

No. Thirty Five January, 1971

news

President: John Oakley.
Secretary-Manager: Russell Laidlaw.
Gallery Assistant: Tony Fomison.
Receptionist: Jill Parsonson.
News Editor: A. J. Bisley.

The Journal of the Canterbury Society of Arts
66 Gloucester Street
Telephone 67-261
P.O. Box 772 Christchurch

President's Comment

1970 was a busy year at the Gallery, with 44 exhibitions as well as other activities, and though our income was lower, and expenses higher than in 1969, we can consider it a successful one.

When our mortgage of 30,000 dollars has been paid off, and we aim to do this in the next five years, our society will be in a very strong position, but in the meantime it is important that membership should keep increasing.

It was disappointing that more members were not present at the Annual General Meeting in November last. The small attendance may indicate that all are satisfied with the way the Society is functioning, but it was a pity more people did not hear Mrs Doris Holland's excellent illustrated talk on her recent visit to galleries in Australia.

The C.S.A. Silver Medal is something rather special, and is awarded for distinguished services to the arts in New Zealand. No suitable nominations were received at last Council meeting so it was decided to make no award this year.

The Stewart Mair Memorial Fund has enabled the council to purchase extra screens, tables and seats for the gallery, and the successful trial run of a self-service coffee bar indicates that this too is likely to become a permanent fixture. I look forward to the day when we will be able to afford a lift.

The Society has a very large membership and I am anxious that everyone should use their gallery privileges to the full. Members should make themselves known to our Secretary-Manager Mr Russell Laidlaw, who is a busy man, but he and the gallery staff are most willing to assist in every way they can and make everyone feel at home.

Members of the Council join with me in wishing you all the compliments of the season.

John Oakley.

Junior Art Classes

Enrolments for Junior Art Classes may be made at the C.S.A. Gallery.

Classes are divided into two groups

Seniors 13yrs. 18 yrs.

Juniors 8yrs. 12 yrs.

Tutors Mr Hamish Cameron
Mr Neill Dawson

First Term commences 6th February

Second Term 29th May

Third Term 11th September

Fees Term of 12 weeks

\$9.00 per term

\$7.50 for children of Art Society Members

Exhibitions 1971

February	Annual Autumn. Sculptors Group.
March	Noel Smith. Alan Pearson.
April	Gopas John Scott.
May	Michael Eaton. Embroidery Guild. Pamela Barnes.
June	L. Summers. Webb Edgar, Dawson, Marwick.
July	C.S.A. Open. Maurice Askew.
August	Star Schools. W. Cumming. David Jackson & Lyall Hallum. Wool Weavers.
September	N.Z. Potters. Louise Cameron Lewis.
October	Kelliher. Sister Lawrence. Colin Wheeler.
November	Group. G. Kane.
December	Summer Junior Class.

Gallery Calendar Subject to Adjustment

Jan 14	A Private Collection. Survey of Poster Art.
Feb 20	C.S.A. Annual Autumn Exhibition Receiving Day, Feb. 9.
Feb 22	Sculptors Group.
Mar 14	Alan Pearson.
Apr 4-18	R. Gopas Retrospective.
Apr 5-19	John Scott.
Apr 27-May 3	Town and Country. Receiving Day, Apr 23.

Exhibitions

C.S.A. Annual Autumn
Receiving Day, 9 February.
N.Z. Academy Sculpture,
Pottery and Graphic Art.
Early 1971.

Posters

The Gallery is having an exhibition of Posters opening on 14th January, and would like to borrow any interesting ones that members would be prepared to lend.

Please ring 67-261.

New Members

Judge K. G. Archer
 Mrs Beatrice Hilton
 Mrs Doreen Burt
 Cashmere Gallery
 Mr R. T. Doig
 Mr Alan M. Eyles
 Mr David A. Eyles
 Mrs Doreen Fraser
 Mr Malcolm Fraser
 Mrs C. N. Frizzell
 Mrs M. L. Gordon
 Mr Stevan Grigg
 Mrs M. D. Henderson
 Mrs Olive Jones
 Mrs P. M. Johnson
 Mrs N. K. Lancaster
 Mrs Nora Machin
 Mrs B. McK. Pease
 Mr and Mrs W. J. O. Price
 Mr David Saunders
 Mr Dennis Taylor
 Mr L. C. Vicary
 Miss Phillippa Webb
 Mrs K. J. Falvey
 Mrs G. Mills
 Mr S. N. Stammers-Smith
 Mr John van der Fluit
 Mr G. T. Druery
 Mr Simon Pascoe
 Miss J. Poulston
 Mr Joel Smith
 Miss Leneka Smit
 Mr & Mrs Winston L. Webb

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 The Canterbury Frozen Meat Co. Ltd.
 The Southland Frozen Meat Co.
 Alliance Textile (N.Z.) Ltd.
 Mr T. S. George, Bank N.S.W.
 Orly Productions Ltd.

The fund now closed, has totalled \$2225.00.

Scheme for Hire of Permanent Collection

Since the Society was established in 1880 it has been building up a representative collection of New Zealand paintings and prints. The collection was significantly reduced in 1932 when 111 paintings and 10 miniatures were given by the Society to the then new city McDougall Gallery but paintings since then have been purchased by the Society for its collection as funds permitted. In addition, several have been presented.

Over the years problems have been experienced in adequately storing the collection and the care and general maintenance of the works has been undertaken by volunteer interested artists to whom the Society is greatly indebted. Due to this interest the collection is now well catalogued and totals nearly three hundred paintings and prints.

Storage and maintenance problems however persist and the Society has now taken the imaginative step of offering the paintings for lease to the business and commercial community.

The hire scheme of the permanent collection will offer the business community, for an annual basic charge, the opportunity to have hanging in their premises a selection of both valuable and significant New Zealand works. It is intended the paintings will be changed three times per annum thus an office which leases five paintings would in fact have had fifteen different paintings hanging over the year.

After viewing the premises and area, the paintings will be hung by the Society and regularly serviced. By bringing its valuable collection to the community in this way, the Society hopes to make offices and business premises more interesting and lively places as well as to stimulate further interest in the visual arts.

Monies received from the leasing scheme will firstly be used to adequately maintain and store the collection of paintings and secondly to purchase further paintings to expand the collection.

The C.S.A. feels sure the scheme will receive the support of the Christchurch business community and by thus ensuring the steady expansion of the collection and distribution throughout the city it is hoped Christchurch will become recognised as the leading New Zealand centre which gives solid support to the visual arts.

Work by contemporary artists is also available for hire with an option to purchase. ●

Stewart Mair Memorial Fund

The Stewart Mair Memorial Fund, a practical expression of Stewart Mair's outstanding service to the Society to be applied by fitting a suitably inscribed wall plaque, furnishing the gallery and completing the public address system—any balance to go towards mortgage repayment—has met with a ready response. The Council is pleased to publish the following list of donors

Mr Donald Murphy	Mr G. T. Phillips
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Mr N. H. Rudkin	Mrs G. L. Montfort
Mrs B. Lake	Mrs Geo. March
Mrs E. M. Rattray	Dr. L. C. L. Averill

Writing on the Wall

As if there weren't enough tourist attractions in Washington D.C., the capital of the U.S., recently acquired another site that tourists are making top priority. It's not as towering as the Washington Monument nor as venerable as the Smithsonian Institute. In fact it's only 1,950 square meters of plywood — a makeshift construction fence surrounding Lafayette Park, opposite the White House. It's a tourist attraction because the whole 720 metre-long fence has been covered with paintings illustrating the historic park — paintings made in an eight-hour day by 21 Washington artists with the help of 200 students at one of the most successful "paint-ins" ever.

The fence had been built as a barrier to hide the renovation of the historic park, and would have remained nothing more than that had it not been for the intercession of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which rounded up the artists and art students to beautify the ugly fence with colourful scenes illustrating the history of the park and the historic structures around it (though admittedly a few of the brush-wielders produced abstractions that seemed less than reverently historical).

The artists solicited private businesses for their equipment, and donations included 463 paint brushes, 60 paint-roller kits, 300 paint stirrers, 50 paint-can openers, 200 paint buckets, 30 ladders, 600 clean-up rags, a 720 metre-long drop cloth and 160 gallons of housepaints. Washington's Mayor Walter Washington visited the paint-in at its peak of activity and pronounced the art "beautiful". From a White House window across the street, Tricia Nixon, the President's daughter, was watching the paint-in. She soon came down for a closer look — and to invite all the artists and students over for punch and cookies in the East Garden of the White House. (It was a come-as-you-are affair, and they came in chopped-off blue jeans, hippie headbands and paint-spattered sweat shirts.)

A few weeks after the conclusion of the paint-in, the National Trust for Historic Preservation published a brochure explaining the scenes on the fence to the thousands of tourists who come to see it. One of the fence's proudest admirers is James Biddle, president of the National Trust. Says Biddle, describing the actual paint-in: "Never before have so many prominent artists collaborated with students in the creation of a single work of art. . . . By the time the last brush-stroke was applied, a temporary eyesore had become an exciting panoramic view of the past."

What will happen to the fence when the park's landscaping is completed? Two possibilities: It will be split into sections and sold at auction to support school art programmes; its sections will be relocated around playgrounds as tribute to the artistic talent of Washington's youth.

Annual General Meeting

Mrs Rona Fleming was elected an Honorary Life Member.

Mrs Doris Holland gave an illustrated talk after the meeting on her trip in Australia.

Officers were elected as follows:

President:

Mr John Oakley

Vice-presidents:

Professor H. J. Simpson, Mr F. M. Warren,
Mrs Doris Holland.

Councillors:

Messrs John Trengrove, J. T. Nuttall, S. H. Wood, T. J. Taylor.

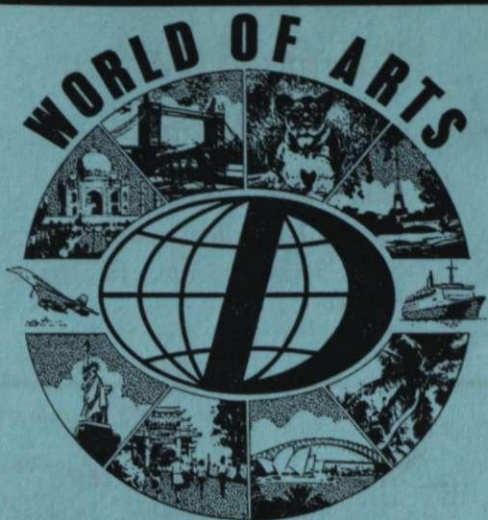
Mrs Helen Garrett did not seek re-election.

Treasurer:

Mr J. Malcolm Ott.

Hon. Auditor:

Mr B. F. Bicknell.



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Group Show 70

During the Group Show pupils from many schools
came to the gallery. One such group came from Meth-
ven High School—nine students and their art teacher,
Miss Robyn Hewetson. Miss Olivia Spencer-Bower
went round the show with them.

Miss Hewetson considers that country pupils need
the experience of art exhibitions, often denied them
in the smaller communities.

Pottery Notes

Last month three woman potters, Freda Ernsten,
Denise Welsford and Rosemary Perry showed their
work together at Several Arts, each potter with clearly
defined style, but each compatible with the others.
Well conceived and well stated domestic tran can
never fail to give enmasse satisfaction to both user
and collector, and these three potters showed nothing
to drop the standard.

The Graphic and Craft Exhibition (also in October)
was an opportunity for local potters to show to ad-
vantage in the company of drawings and prints. The
limited number of pots maintained a generally higher
level of competence than the drawings, which could
have been more stringently selected and hung with
more discretion, but this exhibition could, with more
co-operation from working members be one of the

most interesting shows in the C.S.A. calendar, so do prepare for it next year.

From the Mount Pleasant Group comes news of two recent Raker firings, at the home of Mrs Betts Ivin, Maffey's Road. Some encouraging results have emanated from these open air fires and much useful information obtained.

The big event of November has been the visit to New Zealand and Christchurch, of Mr Kenneth Clark, the English Ceramicist, well known for his expertise in the field of coloured earthenware, Mr Clark was welcomed by the association at a most enjoyable luncheon at the home of our Secretary, Mrs Pam Morton, where about two dozen hungry potters congregated after a morning workshop at Risingholm. Kenneth Clark's special talents for design, and the decoration of flat earthenware made this school quite unique and further discussion slides and illustrations were given at his two evening seminars. At the moment of writing Kenneth Clark has just opened a brilliant little exhibition set up by Several Arts in the Bank of New Zealand ground floor, display area.

Are you an earthenware Potter? If so, in the light of recent rather alarming publicity on the subject of lead poisoning, you would be advised to obtain from the health department their recent bulletin publicising the dangers of lead poisoning from food kept in lead glazed earthenware.

Attention Potters Aspiring to Membership of New Zealand Potters Society.

To alleviate the enormous job of selectors at the big show, new applicants are asked to send work for pre-selection in May, probably to Wellington. More news of this later.

Substitute:

In the meantime plans are beginning to move towards the mounting of the 14th New Zealand Potters Exhibition in Christchurch, 1971. (September).

Our Committee sends Seasonal Greetings to all Members, with Best Wishes for good Potting 1971.

In Search of Art

The West, for centuries, has been receptive to artistic influences from farther Asia, particularly from China, Japan and India. But it has been only in the last three decades that these influences have been truly significant. This should not surprise us, for what we term as an "influence"—whether it is on styles in art or, less tangibly, on ideas or new concepts—takes root only when a culture is ready to receive it. At that time and for many reasons, some of them elusive even to the most diligent historian, an individual or a whole society becomes susceptible to, and reaches out to, the advantages that may be obtained by borrowing from foreign sources.

As early as the 17th century, design motifs coming from China and India appeared in the decorative arts of Europe. But they were regarded as, and used as precious trivialities that could bring a delightful touch of the exotic from countries only then beginning to emerge from the realm of the legendary and the mysterious.

During the 18th century and much of the 19th, the arts of Asia served the West mainly as a romantic reservoir for designs. Symbols that had been arrows of thought in their original cultures became decorative motifs and, as such, were shorn of their original meaning. The new purpose of the imported motifs was not to symbolize. It was to intrigue the aesthetes of the day. The influence of Asian art on Western art was only a superficial one. Why?

This is the kind of question that the historian of art—one like myself who is dedicated to the study of art through the history of man—is obliged to answer to the best of his means, which often are embarrassingly inadequate. He knows that when a profound influence comes as a result of contact between different arts of different cultures, it is because at that time two very

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basic and inseparable conditions are present. In the first place, there is an understanding of, or an empathy with, the fundamental motivations of the other art. Secondly, the new awareness comes because it seems to solve the needs that have coalesced in what we may rudely call the "host" culture. Sometimes those needs are actually problems.

In America we had the good fortune of having been prepared, for over a century, for the understanding of some Asian philosophies. The unfamiliar soil had been ploughed, in a pioneer sense, by such distinguished men of thought as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau. Both Emerson and Thoreau had been deeply interested in Indian philosophy. But the circle of these men was limited and their serious interests were shared by only a small, if powerful, intellectual group.

Somewhat later, toward the last quarter of the 19th century, a new and powerful agent of influence—that of the Japanese woodblock print—captivated the interest of many leaders in European art. The force of this influence signified a change in Western attitudes. Adoption of decorative motifs from Asia was no longer the supreme and satisfying concern of the artists. Those who were inspired by Japanese woodcuts tried to absorb what they had learned, to select the new features they most admired, and to incorporate and transform them in their own work. Inculcated in the Japanese print were many fundamental conventions of Chinese and Japanese painting. After many centuries of evolution, the print brought these conventions almost to the point of bare summation. That some of the greatest artists in Europe were able to appreciate and even to copy a totally different art form of a totally different culture, shows how quickly horizons were broadening in the Western world.

The Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists like Monet, Van Gogh and Gauguin were interested mainly in certain compositional devices, particularly diagonal and atmospheric perspective and flat colour harmonies. It is interesting to note that these devices pertain to what is called the formal structure of an art work as opposed to the literary, that is, the subject matter. Had the Japanese print come to Europe fifty years earlier it, too, probably would have been treated merely as intriguing and exotic curiosa. In the 1870s however, creative painters in the West were breaking with tradition and experimenting with new art forms and unfamiliar themes. They were striving to discard jaded subjects such as grandiose episodes from the Bible and antiquity, and sentimental peeks into the humdrum of daily life. In the Japanese print they found a strange but also intelligible beauty. But, more significantly, they discovered a series of new design formulae that were refreshing stimulants at a time when their own were becoming stale.

For the first time, Western artists absorbed some of the basic elements of an Asian art. In essence, however, they still took only the formal or superficial manifestations of the new art. One great exception was the French painter Toulouse-Lautrec. Like the Japanese print master, Lautrec painted the "floating world", the night life of his beloved Paris with which he was thoroughly acquainted. That world was similar, in many ways, to life in the Yoshiwara district, a favourite source for Tokyo painters who colourfully recorded it in their prints. Despite such exceptions as Toulouse-Lautrec, the traditions of Western art were still deeply entrenched and Japanese prints, popular as they were, did little to instruct the West in the fundamental traditions of Far Eastern art. Nor was the West interested in any but the most obvious aspects of design that the prints represented.

It was not until the 20th century, when the West became aware of a major artistic problem, that it looked to the East for guidance. That problem was how to improve domestic architecture. It was felt as a genuine need, and providently, the solution was found in the traditions and conventions of Japanese architecture.

If we are to understand why, at that particular time, the West sought to develop a new kind of dwelling, we should begin by glancing back at the history of 19th-century architecture in America. We see a medley of revivalist styles—Gothic, Romanesque, Greek, Roman and even Egyptian. We are tempted to condemn the century for creating pretentious buildings that actually were very unsuited to the needs of the people. Europeans and Americans were not the only ones that suffered from this blight. At the same time the people of India, China and Japan were feeling the effects of close contact with the West. Their builders were enormously impressed by the technical advancements that were being made beyond Asia. As a result they, too, designed their public buildings in imitation of the different, wasteful and ostentatious styles that belonged to the past.

In reviewing the architecture of the 19th century, we could conclude that the contribution of the designers was essentially archaeological and therefore essentially sterile. But we would make a serious mistake if we did not take proper measure of that century's tremendous contribution in the field of engineering. Furthermore, we should fail to see that engineering was to become the foundation of a new architectural aesthetic. Two historic structures, the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Crystal Palace in London, evolved from a knowledge of constructing with iron girders. In America, by the end of the century, the first skyscrapers appeared on the horizon and soon they altered horizons all over the world. Louis Sullivan, the great pioneer of American architecture, designed the first skyscrapers, whose steel skeletons were engineered according to the method that had been devised for the earlier monuments.

But while public architecture in America was being revitalized, domestic architecture remained stagnant. Large and expensive mansions were built as copies of Renaissance palaces, Italian villas, and English country houses. Neither climate nor location were taken into consideration. Smaller homes suffered in another way. Real estate speculators plotted grim-looking tracts that monotonously repeated the same model with scarcely any change. Small rooms that had been suitable for houses warmed by fireplaces remained small, although steam heat was in use and could warm larger areas. Windows were designed for exterior appearance, with little consideration for their function. Houses were placed on plots according to outmoded conventions, and no one thought of making the most of the land and exposure.

Private dwellings began to change in both the United States and Europe during the second decade of the 20th century. Furthermore, the change was of a kind caused by profound influence. It is not difficult to trace that influence, for at that time the West was becoming aware of Japanese art and simultaneously was beginning to recognize some of its own needs. The coincidence proved to be extraordinarily fertile, not only in architecture but in many other areas that are usually affected when one culture impinges on another.

In Boston, an eminent connoisseur of Japanese art, Ernest Fenellosa, and his associates spread their knowledge and love of Japan throughout the United States. Books describing and illustrating Japanese architecture and gardens, as well as paintings, sculptures and ceramics from the Far East, were published and read by millions of Americans. Within a relatively short time, the traditions of Asian art began to be understood and honoured in America. We no longer looked at everything from the East as quaint curiosities. We looked for fine art and tried to understand artistic principles that were different from our own.

Looking backward a half century later, we can see how thoroughly the basic concepts of the Japanese house and garden permeated our thought and eventually revolutionized the American home. It is only a very short time since we lived with the untouchable parlour and other rooms that custom uncomfortably

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restricted to certain activities. My own youth was spent in a home of this kind. Now "fluid space" is a cliché in every architectural journal. We run one living space into another and equip our homes with movable panels and screens that make our privacy and our design flexible. The box house of boxed rooms is disappearing and all because we have borrowed willingly from the Japanese home what we found wanting in our own. Above all, we have learned the value of subtle simplicity—that architectural beauty can be achieved without decorating surfaces but by carefully selecting textures and proportions. Our architects have discarded many outworn mannerisms, such as embellishing exteriors of buildings with designs copied from the past. They have been encouraged to think in terms of interior volumes, fewer and more meaningful walls, and well-proportioned roofs. Furthermore, in planning a building, they have been made sensitively aware of the advantages offered by a particular site. The relationship of a building to its land and surroundings has acquired aesthetic significance.

These changes did not take place all at once. The first, perhaps, may be traced to the work of that giant of modern architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright. Early in the century, Mr Wright emphasized the importance of materials, site-planning and simplicity. Most important of all, he did not imitate the Japanese architect. None of his buildings looks like a Japanese house. He did something much more fundamental. Because he understood the basic principles of Japanese architecture, he could apply them, as he wished, to American architecture. And he did this with the acuteness of genius. Instead of copying, he transformed. The Kaufmann house, which was built beside a waterfall at Bear Run, Pennsylvania, in 1937 and worked on until 1939, is an example. For this house he used a most modern engineering technique—that of the cantilever—in order to relate a structure to nature. By combining Western technology with the Japanese philosophy of architecture, he created a home that seems to bridge a waterfall and grow from the rocky ledges beneath.

Japanese craftsmen have always revered the inherent qualities of their materials. Architects in that country worked mostly with wood, and they used it with extraordinary care and sensitivity. Frank Lloyd Wright was a pioneer in the West also in demanding respect for materials. He was reverent toward brick as brick, stone as stone, cement as cement, and the proper employment of each. We could say that our greatest contemporary American architect accepted the artistic morality of Japan—furthermore, that he was never enslaved by it.

Frank Lloyd Wright, although the leader, was not the only architect who has been receptive to principles of art that had been developed in Asia. There were other eager disciples. Carl Koch, for instance, went further by literally bringing the outdoors indoors. One wall of his living room actually is composed of the rock of the hill against which the house is set. Another of many architects who helped create a Renaissance in America is Richard Neutra. A persuasive philosopher of architecture seeking for the purity that is prized in Japan, he worked to eliminate every detail that he regarded as non-essential. Buildings that once would have been laden with anachronisms have been simplified and restrained to the structural bone: skeletal may be a more descriptive term.

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The three masters that I have mentioned — Wright, Koch, Neutra — represent a tiny fraction of the architects who have successfully borrowed artistic ideals from Japan. Closely linked with the architects, and often working with them, are innumerable landscape designers whose inspiration also came from the distinctive gardens of Japan and China. A point that I would like to make very clear again, however, is that our leaders in architecture, in landscape design and other arts did not copy or imitate their Asian counterparts. Instead, they drew upon their understanding of the basic principles and philosophies of the East and applied them in ways that have added to and revived, Western thought and art in our time. The 20th century artist should be distinguished from his predecessors who, as we say, "lifted" designs from the East and used them with little knowledge of, and no respect for, their meaning in their original culture. Our contemporaries have been more profoundly stimulated — or influenced — because they live at a historical moment when many needs of two very different cultures are similar. And from this similarity a concord of minds has been reached.

I have not yet mentioned the current and similar influence of the Far East on another art, that of painting. There is no better introduction to this aspect of our subject than the work of the celebrated American painter Mark Tobey. As early as 1934, Tobey was in China where he studied the art of calligraphy. On his return to this country he invented a style of painting which is based on "white lines". The white-line style of his painting began an entirely new direction in Western art. Associated with Tobey was Morris Graves who, while quite young, travelled in the East. At times Graves used calligraphic white lines for the backgrounds of his strongly new and poetic bird pictures. He was particularly attracted to Chinese painting of the Sung Dynasty and consequently did not continue to base his work on calligraphy, as Tobey has done. Morris Graves, referring to the external world and his painting, wrote, "I . . . make notations of its essences with which to verify the inner eye." With this insight, he was able to invest his paintings with the idealism, metaphysical whimsy and sketchy understatement that were the enviable characteristics of such 13th-century Sung masters as Liang K'ai and Mu Ch'i. The sensitive probing into the philosophy of Chinese painting made it possible for Graves to remain both personal and contemporary.

Asia has had another and even more complex effect upon American painting, an effect so powerful that it led to the creation of an international school, an effect so responsive in our century of intercommunication that it reached back to its very sources and reacted upon Asia itself. I am referring, of course, to the style known variously as the New York School, Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting. Artists painting in this style despised the pictorial image and all reference to the visible world. It is, in this sense, and only in this sense, that their work is related to other types of non-objective painting that had been developed in the century.

Abstract Expressionism, quite unlike the measured, reasoned restraint that marked Purism, for instance, is characterized by slashing brushwork, runaway pigment, and virtuosity. Moreover, the Abstract Expressionist prefers his private statements to be made bold and challenging. His direct assaults on canvas have been another modern rejection of artistic traditions that had evolved as the West sought to create illusions of reality. Pictorial devices that had been developed for perspective, symmetry, light and shade were tossed aside as useless. Now, in 1960, most of the leading artists in the United States and Europe are active exponents of Abstract Expressionism, although the movement began only as recently as 1945. The American painter, Jackson Pollock, who died a few years ago, was its dynamic spokesman. Foremost in America at this time are Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Jack Twarkov, and Franz Kline. The

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movement represented by these artists made a complete break with the past. It was even a greater break than those made by earlier revolutionaries — the Impressionists, the Cubists, the Fauves. Yet, oddly enough, it almost immediately met with wide popular approval. "Wide popular approval", of course, is meant only with reference to the relatively small public interest in contemporary art. Nevertheless, the alacrity with which the Action Painters were accepted and virtually idolized was astonishing.

In order to understand this rapid acceptance of a new art form, we have to turn again to East Asia. But this time the focus is on Zen Buddhism, its philosophy and its arts. Zen has been well-known to American scholars since the turn of the century. But around 1950, quite suddenly, it became a household word in America. Both Zen and Action Painting swept this country at the same moment, and both are still molding our culture. The coincidence was not accidental. Let me explain why I say this by beginning with Zen. It is axiomatic that Zen cannot be expressed by verbal symbols or, for that matter, by any symbol. Zen requires an immediate, non-intellectual response to an immediate stimulus. This is precisely the kind of response required by an action painting. There are no images and no symbols. We can react only to forms and colours and an awareness of the deep personal relationship between the artist and his creation. Action Painting and Zen, therefore, have something very basic in common. Both are incapable of being analyzed in intellectual terms. Both call for reactions that are spontaneous and, for want of a better word, intuitive.

Strangely enough, the intellectuals have been the most avid proponents of Zen and Action Painting. Is this a paradox? It may seem so, but I do not think it is. What I have been discussing, actually, is a phenomenon of social psychology. Evidently a large segment of an educated public found something lacking within its own cultural heritage. We know from history that, in periods of tensions and uncertainties, artists have an irrepressible urge to establish new traditions, to pioneer in a new world of thought and action. The Abstract Expressionists in America who felt this impulse very strongly explored a new territory and, in doing so, opened the way for the restless, experimental and adventurous painters all over the world.

So did the practices of Zen, a philosophy contributed to the West by the East. A curious affinity unmistakably links the two. That affinity rests on man's hope of securing immediate contact with ultimate reality. Throughout the world the triumphs of materialism have destroyed many old values and replaced them with voids. Neither science nor logic have provided answers to ultimate questions. Thus, many thoughtful people have lost trust in intellectual rationale and have turned to Zen philosophy in search of intuitive understanding. The artist, always a barometer of culture, has both anticipated and reflected this cultural longing in his works.

Any influence that fills a need and, therefore, is an influence in the real sense, can only be beneficial. For such influences that have come from the Far East and affected our arts, we can be grateful.

Editor.

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