

THE FINE ARTS

IRON LUNGS FOR GENIUS

SINCE the beginning of art itself, painters have had to decide whether to credit their inner or their outer eye, whether to depict what they see or what they imagine. Usually they have struck an equation between the two, and within the extremes of, say, Bosch's fantasy and Courbet's realism are to be found most of the great images of Western civilization. In our own time, however, the field of choice has been extended drastically in the subjective direction, and today few deny the right of the artist, assuming him talented, to paint the landscape of his imagination as well as the tangible earth. Yet precisely because the question has been dramatized by so much exclusive discussion of "modern" art, we tend to forget how persistent the problem has been. It may be of interest, therefore, to consider the different procedures of two painters from our nineteenth-century past—Albert Pinkham Ryder, recently accorded a fine full-length exhibition at the Whitney Museum, and Frederick Edwin Church, neglected now, but once an extraordinarily successful and famous artist.

The two painters were born a generation apart, Church in Hartford in 1826, and Ryder at New Bedford in 1847. As a young man Church became a pupil of Thomas Cole, dean of the Hudson River School. He went to live with Cole at Catskill, and there absorbed the tremendous veneration for nature, as ultimate authority, that Cole's friend Asher B. Durand expressed in these words: "There is not . . . any charm that the most inventive imagination ever employed . . . that is not to be seen in Nature, more beautiful and more fitting than art has ever realized or ever can."

For a time Church shared Cole's belief that nature was nowhere more impressive than in America, especially along the Hudson River. But after a while the appeal of the Catskills wore thin for him, and he set out to record more exotic and remote territories. Like so many Romantics, he was fascinated by extremes of climate and terrain. He painted the Ecuadorian tropics, and he painted the icefields of the northern seas (where Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster had sought final refuge). He scrambled to the peaks of the Andes, 14,000 feet above sea level, and he sailed the winter ocean. He must have believed pro-

foundly that the artist's talents were sensitive not only to unspoiled subject matter, but to heat, cold, and altitude.

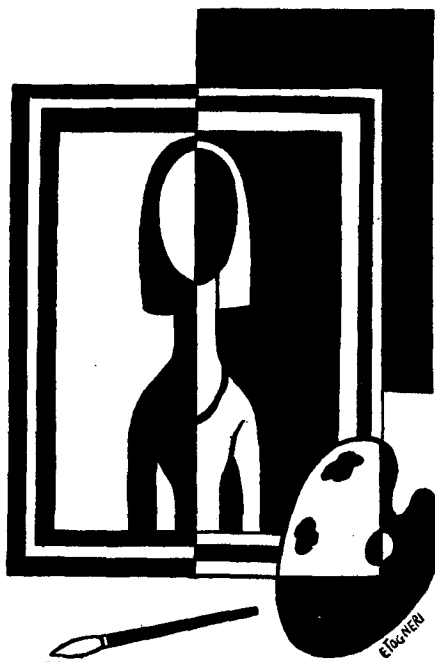
Church made a great deal of money from his art, and in later life he returned to the Catskills to build, around 1871, the large house, "Olana," in which his descendants still live. Henry Russell Hitchcock, a leading authority in these matters, describes the house as a late and eclectic version of the towered Italian villa. It was designed by Calvert Vaux, who created most of Central Park's appealing buildings, but "Olana's" fantastic Oriental details were probably worked out by Church himself. The villa has so many details of the kind that its effect is Moorish, and inside are cabinets full of Near Eastern costumes and trophies, collected on Church's travels. There is also a picture gallery hung mostly with late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian works, many in bad repair. These paintings vary in quality from fair to exceptionally good, and provide in either case a valuable document of romantic taste in America.

The most memorable experience in visiting "Olana" is climbing its central tower, on gnarled stairways, through an attic as vast and strange as one of Piranesi's prisons, until one emerges on a small platform whose finials are Oriental teapots. From here the view extends for miles in all directions. The villa itself stands on a

hilltop amidst a great wooded tract, now much overgrown, but revealing occasionally the plan of its landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, who designed Central Park and was born, like Church, in Hartford. One ascends to the villa by a long, winding road, past a snake-infested lake, past vistas now fogged by underbrush, through groves of mammoth trees. The scale is enormous. It seems especially so if on the same day one visits, as I did, the house of Thomas Cole, not many miles away. For whereas Cole's house and garden are small and restrained, reflecting the eighteenth century in their village refinement, the Church estate testifies to the exuberance which came in with the later generation of American landscapists.

THE CHURCH villa and its setting must be considered together, since one of the house's principal distinctions is that it has numerous huge picture windows framing the various views. From any one of these windows Church could paint the kind of panoramic landscape for which he was once so famous. Nature was his pulmotor, and with her help he created a voluminous, intricately detailed imagery devoted to her splendors. He breathed too deeply, of course, and only in some of his more casual paintings does he appeal to a modern taste which gives high marks—perhaps too high—to sensitivity as opposed to philosophical content. Nevertheless, Church remains an interesting figure, and it is to be hoped that "Olana" will one day be preserved as a public park, with the likely consent of Church's devoted and gracious family. Nowhere else that I know of is there so grand and complete a monument to later American romanticism in the fine arts. Nowhere else, amid our nineteenth-century architectural remains, do the American painter and nature stand so aggressively together.

Albert Pinkham Ryder, on the other hand, was a relative stranger to nature during his adult life, at least to wild, expansive nature as Church understood it. He traveled only to settled Europe, which seems to have impressed him hardly at all. While Church was a born collector and a connoisseur of past art, Ryder was moved only by the paintings of Corot and of his own contemporary Matthew Maris, and drew little nourishment from pictorial traditions. He owned no important pictures except those he himself created, and, whereas Church was entranced with foreign life and scenery, Ryder wrote of one of his finest pictures: "I have every faith that my 'Forest of Arden' will be fully as beautiful as any preceding



work of mine; Bronx Park has helped me wonderfully. . . ."

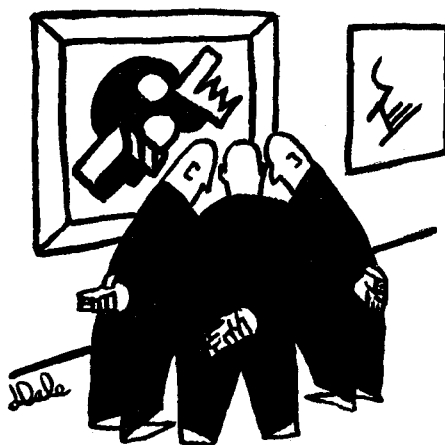
Ryder lived during his active career in New York City, in rooms as cluttered and dingy as those in the house of the late Collyer brothers. He crossed the Atlantic twice just for the sea trip, he loved the Jersey ferry, he knew New York's parks by heart, he "soaked in the moonlight" on solitary rambles through the city. But for the most part nature appeared to him full force only in her skies. "Beyond the low roof tops of neighboring houses," he said, "sweeps the eternal firmament with its ever-changing panorama of mystery and beauty." He read and wrote poetry, he grew more and more eccentric, and he lived a life of inner reverie, working at his pictures for years on end. His imagination was abnormally intense and self-sufficient. If he needed nature at all, he needed her only as a reminder.

A reminder of what? A reminder, I think, of his childhood in New Bedford, then a great whaling port whose seas and skies were of the utmost concern to the town. Lloyd Goodrich, in his excellent foreword to the Whitney show, points out that childhood memories played a constant role in Ryder's art. What remains to be said is that Ryder must have been the first major American painter of whom this was true, the first whose Muse was often himself as a small boy. Modern artists have admired him for this, quite naturally, since childhood experience has been a central feeding ground for contemporary art as a whole. And it is not only Ryder's habitual subject matter—the three elementals of land, sea, and sky—that refers back to his youth. Even his scenes from Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Poe show a primary aggrandizement of symbolic forms that is child-

Patrimony

By Louis Kent

MY FATHER'S and his father's son,
I am one son, and more and less:
I am of two and make not one.
My father gave his length of face,
He brought his father's breadth of head,
But of that blue transmuting gaze
They used for elementing lead
To motes of gold, the blue is all
Their son's eyes have inherited.
Where shall the patrimony fall
From me, the last inheritor,
Who waste their gift, a prodigal
Of mine and of his father's store?
I look at gold and leave but dross
And am of none progenitor.



like in freshness, though much of his era's art is old and miserly. If we compare him to his peers Homer and Eakins, so manly in the literal sense, in practical authority so typical of the nineteenth-century grown male, we find a sharp difference of spirit. Ryder was not weaker than they, but he was younger in vision.

To the pioneers of twentieth-century American painting, Ryder had another recommendation; he was one of our few masters of abstract design. The most extreme of these men deplored his mystic sentiment, while revering his sense of convoluted balance. A

few of them, notably the late Marsden Hartley, understood and applauded both qualities in Ryder's work. I should think both qualities would seem pertinent now to those young American painters—William Baziotes, Theodore Stamos, and others—who are evolving a new kind of romantic naturalism, a half-dreamed interpretation of organic forms, in which the expressive lessons of modern abstraction are put to important use. It may be that Church's almost total reliance on external stimulus will one day again become meaningful to American artists. For today's painters, however, the earlier nineteenth-century conception of nature as "more beautiful and fitting than art" is hollow and useless. Our young artists are much more likely to listen to Ryder, who wrote of one of his early works:

As I worked I saw that it was good and clean and strong. I saw nature springing into life upon my dead canvas. It was better than nature, for it was vibrating with the thrill of a new creation. Exultantly I painted until the sun sank below the horizon, then I raced around the fields like a colt let loose, and literally bellowed for joy.

JAMES THRALL SOBY.

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FICTION

(Continued from page 18)

In his restlessness he finds Márgara, the daughter of a local photographer, and his hungry need for life makes him see her as a woman of mystery. To him she becomes the enchantress, the Xtabay of Maya Legend; when he thinks of her it is in terms of Mexican poetry he has read through the years. The Xtabay never materializes for the reader and these moments are further overlaid when the author asks her readers questions: "Was he in love with her?" "And even if it were not too late what could he say?" "Would she be destroyed and he left to mourn her in the closed room of his memory?"

The stories woven around this central theme are less high flown and more realistic. Domingo's family, as they move about in the limiting confines of their environment, as they succeed in achieving their ends, holds the makings of a livelier, more full-blooded story than the one the author has chosen to tell. Uncle Agapito, the striving banker who governs the family and whose say is final; Serafina, the servant girl who accepts the child as docilely as she accepts the love that brought it to her; Mateo, the chauffeur with the yen to sell real estate—all are convincing creatures

who are out of step with the novel's central theme.

Time and again this book suggests that this is a novel that might have been written in Spanish for a Spanish-speaking audience. Josephina (and why is it not Josefina?) Niggli's prose has the same sweep as Spanish prose; her sentences have an echo of Spanish construction. When she takes her readers to Don Primitivo's to drink beer and to talk and sing, she does not treat them as foreigners entering the closed circle. She translates for them the conversations of habitués, prepares special dishes for them, teaches them the words of songs that are being sung. Skilfully, she opens door after door for them without assuming the role of the over-anxious writer who is explaining the ways of an alien people.

It is only when the reader must follow Domingo's vagaries, when Márgara, the lady of the shadows, moves across a room to disappear behind a curtain, that one regrets that a writer who commands the gift of painting a picture as vivid and as real as her descriptions of Monterrey should build her novel on this kind of romanticism.

Betty de Sherbinin is the author of "By Bread Alone," "The Challenged Land," and "The River Plate Republics."

Halved Home

TRANSFER POINT. By Kathryn Forbes. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1947. 195 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

KATHRYN FORBES is one of those rare adults who remembers how it feels to be a child. To this new story, "Transfer Point," an account of three years in the life of a little girl, she brings the same gaiety and tenderness which characterized her "Mama's Bank Account" (which on stage and screen was to become "I Remember Mama").

When we first see her Allie Barton is ten years old; she is desperately struggling to learn to live in a world which has been broken apart for her by the separation of her parents. Mother and "Aunt" Lottie keep a boarding house in San Francisco, and Allie's life is made up of skirmishes with the boarders, infrequent week-ends with her father, clashes with au-

thority, ingenious lies (they usually don't work out very well), efforts to find a best friend, which for some reason always seem doomed to failure, retreats into a dream world where her parents are reunited and she herself is a heroine.

When the story ends, in 1921, Allie has grown up, although she does not fully realize it. She has learned that she can be practical like her mother and still be "Harry Barton's girl" too, a composite of the two people whom she has loved so much, but without treachery to either of them.

Allie's world is that confused, unpredictable one in which most children live, where parents are inconsistent, annoyed at the most unexpected times, inexplicably your champion at others, where desperate resolves "to be good" often end in the most frightful debacles.

Hilariously funny at times, the story has its heart-breaking moments. Kathryn Forbes handles Allie without sentimentality, understanding the mercurial changes from tragedy to comedy, from stubborn guiltiness to dramatic excitement, which grown-ups find so hard to comprehend. She understands, too, that mothers can love and at the same time woefully neglect their children. But Allie, from first to last, is one of the unvanquished. Life is never going to be easy for her; she will see to that herself. Delicately, poignantly, Miss Forbes indicates the inherent strength which sustains the child as it will the woman.

"Transfer Point" is, first of all, a thoroughly entertaining book. But it is particularly recommended to all parents. It is just possible that from sensitive fiction like this we can learn as much about that strange world inhabited by our children as from many weightier studies.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Now: Somerset Maugham. 2. Sons: Turgenev. 3. Lovers: Helen MacInnes. 4. Punishment: Dostoevsky. 5. Ale: Somerset Maugham. 6. I: George W. Curtis. 7. Prejudice: Jane Austen. 8. Peace: Tolstoy. 9. Pantagruel: Rabelais. 10. Virginia: Bernardin de St. Pierre. 11. Lovers: D. H. Lawrence. 12. Sensibility: Jane Austen. 13. Heaven, Too: Rachel Field. 14. the Black: Stendhal. 15. the Hearth: Charles Reade. 16. Profane Love: Arnold Bennett. 17. Saturday Night: Robert Tallant. 18. Evil: Nietzsche. 19. the King of Siam: Margaret Landon. 20. Fall of the Roman Empire: Gibbon. 21. Long Ago: W. H. Hudson. 22. Evil: Charles Addams. 23. I: Betty MacDonald. 24. Pains: S. J. Perelman. 25. Influence People: Dale Carnegie.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 240

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 240 will be found in the next issue.

QRE RXVMRYVDRKY

FAEAXIUAZ DQA NRYME KL

VY KEDFRWQ. RD AYVIUAZ

QRX DK FCY, DQKCMQ YKD

DK EKVF.—DQKXVE

XVWVCUVH

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 239

He who praises everybody praises nobody.

S. JOHNSON.