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The STORY of GREENWICH VILLAGE

Compiled from most original sources and written comprehensible to both morons & other artistic folk.

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The Story of Greenwich Village

Part XIV

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In the early chapter of this casual commentary we stated that people of artistic as well as literary bent came to Greenwich Village to avoid Puritan persecution—as yet we have only touched the artoid pursuits of batik, weaving, tin powder-box and cigarette-holder decorations. Now we have to deal with stained glass, the early post-impressionistic and expressionistic scene sets of the Little Theatres and the sporadic efforts of the easel picture makers, all of which may possibly be regarded as generically artistic.

Strange as it may seem, Greenwich Village is the cradle of American stained glass. It is possible that many good followers of Wm. H. Anderson would bolt the church if they realized that 90 per cent of the saints and angels of memorial church windows were made and designed right here in the Village—probably by J. and R. Lamb. This honorable firm started many years ago—almost back in the legendary era. Besides in nearly every American church you will find lecterns, pulpits, crucifixes, and all of the panoply of ritual bearing Lamb's mark. Also John La Farge, who discovered Tahiti long

before Paul Gauguin exposed Dr. Traprock, made stained glass windows in 46 and 47 Washington Square. Those were the great old days. Then one could stray across the Square or enter a night lunch without fear of being bundled off in the patrol wagon, which is a form of exercise the police arbitrarily indulge in now and then. It is analogous to the fire drills that occur in the country towns to test the apparatus, and make the city fathers think they are efficient.

Back in that dim forgotten era the Salamagundi Club appeared on Twelfth Street. There Sam Shaw gave prizes and dinners to the Society of American Fakirs, an honorable institution that was completely demolished by the Modern Art Movement. It was the custom of those virile young students, the Fakirs, to burlesque the cut-and-dried exhibits of the Academicians, but Modern Art movements, alas, have put the most blatant burlesques in danger of being taken seriously. The Salamagundi Club, as near as we can divine, was the usual refuge of men who wished to get away from their wives. Only the members were required to do occasional art work.

Over on Fourteenth Street the Kit Kat Club flourished. There artists came from all over town to sketch from the model by gaslight and talk about old times, at least those who were old enough to have any old times.

Meanwhile, Art in Europe had taken a mad turn. Nobody seems to know why. Perhaps it was the Bolshevistic movement, or perhaps the European artist just got lazy, maybe old man Cezanne got bilious from the ventilation in the Louvre, or more possibly still the Amalgamated Picture Dealers' Trust wanted a new commodity to work off on the idle rich. Modern Art, as it is generally called, is a commodity that can be produced and synthesized much cheaper than Old Master or the Barbizon stuff, as it requires no skill or sense to make it.

Now we are not writing a history of art, and as yet History is not in a position to definitely pronounce this new departure as art of any kind. At any rate, whatever it is, this independent movement embraced cubism, post-impressionism, futurism, Congo sculpture, vorticism and the work of Clara

Tice.

There was little of this in the Village until Cody opened his gallery at 46 Washington Square. To be sure Bertram Hartmann had been painting purple elephants and green jaguars, but they had a semblance of form. Zorach, Zoltan Hecht, Ilonka Karasz and Fulop had been slinging recklessly the Hungarian chromatic pigment progression, but sanity still prevailed. Then Cody opened his gallery, much to the embarrassment of the agent of the Eno estate, which had then been in litigation for 20 years. Then Cody's friend Carlock opened a sketch class, where strange people fumbled about after qualities in art that may never have existed – to the neglect of drawing composition and shading. Nearly everybody in the Village got to making this modern stuff, but it must be said to Carlock's credit that he kept the stock brokers from slipping into the art classes by this obviously easy road.

Then Mrs. Harry Paine Whitney gave the Village the Whitney Studio Club, where serious students were allowed to exhibit their work and given a chance to study from models for very nominal

fees. But none of the Villagers had sense enough to avail themselves of the privilege, though the little Moss was always there, writing letters. In many other ways this same Mrs. Whitney did a great deal to help promising students of art, but it was done so quietly and without the usual ostentation of art patrons, that History is unable to give any definite account of her munificence.

After George Carlock sailed to Italy never to return, Myra Musselman-Carr opened the Modern Art School at 72 Washington Square. This school persisted quite a while, in spite of the war and high rents. After a while Mrs. Carr took her school up to Woodstock, N.Y.

Wat Williams had an art gallery for a few months, charging ten cents admission, but before any great good could be accomplished, the Government threatened to shoot him at sunrise for running a theatre without a license. And when he moved over to Washington Square, the Washington Square Association, which is trying to make the Village a fit place to live in, shut up his gallery on the grounds that it tended to draw sight-seers. Also

they fired the little Moss and the Quill out, which of course they could hardly be blamed for doing.

Now the art of camouflage that was so prevalently employed in the war was not invented in the Village, though it was obviously a ramification of cubism. It probably did as much to stop the war as anything. Later when the French artists and the American dilettantes were forced out of Paris by the scarcity of food, much of this decadent art was brought here with them. But now that the eccentrics have gone back to decadent Europe, art in the Village has reverted back to 100 per cent American art work, as taught by the correspondence schools advertised in the American Art Student.

(To be continued as long as we can)