the phony "proletarian" play Groucho is nestling. The original members of the George Abbott company well-nigh steal the fillum as well. It's Marxist revisionism—that's what it is—but a delightful perversion indeed. JAMES DUGAN.

## Young Social Artists

MICHAEL GILLEN, Herbert Kallem, Morris Shulman, Henry Kallem, and Morris Neuwirth are the five original members of an artists' group which (according to Philip Evergood's foreword) "may enlarge later to include more painters like themselves." This is good news; for the work they are showing at the ACA Gallery is good work, and to have more of it cemented with the cohesiveness of a common idea will be splendid.

Skeptics ask, "What is social art and what is a social artist?" Despite their scorn, the fact is that social art and the social artist express very definite concepts about life and the relation of art to life. Some answers will be made to the questions at the symposium of artists and critics to be held at the gallery the night

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of September 23. But the best answers are to be found in studying the work of those painters and sculptors who profess themselves to be social artists, making social art.

In the case of the five young men now exhibiting, this is a pleasant task; for the level of quality is high, and the mood in which they work buoyant and hopeful. Not that their themes are Pollyanna; by no means. A *Collective Kitchen* into which seven persons are crowded, with baby crawling on the floor; or *Cellar Flat* in which the bathtub stands in the middle of the kitchen floor, unadorned and totally lacking privacy; crowded city parks; a mother nursing her baby on a tenement roof, naked baby and bared breast exposed to the sun (*Sun Bathing—East Side Style*); a prison dining room—these are the subjects the artists have chosen to depict.

Now these themes are certainly not the "monumental memory of other things" which academic and pseudo-classical art is. They are out of life, direct and painful visions, facts terrible in their impact. They represent unmistakable death, the death of potential human life, the slow starving of potential talent, the strangulation of longed-for happiness. They are the bitter reality of our time.

But when these young painters and sculptors take these terrible themes for art, they do so not in the spirit of one who rolls a morsel of tragedy on his tongue, but rather as one who sees the tragedy and vows it shall not recur. Before society can be cleansed of this living death, the human beings who make up society and by whose willed and united action society can be remade must know bitterly and fully the depths of their tragic plight. It is this pre-revolutionary phase of agitation that these artists present, as the mild hero of Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Hans Castorp, represented living death in a tuberculosis sanitarium from which he emerged for the struggle and chaos of war, where actual physical death was more truly life than the waking dream of his previous existence.

Since this phase, though not the ultimate objective of our endeavor, is an essential part of the historic process, it has necessary meaning and, through meaning, beauty—as Hans Castorp found in the metempsychosis of his last act. In the paintings this beauty is evidenced in two ways: in the solid forms built from strong cube volumes and in the sensitive care for surface and texture of paint. In the sculptures, the same simple strength is felt in the fact that the forms are not distorted and tortured, not worked over in an anxious intellectualizing of the medium, but cut quite cleanly from their enveloping mass.

Two elements are fused in this approach, realistic concern for the subject and esthetic concern for the expression. It is to be seen that these men have studied their themes; at the same time they have studied their mediums. A real union of form and subject is beginning to appear in the work of progressive painters and sculptors. It is no accident that the most hopeful signs are seen among the social artists.

ELIZABETH NOBLE.

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