



SIGHTS and SOUNDS

IN THE WORLD OF ART

By MOSES SOYER

THE recent exhibition of Picasso at the Buchholz Gallery has stirred even more than the usual excitement, due, first of all, to the high quality and the elements of surprise always contained in his work; secondly, to the almost hypnotic character of his fame and, finally, to his joining the Communist Party of France.

What can one say about Picasso that has not been said before? A huge library in many tongues exists about him. Picasso himself has written about his art, each time somewhat confounding his apologists and interpreters. Dozens of artists have literally built their life's work around one of his individual paintings. (Many of these little men, by the way, have, since Picasso joined the French Communist Party, suddenly undergone a change of heart. By reversing their arguments they are damning him now for what they formerly idolized him. Thus his inventiveness they call now "artistic instability," and his changes of styles "opportunism.") He has been compared often to a delicate musical instrument attuned to the spirit of our time, whose work reflects its restlessness.

Picasso's paintings, except those of the so-called "blue period" (the dancers, acrobats, Pierrots and the many motherhood pictures), the preparatory drawings for the Guernica mural and the mural itself, cannot to my mind be classified as social, except perhaps in the sense that they have opened new horizons in the esthetics of modern art. Picasso is primarily an inventor. He himself has used the word "inventions" in reference to his paintings. It is therefore regrettable to ascribe, purely on the grounds of Picasso's joining the Communist Party of France, new meanings to his work. For that reason the paragraph in Pfc. Jerome Seckler's article, "Picasso Explains" (NM, March 13), relating to Picasso's painting of a sailor, strikes me as silly. He tells Picasso that he interpreted the picture of the sailor "as a self-portrait—the sailor's suit, the net, the red butterfly, showing Picasso as a person seeking a solution to the problem of the times; trying to find a

better world—the sailor's garb being an indication of an active participation in this effort." Further—"but what of the red butterfly, I [Seckler] asked—didn't you deliberately make it red because of its political significance?" "Not particularly," he replied. "If it has any it was in my subconscious."

My reaction to this interview is the same as Rockwell Kent's. Picasso is apparently a modest and kind man, and the interview all but forced upon him. One therefore cannot attach too much importance to Picasso's answers. After the fall of Paris, magazines and newspapers published news that Picasso had been painting idealized portraits of the French Maquis. One or two have been reproduced in the papers. They resemble curiously his early pictures of the blue period. Perhaps they are an indication of the new Picasso, a socially conscious Picasso, reverting to his earlier, intensely human, emotional and understandable art.

BREAKING a long standing rule, the Whitney Museum of Art has opened its doors to a group of thirty-three European artists who in the past seven years have worked in this country. Of this group eight are of French birth, the rest natives of twelve other countries, but all, according to the catalogue note, reached their maturity in pre-war Paris. Many of the exhibitors are well known, their reputations having preceded them.

On entering, one's senses are rudely shocked by the riotous colors and strange forms into which these ultra-sophisticates have transformed the usually somewhat staid museum. One cannot at first but be impressed by the uninhibited display of artistic gymnastics. Each artist tries to outdo his neighbor, to out-sophisticate, to create a sensation. Some are men of talent and wit—Duchamps, Hayter, Masson, Tanguy and others—but to what ends are these gifts employed? To celebrate death, decay, decomposition. They delight in cancerous growths, miasmatic weeds, tumors, unnatural protuberances.

The first experience of novelty and surprise is succeeded by boredom. One finds that the little these artists have to say is already passé. The great world upheaval has touched them not at all. The world is changing but their work continues the decadence of the culturally bankrupt pre-war Europe. As such it is transitory, empty and sterile.

One actually yearns for the more solid performances of the American artists, lacking in sophistication but vital and expressive of our country and our people, and so often criticized and derided. These European artists can teach us but little.

RICHMOND BARTHE's exhibition at the International Print Society Gallery displays a sober and well-educated talent. He is especially good in his portraits, which he does with a fine feeling for character and the inner quality of his sitter. Outstanding are his portraits of Katherine Cornell and a tender study of a Negro child. He is less successful in idealized portraiture. Done on a monumental scale as, for instance, his large head of Abraham Lincoln, which is somewhat sweet and academic, it lacks the qualities one demands of monumental heads intended not so much to be portraits as symbols. Thus the Lincoln head falls quite short when one compares it with his head by George Gray Barnard. (Michelangelo, when a friend criticized his head of Lorenzo di Medici as bearing little resemblance to the subject, replied: "A thousand years hence who will dare to say that it does not resemble Lorenzo di Medici?" Who indeed?) Mr. Barthe is a sincere artist. His output is already significant but it seems to me he will do more important work when he frees himself from a certain tightness and conventionality.

SOME three years ago Yasuo Kuniyoshi was honored by the Downtown Gallery with an exhibition of twenty paintings, one for each of the twenty preceding years. The remarkable thing about that exhibition was that when one compared the first painting with the

3RD WEEK

New Soviet Epic

"ZOYA"

English Text arranged by Howard Fast
Original Musical Score by Shostakovich

Doors Open 8:45 A.M. Daily

STANLEY 7th Ave., bet. 41-42 Sts.
Wisconsin 7-9686

Anton Chekhov Film Festival
A DOUBLE DELIGHT

"MARRIAGE" and **"JUBILEE"**

Featuring artists of the Moscow Art Theatre
at Reduced Prices. GR. 5-8975

IRVING PLACE IRVING PL.
AT 14th ST.

ANTON CHEKHOV'S
"SUMMER STORM"
George Sanders — Linda Darnell
— ALSO —
"WATCHTOWER OF TOMORROW"
Story of Tomorrow's Peace; Plus
"DEVIL WITH HITLER"

★ **CITY** ★ 14th STREET
(near 4th Ave.)

'The Road to Democracy'
In Paintings by
SARA BERMAN BEACH
ARTIST ASSOCIATES
138 W. 15th St., N. Y. C.
Rosa Pringle, Director
May 1 — May 31
11-5 Daily 3-6 Sundays

CLOSED MONDAY • GRamercy 3-9053

DUNN'S
126 CLINTON ST., near DELANCEY
TOPS IN TOWN
For SEA FOOD • STEAKS • CHOPS
DAILY DOUBLE: Lobster and Chicken Dishes
Under Personal Supervision of Helen Dunn

All the atmosphere
of the OLD VILLAGE
plus good food
Candlelight • Fireplaces
Music

17 BARROW
Dinner; Week 5-10 P.M., Sun. 4-10 P.M.
17 Barrow St. CHelsea 2-9184

RUSSIAN SKAZKA
227 WEST 46th STREET AFTER THEATER FUN
• VODKA AND GOOD FOOD
• SKAZKA ORCHESTRA • ALYOSHA
RED ARMY ACCORDIONIST
NO COVER • CLOSED MONDAYS

last the difference was tremendous. Yet, as one studied the pictures chronologically, the difference was imperceptible and one became aware that the change was not sudden but slow and logical.

A critic writing about contemporaries must be tactful, careful not to be flip-pant and to avoid extremes in praise or disparagement. It is therefore a pleasure to be able to throw off all restraint. Kuniyoshi's show is by far the best he has had to date. What impresses one most in his work is his integrity. His color has grown clearer without losing its subdued richness, and his dreamy, slant-eyed, somewhat morose girls are becoming more human. This is especially evident in his fine painting, "Mother and Daughter," where he composes in a more subjective manner than has been his habit. The gestures of the mother and daughter are carefully thought out and studied. The result is deeply moving and human. It can stand with some of the religious paintings of the past which expressed with only two figures moments of ecstasy, sorrow and maternal love.

IT is unavoidable but it always happens to my regret that between my reviews some first class shows come and go. One was Julian Levi's, whose painting "The Widow" was reproduced in NEW MASSES of April 3. My general impression was that he has not changed greatly either in approach or subject matter. His color has become high in key and clearer, and his forms, if anything, more abstract. In composing he has lately been employing methods which are slightly surrealistic.

Levi is one of our most individual and likable artists. His choice of subject matter, fishermen and women, quiet landscapes, and flotsam and jetsam of the sea, is a reflection of his somewhat melancholy, romantic approach to life and art. His is a slow, painstaking and meticulous worker and his paintings are carefully planned. His work does not startle at first; but one comes away from his exhibitions with a feeling of deep satisfaction.

ANOTHER show which I wanted very much to review was that of Anton Refregier, recently held at the ACA Gallery. In him, too, one observes a steady growth and development. The mural quality is still apparent in some of his larger paintings, but a new and surprising departure for him was a series of small genre pictures of people at work

and at play in picturesque Woodstock, where he has been living for the last few years. They were painted in his characteristically sharp and precise manner. One of the most touching paintings, "They Kept On Asking," was of a saintly, white-bearded old man with a rope around his neck about to be hanged by the Nazis.

The criticism most often heard about Refregier's work was the lack of textural quality in his paintings. Doubtless this could be ascribed to his extensive work on murals but it is atoned greatly by the freshness and outdoor quality of his clear color, good drawing and compositional verve.

WILLIAM GROPPER needs no introduction. One of the greatest American cartoonists, he has long been fighting tirelessly against injustice and hypocrisy. In the last fifteen years he has become widely known also as a painter. As in the case of Daumier, the knowledge of drawing, highly developed visual memory, the ability to translate ideas on paper quickly and directly—qualities acquired in daily cartooning—have served him well.

His first exhibition at the ACA Gallery, then located in Greenwich Village, was immediately acclaimed by the critics as the work of an able and experienced artist. Since then Gropper has held many exhibitions in New York and elsewhere, each time growing in stature.

The present exhibition (his first with the Associated American Artists) consists of more than thirty paintings, most of them, to my knowledge, completed within the past year.

While one notices in this exhibition less than his usual emphasis on the war, the theme finds poignant expression in such pictures as "Home," depicting a lonely, grief-stricken figure standing among the ruins of her home, and "De Profundis," a painting of an old Jew attired in a prayer shawl and phylacteries, his head raised in sorrow toward an El Greco sky, praying for the deliverance of his people.

Lately Gropper has delved deeply into the sources of American history and folklore. This growingly important phase in his work has already resulted in such gay pictures as "Rip Van Winkle" and "Paul Bunyan" and the dramatic "Paul Revere" and "The Headless Horseman."

The exhibition also contains some inimitable ruthless studies of politicians, such as "For the Record" and "The



"Mother and Daughter," oil by Yasuo Kuniyoshi. At the Downtown Gallery.

Isolationist," and a number of pictures dealing with the theater—"Backstage," "The Angel," "A Place in the Sun" and others.

It is a typical Gropper show—intensely alive, full of drama, trenchant observation, exuberance. One of the pictures, "Master and Pupil," depicts an old, grey-bearded artist, resembling Leonardo Da Vinci, standing, with a troubled expression, in front of his canvas. Behind him stands a grimacing young man, making derogatory gestures. This picture is reproduced in the catalogue with the following legend: "There are among today's artists those extreme moderns who show only contempt and ridicule for the academic craftsmanship of the old masters. Their clan is fast becoming an academy of its own. In time, another generation of youngsters will hold the same contempt for them."

Gropper need not fear. His work, so vividly recording our time, will live longer than the work of the highly praised and much sought after exponents of art-for-art's-sake.

MR. JOHN VICKERY, a noted Australian artist, has just returned from a Pacific tour of eight months of sketching wounded soldiers in overseas hospitals and in forward combat areas. He has completed more than 650 drawings. The knowledge that the sketch was going to the folks at home proved a real GI morale builder. I have seen some of the drawings; they are more than good likenesses.

Mr. Vickery is only one of many artists of the USO Camp Shows' hospital sketching program. The original drawing, with positive and negative photostatic copies, is forwarded to the

man's family, so that relatives can have as many copies made as they wish. More than 14,000 originals and copies have been sent to American families already.

THE Society of Medallists announce proudly their thirtieth issue by Mahonri M. Young, sculptor. Mr. Young says: "When I was asked to make designs for the medal I was troubled by the number of things I wanted to do. After rejecting subjects from the ring, Indian life, etc., I settled on one of my first loves—labor."

It is a beautiful medal. It represents riggers on one side and riveters on the other. The figures of the workers are modelled with great simplicity in the realistic manner for which Mr. Young is justly famous.

Zoya

ZOYA KOSMODEMYANSKAYA, eighteen-year-old Soviet girl guerrilla murdered by the Nazis early in the war, has become one of the flaming folk-legends of the Patriotic War. Her story, as told on the screen at the Stanley, lacks epic quality. It is quieter in key than such films as *Rainbow*, *No Greater Love* and *We Will Come Back*, which, like *Zoya*, deal with love of country and resistance to the invader. Yet it has a compelling strength of its own. One gets the impression that the producers, knowing that the exploits of the Soviet people have become the common knowledge of the whole democratic world, decided this time to explain the social forces that moulded such people.

Accordingly, the life of Zoya is shown in retrospect. As she grows up she grasps the meaning of Soviet life and its limitless possibilities. She sees newsreel shots of the Spanish War (incidentally the first ever shown on the American screen), and its meaning relates for her the Soviet Union to the rest of the world. Later, through her teacher, she discovers the facts of fascism and war and, most important, that war is indivisible; and that since her country was the antithesis of fascism, her life as a free human being was bound up with that of her country. It was only to be expected that when it was invaded, her first act would be to join a guerrilla detachment behind the Nazi lines. Her mother understands the risks, yet lets her go. For in Soviet life there is no separation of textbook ideals from practice. It is the clear exposition of this factor of