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BASIC CONCEPTS IN THE PLASTIC ARTS

TO say that the purpose of a painting of The Holy Family is to serve as an altar-piece in a given edifice is, of course, only describing its immediate purpose, and overlooks completely the question of why a picture is more desirable for an altar-piece than a blank screen, or why, as in early "tray" altars, a flat-topped table with raised edges would not suffice. Such a description of its function fails also to suggest why the same painting might acceptably embellish the wall of a room of a certain character in a private home or even a room of neutral character in a museum. In other words, a painting has a broader function in the life of man. Painting was already an established cultural factor when first applied to altar-pieces, and it is our purpose to examine the nature and character of its basic function rather than its specific uses.

The investigation must start on the broader basis of a consideration of the activity by which complex objects are manufactured for any purpose, namely, the crafts. What is the character of a craftsman's activity? He evolves a form to correspond to a given function from a consideration of his tools and his materials. Originally, of course, he had to evolve the tools and materials from a consideration of the problem alone, and some craftsmen continue to alter these factors, developing new tools and processes and applying new materials. He differs from a non-craftsman not only in his fund of experience with tools and materials, but in the possession of a creative imagination. Originally, the creative imagination was the sole possession of the craftsman, and until the rudimentary cultural factors had been established, this force took the place of the inherited and developed knowledge which is now commonly considered to be part of the equipment of any artist or craftsman.

Creative imagination is an ability to conceive a form which will simultaneously fulfill conditions of structural feasibility, satisfactory or desirable appearance, and the end to be accomplished. This creative faculty may be nothing more (nor less) than a condition of interest in the individual which permits him to concentrate his entire attention on the solution of a form problem. But continued concentration on such matters soon makes him different from those of his fellows who have not followed a similar path. The essence of a

craftsman's uniqueness is an ability for simultaneous consideration and control of the various aspects of his problem, through gradual mastery of its details, as a musician, a dancer, or an athlete masters a complex gesture by practising isolated elements. A layman, seeing and even understanding the gesture, is mystified by his inability to repeat it.

A certain mathematics instructor ascribed his ability to write simultaneously with both hands, to the fact that in his previous career as an artillery officer he had had to aim the barrel of his field piece by turning a swinging and elevating device at once. This is the craft problem reduced almost to abstract terms. The path of the gun's muzzle is a single movement through the air. It represents the craftsman's finished product. The two wheels or the simple vertical and horizontal movements they produced are the component elements, and the acquired and abnormal ability to manipulate them simultaneously are as the skill of the artisan.

Where are the edges and stitches in the seam of a coat, and how is a flat piece of cloth made to involve and conform to an irregularly curved body without unsightly wrinkles? The pattern of a coat is one thing; a single line defines specifically a given series of areas in a flat piece of cloth which when joined will "involve and conform without unsightly wrinkles." The imagination of the craftsman conceives and understands the single form as corresponding to these several ends. It is simple enough to conceive of involving a body; that can be done with a blanket. The body is conformed to, approximately, by an old-fashioned night-gown, a smock, or a blouse. But accurate conformity, without wrinkles or other unsightliness, and in a given mode, is a number of considerations to be accomplished in the unwavering line of a pattern and its consequent seam, which can be grasped only by the trained mind and hand of a tailor.

The fact that a single gesture accomplishes so many ends explains why skills of the type under consideration can not be communicated without demonstration, and also why it is often difficult for an artisan, and more especially, an artist, to explain what he actually does, and what is the relative importance of the various elements of his work. This confusion on the part of the artist himself adds greatly to that established by the critics and cuts off what might have been the most feasible means of escape. The complex character of the creative gesture also explains why criticism of work done is more feasible than analytical exposition for teaching the crafts.

In the plastic arts an artist is also a craftsman. He is concerned with creating forms by means of certain tools, processes, and materials, governed by a creative imagination superior to mere knowledge of the elements of the problem. The fact of his material concern

has been well understood in most periods of artistic creation. The technical and material aspects of the artist's craft were carefully transmitted from generation to generation by apprenticeship, guild regulations, and formulation of various sorts; and writings by artists show a great and elaborate concern with technical matters which were constant, or evolved but slightly over long periods. Neophytes were required to spend several years familiarizing themselves with material factors, preparing of panels and pigments, manufacture of brushes and frames, and so on, before they were permitted to study what we call "art." And then they dealt with conventions of figure drawing, drapery, and similarly fragmentary elements of the creative problem before they were allowed to create a complete work. The quality of production in the plastic arts reached its greatest heights in periods when technique was transmitted by the craft system.

Within the last century, however, a confusion has developed in regard to the craft of an artist and the importance of his material concern, because of a sentimental desire on the part of cultured people to separate "material" and "spiritual" pursuits, and to honor the artist and his craft by including art exclusively among the latter. The most ruthlessly materialistic society that history has recorded, suddenly became violently self-conscious of its materialism, and attempted to redeem itself by purging its cultural activity of any material concern. At the same time industry apparently relieved the artist of the necessity of understanding his materials, and the recognition of the Post-Impressionist [1] developments in France apparently relieved him of the necessity of understanding his forms. Art criticism, which arose at the same time as a by-product of the self-conscious concern with "spiritual" matters, naturally refused to concern itself with anything but disembodied meanings and interpretations. Matters of the mind alone were worthy. The hand was the attribute of the laborer and controlled mere material. Unfortunately, the formal aspects of the plastic arts were incorrectly consigned to this erroneously degraded category, and the tradition of neglect thus started has continued to dominate the academic and critical treatment of this phase of the plastic arts to the present day.

The reaction against dilettantism has replaced the elaborate, ecstatic interpretation of Victorian art criticism with exhaustive historical research of a definitely valuable type, but interest in significant analysis of form has been slight and sporadic. It is entirely neglected or thoroughly inadequate in the organized teaching and criticism of the plastic arts at present. Thus, although we no longer

[1] Actually, of course, this was itself a manifestation of the anti-materialistic cultural attitude, not a cause.

abhor the material as such, it suffers because considerations of form have not undergone the high degree of systematic development that has been accorded historical factors, and therefore present the difficulties of pioneer investigation which discourage all but the most hardy.

The character of an artist's activity is manifestly that of a craftsman. The variety and evolution of the formal character of his product correspond so definitely to the changes in expressive character that it is futile to pretend a complete consideration of the plastic arts when either the form or the content is neglected. But we can consider an artist as a craftsman without demeaning the character of his activities, without denying the "spiritual" quality of his endeavor. It may be difficult for the lay imagination to believe the supposedly romantic, temperamental artist as but little different in essence from the cobbler, the tailor, the host of artisans who live by their control of materials. But the differentium from these less spiritually important craftsmen is mainly quantitative and lies in the infinitely more complex and subtle character of the form problem of the artist—the end to be accomplished—which has perhaps never been properly defined, and certainly is not generally understood.

In defining the form problem of the artist the decorative function of any work of art must be recognized. It has been the whim and the fallacy of spiritually-minded critics with a Victorian or *fin de siècle* heritage of aversion to the material in culture, to consider art and decoration as distinct pursuits. The decorator was a craftsman, but the artist was an artist. For decoration was considered a secondary spiritual necessity, a mere attribute of our physical environment.

But this is not true. For although decoration takes a material form and is applied to physical objects, it of course does not affect us physically. A comfortable chair is not made more so by the superior design of a tapestry covering. Even an uncomfortable chair might be desirable if so upholstered because it would decoratively enrich its environment. What then is decoration? And what aspect of our consciousness does it affect? A decorated environment that suits our taste, we feel is more interesting, richer, and "there is more to it" than an undecorated one. But a series of true, amusing, or interesting facts plainly printed on large sheets of paper would not be considered decorative. Decoration, then, is an enrichment of the sensuous environment provided by additional co-ordinated material for human attention beyond that which functional necessity demands.

The element of attention in human psychology is the key factor

in defining the craft problem of the artist. It is this faculty to which artistic values are submitted. Optic, aural, and kinesthetic sensory mechanisms are only intermediary agents. The fact that we can encompass a series or group of such sensory elements simultaneously in the grasp of our attention by organizing them into a coördinated pattern, is the basis of the activity by which we enrich our environment in the degree called "art." Coördination in the mind of the artist is accomplished by concentration on his expressive purpose. He focuses his entire attention on a complex expressive gesture by means of a subjective mechanism which he has produced in a long career of preparatory concentration. Normal ability in this direction is called craftmanship, and abnormal ability, genius. An artificial environment, as it were, is thus created for our attention, the satisfactoriness of which can be judged in part by the quantity of experience which it affords. Such an estimation must depend, however, not only upon the number of units present, but also upon the complexity of the structure in which they are controlled.

To simplify the process, let us examine the concept of formal complexity by illustration rather than definition, using the development of a hypothetical taste or style as example. Perhaps if we were conceiving for the first time of the possibility of embellishing a plane surface with markings of an organized character, or of creating thereon simple representations of familiar objects, we would start with broadly outlined forms like the scrawl of a child or the art of the Crô-Magnons, which differ greatly in quality but little in the character of their esthetic structures. As time went on we, our fellows, or succeeding generations of artists, would complicate these simple beginnings as they entered the realm of the familiar. First, the simple form would be set in a definite relation to the boundaries of the area it was developing, thus introducing the concept of pattern, and next would be itself developed by subdivision or the addition of detail. Then follow suggestions of simple relief, color, and light and shade. The discovery of the latter (which generally occurs at a fairly advanced stage) suggests both the possibility of presenting the objects in full mass (rather than low relief) and also of the construction of deep space. When mass and space are present, the tendency is then to develop the mass in relation to the space and moving freely through it. By this stage the process of creation will be so complex that it will be necessary for the artist to fuse the many elements in his consciousness, and the work itself will have a fused character. It is the *fusion* of values which is created and enjoyed rather than the values themselves. Creation and appreciation of such a work become more dependent on the power and less on the patience of the individual.

A work of art then becomes like an organic body, with a smooth unbroken covering of flesh over a mechanically articulated framework of bones. The bones are not visible, but they exert a controlling influence on the structural character of the surface, and if they are not there the supposed work of art is but a lifeless imitation of one. Because of the transfer of creative attention to the total problem rather than to its constituent elements, it is possible for a weak or uncomprehending agent to fail in his grasp, the result being a work of negligible content bearing a superficial resemblance to one of consequence.

In the experience of the beholder, an incompletely developed capacity for attention-control of complex structures causes the individual to get the maximum esthetic pleasure of which he is capable from a simpler form, and therefore to esteem it more highly than an advanced form. Thus a peasant or a child will be bored by a symphony concert, but will enjoy simple folk tunes or nursery jingles; and intelligent men, who have neglected their cultural development, will tolerate utter banalities for the decoration of their homes and surroundings. Some people, whom Sigmund Spaeth calls "foot listeners," appreciate only rhythm in music, favoring that of the most obvious structural character. They are greatly excited by jazz music and military marches, but symphonies are meaningless and intolerable to them.

Thus it is apparent that great works of art can actually be offensive or boring when the pattern whereby their complexity is controlled is too subtle or taxing for an undeveloped appreciation, regardless of the intellectual capacity of the individual otherwise. A confusion arises in this connection because of the apparent ability of a willing, intelligent observer to appreciate some complex works or styles and not others. He is thus made to feel that the latter are inferior or that esthetic values are too subjective for analysis. Of course the constitution of an individual capacity for esthetic enjoyment is unique, but its elements are universal and the character and elements of any given work are constant and objective. In some styles a refinement of emphasis reveals broad, simple groupings within the total complexity of the work, which are accessible to an undeveloped taste incapable of grasping the total content. The clarified forms and broad patterns of light and dark make paintings of the Venetian High Renaissance (Titian) comprehensible and enjoyable to those who are incapable of appreciating the additional subtleties, whereas the insistently restless character of the detail in a northern Baroque painting (Rubens) will over-strain and offend the attention of an untrained (or inexperienced) observer in spite of the fact that the details are really controlled in a general or-

ganization of great breadth and power. In the former case the observer is able to avoid the strain of a greater quantity of material than his attention can manage by ignoring whole groups of values in the work, inner complications of the form, subtle tonal gradations, spacial relations, and so on; whereas in the latter, the various aspects of the form are so intimately inter-related that they make an inescapable demand which exceeds the capacity and immediately exhausts the attention of an untrained taste.

It is as though there were two cases of canned goods, one stowed compactly in its pine box, the other arranged on a counter in one of those elaborate pyramidal compositions by which the groceryman expresses the esthetic content of his soul. In the first instance, we can think of the entire two dozen cans as a cubical unit, without taxing our attention with the multiplicity of its parts. But the cans upon the counter, if they run true to form, will differ sufficiently from a simple pyramid, with the base angles curving forward, a discontinuous outer contour, a scattering of confetti and a prominent price card, so that we must grasp the result as a whole in all its scintillating complexity. There is no major aspect of the design, no clear-cut silhouette, no massing of lights and darks or colors, with which our attention can concern itself to the exclusion of all else.

Of course there are many other essential differences between Titian and Rubens, as well as between these two ways of contemplating two dozen cans, and their detailed consideration would be a complete analysis of their respective styles and expressive content. We are here merely indicating the source of a confusion regarding the subjective character of art appreciation.

There is also another way in which the character of the calculating agent affects his estimate of a work of art, and that is through his "taste." Actually taste is merely the preference of the observer, and what is known as "good taste" is not a universal power to comprehend the nature and quality of art, but a superior grasp of the subtleties of a given current art style. Major alternatives are decided step by step in the cultural development of a given society and the will or choice of the individual artist or connoisseur operates within very narrow limits. His concern is much more with the history of the style immediately previous to any given moment, with which he must be exceedingly intimate, rather than with broad esthetic principles or complete understanding. The latter are postulated in the esthetic attitude of the time, and sensed through a rapport with its product.

Preference between two types of esthetic manifestation is based on their respective expressive characters. It is perfectly possible to describe the characteristics of the various instances of esthetic or-

ganization noted above in purely abstract terms. The Titian and the Rubens, the arrangement of the boxed cans and the distributed cans, can be considered as essentially clarified and unclarified, ordered and organic, but each of these methods of controlling material connotes a definite philosophical attitude toward life which one either possesses or does not. An analytical mind prefers order in art, clarified structure, scale in architecture, and so on, because it permits one to grasp or approach his esthetic material in the manner to which he is accustomed. Or, it presents "life" to him as he is committed to perceiving it. But others who consider this approach stodgy, cut and dried, and unreal, prefer to contemplate life as a moving, ever-changing activity, in which we engage according to an intuitive rather than a planned program, and surprises and thrills are its pleasurable elements. These will prefer flowing, organic, unclarified treatment of form in art. Every phase of esthetic organization of form has some such human or philosophical connotation. And a choice between two equally valuable or excellent, or complex and successful, works of art will be decided upon the basis of the emotional attitude of the individual toward these meanings, which may be called the "expressive content" of the work. One's response to the expressive content of a work of art is taste in the broader sense. It is this sort of taste of which it has been said it is the function of the critic to eliminate from his professional activity, at least in so far as estimates of importance or value in a work of art are concerned.

Thus we find that a work of art is an organization of sensuous stimuli coördinated in such a way as to be simultaneously accessible to the attention. The value of a given object is dependent on the quantity of material controlled, the complexity of the structure whereby it is controlled, and the force and acceptability of the expressive connotations implied in the character of its structure. In estimating such a work ourselves, or in accepting the analysis or estimation of some one else, we must take into account that although the entire content of a work of art is theoretically accessible to any human being, a fully developed personality is implied. One's judgment will be affected by its experience conditioning and by one's reaction to the expressive content of the work. These facts seem obvious enough in this context but actually all judgments are made in approximately the same terms with the same degree of conviction, and a specific effort must be made to analyze and check their postulates and the capacity of the agent by which they are produced. As in the game of drawing straws, the visible length of each straw is identical in spite of the great differences concealed, so in art criticism an erroneous judgment is as well expressed as a correct one.

There are those who reject Rubens because they are incapable of grasping the complexity of his patterns or react in one way or another against the expressive content; those who reject Cézanne because the subtlety or radical character of his means of achieving synthesis escapes them. They are not equipped to function as critics yet they do, to the greater confusion of seekers after light on the subject.

In evolving the concept of a work of art we have started from the premise that its function is decorative and have analyzed the character of the decorative function, implying that the difference between so-called decoration or the minor arts, and so-called works of art or the fine arts, is largely quantitative. This quantitative difference is so great, however, that it actually changes the apparent character of the works in question and the activity by which they are produced, and must be given a special consideration.

A work of art on the highest esthetic level, as differentiated from wall paper, jewelry, textile designs, and the like, is decoration of such vitality and intensity of simultaneous demands on one's attention, that it is able to absorb one completely to the exclusion of all other stimuli of the attention, and is capable of producing a degree of true emotional exhaustion. This superiority in quantitative content produces two qualitative differences in a work of art as opposed to simpler forms of decoration. In the first place, its claim to exclusive attention gives it a sort of focal character in any given setting. Either its contents are definitely isolated from its surroundings by the material limits of the work, as a framed picture, or a statue placed upon a pedestal or in a niche; or, in the case of those works in which the actual boundaries are depreciated, a definite focus is created within the work itself. Thus a work of art has either a definite beginning and ending or a definite focal "middle." The same would of course be true of completely self-contained decorative objects which would not be considered major works of art but are sometimes called "objets d'art," such as ceramics, hangings, metal ware, etc. In the case of this type of object, however, although the definite limits of the form give it some focussing power in relation to its environment, the quantity of attention-absorbing power is definitely limited by the tendency to identical repetition of motifs. In a major work of art serial correlations are enriched by variation of the units. The use of a greater number of dimensions, i.e., a more complex esthetic structure as previously pointed out also provides a more or less quantitative differentium between works of the major and minor arts. The other differentium which results from the increased quantitative content of a major work of art is the importance of its expressive content.

We have seen that apparently abstract technical devices in the plastic arts have an expressive content. A running border around the top of a wall will differ in its expressive content if it is a square meander or a round one; if its lines are thick or thin, close together causing the design to appear like a solid bar, or separate and emphasizing the complex course of the lines themselves. These alternatives are not decided accidentally or without meaning, however little the creator may be conscious of the reasons or nature of his choice. But in a work of art, with its much more complex esthetic structure there are many more choices to be made. The character of the form, of the tones and colors which describe it, the space it occupies, each has many aspects all of which present alternatives to the artist which he decides on the basis of a predilection for their expressive content. And these choices are not isolated and independent, because just as every individual possesses a character, which though it may be unique is also fully integrated, so the esthetic taste of every individual is an integrated one, and such a series of choices in a work of art presents a unified and complex realization of a given esthetic consciousness.

But these alternatives express not only an abstract attitude toward material and therein toward life as a whole. For from the beginning of recorded culture, apparently, artists have found that they could cause the elements of their decorative program to describe semblances of natural objects without in any way damaging the force of the design; and (where the hen came before the egg) others found that their representations of natural objects could be regimented to perform a decorative function without depriving them of the meaning which they contained in their original form. Had these discoveries not been made at the very dawn of civilization the possibility of the combination would have to have been seen by later artists, or the plastic arts could never have achieved the degree of subtle complexity and richness of content which eventually occurred. A work of art has a certain organic character in the rich and profound interrelation of all its elements, and had not man referred to the master patterns of organism created by nature, his task would have been infinitely more difficult and he would undoubtedly never have attained the high level of artistic success of the great periods in his cultural history. Thus it is that each esthetic alternative chosen by an artist not only expresses an abstract attitude toward material form, but this is given an additional turn because of its relation to a specific, recognizable human or natural form. The fact that the figures in an Italian quattrocento painting, for example, are shown prominently in the foreground, not only presents a given plastic program with an implied expressive content, but relates that

expression to a suggestion of the importance of man in relation to his environment as it was felt by the society of the time, and to a specific incident in a human career.

Therefore, a work of art is differentiated from a decorative object in the ordinary sense, by an intensity of material content and a complexity of esthetic structure, which not only gives it a dominant focal relation to its immediate environment, but also draws in or encompasses factors and meanings relative to natural forms. A true work of art, therefore, has sufficient richness of form to engage human attention in a high degree and also a literary or narrative content. However, this criterion can not be applied mechanically and superficially, but must be used with understanding. For example, a so-called "decorative" fourteenth-century Sienese Madonna and a highly narrative but otherwise slight modern academic piece might cause some question as to relative merit on this basis. In judging the Madonna, it would be necessary for one to recognize the superior force of symbolic meaning to the artist of that period. The general philosophy of the Middle Ages emphasized the supposed systematic structures of nature and life, and theology stressed the transitory, ephemeral, and even unreal character of the physical world, dwelling on absolute hierarchies and eternal principles. Symbolic compositions were therefore infinitely more powerful in their concrete meaning than a literal representation of natural forms would have been, even though we now tend to associate such "abstractions" of form with a more purely decorative function.

Thus it is apparent that one is not only dependent for his ability to grasp the total significance of a work of art upon his own fund of esthetic experience, but especially in respect to its specific meaning he is dependent upon the history of forms and concepts of the culture of which he is a part. It is hardly possible for any of us to think of a Sienese Madonna as the Mother of Mankind, and furthermore such a concept is unimportant to many of us. Some human values are sufficiently universal that an artist with a profound grasp may be able to convey them to remote times and places, but the full force of narrative significance is only available to the immediate contemporaries of the artist.

In the case of the work of obviously slight formal content, but with a definite meaning and a convincing representation of natural objects, we will probably feel a willingness to accord the object an important decorative position in our environment which may be surprising to us in view of our low estimate of its decorative vitality. Because since its specific meaning is fully accessible to us we may expand its human values, if they have any cogency whatever, by associations and echoes in our own experience, and since its general

aspects parallel those of the great art of our time it will suggest the formal complexity of the total esthetic program of our own culture, though it fails to achieve or powerfully exploit it. In this sense it will merely be a "picture of a picture," but to the vigorous the effort of filling out the implied structure is stimulating and therefore favorable; to the weak the deflated values in a work of this sort are less exacting upon their powers of attention and therefore more acceptable. This is one reason why "historical perspective" is necessary to weed out the production of a period. In examining the work of our contemporaries we are often so conscious of the evolutionary sequence which dictated their creative program that, understanding the intention of the artist, we take it for the fact. When we judge a painting from the distance of a few decades or more we may know what the artist was striving for, but we no longer have a creative mechanism of our own for automatically seeing such things in every work. The painting must do everything it sets out to do unassisted by the beholder and the weaklings are therefore soon spotted. "Historical perspective" begins to operate at the point at which this becomes true.

Incidentally the possibility of enhancing one's enjoyment of an inferior work of art by increasing its content with associations from general experience, is largely dependent upon the use of recognizable natural objects. Obviously the number of associations we can have in connection with a geometrical shape, let us say, is exceedingly limited, and of a very simple nature. Whereas our associations with natural forms are both more numerous and richer. Seizing upon this fact, artists of the recent past pushed the development of the naturalistic or representational elements of their style to such an extent that practically all decorative content was eliminated, and there are still some who follow this program.

The change of emphasis from formal content in Western European art to expressive content came at about the end of the eighteenth century. Implied and begun in the cultural changes of the end of the Middle Ages, the balance shifted for the first time perhaps in the work of Hogarth. The reversal was complete and the expressive attitude monumentally embodied in the work of Daumier and Goya. Because of the cogency and conviction of their expressive content, these men seemed to go farther than any previous style in the observation and presentation of the natural aspect of form. The small fry who make it their business to seize upon the obvious in any approach to a problem which is beyond their comprehension, must develop it to its ultimate conclusion because they are unaware of its original purpose and therefore of its functional limits. By the middle of the nineteenth century they had propa-

gated a program under which an artist had to study anatomy by dissection as if he were a surgeon, antiquity as if he were an archeologist and a classical historian, landscape as if he were a botanist, perspective as if he were a physicist, and so on. Although it was vaguely recognized that all this was done for the high purpose of better serving the expressive content of art, the net result was an emphasis on objective detail which left little room for anything else. Figure compositions were of course based on some narrative element or subject, but it appeared that the people who had been able to follow the rigid discipline necessary to master the body of factual material outlined above, were deficient even in literary imagination. This mountainous mechanism brought forth works whose mouse-like expressive content was disappointing and inadequate. In Meissonier's "Friedland, 1807" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City the formal content is not only lacking in esthetic significance, but the high-school cheering section concept of war which it embodies is lacking in penetration, to say the least. Compare, for example, Goya's series of "The Horrors of War" or his "Massacre of the Second of May."

The fallacy of the value of a highly specialized factual knowledge to an artist lies in the fact that the beholder of his works will not be similarly informed, but must judge of artistic reality as it coincides with his general unanalytical experience of form, wherein a variable attention element has caused him to retain details in varying degrees. In art the whole is not made up of the sum of its parts. Sensitivity to significant characteristics is much more valuable to an artist than detailed scientific knowledge, and though analysis or study of form may help to develop this faculty, the expressive purpose must always remain in view. In a naturalistic style where rich distribution of small units is part of the esthetic program, a detailed knowledge of form will be of service to the artist, but the details must be organized in accordance with the esthetic program and not exactly as they occur in nature.

Esthetic significance of form is a thing definitely apart from natural significance, however naturalistic a style may be. It has been the genius of occidental artists to produce both, simultaneously in a high degree. Naturalistic appearance in a work of art is by no means a draw-back unless it has been achieved at the expense of esthetic significance. But some element of esthetic reality is necessary in any object embodying a decorative purpose, because human attention can only be engaged repeatedly by an object which appeals to the senses. The intelligence is bored with repetition. The product of a mind can be stored indefinitely in another mind upon a single complete experience thereof. We are bored by the repeti-

tion of a fact or story we have heard. But although we know the taste of fine wine it is pleasant to repeat the experience indefinitely. For "factual decoration" to have constant attention-compelling force it would have to change constantly like the freize of running news items on the Times Building.

It has been emphasized here that the basic importance of a work of art is its ability to hold and enforce attention in the greatest possible degree. The function of *attracting* attention is a separate one, on a simpler and much less rich plane. In a poster or a bugle call, for example, the esthetic structure is consciously simplified, the contrasts made as sharp, and therefore as lacking in subtlety and complication, as possible. The military bugler usually employs only five notes. One's attention is startled but not engaged. A simple and concise message is transmitted, but there is no invitation to dwell on the material, because the functional simplification of its structure has left it excessively angular, brittle, blatant, or shallow.

A similar character inheres in works of art which succeed on the basis of a simplification in terms of the novel elements of a given mode. Because of the single-mindedness of their purpose they capture the specific qualities toward which they are directed in a superlative degree, and because this program is based on a current fashion it has a definite contemporary value. As these values lose their timeliness, such works are left without any force whatsoever. A work which is "striking" now, is "dated" twenty years from now, and often practically incomprehensible or "quaint" after a few more decades. This is another example of the force which historical perspective plays in the judgment of works of art. The "perfect" or well-developed critic, however, should be able to penetrate the simplicity of a work of this type, and signalize the character of its appeal from the start.

Mural paintings and monumental sculpture attract attention automatically because of their size, but since nothing in the esthetic programs of these arts is sacrificed in the interests of this function, it is obviously not a draw-back. When works of this sort are altered "to suit their setting" in the sense that their structure is *simplified* to conform to certain mechanical characteristics of the site, however, a definite loss of value is sustained. When they are subordinated to, instead of integrated with, a larger structural unit of which they are a part, works of this type become decorative in the secondary, attributive, superficial sense, and not major works of art. Nevertheless, most academic or conventionally-trained artists or architects will say that a mural painting must employ forms which do not suggest bulk or space in any great degree because these elements destroy the architectonic significance of the wall. How-

ever, the use of a mural painting is indicated originally by the presence of an inactive area in an architectural design which it is desirable to activate. Theoretically, therefore, any degree of power and complexity is acceptable provided it is completely integrated and suitable in expressive content to the function and design of the building. If its structure is simplified, however, to insure maximum emphasis on the architectural design, or simply because of lack of power or grasp on the part of those responsible, the mural then fails to comply to the present definition of a major work of art. It will lack sufficient content to absorb attention completely, and being dependent on a larger unit, will yield its focussing power to the design of which it is a part.

We have attempted herein to survey the character of the concepts which underly the creation of a work of art, showing both its essential functions and the character of the means by which this function is discharged. A major work of art has both a decorative and expressive function, intimately interrelated, of which one or the other may constitute the primary concern of the artist, but neither may be entirely neglected. They affect the beholder as stimuli so perfectly and elaborately coördinated that in contemplating the work his attention is afforded an opportunity for experience of the maximum degree of intensity and complexity that is accessible to him. In general, especially in the case of those works whose values are fused into a more completely unified esthetic program, it is necessary to judge the value of a work of art by its subjective appeal to an individual. But the resulting judgments will vary with the character of the agent, and if they are to serve any other purpose than a mere estimation of his enjoyment of a given object, they must be analyzed or "corrected" as has been noted, just as a chemist or physicist corrects his laboratory findings for fluctuating conditions of temperature and atmospheric pressure. In a basic sense the value of a work of art to a given individual is directly dependent upon the amount of properly coördinated material presented to his attention. The absolute value of a work of art is likewise dependent on the potential amount of coördinated material accessible to the attention of a perfectly cultured or understanding critic. These two calculations of value will differ, the latter exceeding in so far as the specific person in the first instance falls short of perfect understanding, but being less in so far as momentary, "fashionable," or contemporary values may be accessible to him.

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