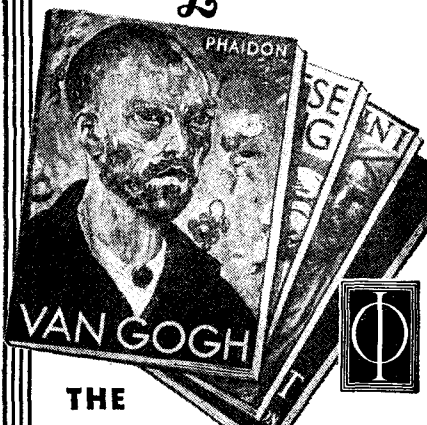


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THE FINE ARTS

AMONG OTHERS, MARINO MARINI, WHO LIVES IN MILAN

ROME. THE contemporary Italian art scene continues lively and eager. Each major city has its own school of artists, as during the Renaissance, but today Rome, Milan, and Venice are the most active centers. Milan is the principal market place, and in that city there are more than twenty large collections of modern Italian painting and sculpture—far more than New York can boast in the contemporary American field. Revisiting some of these collections recently, I was again impressed by the qualitative average, though almost no works by non-Italian artists are to be seen. (The prices of foreign pictures are extremely high in relation to those of Italy, and the habit of artistic isolationism, if waning fast, is still ingrained.) The Italian collectors work hard at their avocation, and several have extensive libraries on twentieth-century art. A majority of them, perhaps to sharpen their comparative judgment, have adopted a curious method of showing their possessions. The works of a given painter are hung all together, one after another, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty in a row. The system leads to stamp-album monotony, and I cannot see that its final advantages are real.

Most of the leading artists live in Rome or Milan, though at Venice there is a small but vigorous group which includes the painters Pizzinato and Santomaso and the "abstract" sculptor Alberto Viani, recently given first prize in the big sculptural competition at Varese. The Varese award infuriated the academicians, and their anger was increased when a second modern sculptor, Pericle Fazzini, of Rome, shared the sculptors' prize at St-Vincent. Such prizes, in cash, are important to all but the most securely established artists, for the newer or lesser men earn very little through sales. Indeed, it must not be supposed that the lot of the advanced painter or sculptor has been easy since the collapse of Fascist officialdom, or that the forces of reaction are scattered and impotent. On the contrary, there is here a rather savage opposition to whatever is new and courageous in art. At Venice, for example, several of the best modern artists have been given studio space

at the Academy of Fine Arts. But they are not allowed to show the students their work, and only the convinced support of a few members of the controlling commission keeps their names on the Academy's list.

In recent months, the conservatives have been cheered on by Giorgio di Chirico, internationally the most famous living artist of Italy. Once one of the decisive figures in the modern movement, which he now bombards (along with such targets as the United States of America, France, all art critics, and practically all other artists), Di Chirico is today the indefatigable author of abusive letters to the press. The dim and the doddering applaud him; the young groan. He is currently suing the Biennial Exposition of Venice for 5,000,000 lire because they exhibited some of his earlier works last year without his permission. If he wins the suit, as seems unlikely, he will have deprived public institutions of a fundamental educational liberty; he will have established the dubious moral principle that art belongs essentially and wholly to the man who creates it rather than to the humanity of which the artist is only a part. Lately, however, Di Chirico's and other diatribes have been drowned out to some extent in Italy by the triumphant peals of Louis Armstrong's trumpet and by the blare of publicity which has accompanied the release here of Ingrid Bergman's "Joan of Arc." The Italian public is delighted with Miss Bergman's Nordic esteem for Roberto Rossellini. It will go to see her in anything, which is to say that it will go to see her in "Joan of Arc."

A very decided asset in the struggle of modern Italian artists against public indifference, academic contempt, and sometimes against religious censorship is the fact that nearly all the outstanding scholars in earlier art fields are also deeply interested in the painting and sculpture of their own time. It was gratifying, for instance, to visit one of Florence's most eminent Renaissance authorities and to see on his walls a Giorgio Morandi of 1923 hanging near a Lorenzo Lotto—to realize that if this man has done much to reappraise numerous artists from Italy's great past, he is also the first to have written a monograph

on the remarkable sculpture of Umberto Boccioni, futurism's central figure in art. We have in America, too, some art experts in traditional fields who are aware of contemporary activity. These are very, very few, and perhaps nowhere except in Italy is art so widely regarded by its eminent historians as a logical continuum, right down to the present.

In the end, of course, only the quality of the works currently being produced can decide whether modern art will prosper or decline. Italy's post-war painting and sculpture show decided energy and promise. More than that, there are some vital personalities. Among the older men, I would name first Giorgio Morandi, a solitary, dedicated painter whose subject matter is deliberately restricted to still lifes of bottles (he has done occasional landscapes, but none since 1944; he painted a few portraits in youth, but now dislikes portraiture intensely). I went to see Morandi at Bologna, where he has lived all his life, with very rare excursions even to nearby cities. A tall, straight man, with cropped gray hair, a long, ascetic face, a strong jaw, and heavy hands, he lives with his sister in an apartment in the center of town. He talks slowly and gently, almost never about his own work except in modest reply to direct questions. On the apartment walls are a Jacopo da Bologna and three drawings by the Douanier Rousseau: brothers in emotional directness living 600 years apart. Morandi's studio is a small room off his bedroom, and on the tables and the floor are the models from which he works—bottles in all shapes and colors, tin boxes, artificial flowers, and fluted, celluloid babies' rattles, white and blue or pink and white. Seeing these simple objects and glancing from them to the completed pictures on the walls, it was overwhelmingly apparent how personal and valid has been his achievement. Like Vermeer and Chardin before him, like the Douanier Rousseau, of whom he spoke so much, Morandi has created a rich and subtle synthesis of form, a remarkable lyricism of light and tone. Coming away from his studio, I was more than ever convinced how heretical is the theory that critics should never know the artists about whom they write. To see how Morandi works is more than a privilege; it is an inestimable help toward understanding why he is so universally—and justly—considered in Italy as that country's finest painter of today.

The principal artist of the middle generation is, I think, the sculptor Marino Marini, who lives in Milan. Like many of the greatest sculptors,



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Marini has come slowly to the mature authority he now shows. Born in Pistoia, thoroughly Tuscan by heritage and in temperament, he studied in youth at the Academy of Fine Arts in nearby Florence. Afterwards he traveled a great deal, lived in Paris for several years, and developed an almost scholarly knowledge of the major sculptural traditions, both Western and Oriental. This knowledge protects him from eclecticism by its very range, and almost everything he has created during the past five years is strongly his own. His power is immense, his psychological acuity and plastic sense are exceptional. What is perhaps most notable about his recent work is that it brings to the contemporary idiom a new human warmth. It is this quality in his art which means most to the younger sculptors of Italy. One of the latter, for example, mentioned Marini and Henry Moore as the prophets of a direction he hoped to follow, a direction which does not abandon the great accomplishment of Brancusi and Arp but strives to extend it toward a more apparent humanism.

At Rome the leading younger painter, now more securely than ever, is Renato Guttuso. The very opposite of a facile craftsman, Guttuso has fought hard to attain a style. But he is vigorous and convinced, and both his color and his harsh, woodcut-like contours proclaim a personal signature. He is growing, and he is already, I think, a more considerable artist than any of his Parisian counterparts in age and tendency. In recent months we have often heard in America that Guttuso had knuckled under to the banal artistic directives of the Communist Party, of which he is an ardent member. I saw a number of new pictures in his studio and a few others in private collections. In none of these could I find any evidence that he has compromised with his instinctive approach to painting. His subjects are humanitarian by preference, but he is a long way from Social Realism as the Soviet Union defines it. His point of departure is Picasso's art of the past fifteen years (he admires the great Spaniard enormously, and seems to have been the only Italian painter in whom Picasso was interested during his recent visit to Rome). But Guttuso's art is unmistakably Italian in every respect.

With Morandi, Marini, and Guttuso, with men like Pizzinato, Viani, and Bruno Cassinari, with the astonishingly talented Roman youngsters Vespignani, Muccini, and Graziella Urbinati, postwar Italy is holding the momentum which the Fascist downfall released. —JAMES THRALL SOBY.

Isms in Art

THE AESTHETIC THEORIES OF FRENCH ARTISTS. By Charles E. Gauss. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. 111 pp. \$3.

By SHOLOM J. KAHN

ANYONE who still thinks that the various movements of modern art have been the products of wilful and irrational eccentrics should read this slender but thoroughly documented book.

Starting with the rejection of Gustave Courbet's realism by the jury of the Exposition in 1855, a rapid survey explores the ideas which motivated the painting of Manet, Seurat, Pissarro, Renoir, Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, Braque, Dali, and others, down to the present. Happily, Mr. Gauss does not attempt to be exhaustive. Rather, the essence of each significant movement (realism, impressionism, symbolism, fauvism, cubism, and surrealism) is briefly stated, as often as possible in the artist's own words, from letters or manifestoes. Sometimes the writings of outstanding critics contemporary with the artists (Taine for realism, Denis for symbolism, Apollinaire and Breton for surrealism) are also used. The result is a handy sampling of, and guide to, the essential literature of these influential art schools.

However, instead of piling quotation on quotation, the author has been content to select only the most significant ones and then discuss the central point of each theory, relating it to important movements of thought in each intellectual generation. Realism is seen as a reflection of Comte's positivism; symbolism, of Bergson and Croce; cubism, of the relativistic physics of Russell and Whitehead; surrealism, of Freudian psychology, and so forth. Unfortunately, these correlations are sometimes sketchily made and not sufficiently integrated with the rest of the material; in the case of symbolism and Schelling's absolute, for example, the reader is left wishing that it had been probed a bit deeper.

A central theme, which gradually emerges, lends an added, almost dramatic, interest to the reading: the various theories are seen as "mutations or denials of realist suppositions." This helps us to understand, not merely the perennial desire of art to capture, understand, and idealize reality, but also the historical development, the manner in which one "ism" has followed another in rapid and somewhat confusing succession during the last century.

In brief, the realist strove for an