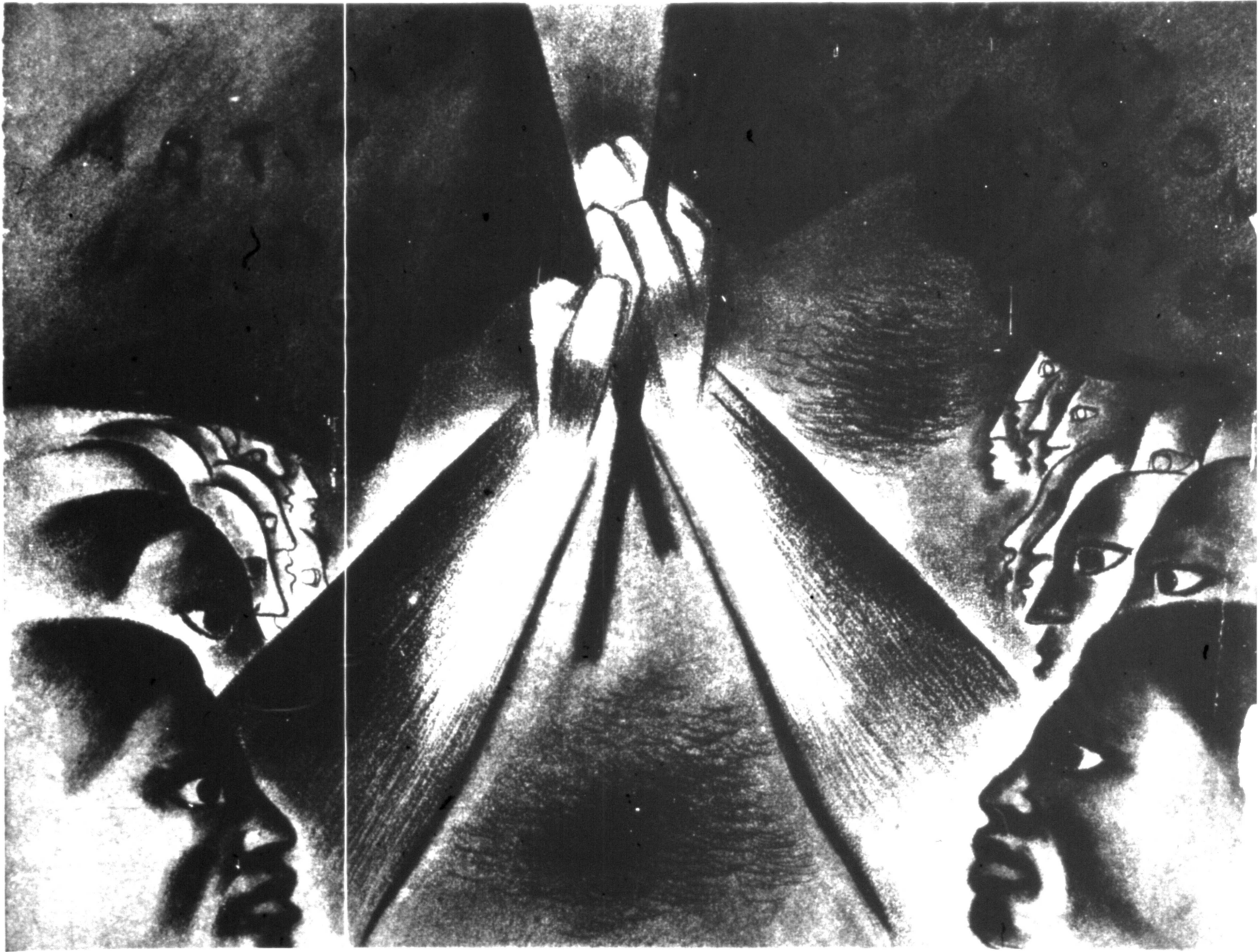


# ART FRONT

JULY-AUGUST

10c.



15

WHAT KIND OF A WORLD'S FAIR? RALPH M. PEARSON .  
FRENCH ARTISTS AND THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE : SAMUEL  
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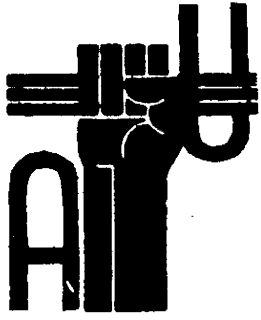
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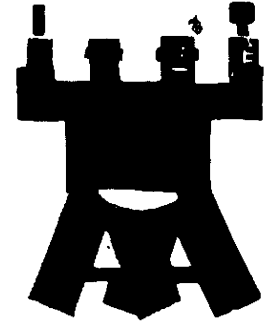
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JULY-AUGUST, 1936



# ART FRONT



## ORGANIZE AGAINST LAY-OFFS

**W**E will contract the arts program to get the best artists, painters, musicians, etc." With these words Aubrey Williams, W.P.A. executive outlined a program of curtailment of Federal Arts Projects which will throw off at least two-thirds of the present number of artists now working for W.P.A. All indications are that layoffs will begin early in July.

A delegation representing 21 organizations representing close to 50,000 workers in the music, drama, painting and writers' fields, appeared before Mr. Williams to present demands for larger allocation of funds for continuation and expansion of the four Federal Arts Projects.

Artists must rally all their forces against this vicious attempt to begin a campaign of curtailment and discrimination by dragging out that discredited scarecrow—"merit system." Artists must spike this flagrant capitulation to the Hearst cry of "boondoggling."

Surveys presented by the delegation proved conclusively that the present projects have not been able to satisfy the cultural needs of the American people. Hundreds of thousands of adults and children have been given the opportunity to study art and art appreciation for the first time in their lives in many communities. Thousands of public buildings and parks still lack mural and sculptural decoration. Art is a natural resource of the country. It must be developed. To curtail the arts projects now is on a level with Hitler's anti-culture campaign. Art is a living necessity for both artist and public, not a "luxury" indulged in by a few private connoisseurs.

We insist that all unemployed artists must be employed on the projects at a decent wage level. United effort will win our demands. All localities must organize mass actions, mass picket lines, mass meetings in order to demonstrate our strength in fighting this dangerous threat to culture.

## NATIONAL SCOPE OF ART FRONT

**T**HE mobilization of the various Artists' Unions throughout the country has gone forward at a very rapid rate, so that between two issues of ART FRONT the scope of this magazine has changed from representing first the local interests mainly of the Artists' Union of New York, to that of representing the Artists' Unions in the Eastern District. And now it has been endorsed as the official organ of the Midwestern Artists' Unions. The editors are keenly aware of the new responsibilities and will make every effort to keep pace with the growth of the

**OPERATING ON A SUMMER SCHEDULE THIS ISSUE OF ART FRONT COVERS THE PERIOD JULY-AUGUST. THE SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER ISSUE WILL APPEAR OCTOBER 1, AFTER WHICH THE REGULAR MONTHLY SCHEDULE WILL BE RESUMED.**

Artists' Unions on a national scale. However, this can only be done with the effective cooperation of all the Artists' Unions and also other artists' groups. Under the plan set up by both the Eastern District and the Midwestern Conference, the local unions are to set up Art Front Committees having the very definite task of obtaining subscriptions and bringing ART FRONT, not only to the members of the union, but also into the community. They must also bring news of a national character from their locality to ART FRONT. Only in this way can the magazine fit the needs of a national organization. We urge that these committees be set up immediately and start functioning. As the only magazine put out by artists and devoted entirely to the interests of the artists, ART FRONT should occupy a most important place in both the cultural and economic fields connected with art.

## PHILADELPHIA AND ITS "ART AUTHORITIES"

**T**HE art museum is assumed to be a community institution. As such it should not be in the clutches of "lay art authorities" who impose a slavery of styles, dogmas, and literary concepts. Its role of nurturing culture should embrace the work of living artists as well as of those of the past.

In the Philadelphia *Ledger* of Monday, June 1, a motion of the Fairmount Park Commission was reported as authorizing Joseph C. Widener as chairman of the Wilstach Committee to spend \$160,000 for paintings to be housed in Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, for the Wilstach Estate. At the meeting Mr. Widener said: "It has always been my policy to buy worthwhile art work. In particular, I have in mind two paintings by Boucher. . . . I am not sympathetic with modern art. What I think we should do is acquire the classics—those paintings which have lived through the centuries. Art like clothing changes in fashions and only the cream remains."

Realizing that our museums should be representative of all art, no matter of what period or school, the Artists' Union feels that Mr. Widener's statement reveals him as incompetent to handle these funds. We do not deny the historical importance of great creations of the past, but we do insist that the first hand creative experience is of greater social value in its own right than the revered example of art from a bygone century.

This proposed purchase of two canvases of the Wilstach Estate has aroused the righteous indignation of Philadelphia artists as being unjust and biased. If these artists confine their objections to a few individual outbursts, there will be no effective curb of this proposed action. The Artists' Union is inviting all art organizations of the city, all artists, and all those interested in arts to initiate a campaign of protest.

You should send your letters of protest at once. You should get your friends to do the same. You should get your organizations to adopt resolutions of protest. These letters and resolutions should be sent to the press and to the following people:

Fairmount Park Commission, Room 127, City Hall, E. T. Stotesbury, President; Emory McMichael, Vice-President; Joseph Carson, Treasurer; Major Thomas, Secretary; S. Davis Wilson, Mayor of Philadelphia; Pennsylvania Museum of Art, Fiske Kimball, Director; Henri Gabriel Marceau, Curator of Fine Arts.

Please send a copy of your protest to the Artists' Union, 1212 Walnut Street.

Fraternally Yours,

HERBERT JENNINGS,  
President.

### HOW REPRESENTATIVE IS THE NATIONAL EXHIBIT?

**T**HE highly touted national show at Rockefeller Center opened on May 15, but opened without representation of work from many of the best artists in the country, particularly the more advanced and progressive painters. The painters were invited to show their work on the basis of participating financially in the proceeds of the exhibition. The artist was to get a percentage of the proceeds after expenses were paid, which sounded like an excellent proposition until it was learned that Rockefeller Center was to get 60 per cent of the entire proceeds first, then after the expenses were paid the remainder was to be divided among the artists. As the show was lavishly mounted, the prospect of the artists deriving any appreciable revenue was very faint indeed. The committee in charge of the exhibition was approached on the proposition of paying the rental fee, but refused to consider it. Members of the American Group, the Artists Congress, Painters, Sculptors and Gravers, the various Artists' Unions and The Harlem Artists' Guild thereupon refused to exhibit work. Through a misunderstanding of the actual nature of the exhibition, many members of the Minnesota Artists' Union sent work. They were apprised by wire of the actual situation and seven members immediately withdrew their work, which had already been hung. After the work had been withdrawn, Governor Olsen, for reasons of his own, saw fit to apply pressure to have it rehung.

The Artists' Congress led the campaign to expose the true nature of the exhibition. They printed and distributed leaflets urging the public to boycott the show. The plan for the exhibition was very carefully thought out by the committee,

headed by Mrs. Breckinridge. Rockefeller Center was to get lots of free advertising and 60 per cent of the total proceeds, the Governors of the various states were to have a sort of Roman holiday in which they could parade as patrons of the arts, of course there would be ample advertising for Mrs. Breckinridge, and the artists were to get what was left over—if anything. The public was to foot the bill in the form of a 25 cents admission fee, thereby making sure that the owners of Rockefeller Center would not go hungry. Advertised as an exhibition of representative work of the country, the artists had no part in the selection of the work, this being left to the discretion of a committee to be set up by the Governor in each state. As a result, in New Jersey a large group of progressive painters were entirely ignored and initiated a campaign to apprise the public of the far from "representative" nature of the exhibition. Under the conditions set up for the exhibition, it still remains to be seen whether the misguided artists who did exhibit will get even their expenses back.

With a national organization of Artists' Unions, a National Committee on Rental Policy, and an active Co-ordination Committee, these issues can be more forcefully and more successfully fought in the future.

### T. R. A. P.

**O**PERATING with funds from the four billion dollar federal relief appropriation, the T.R.A.P. was set up with an initial allotment of one half a million dollars to put unemployed and needy artists to work producing works of art for federal buildings. Becoming highly involved in questions of qualifications of

the artists to perform this work, the project has so far spent only one-half of its appropriation and has put only a negligible number of artists to work, despite the fact that there are innumerable places for the allocation of these works and thousands of unemployed artists. Learning of this situation, the Co-ordination Committee set itself the task of finding out why this money, allotted by Congress for the purpose of aiding artists in distress, was not being used.

At a conference with Olin Dows in New York on June 11 the committee learned what was holding the work up. Although performing the same type of work as the W.P.A., the project committee in Washington set up exacting and vague standards. This sounds like a contradiction, but as the committee itself cannot adequately define what the qualifications are and is unwilling to accept the qualifications of any painter who is a professional artist, the reasons for the ensuing confusion can very readily be seen. The Co-ordination Committee offered a concrete plan as a means of cutting this Gordian knot. The plan provides for transferring a number of artists considered qualified by the committee from F.A.P. to T.R.A.P. Selections will be made also from a list recommended by the Unemployed Section of the Artists' Union. Mr. Dows promised action and while not specifying the number to be employed, thought it might be from 150 to 200. The places of the artists transferred from F.A.P. will be filled by artists now unemployed. This seems to offer a way of putting needy artists to work and appeasing the committee at Washington. This is one more reason why organized artists must have adequate representation on the various "Art Committees."

## HARLEM ARTISTS' GUILD

### A STATEMENT

**T**HE Harlem Artists' Guild, with a view to promoting the best interests of Negro art in America, feels obliged to adopt an attitude of non-cooperation toward the Harmon Foundation in its effort to collect an exhibition of art work done by Negroes to be shown at the Texas Centennial Exposition. J

The Guild, comprising the majority of Negro artists in Greater New York and numbering in its ranks some of the foremost Negro artists of the country, is convinced that the Harmon Foundation does not serve the best interests of the Negro artist. We feel that the Harmon Foundation's past efforts to advance Negro

art have served the opposite purpose by virtue of their coddling rather than professional attitude toward the Negro as an artist. Basic in the ill-direction of the Harmon Foundation's efforts has been the fact that they are not a recognized art agency and, possibly for this reason, have presented Negro art from the sociological standpoint rather than from the aesthetic. The selection of the Harmon Foundation as entrepreneur for the Negro artists in the instance of the Texas Centennial Exposition is a clear example of how insidiously the Foundation has become the arbiter of the Negro artist's fate through the mere fact of its orginal, perhaps well-



intended, philanthropy. It is because the Guild feels that Negro artists should no longer be hampered by such stagnating and misdirected philanthropy on the part of an organization which is incompetent to judge art except on a racial basis that we take this occasion to announce our reasons for not cooperating with the Harmon Foundation in this particular instance.

In registering our attitude toward the Harmon Foundation, we do not wish it to be construed as a criticism of the committee in charge of the Negro part of the Texas Centennial Exposition. Except for the position of the Harmon Foundation in the arrangements we would do our utmost to try to further the committee's program. Since our organization it has been and still is our intention to do everything within our power to advance the Negro's position as a potent factor in the

art of America, and such a position, we believe, must be held because of the intrinsic artistic value of our contribution to art rather than because of matters of race.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The hand of the Harmon foundation in Negro art is comparable to the hand of the so-called friends of the Negro people, who seek to misguide the talents of Negroes and keep their abilities chained to interests which are inimical to the progress of Negroes in political, economic and cultural fields.

It is now well recognized that the Negro artist has a special contribution of the highest order to make to American art. This contribution can be fully made only if the Negro is released from the brutal oppression which fetters him at every turn. Therefore the struggle of the Negro artist for equal opportunities, for the development of his talent,

must be made part and parcel of the fight for the complete freedom of the Negro people. It must be carried on through a fighting alliance of Negro and white artists, workers, professionals, and others who feel the sting of capitalist oppression—which frequently masks under the name of "pure art."

The Negro part of the Texas Centennial Exposition can be supported only in so far as all discrimination against Negro artists and patrons is eliminated, and the exhibition does not caricature the Negro people. The real Negro art of today is that art which reflects the growing struggles of the Negro people for their liberation, and their growing consciousness of the necessity of allying themselves with those progressive whites who see the need of joining with the Negro people against the common enemy—capitalist oppression.

## FRENCH ART AND THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE

by SAMUEL PUTNAM

EVER since the middle of the nineteenth century—doubtless, ever since the Middle Ages—French art has been an object of commercial exploitation, and the French artist, all too frequently, the victim of that exploitation.

We may think, for example, of Cezanne coming into Père Tanguy's shop and leaving his canvases there, to be stacked against the wall according to size. For the smallest, up to a certain size, the price is \$8. The figure is graduated up to \$20 for the largest. For the first Cezanne it purchased, the Metropolitan Museum paid \$8,000. A more important picture in the same collection sold for \$46,000, which would be a moderate price for the master of Aix today, seeing that his work is practically off the market.

When Renoir's "Vue du Pont-Neuf" brought \$60 in 1876, the sum paid was looked upon as fabulous; only Manet could do better. The same painter's "La Source" came nearer to hitting the average, at \$20. Before the end of the century, it was resold for \$14,000. "Avant le Bain" likewise went for \$20. By 1894, its owner valued it at \$1,200, but could find no buyer. The canvas was later picked up for \$25,000. At a sale in 1877, sixteen Renoirs were knocked down for \$400. The year following, the "Pont du Château" brought \$8, the "Jeune fille dans un jardin" \$6; "La femme au chat," \$16.

This will give some idea of how prices ranged. Renoir was one painter who was early marked as a "value." Fifteen years before he died, he was to see a single painting of his command \$125,000. Some-

times, as in the case of Renoir, the artist in his later years got at least a share of the profits. But the early years—that is a different story. It was the fate of most of the Impressionists to have to struggle with all but incredible hardships. The

life of none of them, perhaps, is better illustrative of this than is that of Camille Pissarro, whom some one has sentimentally described as "a sweet-tempered Jew, with a sense of comedy amid all his sufferings that brings tears along with the

●  
"HEAD"

by

HUGH MILLER

●  
Courtesy  
Federal  
Art Project  
●





smiles." This is the kind of "comedy" with which the artist can very well dispense. It may be amusing to the sentimental reader of biographies, but— It is worth noting that the author of the description just quoted, a midwestern art journalist, is one who can see no social meaning in art and no justification for artists' organizing.

Monet was another who knew a grinding poverty in his youth; and he, too, saw his canvases go for 80 francs, or about \$16. By the time he had attained some sort of economic security, he had blindness to fight. All this (read, e.g., Tabarant's monograph on Pissarro) is at some remove from Henri Murger, his "vie de Bohème" and tinsel Mimi's. Yet it was, significantly, at this very time that the great Bohemian myth grew up; and our attention is distracted from the artist's sufferings, the effect upon his work and the glaring injustice of the thing by such a legend as that of the kindly and whimsical Père Tanguy.

Yes, there can be no doubt about it, French art, from the nineteenth century on, has been built up into a high-powered modern business enterprise. A couple of years ago, M. Maurice Vlaminck, who happens to be a novelist as well as a painter, wrote an angry 10,000-word epilogue to his *La Haute-Folie*, in which he has a bitter indictment to make of the spirit of commercial speculation which lay behind much of the after-War painting. Following an allusion to the late Ivar Kreuger, he goes on to remark:

"The painting of the subconscious, for instance, was a security that had to do with the Stock Exchange, purely and simply, permitting the picture dealer, as it did, to become a broker appealing with promises of a rapid rise in value to the covetousness and credulity of his inflationist customers. It was not a picture that was bought; it was a share of stock . . . there were fliers in painting as in gold mines, copper and cotton. . . . A new firm would discover a new name and float a new stock on the market."

But while painting might be a business, the painter has been far from being a business man, in the past; and he has usually been lacking in any perceptible sense of his relation to the social-economic structure about him. A few, like Courbet and Daumier, have had more than a glimmering, and have left some record of it in their work. Nearer to type, however, is Cezanne, himself so much exploited. The Paris of 1874 might call him a "communard" or an anarchist; but the reference was to the aesthetic qualities of his pictures (today, it would be "a Bolshevik in paint"). Cezanne was a victim, not merely of financial exploitation, but of a

bourgeois civilization such as forbade him, in a small town, to employ female models. Yet he remains the perfect petty bourgeois, taking it on the chin.

We find other nineteenth century artists seeking an escape through their art: in the "cruel" realism of a Degas (ugly bodies, postures and the like, reflecting the ugliness of an environing society); in the "tumultuous spaces" and the "nightmares" of a Gustave Moreau; etc. All of which is no solution of the economic problem.

It was six years ago, in 1930—the year after the beginning of the "Depression," it may be noted—that French artists really began awaking to a realization that the political, the economic, the social is one of art's vital concerns. The present writer was a resident of Paris at the time and had opportunity for first hand observation. The stimulating impulse came



from the direction of the Soviet Union, having been brought back by writers and artists who had visited the U.S.S.R. and who had a view of the freedom and protection which the artist there enjoys. It is this reporter's impression, though he may be wrong, that it was the writers, Louis Aragon and others, who took the lead. In any event, the A.E.A.R., or *Association des Ecrivains et des Artistes Revolutionnaires* (Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists) soon resulted. This organization is a loosely knit one, something like the League of American Writers, which was in good part modeled after it, or the American Artists Congress. Its membership has grown rapidly all over France and now runs into the thousands. Last fall (November, 1935), at the time when the question of Italian sanctions was up and a war was on between pro-Fascist and anti-Fascist intellectuals, it was able to muster around 10,000 signatures to an anti-Fascist manifesto.

For, political in inception, the A.E.A.R. has remained chiefly political in its func-

tioning; its constitution provides for action on this, rather than on the economic field. Had not the French Fascist movement grown so portentously in the past four or five years, it is likely that the A.E.A.R. would have had its energies in part released for economic, trade union organization and action. As it is, the Fascist peril has been all too imminent. French artists have felt that, unless they saw this political battle through with the French workers, they were likely to wake up some morning and find themselves at the tender mercies of a de la Rocque. And that was something they did not want.

They knew what it meant. They had but to glance across the border, at Germany. They had beheld Der Fuehrer stamping out the German Expressionist school of art, as being un-German. They had watched him hounding the "depraved French," meaning Cezanne, Picasso and company, from the picture galleries—all in the name of "sanitation," mind you. They had seen him closing art museums and turning them into concentration camps. They had seen him, even, sending his Storm Trooper emissaries down into Czechoslovakia to close the exhibition of a John Heartfield, for the reason that it happened to tread on the Nazis' tender feelings. They had seen him sending architects to jail for daring to build a house with a flat roof; for everything in Hitler's Germany has to be "Gothic," you know, just as in Mussolini's Italy it has to be baroque. They had seen all this, and were resolved that this supreme insult to the human intelligence was not going to occur in their country. It was worth fighting to see that it did not occur.

It is not surprising, then, if we discover well up on the anti-Fascist firing line men like André Lhote and Maurice Vlaminck, who are among the leaders of the modern painting movement. It is particularly not surprising, when we notice who is on the other side. Men who have been the life-long enemies of all decency in art. A Camille Mauclair, who is quite possibly the world's worst and most vicious painting critic—not forgetting a very promising American candidate or two. A Louis Bertrand of the French Academy, who has joined with Mauclair in attacking painters like Vlaminck and Leger for not being French, although they ought to be French enough to suit anyone. French artists, in short, know what is coming to them if Fascism triumphs. They had a foretaste of it last November, when open threats of assassination were made to them by the so-called Right "intellectuals." They are accordingly determined to see that Fascism does not come to France. Joined with French writers in the A.E.A.R. and the "House of Culture"



Politician

Masereel

group, they are fighting with a passionate devotion—Vlaminck, for one, has taken a notably strong and independent stand—for the preservation of art and culture, which they now know to be inseparably bound up with the fate and future of the working class.

Economically, meanwhile, the average French artist is in a pitiful plight. There is a sense in which it may be said that he has been too busy, too preoccupied, on the political plane to be able to organize and fight as he should in the economic field. He has made little if any headway against the dealer, who has systematically robbed him all these years. He has not succeeded in wresting from his government such projects as the American artist has won from his. That government gives him a dole, if he is lucky enough to get it, of eight francs a day, or somewhere around fifty cents (at the present rate of

exchange. In this, he enjoys a parity with the French worker; but he is a number of francs under what a blooded canine is regarded as worth, seeing that a dinner in Paris' fashionable dog restaurant costs ten francs. The result—we have heard Barbusse telling us what the result is: the artist is reduced to exchanging his canvases for bread and potatoes in the street.

Following the recent victories of the French People's Front on the political field and the French workers' economic gains in the key industries, it is to be hoped that the artists will now be in a position to enter upon an effective struggle for economic betterment. Under the coming ministry, they may be able to secure projects or at any rate an increase in relief allowance. In the meanwhile, American artists may take a lesson from what has happened to their fellows

abroad. As time goes on, it is possible that we shall find ourselves more and more deeply involved, our energies more and more monopolized in the political battle with the Fascist Terror. But we at least shall have our organizations, which are going concerns—we shall have those to fall back on. And with the economic, trade union experience we shall have gained, with the victories we have already won and those we mean to win, and with the spirit and the courage which shall have come to us as a result of it all, we shall be equipped to deal with our home-brew Nazis.

Our good fortune lies in having had a chance to fight the economic battle first. American artists may congratulate themselves on being ahead of any country in the world, with the exception of the U.S.S.R., in the matter of trade union organization.

## MID-WESTERN CONVENTION

CHICAGO has just seen the successful conclusion of the convention of the Artists' Unions from six states. There were five delegates from Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the first Artists' Union was organized several years ago. There were five from two artists' groups in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one from Nebraska, two from Michigan, nine from Chicago, and two from the plains of Iowa.

These delegates came together for the purpose of co-ordinating the action of all the Artists' Unions to secure better working conditions, better pay, and jobs for all unemployed artists. It was found that there is no Federal Arts Projects in either Indiana or Nebraska. In fact, where there had been no organized struggle by artists' groups for employment by the W.P.A., the conditions were very bad. The scale of wages varies from city to city, some receiving as low as \$71.50, whereas in New York City, Boston, and Providence and a few other cities in the east, the minimum pay is \$103.40. In Chicago, the artists are victims of a vicious "stagger system," in which artists are hired on the project for a few weeks, the administration gets a few of their good works, and they are given a "furlough," which means that they are fired off the project for as long as the administration chooses to keep them off.

In the State of Iowa, an artist elected by the Co-operative Artists of Iowa has been appointed by the administrator of the project there to serve on a committee of three persons who act as an advisory board on the Federal Art Project for the state. Some of the Artists' Unions were

very backward in the struggle against war, fascism and reaction. Some were not co-operating with other progressive organized bodies for the advancement of their economic security.

The closed sessions were devoted to thorough discussions of the most vital problems of the artists. There were heated arguments on the rental policy, the Federal Arts Bill, the Federal Arts Projects, unemployed artists, wage scales, and organization.

The recommendations of the closed sessions were introduced at the final session for action by all the delegates.

### RESOLUTIONS

1. The Mid-West Convention of Artists' Unions proposes affiliation with the Eastern and Western Districts of Artists' Unions for a National Artists' Union.

2. The Mid-West Convention of Artists' Unions favors eventual affiliation with the A. F. of L. as a National Artists' Union with our own constitution and program.

3. We go on record for the organization of all workers on the art project on an industrial basis.

4. Be it resolved, that this convention of the Mid-West District of the Artists' Union pledges itself to fight all tendencies and forces of reaction, war and fascism, fascism.

a. We recommend the boycott of all publications of William Randolph Hearst because of his manifestations of anti-union, anti-civil liberties and un-American policies.

b. We endorse the boycott of the Olympic Art Exhibition to be held in the

summer of 1936 in Berlin and urge all artists to support this stand.

c. We recommend to all affiliated artist bodies that they cooperate with local chapters of the American League Against War and Fascism.

d. We call upon all artists to refuse to make any posters that would foster war propaganda.

5. As neither of the major existing political parties offers satisfaction of the minimum demands for permanent economic security in the form of adequate unemployment insurance, expansion of the W.P.A. to include all unemployed on a permanent basis and old-age pensions, and as we seek peace to protect and advance the cultural life of the people in preference to increased armaments destructive to these pursuits, we therefore urge the formation of a National Farmer-Labor Party dedicated to these principles and recommend that each affiliated Artists' Union initiate and support all efforts toward building this political party for professionals, farmers and workers.

6. We recommend the establishment of a co-ordination committee representing all artists' organizations for the purpose of co-ordinating their efforts.

7. We favor the setting up of city or state project councils to represent the interests of all the workers on the W.P.A.

8. That the Artists' Unions build up Commercial Artists' Sections and that commercial artists be represented on the Executive Boards of the local Unions and on the Central Committee of the Mid-western District.

With this meeting, the National Artists' Union has taken a tremendous stride forward.



# WHAT KIND OF A WORLD'S FAIR?

## The Artist Challenges the Program of the Bankers.

by Ralph M. Pearson.

**N**EW YORK CITY'S coming World's Fair was conceived, and is being managed, by businessmen. It is legally organized as a membership corporation with 118 prominent citizens as incorporators. It is non-profit-making, any surplus, after all expenses are paid, is to go to "charitable, scientific or educational purposes. I am going to show that a *World's Fair*—think of the potentialities of that title—run by businessmen, even though not for their immediate personal profit, can be little more than a glorified bazaar, cannot begin to live up to the implications of its title, cannot represent or foster the great not-business achievements or possibilities of the nation and so is predestined to be a cultural and educational flop. Shall we accept this situation without some protest, even though it is may be too late to change the plans?

A World's Fair, I take it, should be a number of things. Of course it should "stimulate business" (its first announced objective in New York City's case). It should give crowds of eager visitors exciting entertainment — not necessarily based on the negative excitements of "getting stung." It should exhibit, foster and publicize the advance guard of our distinguished achievements in the fields of education, science and the arts—thus, through education untainted by the profit motive, pointing the way to growth. It should be a cross-section of American manufacture, incidentally revealing the tremendous technical advances in certain fields and the equally impressive cultural lag in others—as these advances are recessions are determined by profit considerations. But, preeminently, since the very name "World's Fair" implies a bringing together of all peoples to show their outstanding products, this great community enterprise of ours should reveal to the world our potentialities in all major fields of human activity, and to us, the similar potentialities of other nations. To do that is to push civilization in general a step ahead by showing the way of genuine progress in a manner that transcends the possibilities of the routine, daily business of living.

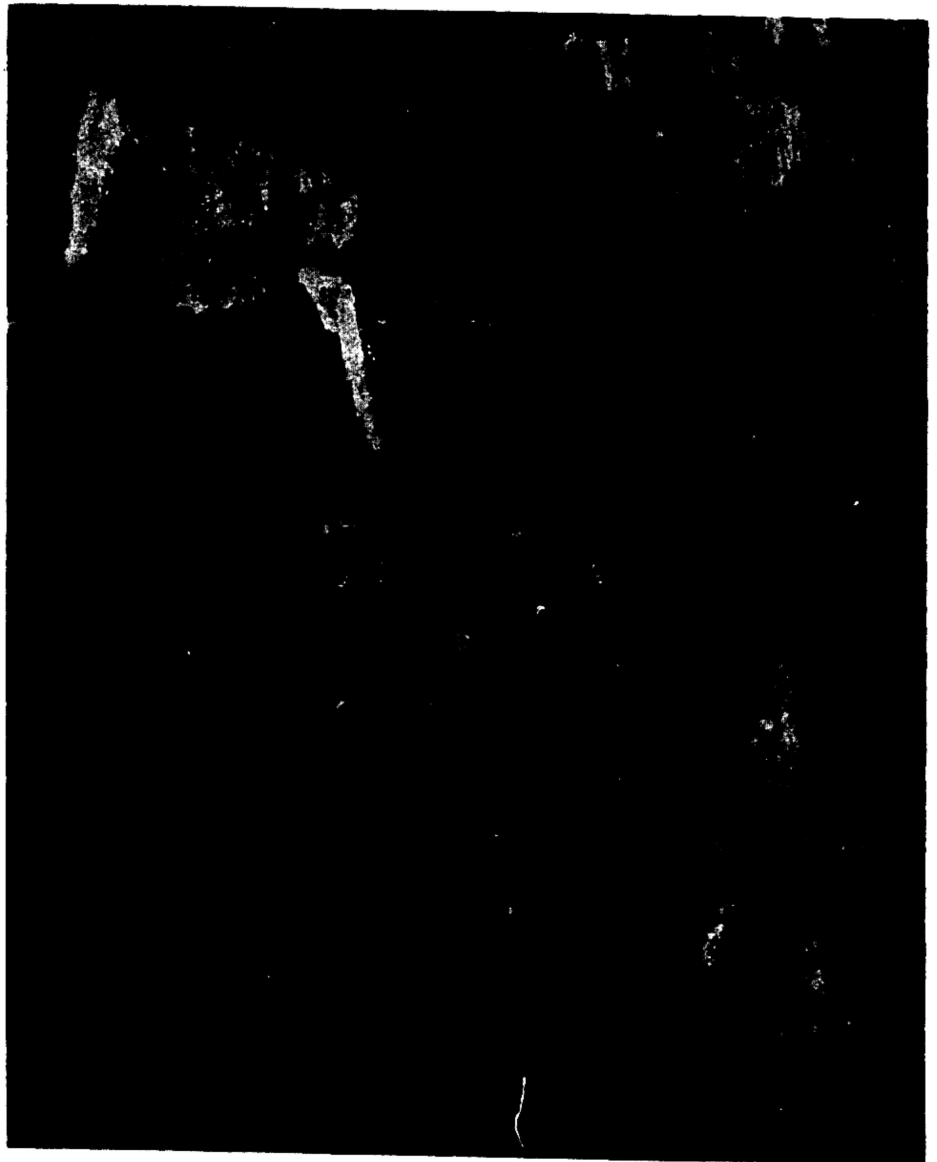
By its very nature a World's Fair should be a community enterprise. Its ideal sponsorship, therefore, should be by a community agency which could keep the event communal in character, could foster those exhibits, including entertainment, which are of the greatest social

value, could protect the public from profiteering camouflaged as education. *A non-profit-making, private corporation organized by business men is not such a community agency.*

Government is the existing social agency which is supposed to be impartial and concerned with the community welfare and progress. Government, too, is supposed to be superior to, or at least a regulator of, the forces interested in private gain. At its best it dominates or supplants such forces; at its less than best it is the only recourse we have with any power of regulation. Government, therefore, is the one and only logical

agency for the sponsoring, regulating and managing of a World's Fair.

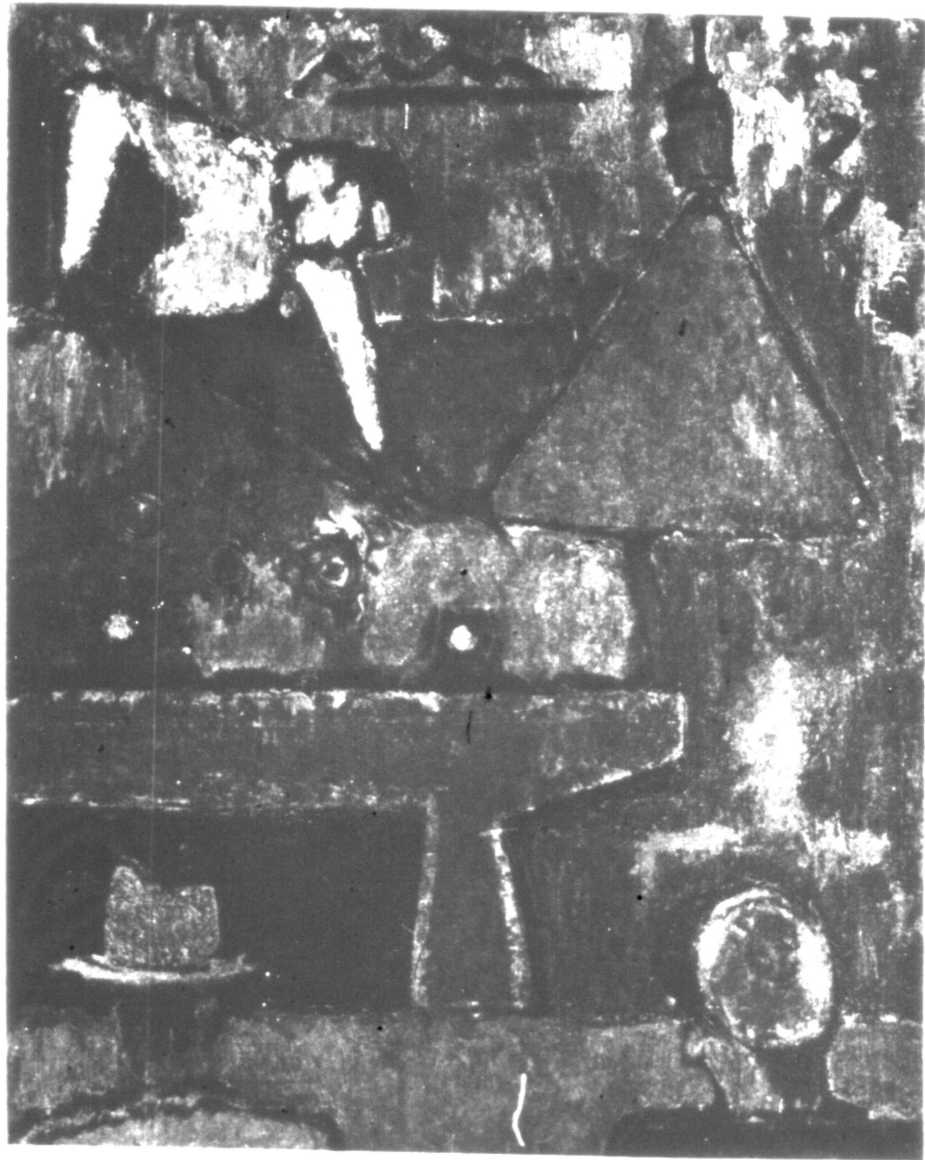
The governmental bodies which have proven their capacity to place the public welfare above considerations of private profit are the various national, state, county and city park commissions and such special bodies as the Tennessee Valley and Port of New York Authorities. The park systems, the community enterprises and the reclamation services which these public spirited bodies have built are at the top of the list of forward-looking achievements and the most brilliant victories of social planning over the self-seeking chaos of our individualistic



Poolroom

Louis Nisonoff

Courtesy Artists' Union Exhibit



economy. The Holland Tunnel, the George Washington Bridge, Jones Beach Park and Parkways, the Westchester Community Center, the conservation programs at Norris and Boulder Dams are a few of many cases that prove the point. It is such an agency that should build and manage a World's Fair. It is only such an agency that can progressively represent our creative potentialities before, and in cooperation with, the countries of the world.

The New York World's Fair is already legally organized with 118 prominent citizens as incorporators. The corporation is non-profit making; any surplus, after all expenses are paid, is to go to "charitable, scientific or educational" purposes. The Chicago World's Fair of 1933-34 with its record of financial success is to be used as a model for present plans. From all accounts this solvency of the Chicago Fair is of major importance to the New York directors and that result is in the foreground of their plans for emulation. The list of 118 incorporators is made up as follows:

Representatives of big business .....	58
Bankers .....	22
Lawyers .....	13
Officials connected with public service.....	12
Professions and education.	6
All art fields.....	5
Labor .....	2
	<hr/>
	118

This set-up of a privately organized corporation, then, is backed by 93 business minds with bankers in the majority, against 25 of all other persuasions—educational, official, labor and art. George McAneny, President of the Title Guarantee & Trust Co., and of the Regional Plan Association, is the moving spirit in the preliminary plans. Can such a business-minded corporation create a community enterprise that will represent genuine progress and bring distinction to the City of New York? In my opinion, it cannot.

There is nothing wrong about a public enterprise for the public good being self-supporting. We all, I think, enjoy paying the modest fees for boats, refreshments and bathing lockers in the public parks (when these are not private concessions) because we know these fees help support a common enterprise, that they go to government, that no one is profiting from them. On the whole we are proud of our public parks and the service ideal behind them.

When, however, a group of business men dominated by New York's biggest



Low Tide

Harry Gottlieb

Courtesy American Artists' School Print Series

bankers organize a non-profit-making corporation to promote a World's Fair on a self-supporting basis, the atmosphere is not so savory. Especially when they announce their main objective as being "stimulation of business," meaning, of course, stimulation of profit. We know the business mind. We know its hard-boiled, shortsightedly practical, dehumanized policies, its suppression of spirit and starvation of the senses, its aesthetic ignorance and fears, its utter lack of *unprofitable* leadership, its callousness to the general *unprofitable* good—all in the name of its one and only deity. Profit. To allow that type of mind to control a World's Fair is not only unsavory; it insures that what should be a great community project featuring supreme human achievements (whether commercially profitable or not) will be, instead, primarily a "business proposition" featuring such advanced and other achievements *as fall in line with business policy*.

As an example of how profit policy works in staging a supposedly educational exhibit take the model houses featured as the "Home and Industrial Arts" exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. In this case the apparent object was to show the millions of visitors the "latest improvements" in the art of home building and furnishing. (The Chicago Fair was under the same corporation sponsorship as is being planned for New York.) Did the model houses fulfil that specification? Let us see:

Nine model houses were announced. Ten were built. The right to build a house was for sale at \$3,000. The buyer of that right could then do what he pleased with "his" exhibit—could call

in such architects and manufacturers as he chose to cooperate with, charging them what he could get for the privilege. In other words, he could make money on his investment; the transaction was strictly a business proposition throughout.

The exhibitors who accepted this business deal were the following:

The Stran Steel Corporation in cooperation with *Good Housekeeping Magazine*; The Masonite Corporation in cooperation with *Home and Field*; American Rolling Mill Co., in cooperation with Lois Palmer of the *Ladies Home Journal*; Lumber Industry of the U.S.A.; Brick Manufacturers Association of America; W. and J. Sloan; Century Homes, Inc.; General Houses, Inc.; John C. B. Moore, an architect and State of Florida.

Of these ten exhibitors the first six obviously bought the right in order to advertise their own products—steel, masonite, lumber, brick and antique furnishings, copied and original. Two others were builders wishing to sell houses, one was an architect wishing to sell his plans and the last was the State of Florida wishing to present an ideal modern house for its southern climate.

Five motives, in other words, were entirely business and limited to the promotion of a single material with no possible concern with the modern art of the home except as that affected their product. Three were motivated by the desire to sell progressive modern houses or plans thereof. One, the Commonwealth of Florida, had no ax to grind and so, without the domination of the profit motive in its choice of exhibit, was entirely educational. Certain of the other exhibits may have been educational but that result



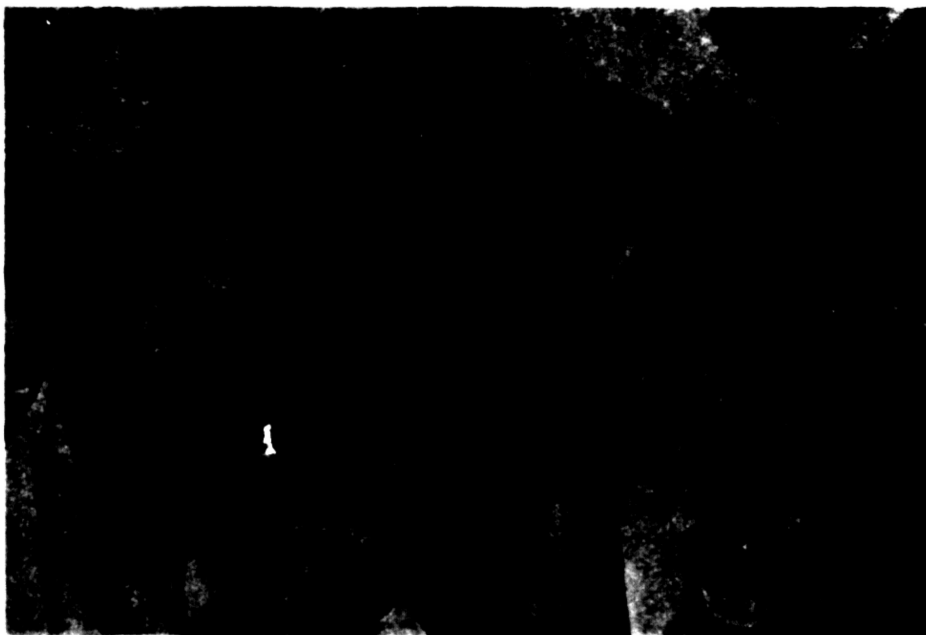
was not guaranteed by the Fair itself. If it did so happen the result was an accident.

If a World's Fair is dominantly business this result is inevitable and, if frankly recognized for what it is, can be accepted on the business basis. But, if a World's Fair has any pretensions about being educational or about fostering genuine "progress," then this situation is rotten at the core and utterly untenable. Oil and water do not mix. Business or education—we can have our choice; we cannot have both.

"Of course," say the business leaders, "we shall call in architects, artists, designers, decorators and stylists to design for us buildings, grounds, exhibits, color-schemes, etc."

Exactly! You will call in a grand mixture of discordant creeds; you will try to compromise to please all comers; you will naturally commission the "business-like" individuals—the commercial designers, the big-business architects who have made their pile by playing safe and pleasing your conservatism. You will be incapable of realizing and consistently applying the axiom that a Fair is the one certain place where adventure is a better business, entertainment and educational policy than safety. You will dodge all creative rebels like Frank Lloyd Wright because such are "difficult to deal with." You will invite to your committee to represent the arts, as you already have, Joras Lie, valiant leader of a dead tradition. You will bolster the uncertainties of your own esthetic creed by the certified correctness of established, and so out of date, standards. You will fail to be as honest and functional wherever you touch "art" as you are when you are honestly and functionally building a machine. If a World's Fair can teach you and the country just two great points—esthetic adventure and functional honesty of design—it will be worth the forty millions of other people's money you expect to invest in it.

I am not denying there has been great progress realized since the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The 1933 buildings, instead of being copies of Greek temples, were adventurous and of exposition tempo. The color-scheme by Joseph Urban was festive and alive. Some of the buildings were modern architectural masterpieces for their exposition purpose. Science, electricity and engineering were there in a preponderance of educational glory. But applied art, corrupted by profit compromise, was a hodge-podge of distinction and banality, of genuine creation and progress mixed with the red-light district merchandise of "copied" and "imported" escape. The main educational illumination implicit



Detail from Harlem Hospital Mural

Charles Alston

Courtesy Federal Art Project

in such an exhibition is the cross-sectional revelation of our current esthetic confusion. Chicago achieved so much in 1933 under its efficient business-minded management; New York can hardly do better in 1939 under identical auspices.

What is the solution? The business mind is already in the saddle. The machinery is already set in motion. Acclaim, we read, of plans and organization has been universal; there has been no dissenting note.

Since it is now too late for a total reorganization and since government must cooperate in present plans, the only practical answer is as great an increase as possible in governmental participation and responsibility. Plus the making of a case study out of the event and the application of the findings to future Fairs.

European governments have long recognized their responsibility to foster by direct appropriation all departments of the arts. I have statistics showing the amounts appropriated by France, Italy and England during the years 1925 to 1929 for the activities which may be grouped under the general heading of the arts and which, roughly speaking, would cover the art fields related to a World's Fair. Summarized these show that the annual appropriation of France was over six million dollars, of Italy over three and a half millions and of England over four and a half millions. In addition to the above regular expenditures in France, the City of Paris appropriated three million dollars in 1925 as a subvention to its International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts.

This important Paris Exposition, under the Department of Expositions of the

City of Paris, in which we were invited to participate but had to decline because officially we had no modern art industrial production, has many fundamental lessons for us as an index of what we can do here under governmental management if we will.

To summarize these lessons and to support the obvious but unrecognized argument that it is only through using the leading modern artist that creative distinction can be given to things of use, including Fairs, I am going to quote from the official report issued by the Hoover committee of 141 American business leaders in the field of industrial arts who went to Paris to see this exposition and find out what this Modern Movement they had hitherto taken as a joke, really signified. This report published in 1926 should be a guide book for present plans (the italics are mine):

"The Modern Movement as a whole is now making a very important contribution to the arts of decoration as related to modern life.

"The creative designer is accorded a position of much greater importance and dignity in France than in the United States. . . . A considerable number of artist-craftsmen of a high order of creative ability and technical skill serve as *artistic pioneers* and their successful achievements provide *valuable suggestions* for commercial production.

"The nation which most successfully rationalizes the Modern Movement will possess a *distinct advantage* both as to its domestic and *foreign trade*.

As a nation we live largely on warmed-over dishes. In a number of lines of manufacture we are little better than *producing antiquarians*. . . . The richness and complexity of American life call for *excursions into new fields*.

"Conservatism is manifestly not the way to protect us from the incursions of foreign





Detail from Marek's Hospital, Mura

Charles Auster

competition or develop the possibilities of our own foreign trade, nor is it in itself the best means through which to develop an industrial art by which American homes may reach an expression *truly appropriate to the social and living conditions of the twentieth century.*"

These business gentlemen, in other words, learned what they had never before realized, that the modern creative artist is, or should be, a leader instead of a clerk and that as such he can be an economic asset to his country. It was such artists, they learned, who drew 250,000 people a day to the Paris Exposition, piling up total paid admissions to 14,909,387 and more than covering the total investment of 75,000,000 francs. It is that lesson that the United States must learn if it wants the pulling power of leading, instead of following, productions.

I have no figures covering our governmental expenditures for the arts during this period but it is a well-known fact that such support for the theatre, opera, fine arts, art schools, museums, art manufacturers, motion pictures, purchases of modern works and expansion of the arts abroad—(items covered in the French appropriations)—were, until the past two years, practically nil. The grand scale of the art relief program (with an appropriation of a little over one million dollars for the first year), and the movement for buying contemporary murals and sculptures for public buildings, is a belated acknowledgement of governmental responsibility in this important direction.

In spite of a too democratic standard of judgment this movement is a civilized gesture of great importance to the future of American art—if only because it gives a large number of artists a chance to produce and grow with experience. Its limitations reflect our weak spots in judgment resulting from our habitual divorce from the arts. But these weak spots, at least, are not corroded by that greatest of cultural evils—the profit motive. They are frank revelations of our cultural immaturity and, as such, are curable. There is hope in the government program.

If this program were extended to cover the planning and management of a World's Fair with chief consideration given to the social values involved and the distinction of the enterprise as an expression of our national capacities in the arts, as well as in business, engineering and science—then we could throw our energies into the great plan with warranted enthusiasm. With the money-lenders, the real-estate speculators and the other eminent exponents of the acquisitive instinct in control—our ready enthusiasm is for an illusory dream.

No happy balance of compromise on this basic issue is possible. Either busi-

ness policy will be in the ascendency and control art policy, or art policy will dominate and control business. In the former case we shall have a Fair that will balance its ledger admirably, pay up all its privately-owned gold bonds and be, in effect, an animated advertising section of the *Saturday Evening Post*. In the latter

case, whether or not we better the financial record (a matter of relative unimportance), we shall be making a world-wide declaration that we are becoming a cultured nation.

Of course we want a New York City World's Fair. *What kind of a World's Fair do we want?*

## ART IN HARLEM

by C. J.

**D**ORRANCE BROOKS SQUARE in Negro Harlem was converted recently into a grand festive place as hundreds of residents from around and about the community turned out to see an exhibition of the excellent work that is being carried out by various government financed cultural projects. Bright colored lights, games, sport events, music and speech-making marked the ceremonies which extended throughout the week.

While the shortcomings of the present W.P.A. set-up are numerous so far as the existent segregation and discrimination in the supervising personnel is concerned, the "little good" must be mentioned.

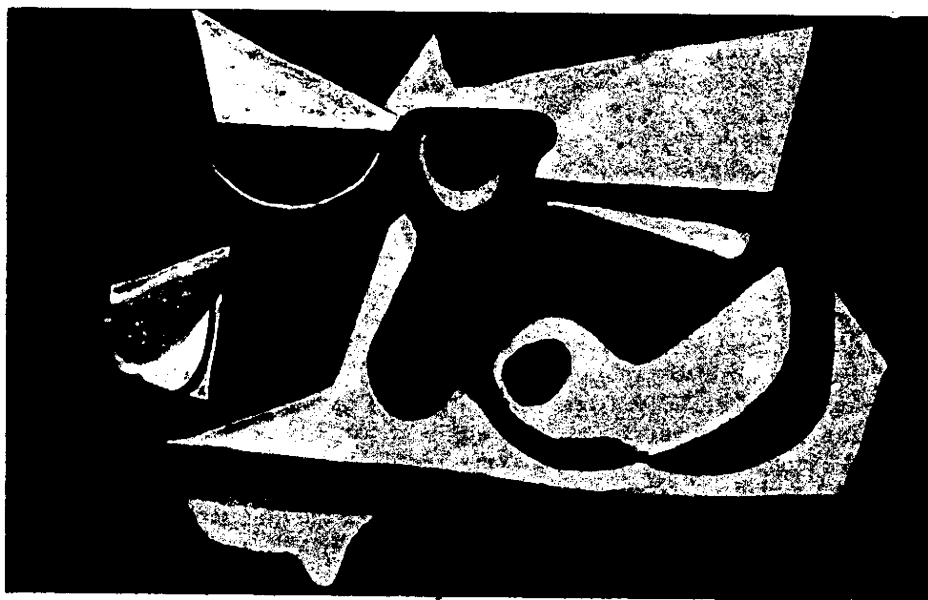
Negro Harlem more than any other section of the city still lacks adequate recreational facilities for children—a congested slum that has less than three playgrounds. The kids once home from school have nothing to occupy their minds other than perhaps their home work and a game of stick ball amid the traffic of some side street. Three years ago under C.W.A. supervision the various arts and crafts projects first got under way. There was an immediate response. The classes were filled and more teachers were needed. With the W.P.A. came greater expansion and classes opened in churches and

settlement houses.

This festival marked the first exhibit which brought to the public examples of the kind of work children are able to do with a little training. The work aroused the interest and admiration of the entire community. The best examples of the entire show were the kids' paintings displayed along the sidewalk galleries. Even the justifiably censured project administrator, Victor F. Ridder, after reviewing the show, was forced to admit that Negro children could do work as well as white if they are given the opportunity.

There is no doubt that the Negro artist is rendering the community and the Negro people at large a great service indeed. Judging from the spirit with which the public received the exhibition they would be the first to support any demands for a cultural program to be carried out in Harlem.

Just off the square in St. Mark's Church, some thirty artists, members of the Harlem Artists' Guild, were represented either by their paintings, sculpture or mural designs in a show held in conjunction with the festival. Most of the Artists are still youngsters who have only lately decided to direct their efforts in the field of creative art. However, there were many brilliant canvases which point to the



Composition

George Byron Browne  
Courtesy Municipal Art Gallery



Composition

George Byron Browne

*Manhattan Art Society*

*Page 11*

fact that in Harlem there are a number of up and coming painters of great talent and within a few years the American Negro painter will stand alongside the musician as an important contributor to American culture.

Aaron Douglas, perhaps the most widely known of the group, is represented by two landscapes done with his usual lightness and sophistication—pleasing to look at but lacking in the simple rugged power that should be evident in the work of a man who has so often expressed a militant spirit.

Robert Pious has turned out two canvases, *Shoe Shine Boy* and *Three Old Ladies*, which are somewhat academic, but with feeling and finish. Pious handles his paint very well and his choice of subject matter is excellent—we believe that he will continue to paint pretty pictures until he gains a thorough understanding of the emotional depth of the subject matter which he chooses to paint.

Charles Alston's line drawings and mural designs, *Mystery*, *Magic*, and *Medicine*, display the artist's draughtsmanship and compositional sense. The designs are smooth and competent. The artist attempts to portray the Negro in the earthy reality of his struggles but perhaps due to his present environment he seems first a sophisticate—then an artist.

Henry Bannarn's winter landscapes have an undeniable paint quality and a restless strength about them. He seems to follow in the tradition of George Luks and John Sloan.

Norman Lewis paints from the love of painting and very often turns out a beautiful piece of work such as his canvas, "*A Woman Washing*," which was strong, firmly executed and excellently composed in the modern plastic tradition.

Sara Murrell's water color, "*Hills*," is a fine piece of work. This along with other examples make her probably one of the most talented of the younger Negro painters. She has a fine sense of color and feeling for composition. The results of her use of pure color give an amazing effect on wet paper.

J. S. Glenn's work is wild and badly composed.

Passing mention must be made of work by Sarah West and Mr. Perry, two instructors whose work was represented in the Festival exhibit. Miss West as a teacher and designer of rugs showed some remarkable modern designs that would be a vital contribution to applied arts. Perry displayed charcoals of city life that were full of lively cubist forms, intelligently handled. All in all, the rich and varied talents displayed deserve a rallying interest and support by the entire community, Negro and white.

# TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY ART

by Louis Lozowick

**W**HEN a new art current emerges, persisting over a long period of time, comprising a large number of adherents, exhibiting a continuity of development, embodying a solid system of principles, we are justified in assuming that a fundamental change in society has taken place. In a broad generalization: Italian art of the fourteenth century, Dutch art of the seventeenth century, French art of the nineteenth century—each compared with the art of the century preceding it might be taken as characteristic illustrations. Similarly—perhaps in even broader generalization—the emergence of a revolutionary art in the Soviet Union as in Japan, in Mexico as in Hungary, in Holland as in the United States, points to the presence of a revolutionary world situation, is in fact both a symbol and a product of that situation.

The capitalist press in a moment of unconscious clairvoyance has referred to the revolutionary artist as "class-struggle" artists. Excellent appellation, for it identifies the revolutionary artist unmistakably. Like the artists of every age worth considering, the revolutionary artist proceeds from direct experience of immediate reality, knowing, however, that experience and reality have no meaning except in concrete connotation. The revolutionary artist proceeds from the patent factor that the class antagonisms, always present in capitalist society, have reached the acute stage of open class war. When capitalism "plans" industry by curtailing production, "solves" starvation by destroying food and degrades the human personality, science and art to cash payments (to limit ourselves to a few short items), the conclusion is inescapable that the basic assumptions underlying capitalist society have lost their validity; that it has reached a stage of insoluble internal contradiction which only a shift of power can resolve.

In all parts of the world there are signs of incipient and open revolt against the system. The organized working class, joined by growing numbers of intellectuals, farmers and other elements, and guided by the philosophy of Karl Marx, is the only force that can abolish it. Artists like others, whether they want it or not, whether they know it or not cannot remain outside of the situation described. We notice, in fact, everywhere

the parallel process of fascization and radicalization of art as representative of the two forces in conflict. (The meaning of the so-called American school is transparent. On one hand it attempts to corner the art market against foreign competition; on the other hand it is the first step in the direction of a more aggressive chauvinism, a home style. Whether it will also take the last step will depend entirely on how far reaction travels in the United States.)

When the revolutionary artist expresses in his work the dissatisfaction with, the revolt against, the criticism of the existing state of affairs, when he seeks to awaken in his audience a desire to participate in his fight, he is, therefore, drawing on direct observation of the world about him as well as on his most intimate, immediate, blistering, blood-sweating experience, in the art gallery, in the bread line, in the relief office. But as already indicated experience to him is not a chance agglomeration of impressions but is related to long training, to habits formed, to views assimilated and entertained at a definite place and time; to him experience acquires significant meaning by virtue of a revolutionary orientation. In sum, revolutionary art implies open-eyed observation, integrated experience, intense participation and an ordered view of life. And by the same token revolutionary art further implies that its provenance is not due to an arbitrary order from any person or group but is decreed by history, is a consequence of particular historic events.

Although the revolutionary artist will admit partisanship he will most emphatically deny that it need affect unfavorably his work. Obviously, if disinterestedness were in itself a guarantee of high achievement all the tenth-rate Picassos would be genuises; if social partisanship resulted necessarily in inferior art Goya and Daumier would have to be erased from the pages of art history. Nor does partisanship narrow the horizon of revolutionary art. Quite the contrary, the challenge of a new cause leads to the discovery of a new storehouse of experience and the exploration of a new world of actuality. Even a tentative summary will show the vast possibilities, ideologic and plastic; relations between the classes; relations within each class; a clear char-

acterization, in historic perspective, of the capitalist as employer, as philanthropist, as statesman, as art patron; the worker as victim, as striker, as hero, as comrade, as fighter for a better world; the unattached liberal, the unctuous priest, the labor racketeer; all the ills capitalist flesh is heir to—persons and events treated not as chance snapshot episodes but correlated among themselves shown in their dramatic antagonisms, made convincing by the living language of fact and made meaningful from the standpoint of a world philosophy. The very newness of the theme will forbid a conformity in technique.

Strictly speaking, contemporary revolutionary art is not altogether new. It already has an impressive history and many precursors of great talent. Almost as soon

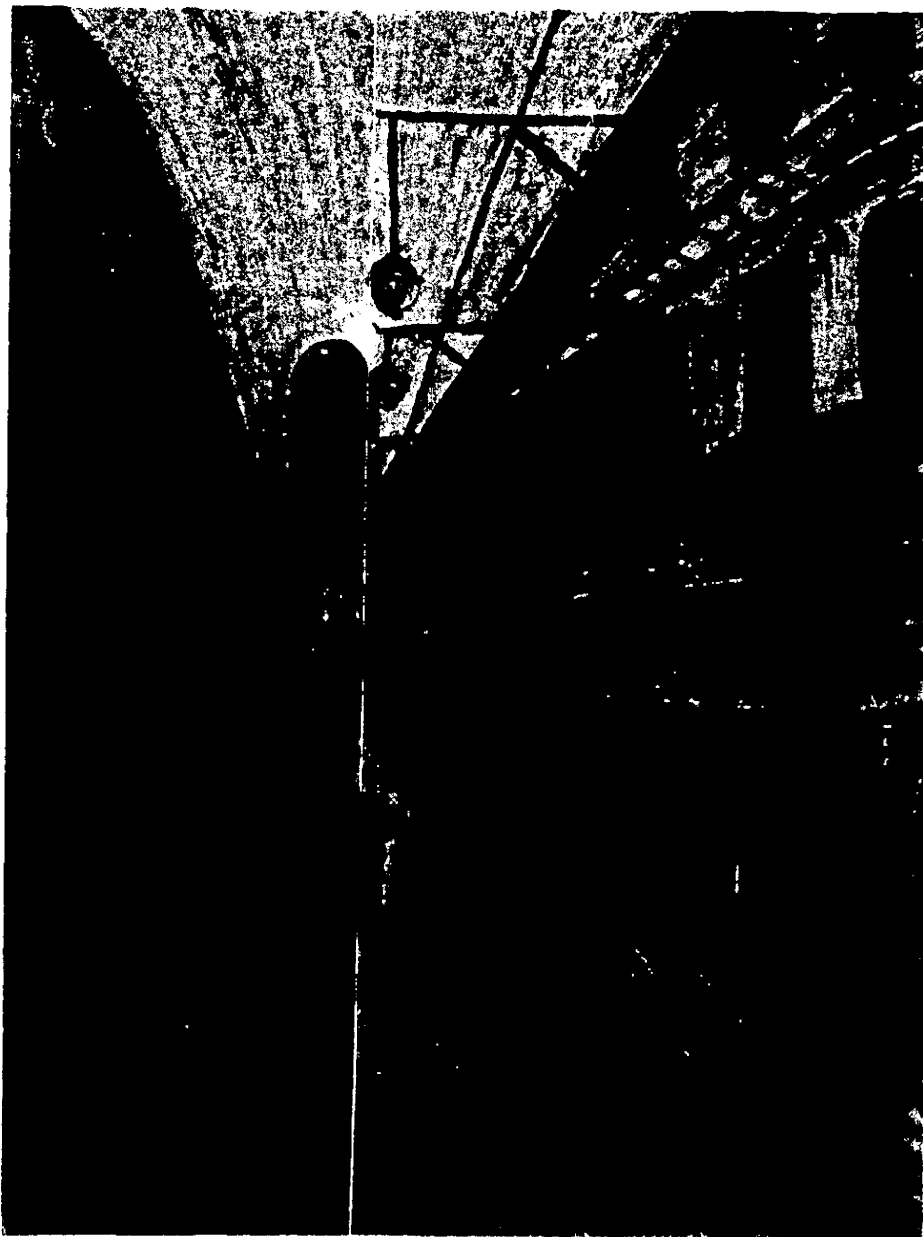
as industrial workers organized as a class in the early part of the nineteenth century, pictures began to appear which showed labor in its social position and historic role. Tassaert, Jeanron, Adler, Laermans, Courbet, Daumier and many others pictured the working class in its daily occupations as well as on barricades and in strikes.

If contemporary revolutionary art stems in a continuous line from the artists enumerated, it descends in a collateral line from many more, throughout the ages. For the overwhelming mass of art across all history—Egyptian, Byzantine, Renaissance, Dutch, French, etc., has been art derived from social experience and directed to social ends, an art frankly partisan for one or another historic class.

Thus the revolutionary artist has a rich

cultural heritage to draw upon, absorb and utilize in his efforts toward the formation of a style appropriate to his needs. But just as no style can be created out of a vacuum, so no style can be carried over from one period to another without change. Certain elements in the cultural heritage such as the religious genre and pure abstraction are not usable at all. Other elements may have to be radically modified. The problem of how to utilize the cultural heritage will be best solved in practice—revolutionary art being still in process of formation. As an extreme instance one may take the revolutionary artist who has recourse to the method of surrealism. Like the surrealist he records within the same frame a series of events, distributed over several points of space and time (the surrealists are the latest but by no means the only ones to use this device which is, in fact, quite ancient), but unlike the surrealist he gives the events logical unity and ideological meaning; like the surrealist he uses a meticulous technique but unlike him he rejects its mystical application. Where the surrealist postulates irrationalism and automatism, the revolutionary artist must substitute reason, volition, clarity. The message will fail of its object unless it is clear and forceful; the meaning will not carry conviction unless it is effective. And this, by the way, is only another aspect of the form-content relation. It is therefore a perversion of the truth to accuse the revolutionary artist—as is done so often—of disregarding the problem of form. Beginning with Marx and Engels (who presumably knew their own minds) the importance of formal excellence in art has been stressed by every Marxist who has written on the subject. The Marxists maintain, however, that while all artistic creation implies formal organization, it cannot be reduced to it, much less exhausted by it. Content and form are mutually interpenetrating; both derive from social practice, are outgrowths of social exigencies.

To illustrate by an example (one among many) from the history of Christian art. Early Christianity was a movement of the enslaved, the impoverished and oppressed; their art of the Catacombs (second and third centuries) followed the style and imagery of Roman fresco painting and incorporated in their work the humble subject-matter from their own life and beliefs; stone masons, agricultural workers, the figure of Christ (Orpheus) as the Good Shepherd, all done in subdued colors and treated with a directness and simplicity which invite intimacy between image and audience. With the spread of Christianity among larger masses, with the rise of a priest-

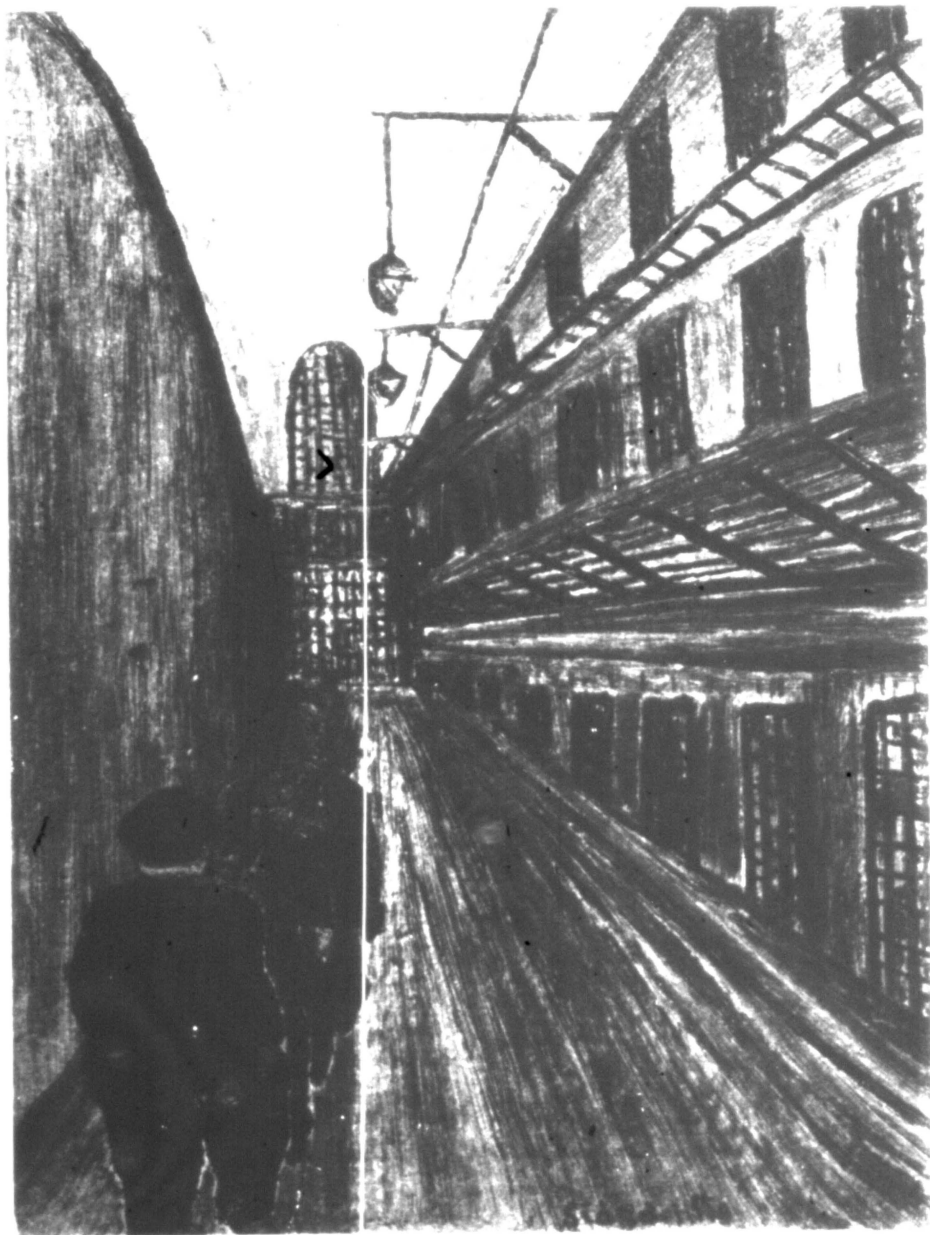


Raymond Street Jail

Sid Gotcliffe

Courtesy Artists' Union Exhibit





Raymond Street Jail

Sid Guticoff

hood and the growing entrenchment of the church as part of the state apparatus, new elements came into Christian art (fifth and sixth century): the formal dignity of the Byzantine, elaborateness and solemnity. Art emerged from the underground catacombs to make its abode in caste-ridden houses of worship. The image of Christ as the Good Shepherd gave way to the concept of Christ as Lord, as powerful ruler with all the attributes of regal authority, throne, scepter, splendid raiment, an increasing army of royal attendants (pictorial elements these, inseparably both content and form). The resplendent colors, the precious stones, the rigid formal dignity served as a wall to keep the congregation at a reverent distance. Christianity had become the state religion, admirably responsive to the needs of the ruling autocracy.

In this example which could be profitably analyzed in greater detail, we see with striking clarity how old forms are grafted on new contents, how new forms evolve to meet new social situations, how reciprocally related are all the elements involved and how contingent on the underlying class structure. If historic precedent is any indication the revolutionary artist may look confidently to the development of a style appropriate to his aims. For the present, revolutionary art is still a direction but a direction well defined as to its source and its goal.

A revolutionary orientation must ultimately affect even the treatment of old genres such as still life and landscape. Which brings up the question of whether the revolutionary artist should at all deal with them. The formation of a revolutionary art is not the task to be achieved by one work or even by one artist. It is the labor of a movement; whether one member or another occasionally paints a still life or a landscape is, viewed in large perspective, of little consequence.

A more serious question is: can the artist who has been trained in the dispassionate contemplative tradition change into a participant and revolutionary? Unquestionably yes—with reservations—even as the conditions under which he lives and to which he must adjust himself, change. In proportion as his ideology forms and matures and becomes part of his mental make-up his art will seek to express his feelings and thoughts. But the process is not mechanical; it depends on the mobility of character in the individual artist, on how set he is in his ways; it may be very painless with certain artists, very slow with others and all but impossible with some. The process should be in every way encouraged—it cannot be forced. But again, in a movement of such major proportions the behavior of a

few single artists is inconsequential.

We are in the midst of a vast, decisive transformation, economic, social, cultural, by which no one is unaffected. Where among contemporary art currents can we look to the expression of this momentous event? In the moribund symbolism of the doddering academy? In the "hypnagogic" trances of the surrealists? In the tabloid thrills of the American school? Whatever else might be said about revolutionary art, it does not play sycophant to "disinterested" collectors, nor cater to the speculative needs of the dealers. It grows out of profound conviction of the artist and the living issues of society. Fortified by a revolutionary tradition (present—if neglected—in American art as in the art of other countries) the revolutionary artist stands before an ideal and a task to which all artists not directly interested in the maintenance of the *status quo* can rally. To make art auxiliary to the building a new society is not to degrade but to elevate it. An art to be valuable must be historically on time. Revolutionary art makes sure to be in the vanguard rather than in the rearguard of history.

#### OF ALL THINGS

The American Newspaper Guild at its third convention voted to join the A. F. of L. A resolution was passed supporting a Farmer-Labor Party. The Guild will be an active force in the fight for industrial unionism as opposed to craft unionism in the A. F. of L.

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The Liberty League, mouthpiece of Big Business and the leading spirit in the "Balance the Budget" (by cutting relief) drive in Washington, has a deficit of its own of over \$35,000. Evidently it costs money to try to starve the people.

\* \* \*

Grand opera singers are organized into an A. F. of L. union. They have already had experience on the picket line. They put out a magazine similar to ART FRONT called *Aria*.

\* \* \*

The American League Against War and Fascism has organized a Citizens' Committee to aid in a campaign against Hearst. A huge demonstration is planned at Coney Island, where thousands of citizens will gather on July 4th. Floats, banners, anti-Hearst signs, fireworks shooting anti-Hearst slogans, a loudspeaker on a motorboat patrolling the beach, and streamers from an airplane are only part of the program planned. One hundred trade unions and numerous church, liberal

and peace groups are participating. Senator Schwollenbach will deliver a radio address pointing out the dangers of the Hearst press.

\* \* \*

The writers are holding their first western conference on June 13-14 at Chicago. As in the case of the artists, the need for a national organization to successfully cope with cultural and economic problems was apparent. The artists, having successfully concluded their first midwestern conference, extend their best wishes to the writers in their efforts to build a national organization.

—S.M.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

*HOL' UP YO' HEAD*, written and illustrated by Herb Kruckman, Pitel Publishing Co., New York, 1936. \$1.25.

**M**R. KRUCKMAN, a well-known Artists' Union member, blooms into print with a lively book dealing with a modern Negro Jesus who tries to lead his oppressed people against their exploiters—the capitalist class. In the end the officials frame Jesus and lynch him. Pilate, to misdirect the people's anger, decides to "blame it on the Jews." Thus the author gives a double-edged sharpness to his allusion to present-day fascism in Germany.

A rich humor and dramatic tempo enliven the book all the way. Kruckman transposes the Southern dialect into a poetical rather than a realistic mould, and any charges of Negro caricature must come from unimaginative readers who shun the allegorical style. Time and again Kruckman relates such fine bits as "Jesus An The Dead Gal" where Jesus after resurrecting the maiden tells the people they are always too ready to give up the living "fo' dead," or chapters like "De Lan' Fo' Him What Brings Fo'th Fruit" and "Dey'll Tighten Yo' Chains" which are strikingly relevant to today's social problems. The call for the liberation of the Negro is intelligently sounded through the work and expressed in terse, flexible writing.

The drawings (the originals were recently on view at the A.C.A. gallery) are a new and special contribution to American book illustration. Those acquainted with Kruckman's graphic art will find some of his most powerful drawings here. A simple, dominant line full of vigorous and deep-felt distortions characterize "Gib to Caesar," "De Lynchin'," and "Hear Dem Peepul Clam'rin," to list only a few of the outstanding drawings. Book publishers would do well to utilize such talent as Kruckman's instead of giving us repeatedly their stale "classic" formulas.

**FIRST AMERICAN ARTISTS CONGRESS.** 103 pages. 50 cents.

**T**HE Artists' Congress has just issued a book serving a dual purpose, to help raise money to carry on their work, and to make known the work undertaken by the Congress. The book contains an introduction outlining the background and purposes of the Congress, papers read at the various sessions, and as much of the general discussion as could be squeezed in.

Those who had fears that the American Artists' Congress would be merely a collection of names have seen with satisfaction this organization participate in a broad program affecting the well being of all artists. The Congress gives every indication of being a lusty and active organization. It is interesting then to review in the pages of this book the initial work of the Congress in getting under way.

Meyer Shapiro furnishes perhaps the most complete paper under the title "The Social Bases of Art." The usual pat explanation is dismissed and a serious attempt made to fathom the many hidden social springs of modern art. George Biddle pleads for boycott of the Berlin Olympics. Alexander Stavenitz seeks a permanent art project. Paul Manship and Hugo Gellert point out why artists should oppose war and fascism. John Groth, speaking for commercial art, would follow the tradition of Daumic and Forain. Problems peculiar to the various crafts are discussed along with general problems of the artist in a series of papers by well-known artists. Two papers by the Mexican delegates complete the book.

Recommended for all those interested in the preservation and growth of culture.

Required reading for all artists who are seriously interested in their profession.

Put out with a paper cover, the modest price of the book should assure its wide distribution.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**W**HILE Rauch's article on the Paris Gallery in the June issue hardly merits a reply, there are certain factual distortions which we feel require correction. The article states that the Gallery Group was organized by John Lonergan and others. The facts are that the Gallery was organized and maintained at great personal sacrifice through the four years of its existence by Dorothy Paris, and that Lonergan was not ad-

mitted into the group until the second year of its existence, after its ideals and standards had been quite definitely formulated.

The balance of the article is mainly concerned with an unintelligible confusion between picketing and painting. If the commentator were better acquainted with the group, he would know that they were no negligible in either activity. This confusion does not exist in the group: they see no more reason for picketing while they paint than for painting while they picket. This does not by any means imply that there cannot be, or has not been, good art in leftist propaganda or vice versa.

Is it possible for anyone to believe at this late date that the purely leftist attitude is the only valid measurement of the social value of a work of art? Yet this belief must have loomed large in the commentator's mind; else, how explain his lack of wholeheartedness in acknowledging the group's merit?

In something of an accusatory tone, the article states that the artists "carried paintings to wealthy ladies on Park Avenue, showed them, and carried them back again." This is a trite journalistic cliché which has not the faintest basis in fact.

There are a number of further misstatements in the article. We enumerate them as follows:

"A few won prizes. . . ."—No artist in the group ever won a prize.

"They (referring to Lonergan among others) proposed that Rockeller's treatment of the Rivera mural obliged them not to show but to boycott the (Municipal) exhibition. . . ."—How can one refuse to show if one has not been invited to show?

"Each year, it seemed, would be the last for the Gallery. The Gallery didn't close. The Artists' Union by its militancy had obtained jobs for a great many artists. . . ."—This implies that the W.P.A. saved the Gallery. As a matter of fact, the Gallery was supported exclusively by Dorothy Paris, with the exception of March and April, 1936, when the artists contributed a small amount of aid.

But why go on enumerating misstatements of detail? They serve only to indicate a total lack of information, if not integrity, on the part of the commentator. They are all overshadowed by the one glaring error—a complete missing of the point—which is that the Gallery was founded and maintained through the effort and devotion of Dorothy Paris, by and for the artistic aims and ideals of the artists.

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