

JUN 18 1935

NY (55) NEW

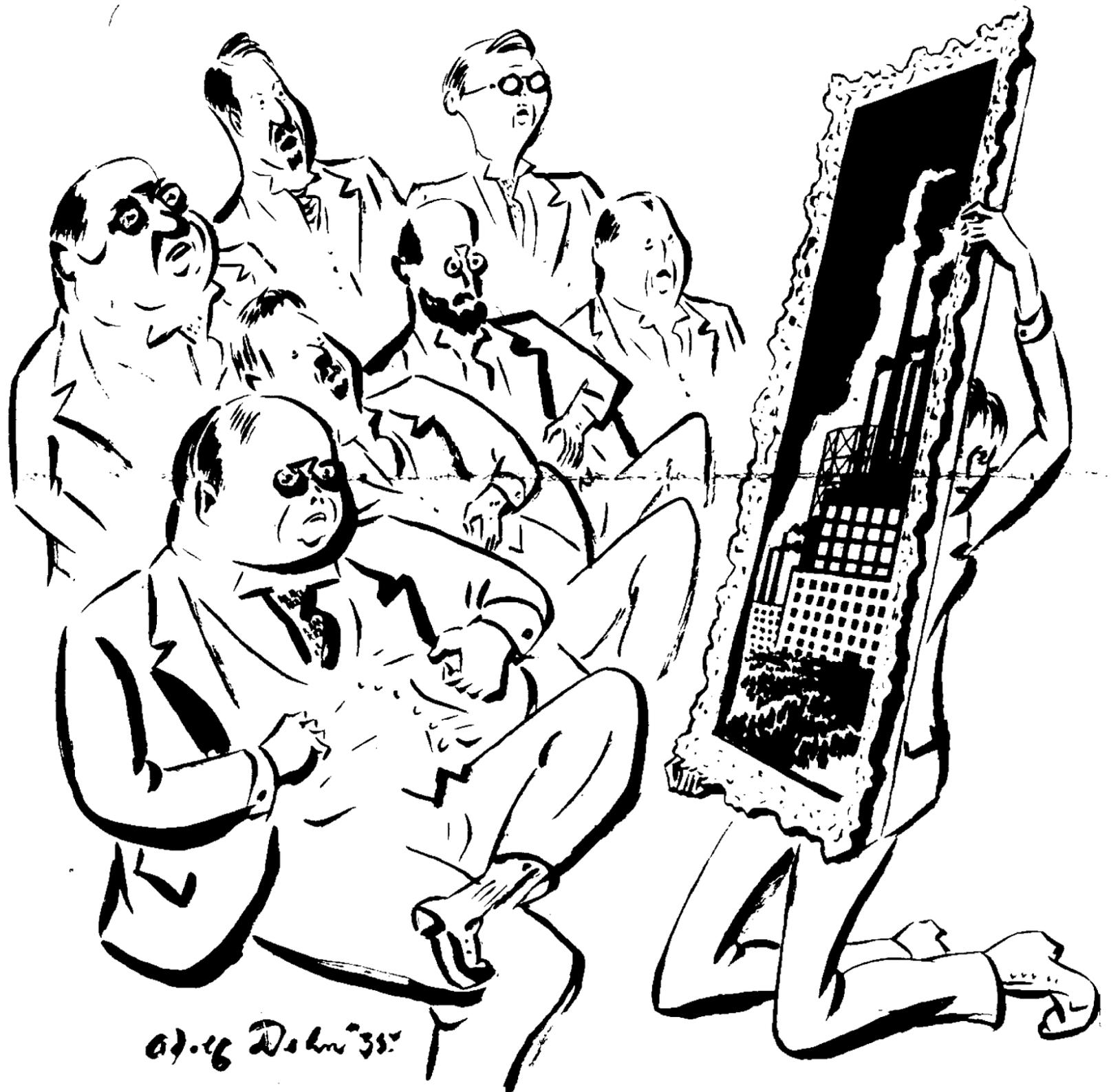
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JULY 1935

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ART FRONT



Stuart Davis '35

"WE REJECT" — THE ART COMMISSION

STUART DAVIS

THE SOCIAL STERILITY OF PAINTERS — JEAN LURCAT
 AN IOWA MEMLING — LINCOLN KIRSTEIN
 JOE JONES—BOB MINOR IN GALLUP

THE UNION

APPLIES FOR AN A.F.L. CHARTER

THE recent decision of the membership of the Artists' Union to apply for a charter in the A. F. of L. is an important and far-reaching step, and one of vital concern to every artist. It is necessary at this time to answer the questions that are perplexing many members of the Artists' Union, as to why we should join the A. F. of L.? What are the benefits to be gained from such an action? Does this step imply that the Artists' Union as an independent union is not in the real sense a union, or that as an independent union it does not effect certain gains for the artist? It is these questions together with specific information as to the financial and other problems raised by joining the A. F. of L. which in the main will constitute the basis for this article.

I want to state at the outset, and with emphasis, that the Artists' Union has justified its existence as independent union. It is generally agreed that it is directly due to the formation, existence, and activities of the Artists' Union that government art projects on a large scale were brought into being. How then can we explain our wish to join the A. F. of L.? In order to answer this adequately it is necessary to review briefly the general economic situation that confronts us as artists.

The Roosevelt \$19.00 to \$94.00 a Month Works Program

The new Roosevelt Works Program is to be put into effect almost at once. It calls for a drastic reduction of the very meagre wages at present received by project workers, to a below subsistence level. In certain regions slightly higher sums will be paid professional and cultural workers. The government excuses this wage-cutting scheme on the ground that it will thereby be enabled to extend work projects to include a larger number of workers (3,500,000) throughout the country—only a small proportion of those who need employment. This program is simply the "stagger program" which, first instituted by Hoover, met with such vehement opposition from organized labor at that time.

Yes, we must admit that this program spreads work. It spreads work by spreading the pay. Any program instituted at the expense of the underpaid and undernourished relief workers and the unemployed must be firmly resisted by organized labor. Such a program can only succeed in reducing standards of living gained through long years of struggle of American trade unions. The government is giving its sanction to this reduced standard of living gives direct support and endorses the efforts of private employers to follow suit.

A situation of this kind, which strikes at all workers, demands that all workers join to protect their common interests. That we have such common interests with the A. F. of L. workers is beyond dispute. This raises the question: How can we best unite our efforts with those of the A. F. of L.?

On the various art projects throughout the city—both the Park and the College Art projects—members of the Artists' Union have been brought together on the jobs with members of the N. Y. Woodcarvers' Union (A. F. of L.), the Society of Modelers and Sculptors (A. F. of L.), and the Architectural Carvers and Sculptors Assn. (A. F. of L.). The administration has taken advantage of the gap between our union and those others by establishing irregular classifications through which it has step by step attempted to reduce the wages of the various sculptors. It is clear that this action of the administration would have been made impossible were all these unions working in unison.

What then was to have prevented unity of artists in an independent union with these various A. F. of L. organizations? The very first question always raised by these unions was and is—why are we not in the A. F. of L.? We must state at this time that although we have no apologies to offer for having existed as an independent union, if by joining the A. F. of L. we can achieve unity, and be enabled to carry on a stronger fight for trade union wages and conditions on the projects, then by all means we will make efforts to join the A. F. of L.

The Principle of Organization

But, while I speak of joining the A. F. of L., I believe it is necessary, for the benefit both of the artists who are and those who are not members of the Artists' Union, to stress the need for organization. The elementary purpose of a union (except company unions) is to bring about better conditions, wages, hours, for workers in a particular craft or

industry. It is directly due to the high development of trade unions in America that the workers here have succeeded in winning the 8-hour day. The standard of living of the American workers, however inadequate, is considerably higher than that in countries that have poorly organized trade union movements. In short, a union unites the workers in their own behalf. In the light of this, I think that we cannot repeat too often to the artists on projects that they owe their jobs to the fact that they organized a union and fought for jobs. However, not all the artists on projects are organized and these unorganized artists have received jobs due to our organized efforts. Ironically enough, these same artists who can thank the Artists' Union for their jobs constitute a definite menace to the union and to wage standards of all the artists on projects when they refuse to join the union, because it is precisely to these people that the administration turns as a bulwark against our efforts to win better conditions. In other words, they are jeopardizing their own interests as well as ours by keeping the forces of the artists divided on projects.

The Artists' Union, is a non-partisan, non-political organization. All that is required of any member in The Union, no matter what his political belief, is that he assist in the general program for jobs and trade union wages and conditions. There is no reason why any artist should not join The Union and yet the problem of artists on projects who remain out of The Union for one reason or another constitutes a serious menace to us all if permitted to continue.

I wish to make it clear at this time to some artists who have naive ideas as to what benefits are to be derived by joining the A. F. of L. that the charter which the A. F. of L. gives us will accomplish absolutely nothing for us automatically. It is our work as an organization which gives us access to the A. F. of L. Locals, a tremendous base of support, that will achieve things for us.

But let us be clear in this: Effecting unity with all these sections of the A. F. of L. will not come about overnight. It entails a process. There are obstacles to be overcome, but, having occasion to work together with these workers of the A. F. of L. we will be able to bring them to work together with us.

Unemployment as a Permanent Feature

Even during the period of so-called prosperity large numbers of artists were without regular incomes. There was a tremendous overproduction of art in a society interested only in those things that can be turned into profit. With the advent of the crisis the artists as a mass lost their economic footing and were forced to demand that the government assume responsibility for their social existence. This phenomenon is not only true of the artists, but applies as well to all cultural and professional workers and to a great proportion of the industrial workers. The most conservative economists admit that, even were the production standards of 1929 to be restored, as a result of rationalization in industry, speeding up workers in their output, and the use of new labor-saving devices, there would still remain a permanent army of more than 10,000,000 unemployed.

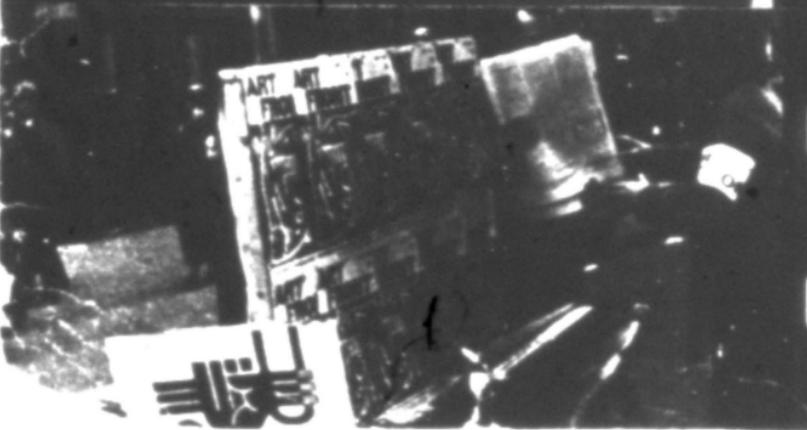
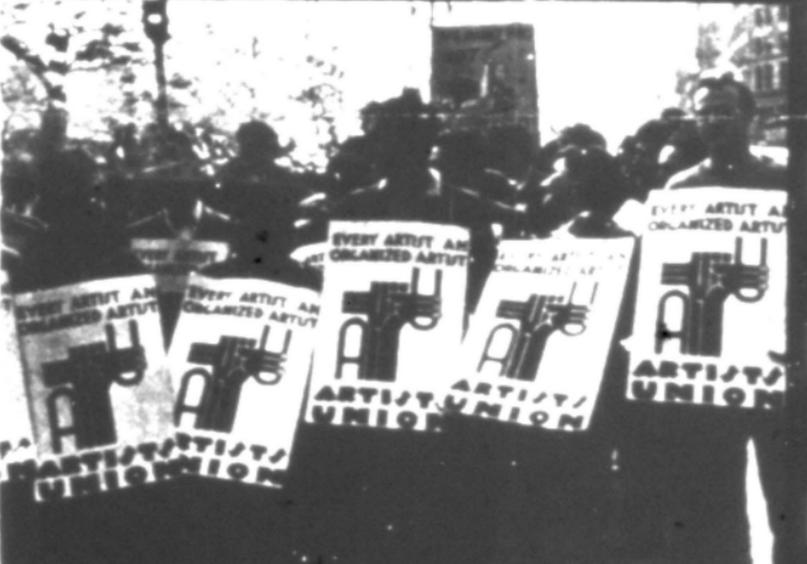
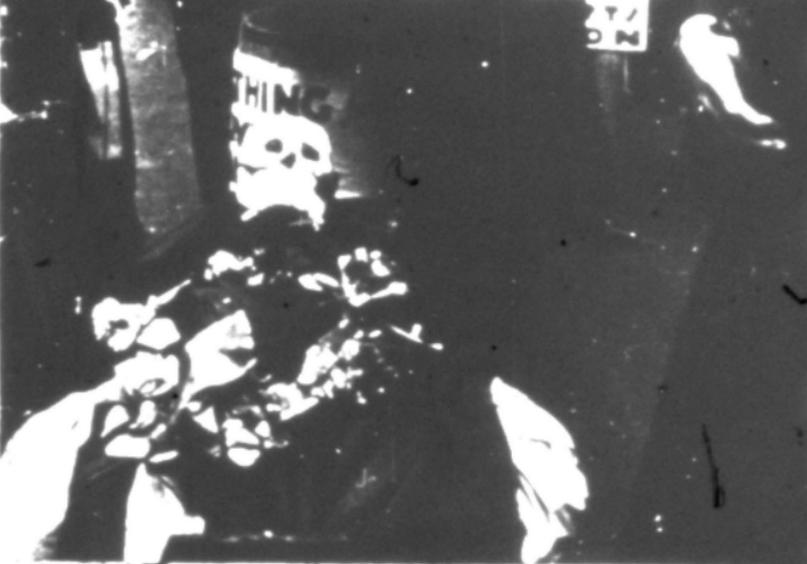
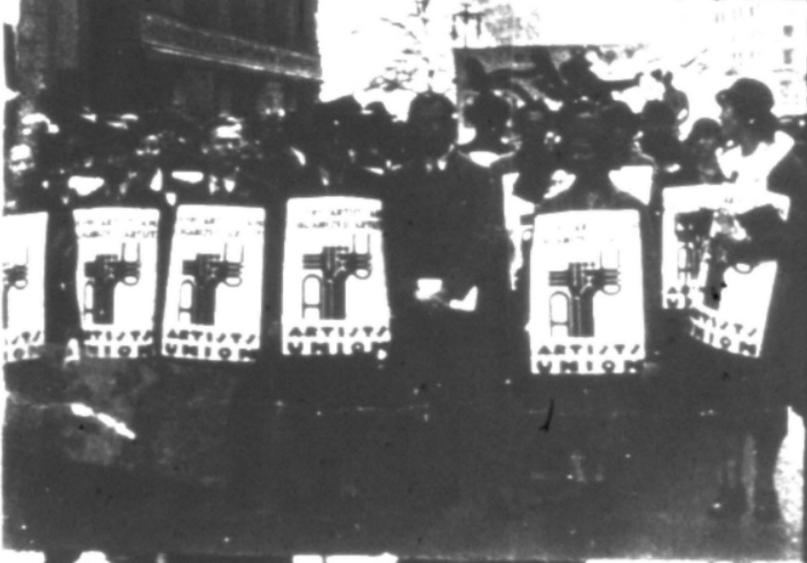
The new Roosevelt works program reduces wages on works projects and will throw millions of unemployed off the relief rolls; wages in private industry are being systematically reduced, while through inflationary measures and taxation on commodities the cost of living is gradually rising. The gap between production and the workers' inability to buy back what they produce causes unemployment to become a permanent feature of the present economic structure.

Organizational Structure, Initiation and Dues

Lastly, I wish to deal with the problem of organizational structure, initiation and dues payments as conditions for joining the A. F. of L. We are being granted a charter as a Federal Local of the Federation and we are given freedom to organize our union on an industrial basis, which means that we will organize every artist, whether a commercial or studio artist, and all the various branches of art into one union. The industrial form of organization is distinct from the craft form, which calls upon each highly specialized craft within a particular industry to form as a separate union. Craft unions have, in many cases, decentralized the organizational efforts of the workers. As an example of what I mean, one craft of workers in the automobile in-

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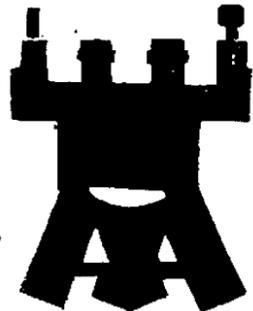






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Morals In Murals

THE murals designed for public buildings by artists of the Public Works Division seem to meet with official approval in inverse order to their social and artistic worth. The few most significant designs have been turned down altogether. Of those accepted, recommended changes, deletions and "suggestions" have brought the work to a state approaching vacuity before it could be executed. Seemingly the primrose path to official favor lies through lifting the art and the hypocritical moral lessons of cheap magazines, or better, school text books, and translating them into art for walls.

We blush to think that the requirements for a mural, as they have been voiced by various authorities, may be an index to the mentality of New York Officialdom. A hospital superintendent, for instance, in turning down sketches submitted to him by a capable artist said: "I want little boys in Dutch shoes on the walls of my hospital. I'm superintendent of this hospital—I'm going to be superintendent of this hospital for a long time, and if I want little boys with Dutch shoes on my walls, I'm going to have 'em! See?" The head of one of the largest high schools objected to a classical symbolic figure done by Charlot, because under the draperies, he thought, the legs were too far apart. He felt it might give bad thoughts to the boys and girls.

The murals designed by Louis Ferstadt for the Abraham Lincoln High School were turned down in their entirety by Mr. Mason, principal of the school. Mr. Mason wanted something "inspiring", like a group of boys and girls climbing up the stairway of happiness and success. Instead, Ferstadt designed panels showing young people at work with T-squares, with laboratory apparatus, studying books, working together. The final panel showed the children entering into a better world, supposedly brought about by education. Perhaps Mr. Mason thought there was something subversive in that. Anyway, he rejected the murals, calling the figures of the children "suggestive," and "not fit either morally or artistically for the school."

The murals for the Riker's Island Penitentiary designed by Ben Shahn and Lou Block successfully took the first hurdles of Officialdom, the Commissioner of Correction, and the Mayor, but came to grief before that final obstacle in the way of art—the Municipal Art Commission, which pronounced them "psychologically unfit," and "anti-social."

The Art Commission, like the heads of the schools and the hospitals, is handing down decisions in a field foreign to it. Originally created to pass judgment on an occasional park statue or a piece of decoration, it suddenly flounders before the important task of judging the numerous murals produced under the Works Program. The present Commission proves its own inadequacy for the task by its single standard of academism, by its clinging faith in formal decoration as the only style for murals, by its asserted opposition to social subject matter.

ART FRONT advocates the abolishment of this Commission, and the creation of a Commission consisting of democratically elected representatives of the art organizations, the art institutions and the public.

\$19 - \$94 or Fight

WITH the folding up of the N.R.A. profuse reassurances have come from manufacturers, as well as from relief heads, that wages would not be cut, and that hours would not be increased, that, in spirit, the N.R.A. codes would be carried out—"Voluntary Codes," they are now being called.

One has only to recall the reassurances from these same manufacturers (there were no relief heads then) to President Hoover during the crash of 1929 to know exactly what weight these promises, these reassurances carry.

Under the N.R.A. Public Works wages were to be measured according to the following policy: No matter how low the wages under the Codes, Public Works wages were to be lower, so that there would

be no inducement for a privately employed worker to seek work on Public Works projects. How much lower these wages were to be was recently announced: for laborers, a \$19.00 a month minimum; for the most highly trained professionals, a top wage of \$94.00 monthly—with the consolation of no time off for sickness or bad weather.

Such a minimum and such a maximum disregard our hard-fought for union wages and living standards. They disregard the fact that under the Roosevelt Administration, the cost of living has risen 37%. They disregard the grim truth that a family cannot live on \$19.00 per month.

How does all this affect the artist? The wages of artists under Public Works and Work Relief projects have gone down in a series of dives. Starting at \$42.00 weekly under the P.W.A.P., they fluttered to \$34.00, to \$38.00, and then, under the Work Relief projects, began to go down in earnest to \$30.00, to \$27.00, to \$24.00. And now? That will depend upon the Administration's classification of artists, but it has been suggested that \$18.00 weekly is the new low. Will it stop there? No. Already amid the bedlam following the collapse of the N.R.A. employees in private industry have had their wages lowered, their hours of work increased. This downward trend will not stop until it has found the level set for relief wages (\$19.00-\$94.00 monthly).

So we have a situation in which relief wages must be kept lower than wages in private industry—and private industry, no longer restrained by the N.R.A., will constantly lower its wages toward relief wage levels.

How shall artists meet this situation? It can be met only by the strongest organization of the projects by the Artists' Union, and by immediate affiliation and co-operation with the American Federation of Labor, through which we will have full support for The Union program of \$2.00 per hour wage, and a minimum fifteen-hour work week, on Works projects.

The Sidewalks of New York

BOTH picturesque and pathetic is the picture of the artist on the sidewalk with his paintings and drawings mounted before him, waiting for the curious and possible buyer. This place in the sun (and rain) in Washington Square is given him for the public attention it draws to the Village and the free advertising it gives to Village store-keepers and real-estate dealers. Year by year the two-weeks exhibition brings in smaller and smaller returns. The Coney Island circus of art becomes more seedy, less sensational. The curious only look and never buy, and the artist remains on the sidewalk.

This type of exhibition has been very much encouraged in Washington Square, in Hearn's Department Store, in Wanamaker's by the Mayor, his Committee of One Hundred, and a few frugal tax-paying art patrons who hope to be allowed to forget the needs of the artists for art jobs, adequate relief and the Municipal Art Gallery and Center.

The Artists' Union, the one artists' organization that has carried on a consistent struggle for the economic security of artists, refuses to support this type of exhibition. The Artists' Union holds that the artist is a vital part of the life and culture of his community. There are public buildings to be decorated; there are children eager to be taught; there are libraries, schools, hospitals that want pictures of all sorts for their walls; there is a need for new books with illustrations for schools. These and many more needs of the community can be filled by the artists. All such work can be carried on through a Municipal Art Gallery and Center, where artists are employed on public works of art projects, and where pictures, books and exhibitions can be had by the public. This, rather than fruitless out-of-door exhibitions, is the answer of the Artists' Union to keeping the artist of the sidewalk.

Why Artists Picket

THE organization of workers to gain shorter hours, better pay or improved working conditions is seldom in harmony with the plans of their supervisors, straw bosses or employers. On February 5th, Miss Manning, head of the Lenox Hill Settlement House, wrote Mr. Truman of the College Art Association:

"I am sorry to have to ask you to discontinue the work of Miss Florence Lustig and Mr. Bernard Child. I am asking to have you transfer these teachers because they do not cooperate well with our program. It is also too difficult to secure an honest report in filling out the time sheets. There are reasons which I will not go into here which, from our point of view, are important. We would like to have this change made by the end of the week."

The reasons referred to were that the two artists had been active in organizing the workers on the project to ask for union wages, to act against being docked for sickness, and against other abuses of the rights of workers by the relief administration.

The Artists' Union protested against the threatened transfer of the two artists, and they were given a month's stay. They completed a puppet show on which they were working, and Miss Manning wrote again to the College Art Association. She called the results of the puppet performance excellent, said that the artists now came on time, but asked that they be transferred.

Both were transferred to another project. The Artists' Union promptly picketed both the College Art Association and the Lenox Hill Settlement House. Several children from art classes of the Settlement House joined the picket line.

At first Child and Lustig were threatened with a suit for abduction of the children, but when it was learned that they had the consent of their parents, the case was dropped. Instead, the two artists were fired from all work relief projects and left without home relief or any means of livelihood. It was learned that on March 20th Miss Manning had written to Mr. Langsdorff of the Emergency Relief Bureau, saying:

"My asking for the transfer of Miss Lustig and Mr. Child was not caused by their failure to do good art work. . . . Their general attitude toward their work was disintegrating to our organization. Subsequent events have more than justified this opinion, as shown by their exploitation of a group of small children from our Children's House by bringing them into a picket line. For this reason I fully endorse their being removed from all projects."

Miss Manning, however, countenanced the use of small children in a counter-picket line, which was used in an effort to break up the Artists' Union picket line before the Settlement House.

The reason for the firing of Child and Lustig was undoubtedly their organizational activity. When the Artists' Union picket line became uncomfortable, both the College Art Association and the Settlement House protested that it was no longer within their power to re-instate the artists, and even claimed to be in sympathy with the principle of organization. Yet, Miss Manning had written to the College Art Association:

"But of course if I ask you to have them (the artists) stay now, they would simply say it was a triumph for their Union, and as this would not be true, I am unwilling to have them say so."

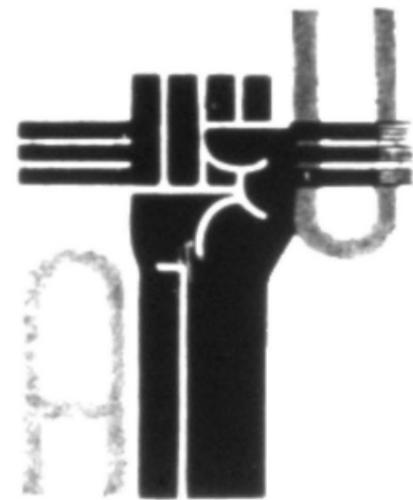
Willing or unwilling, the administration will have to recognize the right of artists on work relief projects to organize. The Artists' Union will continue to picket Lenox Hill and the College Art Association until the artists are re-instated.

Whose Convenience?

THE Emergency Home Relief Bureau a month ago established a new division for single men, called the Bureau of Unattached and Transient Men. The announced purpose of this new division was "for the convenience of the Relief Administration."

The past week's functioning of this new division has illustrated graphically what the relief administrators mean by their "convenience". Since it has

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Morals In Murals

THE muralists are not only painting the walls of the City Hall, they are also painting the hearts of the people. A new mural is being painted in the City Hall, New York City, and it is a masterpiece of art and morality. It is a mural that will inspire the people to fight for their rights and for the betterment of their race.

It is a mural that will inspire the people to fight for their rights and for the betterment of their race. It is a mural that will inspire the people to fight for their rights and for the betterment of their race. It is a mural that will inspire the people to fight for their rights and for the betterment of their race.

Why Artists Picket

THE artists are picketing because they are fighting for their rights and for the betterment of their race. They are picketing because they are fighting for their rights and for the betterment of their race. They are picketing because they are fighting for their rights and for the betterment of their race.



Detail, Prison Mural

Ben Shahn

"WE REJECT" — THE ART COMMISSION

THE large mural designed by Ben Shahn and Lou Block for the Riker's Island Penitentiary was rejected by the Municipal Art Commission on the ground of "psychological unfitness." This stupid and irresponsible decision is the more easily understandable when we recall that it is Jonas Lie, painter member of the Commission, who is behind the ultimatum—at least according to his own boasts in the *New York Times* of May 9th. We suggest that while the Commission was thinking along the line of "psychological unfitness," it might have done well to look to its own painter member. For, wherever particularly stupid and reactionary acts are committed in regard to art matters, one seldom has to look far to find the person of this back-slapping, hand-shaking, pot-boiling President of the National Academy of Design. But more of this later. Let us accept the decision at its face value, and examine the validity of its claims.

"Psychological unfitness" is the reason given for rejection. Disregarding the role adopted by the Art Commission in overstepping its function as an art jury, and handing down decisions in the field of psychology, we must simply state that the charge is decidedly untrue. Even were it true, then, included in the indictment, along with the painters Shahn and Block, would be Mayor LaGuardia and the Commissioner of Correction, Austin H. McCormick.

The ideology and pictorial appropriateness of these murals were not worked out in the isolation of the artists' studios. From the time the project was approved by the Mayor and the Commissioner, the artists spent months of research and consultation with authorities in the field, meanwhile developing their compositions. They read and thoroughly acquainted themselves with penology in its historical and theoretical aspects. They conferred with Dean Kirchwey, one-time Warden of Sing-Sing, and with the present Warden, Lawes. They were given freedom to sketch and photograph in many prisons and were in regular contact with Commissioner McCormick as the work progressed.

From the foregoing it becomes clear that the artists were in possession of authentic factual material and informed critical opinion. When the sketches were complete, they were thoroughly approved by the Commissioner. They were then submitted to the Mayor, who pronounced them "a swell

job," and said, "They will be a credit to my administration." It is important to note here that the approval of the Commissioner and the Mayor was not merely an expression of satisfaction with the artistic merit of the murals, but was precisely a statement of approval as to their appropriateness and "psychological fitness" for the place for which they were designed, the Riker's Island Penitentiary.

The murals were first rejected by the Art Commission in February, although at that time no announcement was made of the decision.

In an effort to have the case reconsidered on the submission of additional evidence as to their psychological fitness, a poll of opinion among prisoners on Welfare Island was taken. Commissioner McCormick selected a group of forty prisoners which he considered representative of the prison population. The nature of the test was suggested by Dr. Schulman, criminal psychologist and head of the Hawthorne School for Boys. The sketches and some enlargements were placed on exhibition and were carefully inspected in turn by small groups of the forty chosen for the test, until all had had an opportunity to form an opinion. They were then asked to answer the following four questions in writing.

1. What do you think of these pictures?
2. How do you feel about having them on the walls of a new prison?
3. In your opinion, what will other men here think about it?
4. Visitors will also go through the halls. Of what interest do you think these pictures will be to them?

Now carefully note the following: Of the entire answers, 97 were favorable, only 10 were unfavorable, 22 were indifferent and 31 were left unanswered. There is no question here as to the definitely favorable reaction from this representative group of the prison body. Yet, in the face of this, the Commissioner made a public statement to the press on May 9th to the effect that, although the replies were favorable, he had decided afterward that the sketches would probably have a bad psychological effect on the prisoners. In view of the fact that the conditions of the test were the Commissioner's own, it looks as though, in this particular game, only the house had a chance to win.

On the same day, May 9th, the old reactionary, Lie, blew off some steam to the press. In the *New York Times* he is quoted as saying that an effort is being made to inject anti-social propaganda into paintings paid for as relief work by the government. In view of the simple facts of the case as stated above, Lie has apparently convinced both the Commissioner and the Mayor that they were conspiring with the artists to spread anti-social propaganda. Thus Lie must indeed have power to be able to make such charges against two of the highest city officials—and make them like it.

At this point I think it is in order to give a brief description of the content of this "anti-social" mural as it was worked out by the artists with the co-operation of Commissioner McCormick and the approval of the Mayor.

The murals are designed to occupy two opposing walls of a long corridor leading to the prison chapel. There are also designs for the short end walls of the corridor. The purpose of the mural is to show what has been done in penal administration and reform, and to show the advances in modern penology by contrasting this with the old methods of segregation and punishment. The subject matter is treated realistically, as opposed to a decorative or symbolic treatment.

Over the door at one end—the police line-up, the first introduction of the criminal to the penal system, is represented. Starting from there, on the left wall is portrayed the course his imprisonment may take if the undirected "social revenge" system of penology is in effect. On the opposing wall are contrasted the methods of prison organization which are the product of the modern penological practice, whereby the prisoner is treated as a member of society who must be saved for proper life as a citizen on his release. On the two walls we see opposed to each other the Southern prison camp and the modern prison farm where the men do healthy, constructive work. Opposed to the scenes in old prisons, with their horrors, are shown the sanitary conditions now more and more coming into being in prisons under modern penological supervision, where adequate hospitalization and X-ray therapy are used to correct the physical handicaps that lead to crime. The wall over the chapel door summarizes the two long walls.

This, very briefly, is the ideological content of the mural. Artistically, the work is unquestionably of a high order. Stefan Hirsch, mural painter and instructor at Bennington College, has written of them: "The walls (on which the murals are to be placed) are too long to put one single composition on them and still have the painting seen in one glance. . . . The obvious thing to do was to divide the walls into panels of equal size. Shahn, however, never does the obvious; he created narrower and wider panels which lend the wall a certain rhythm, and force the onlooker to step from panel to panel with renewed interest all the time. To increase this effect he uses what I would call an 'open and shut' composition. I mean by that the use of a scene with deep perspective, such as an outdoor scene in one panel and in the next an indoor scene with limited depth of perspective. This creates a dramatic change for the eye as it wanders from panel to panel and, to my knowledge, is a completely new device in modern art. . . . When I say panel, I use this term only for lack of a better one, because the various scenes are very ingeniously played into each other without any sharp break and yet with a definite change of subject, mood and emphasis. The occasional change of scale of the figures from one scene to the next enlivens the composition and forces the onlooker to take each scene on its own merits, so to speak, without being definitely conditioned by the preceding one. . . . They are conceived in color from the very outset, not, as most murals, in black and white. This is one reason why they don't look better in photographs than in color. . . . Moreover, there is no violence in the color, but rather a great and earthy solidity, a certain reticence that does not try to beguile with brilliance, but attempts to convince with simple statement. . . . He has taken a firm stand regarding the old rule that a mural must always be flat, and not 'tear holes in the wall'. This rule is an invention of non-painters, and is not borne out by the history of art in the western world. It happens only through the use of a mathematically deliberate perspective that the illusion of the hole in the wall is created, while an unphotographic perspective rather symbolizes than creates actual space, and is therefore not apt to destroy the architectural qualities of a room. . . . Of course, all these devices would not mean very much to me, if they were not behind a new and great visual conception of the world, as they are indeed in Shahn's designs. It is very hard to put



"WE REJECT" — THE ART COMMISSION

one's finger on the subtleties of the artist's genius and for that reason I have dwelt too long, perhaps, on the craftsmanship in this work. I don't think I'll have to point out the keen characterization in all the figures and the remarkable incisiveness of the stories told, the blending of economy with realism in all the details, and the evocative quality of many of the objects represented. I consider this work of art the most important thing since Orozco's frescos at Dartmouth."

Just where the "anti-social" factor in these murals enters is difficult to see, but I suspect that it creeps in in the super-heated and fascistically inclined imagination of Mr. Jonas Lie. If we remove Mr. Lie from the scene, the anti-social element evaporates. The murals are devoted to telling the story of improvement and the need for further improvement in prison conditions, and are a support and a record of all the constructive efforts that have been made along these lines.

In using his position on the Art Commission to stop these murals, Jonas Lie has, I believe, satisfied a personal animosity, and at the same time has put himself forward in the press as the patriotic Boy Scout, always there to do his deed for home and country. Lie's charge of "anti-social content" is a lying charge, and he knows it, yet this man of mean ambitions is actually in a position to pass judgment on the work of artists. Rover Lie, the Watch Dog—his bark is loud against (other) foreigners to show how dearly he loves the country of his adoption.

A few anti-social acts of which Mr. Lie himself can boast are the following: The bailing out of jail for \$500.00 of the vandal Smiuske, who threw paint remover and set fire to a painting which satirized the New Deal (in Tarrytown, August 31, 1934); enthusiastic approval of the destruction of the Rivera mural by Rockefeller in Radio City; statement before the Society of Mural Painters that he had passed mural paintings on the art projects "with a smile, but there is an awful lot behind that smile," because many of them were "going into old decrepit buildings that are coming down anyway," and besides, "whitewash is cheap"; statements that he dislikes mural painting in general; statements of revulsion and contempt for modern art in general; and expressions of disapproval of government-sponsored mural projects—all of which must be judged by him as painter-member of the Art Commission.

By these and by other anti-social and anti-cultural words and behavior, Jonas Lie has proved himself unfit to hold a seat on the Municipal Art Commission, or to hold any public office, for that matter, outside that of a Fascist Censor. For these reasons the artists of New York are demanding his immediate removal from the Art Commission, as a menace to art, and as a person antagonistic to the civil rights of Americans. Further, we demand that the Commission as now constituted be replaced by one elected by a democratic vote of delegates representing all the organized bodies of artists of New York City—a Commission which will truly represent the artists, which will be aware of the problems confronting artists, and capable of judging art on its own merits.

Stuart Davis.

THE SOCIAL STERILITY OF PAINTERS

The following is the conclusion of the article by Jean Lurcat, begun in the last (May) issue of ART FRONT

MERE denials are not sufficient. In the mind of Breton nothing was yet decided in 1924. It was not only to taste that he was unable to bend his principles. Suffering from the obscurity of the whole epoch, he prolonged its movements as if in spite of himself. Since then we have seen him fly into a rage having found out his theory.

In any case there will always be doubt and confusion around these exceptions (Dadaists, Catholics, Surrealists). It is the same with the idea of art. If art were really questioned, put to the test, a hereditary estheticism would still be found to hover over the councils of the Dadaists, to preside at their meditations. The humor and scandal which they propagated under the guise of poetry and painting attacked only the internal contradictions, of that same poetry, that same painting, and, however desperate the play, it remained nevertheless a game and nothing more. Principles are the products of societies. The wound beneath art should have been opened up. Society itself should have been attacked, and by name, and not merely the false graces of society and the groups of people, often obscene, living off these graces.

It took Dada several years to find that out.

With us painters, although it is almost impossible for some of us to believe nowadays in this art of ours—to believe that it can be practiced in the fullness of its rights and duties—although we cannot, at all, believe in the validity of the moral code that drags along our tastes—opposing our desires, our mental attitudes, opposing our will, our reactions, so often the brakes of our action—how are we painters going to believe in the possibility of driving back in our lifetime these false teachings, these habits of feeling that have made of us nothing but accomplices, vain servants? The domination of an epoch, its chains, those which we admit, and those more terrible which are inadmissible, its pressure against us, warp the spirit. Poisonous air can be breathed only through the mouth. War kills only after the public wailing of its chiefs—who "never wanted such a thing!" Bestiality breaks loose where dishonor hides from the light of day. Painters, we have sulked ourselves, we have blockaded ourselves by our invincible need to get ahead of others, of each other, to let those who follow us pay for that uncomfortable feeling that we have cut ourselves off from the rest, from the mass.

We cannot work with impunity for a few princes who still cling to the stronghold of their former power. Neither the Negro, the Scythian, nor the Greek knew or had to reckon with those specialists in questions of art who would strengthen its stubborn or freakish sensibilities by breeding it with primitive arts. In the Rue de Lapp, one stumbles into some little fallen-in store where there is a specialist in Caledonian art, or in old iron furniture. One is simply forced, pushed by the times to breathe this niggardly atmosphere, which, as Pabst said, "sharpens the sensibilities, but dries up the heart". So, certainly, it does not displease me to find this confession of Breton's—"Breton, sure that he will never get done with this thing called heart, the doorbell of his house." We cannot doubt it, the men of this generation have suffered a great deal, and

Breton with them. But why are we tempted to write in the margin, as in a school book, "He could have done better"?

In France painting is never for an instant lost to view. It has played a role so active, so central, even, so cumbersome, I must admit, that one can hardly touch the world of poetry or music without finding there its imprint, sometimes its domination. Almost everywhere it is either visible or implicated. Few have ignored it, many have consulted it. The interrelation is so deep that in the works of several writers we cannot tell where it begins, where its primacy is overcome. This intimacy between men of letters and painters makes us ask whether it is not a common danger that has drawn them together, a desire to eat their last cans of food together. It is curious to observe that, among the most insurrectionary, the plastic arts have found the most attentive audience. So I will not be far wrong in saying that at the final point of dissolution painting will still occupy a favored place. Its sensibility, its febrility in France have forced it to serve as a registering instrument. It is painting which has undoubtedly shown the worst signs of decadence, and at the same time, the desire, alas too hesitant, of renewal.

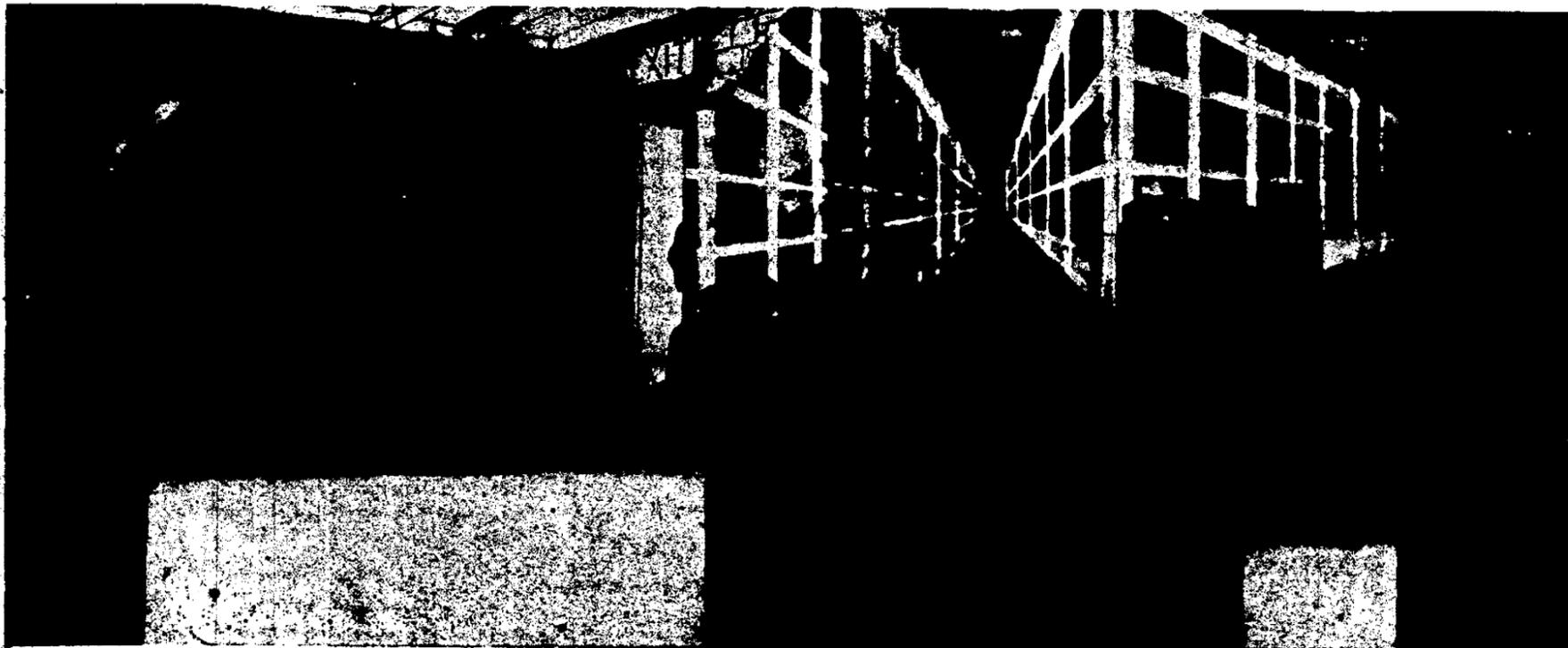
If it is true that with some its spirit has degenerated until, like Onan, it no longer believes in anyone but itself, why not recognize in this retreat, in this taste for the *trappe* an accomplished reputation of the era? What could it believe, admit, accept from the Third Republic? The question only makes us burst out laughing. What have these stammering moralists, these imperialists who could not even banish cynicism, given to the painter that is essential, that he could first have absorbed, then translated into works of durable value? For that task there should have been something like the amiable foolery of Henri Rousseau, that power of popular illusion captured in his appealing, easy-going art. Rousseau was perfectly content with the Republic, but his "Celebrators of the 14th of July" are the Reds in their wooden shoes of '89, and not the bearded "radicals" of 1930 eaten by the moths of departmental politics. The painters should not have bothered with these men, nor with their gospels. Nausea brings bad counsel.

That is why painting crawled under its tent and has not come out, except as in the case of the Dadaists, for some fly-by-night encounter more likely to light the torch of the enemy than to stir their own hidden fire. Other groups, most of the Fauves, for instance, have stayed irremediably conformist. Cubism has been like a dowager polishing up her jewels, blind, utterly bewildered by the disasters of 1914 and what followed.

The trouble is that everyone deceives himself with words. The intellectuals of Paris thought they were seeing a regeneration of painting when, led by Matisse, the painters determined to resist external phenomena. Should painting follow events or content itself with watching, astonished, from a distance? Literature, coming on the scene, promised that she would try to take the same stand, but vainly, for she could not help recognizing or wanting to recognize a certain qualified revolutionary spirit.

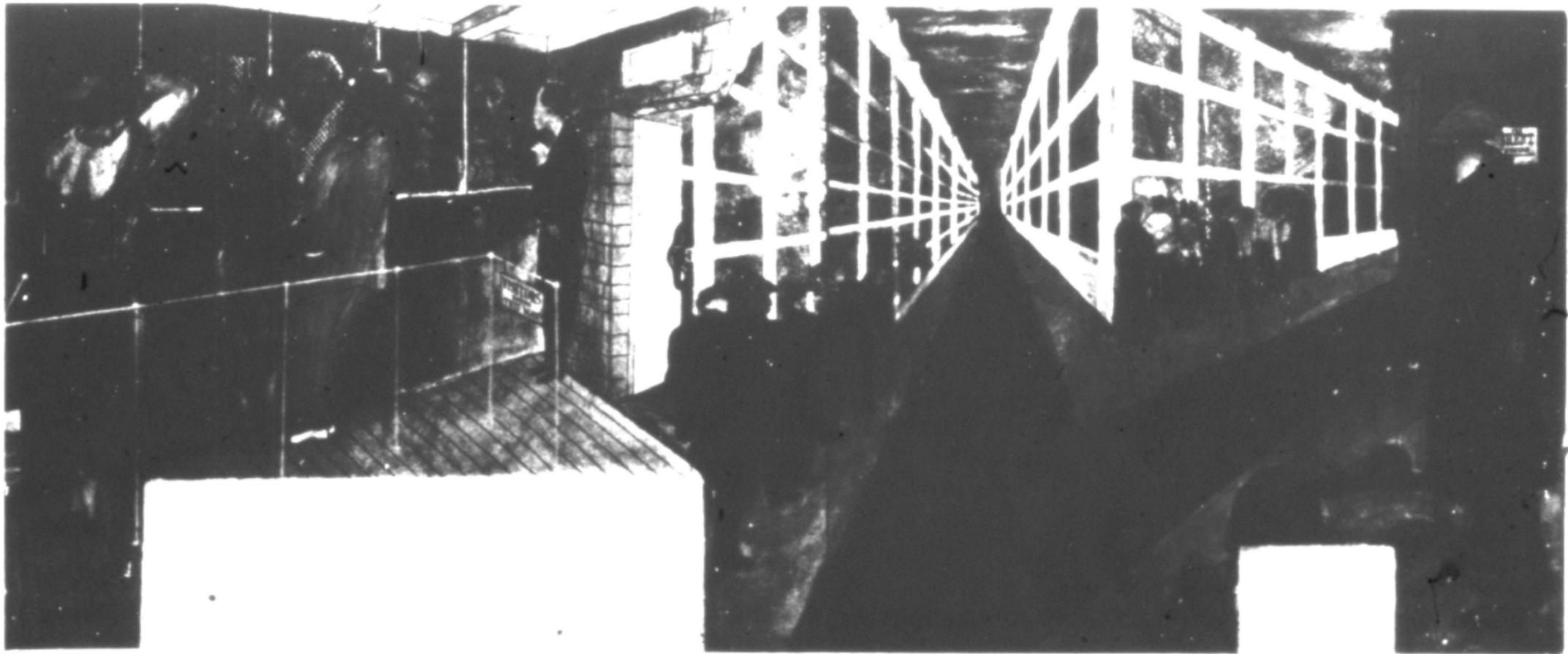
"In the figurative sense", our Larousse dictionary

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Prison Mural, Left Wall

Ben Shahn



REVIEWS

An Iowa Memling

GRANT Wood has not been exactly unknown in New York, up till this present season, but his recent show at the Feragil Galleries has surely established him as one of our triumvirs, with John Steuart Curry and Benton. It's no prophecy to assume that his reputation and popularity among picture buyers will exceed theirs. His pictures are conveniently fair-sized and would not crowd you out of your dining-room like Benton's large intestines. They are laboriously painted, with highly polished surfaces looking less like sloppy sketches than Curry. He is very much in the New Deal school of refined nationalism and it can't be long before the Art Colony he has founded in Stone City, Iowa, will be the home of an official academy of imitators.

In the *New Yorker*, Lewis Mumford has already revealed the confusions in Wood's national provincialism. An art student, like thousands of others, his paintings in Europe were simple impressionistic observations until he underwent the revelation of the school of Van Eyck. His remarkable technical lucidity, traceless brush strokes, breathless neatness of its clean scenes, the airy, almost antiseptic sparkle of the Flemings, profoundly attracted the Iowa Quaker. Next to the disorderly smudged palettes of impressionism and post-impressionism, mediæval paintings of Germany and Flanders seemed an absolute, ultimate vision. The skin of this vision Grant Wood took back to Iowa, and the result was "American Gothic."

This picture is carefully observed and painted by no means without love. The characterizations of the farmer and his wife are delineated with extreme cautiousness. There are hints of technical difficulties overcome, small roughnesses which give the panel a solid atmosphere and the placement of accessory details of the pitch-fork echoed inversely by a "gothic" gable is witty and fortunate. It is almost entirely an honest picture. Almost! But behind the house and between house and edge of the barn swell some vague forms of spongy trees, here by no means offensive but to develop, in later panels, into those fungous shapes which destroyed his integrity.

In the catalogue of the show we are told that at about the same time (1930) he became interested in patterns on willow-ware china plates. "Pruning out these pretty mannerisms has caused him no little trouble in his later work." No doubt, but it's hard to see any trace of pruning. The appropriation of a given style, as, for example, the Wedgewood formula for trees, is part of the same simplicity which recurs again and again in Wood's work: innocence or rather simple-mindedness which makes him quickly choose a manner (real laziness), and expend any amount of labor on pushing the mannerism to a petrified, immaculate realization. Trees in Iowa must have the same generic elements of trunk and leaf as trees in New Jersey or even trees in Burgundy, but not as trees on blue-plate specials. Wood observes the ranks of corn sprouting freshly in his landscape "Stone City", with charm and quaintness, but the rest of the picture looms up into a fat toy territory, a bulbous "decorative" treatment, about as American, as the scenery for the *Chauve Souris* was Russian.

Grant Wood is not a negligible painter. He has observational powers of considerable development. For example, there is a portrait of a corn-fed Middle-Western girl, fattened on fresh vegetables and thick cream, her heavy blond hair looped onto her plump shoulder, that is terrifyingly effective. If you were to cut this girl open, you would find tissue like the inside of a melon; solid, juicy, cellulose. The face is well realized, but to soften the effect of cruelty in depicting her shameless vegetable smugness, Wood has draped a "decorative" curtain, whose darkness is a legitimate offset for the figure, but whose form and pattern has no relationship to the intensity of her cow-like cabbage mask.

In Wood's good pictures there is a simulacrum of truth which is always vitiated by his lack of intensity in seeing. Is this lack of intensity a natural facility which is inherently weak, or is it rather a calculated knowledge of what his sitters will stand for? Does he know just up to what point he can tell them the facts of life, like an old family physician, or just doesn't he see them, as he almost makes you think they are? Grant Wood is a member of the Great American Fraternity of cagey permanent adoles-

cents, boys who are old enough to know how old they can afford to grow up. In public press and films there is Will Rogers, a candid, cunning weather-vane. In literature there is the "documentary" genre of Phil Stong. In commercial art there are Norman Rockwell's covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*. In what essential way does Grant Wood differ from these good fellows? Does he not corroborate the general wish-dream that after all everything is quite all right? His sweet, encompassable, diminutive childish landscapes, his quaint, sturdy, healthy folk, his well-kept, clean-smelling farm buildings give constant testimony that, in spite of all, we have our rocks and rills.

What as to his future? In the cartoons for his murals "The Fruits of Iowa" there is more than a trace of the kindly plumpness of Diego Rivera, which is also consistent. There is much in Wood, of this Mexican's tendency to over-simplify, to make static, to make swollen, over-placid. They are both, in their separate ways, guilty of infantile rightism. The direction, in more ways than one, is to the right.

In a discussion of the character of Grant Wood many instructive parallels may be drawn. Far too numerous are the contemporary young painters who swallow, at once, as he has done, a simple formula, in order to keep them going. An art student with at least a trace of natural facility, perhaps even a small original inherent impulse toward paint and a good deal of normal physical energy, in the natural course of keeping his eyes open, can easily fasten, wholly accidentally, on a "style" like Grant Wood's on the Flemings. The resultant formula-ism is what is so deadening to a great part of present work. These painters neither directly feel nor wholly observe,

(Continued on page 8)

Joe Jones

WHENEVER you used to meet a painter, he would begin to tell you about his troubles. He was seriously dissatisfied; he must experiment more with cool colors, or his own were too dry; next day he would try something in the way of texture. If he could only handle that little question of brush technique! And he really believed that greatness could be attained by a series of such minor maneuvers in craftsmanship. Yet, as he went on, the art of painting appeared like a string of Pyrrhic victories, exhausting him from canvas to canvas. A miracle of detail distorted his space, a miracle of distance cost him his color. To console himself he began to value his imperfections and pretend to treat his successes as little diversions from a nobler quest. A cult of experimental painting arose, divorced from any but the most transcendent aims. Then abstract perfection and failure were wedded; the artist saw himself as a stricken hero. His verdict upon himself was at once severe and complimentary.

The truth was that had given himself an oversized problem, or perhaps it was forced upon him. The rationalization by which he exalted his technical defeats reflected the attempts to justify himself against society. To be needed only as a clown, to relieve an empty afternoon, or cover a boring wall is no compliment. One has to retire into oneself to recover confidence. So the artist set himself up as the emperor of his solitude, demanding tribute from the outside world in return for the benefits scattered by his intellect or his personality. If the world would honor his retirement, he would accept all responsibility for the future of art. The external world, no longer the subject of the painter became merely one of the sources of problems for him. He used his eyes as doves, to bring him reports of the world. But what really interested him was himself as an individual or as creator of new objects. Cézanne and Picasso bound this magnificent but short dynasty.

After a while it was discovered that many experiments were being repeated. This was embarrassing. Would it not, perhaps, be wiser to consider? Joe Jones, of St. Louis, exhibiting at the A.C.A. Gal-

lery is one of the important artists who accepted this hint with full understanding of its import in the modern world. Instead of conceiving of society as a far away province of art, he sees himself subject to society, bounded by enmities and alliances, member of a class, a worker. Secondly, he thinks of technique, not as the means by which forms are established, but as the way form and content achieve corporal unity. The form of a work of art depends on the degree to which the form of the external object with which it deals is transmitted. Technique is the operation of transmission. But, as meaning is a primary element of form, a painting becomes more than the representation of scene—it becomes that scene transformed by meaning. The painter has not sacrificed his intellectual adventure at all. He has really extended it.

In Jones' work, one immediately remarks the pressure of the world of nature and of society, the inclusion of its necessities, pleasures, struggles. He is utterly committed to its service. Technique becomes for him a kind of tactic which he varies with the demands of situations. It presents no problem in itself for him, but only those arising in connection with a content. I believe this accounts, not only for the variety of his approaches, but also for their unevenness. He is not content to use a method which was successful for one event, to express another with a different meaning. His business is not pleasing effects, but esthetic integrity.

Compare his treatment of landscape with his handling of proletarian subjects. Your immediate impression will be that, whereas the structural medium of the landscape is color, the worker scenes are organized chiefly in line. A landscape recedes into deep distance with close variations of color from plane to plane, reddish yellow to greenish yellow, to olive to blue; a blue tractor with red wheels moves in a field of cut and standing harvest wheat, the red earth showing through; a spurt of steam leads to light dust in the sky. The textures are rich and firm, the outlines blurred; an exuberant romantic merger by means of color brings man, machine, wheat and sky together.

A proletarian demonstration bursts from between factory walls whose colored planes cut into one another like jack-knives. The landscape is hard and violent in outline and texture. Agitated planes, a crowding of lines toward the narrow street prepare for the emergence of the workers who come out on a clear foreground, so drawn as to be completely expressive of their militant meaning. The leader looks to the right of the picture where, against a wall, cool grey and yellow, quietly parallel to the picture plane, a compact deathly group, dull green and grey, crowds over a garbage can. A contrast and an emphasis are achieved here by no attached stories, but by the resources of technique alone. Yet the craftsmanship of the artist is not the fountain from which he replenishes his creativeness; it is the servant of an intelligence which his economic position as a worker, and his political insight as a class-conscious one, furnish him with constantly increasing material. The proletariat repays the artist for his alliance; it renews his technique by clarifying its purpose.

Clarence Weinstock.

Bob Minor In Gallup

GALLUP, New Mexico, is a mining town. I have never been to Gallup, but I know from mining towns in Pennsylvania that, as a mining town in America, it stands for grey and broken lives, sequestered in dirt-ridden squalid shacks that stretch monotonously row on row in bedraggled, unsewered misery. As any mining town in five-sixths of the world, shackled by the same economic bonds, it stands for human sweat and blood, for the exploitation of human suffering. Gallup is a mining town, and like all such mining towns, Gallup stands for the Company, the ubiquitous, voracious, immeasurably greedy Company. But Gallup today is not only any mining town. It is a mining town where the contradictions of the few against the many have been most clearly sharpened, and where the paraphernalia of abstract human justice has been ripped off to show, as if skinned, the raw ugly granulated stuff beneath.

Robert Minor went down to Gallup with David Levenson of the International Labor Defense, to protect the ten miners who are held on an obviously framed murder charge, because they dared organize their fellow workers against hunger and starvation, stands today, with Lawyer Levenson, as that focal point around which the forces of law and order have so shamelessly unmasked themselves. The Company—always the Company, this time a Morgan controlled one called the Gallup-American Coal

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Company—feared Robert Minor. Feared him as an individual and as a leading representative of that section of the working class which has learned that the only way out is that way which today fights unceasingly for today's demands; never forgetting, that directly or indirectly, that fight is beyond today, a fight for the freedom of the whole working class. They feared Robert Minor, they feared Levenson, and in that desperate fear, they forgot all their hypocritical talk about civil rights and democracy. They wanted to crush the trade union movement in Gallup, they wanted to beat down to earth the rising unemployed. Robert Minor, chairman of the National Gallup Defense Committee, was a formidable obstacle. They thought to remove him by terrorism and lynch method. On the night of May 2nd, hooded Vigilantes, ringed in and protected by New Mexico's military machine, kidnapped Robert Minor and Levenson, brutally beat them, and left them to die in the desert. They did not die. They were not terrorized. They came back to face their real abductors and jailers, the Company, with its police and its courts and press, with its judges, its Governor and senators. They came back to fight through the fight in Gallup—a fight which Minor calls essentially a trade union question, which must include all trade unions in its defense movement. In Gallup, mining town where under the wings of the Blue Eagle, black-hooded terror and lawlessness ride through the night, Robert Minor, artist and working-class leader, has again, in a long life of such demonstrations, shown the steeled and tempered spirit of which a revolutionist is made.

I wish I knew Minor to speak with and laugh with. There seems about him, on the platform, in his office, such a love of laughter and zest for life. On the lecture stage, he is like a caged lion, vibrant with his will to revolt. A big man, strapping, bearing still within him that Texas range where he was born, his speech is not polished, is not of that quality which makes for the good orator. But he is so much on the platform, striding across it, hands in pockets, out of pockets, hat on head, shaggy grey eyebrows patterning and repatterning themselves over his deep-sunken eyes, that you know he is speaking of the fire within himself. I have heard Robert Minor make a technically poor speech at an evening's meeting, and yet I have felt within myself and have heard expressed by others the flame of a will to struggle that only his talk evoked.

In his work, he is kindly, quiet, with a deep-rooted sense of humor. On the *Daily Worker*, where he once sat in the editorial chair, he still takes a paternal interest in the cartoonist, and whenever someone new shows up, pays his compliments by standing over the shoulder of the artist for a few minutes while he is working, and then, taking a pencil from his hands, sketches on the drawing a few lines to show the new artist how he, Bob Minor, would do it. It is his way of greeting; a bond set up between two fellow artists, working in the same spirit.

Though today Robert Minor is a revolutionary leader, an outstanding member of the Communist Party of the United States, devoting his time and his creative energies in the active struggles of the working class, he holds no uncertain place as an American artist. Born over fifty years ago, the son of a Texas judge, Minor has from the beginning drunk deep of experience. Like Joe Jones, outstanding mid-western artist who is revealing the American scene with a rich earthiness that Benton's sterile Americanisms can never attain, Minor began his art career as a sign painter. Knocking around, as itinerant worker, plying his trade, eating in hash joints, he began early in life to understand the meaning of men, unemployed, hungry, thrown off by an industrial civilization that was as insane as it was cruel. His first important job as cartoonist was on the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, and again as predecessor to that other St. Louis artist, Joe Jones, his revelations of America—even in his capacity as cartoonist on a capitalist newspaper—were not of the Heil America, cornfed school of porcelain prettiness. Coupled with a sublime bump of ribald comedy were a penetration and perceptiveness that



Levenson and Minor After the Gallup, N. M., Kidnaping

made of even his early cartoons weapons in the fight for the liberation of man.

A train from St. Louis to Park Row on a Pulitzer contract that made him cartoonist on the *New York World*, brought Minor to Manhattan. And bringing Minor to Manhattan was to bring the already revolutionary artist into close connection with those pre-war revels of the old *Masses* and *Mother Earth*, firing in him the need to draw only those cartoons that would sear through the slabs of fatty falsehoods, that would cut through with acid laughter to the truth beneath. He began to draw for *Masses* and *Mother Earth*, unsigned cartoons that needed no signature. There were grumbings at the *World* warnings, threats of dismissal. Minor kept on drawing. He was a good cartoonist. They didn't want to fire him. He had built up a reputation in New York as the *World* cartoonist and they were loath to lose the profits he was making for them. But even the thought of the loss of profits could not allow them to keep Minor when the cover appeared on *Mother Earth* that bore a cartoon of Billy Sunday strutting around in a jazz dance with the figure of Christ as his partner. The *World* was sorry, but it had to do without Minor. But if the *World* was sorry, New York workers were glad, for Minor's cartoons began to appear in the *New York Call*, the revolutionary socialist daily of pre-war days.

Years of brilliant service as a revolutionary artist followed. His anti-jingoist, anti-militarist cartoons of those days of febrile preparations for the world slaughter, and his anti-war cartoons during the carnage, did much to consolidate the efforts of the militant struggle against imperialist war which was so unashamedly betrayed by false leaders. Minor "Ripped the Brass Buttons Off of War", in a series of drawings that he did at this time for a newspaper syndicate; and another series of the Pershing occupation of Mexico, coupled with editorial comment, revealed his talent as a writer as well as artist.

In 1916, during the Preparedness Parade in San Francisco, a courageous and militant fighter for the rights of workers to organize, was framed on a charge of bomb-throwing. That fighter, Tom Mooney—today the world's best known and best loved political prisoner, who still carries on an undaunted fight for his class within the walls of San Quentin—was rushed through the trappings of a trial before a court which was not interested in justice but in removing Tom Mooney from the political scene. They thought, as they did with Robert Minor, that they could imprison him, kidnap him, terrorize him. Tom Mooney, and Robert Minor, the young revolutionary artist who rushed to his defense in 1916, are not of the manner of men

who are easily vanquished. They are both made of the substance of heroes, heroes of the world struggle for freedom.

Robert Minor threw himself into the fight to free Tom Mooney. It is a battle which he has been waging until this day. In the early years, together with other active work in which he was engaged, it was a fight which so engrossed him that Minor gradually turned from his drawing board to the world of action. And in so turning, he saw before him the gaping wounds of a world born of blood and strife. Only one hope seemed left for mankind, lying defeated by the four-year shambles. To this new hope Minor turned. In 1919, he went to the Soviet Union. He spoke with Lenin, he watched, he worked, he learned. He went also to Germany. There had been a Soviet Union in Germany which had died in birth, fighting for its chance to live, but aborted by the lying handmaidens of the old regime. Here Minor also watched, worked and learned. Then Minor returned to America no longer the reckless, inconsistent revolutionary, the "rugged" anarchist. In his famous call to fellow anarchists which he published at this time, he urged all anarchists to rally to the support of the Soviets.

Robert Minor was now a revolutionary in the best sense of the word—in the true Marxist sense, of disciplined struggle, of dogged determination, purged of adventurism and steeled with conviction. And such a revolutionary Robert Minor has remained. The passion of his early days, the deep resentment against the injustices of the system, are combined with a solid foothold in Marxist knowledge and Communist activity.

No longer the artist, Robert Minor is today the man of action. As editor of the *Daily Worker* during its first days, as organizer, agitator, unemployed leader, Robert Minor has learned to handle men as once he handled pen and pencil. What has been a loss to art has been a gain to militant working class leadership, but whether as artist or as leader, Robert Minor has always given of himself generously and completely to his class.

Ethel Olenikov

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THE SOCIAL STERILITY OF PAINTERS

(Continued from page 5)

tells us, with that good assurance which stock companies alone possess, "revolution means sudden changes brought about in conditions of the world, in opinions". Let us prove then that there was nothing new in this change of spiritual values, nothing strange nor dangerous to affect the ways of men living in society. We know too well from experience how this word has been exploited, and we are no longer caught in the nets of those revolutions which are only the sidings of authentic revolutions.

Evidence of revolution becomes real only on the day when black can be considered white, and white becomes black. In Moscow many persons felt frustrated when carried away by the full acceptance of the term, and having lived through such a violent change, they recognized the survival of things of the old order, police, loans, marriage, bureaucracy. I will not discuss this sentiment here, nor do I take any side except in my inner mind. In public I am only arguing a problem of definition.

Was Cubism a sudden change, or rather that which Larousse gives us as the non-figurative sense, "movement of an object which travels around a closed circle"? Indeed, I find this definition the exact explanation of what Cubism was, wording which limits it, stops it, puts it in its place, even disposes of it.

Whoever examines the work of Cezanne in the light of its possibilities, its future, cannot but recognize in it all the implications of Cubism, and to him the event Braque-Picasso loses its novelty, ceases to be revolutionary. Let us in turn cease to consider it an attack launched into the vitals of our culture, but rather an incident of insurrection, an impatience with certain exaggerated notions of our culture with its syntax.

If Cubism had not attained its central position in the world of plastic art today—and only old fogies would deny it that position—some other art of the same purport, the same idealism, would have taken upon itself the same refutation of the exterior world that Cubism implied, the same retreat, the same escape.

Just as Maxime Alexandre and Peter Unik set forth so well in their pamphlet, "a crowd of young bourgeois, restless, finding in eroticism, in dreams, in the sub-conscious, in poetry as many means of evading the problem put before them by the decomposition of their class". What these two men said about surrealism as an explanation of the approach of the younger stratum of bourgeoisie to the esthetic extremists, applies also to Cubism, and could have been applied since 1914 to the works of the so-called advance guard. Cubism and Dada at that time do not quite represent a dictatorship over things of the spirit, but rather a more humble state of the spirit itself, a reactionary attitude rather than an attempt at action. They were movements brought into being by a certain moral degeneration, tending rather to limit the fields of the painters' thought than to extend them or throw them open. Of what use is the spirit of insurrection, if it cannot reach the point of aiming at some definite objective?

We hear it said that the Cubist painter tried to free painting from a social group, to give it a life of its own, an evolution, liberty, that an artist should treat an object as he alone could feel it. Surely the point of view that painting, up until this time in slavery, should seek and find a universe of its own, in which the language laws and products would be determined only by itself and its own destiny, is too individualistic to be practical. It is well demonstrated here that such a spiritual divorce from the times and society was sensed by many and left unexplained, accepted and not combatted. Braque and Picasso express nothing further than that which in May 1904, ten years before, Cezanne had formulated in the words: "Taste is the best judge; it is rare; the artist addresses himself only to a highly restricted group of individuals; all that is necessary is to have a sense of art, and that sense of art is the horror of the bourgeoisie."

What may seem a truism to some seems mere childishness, if we do not permit ourselves to read into these phrases anything more than they actually say. The whole life of Cezanne would lead us to believe that more is meant by these lines than merely the rebellion of a player tired out by checkmates, of a person wearied by unsuccessful attempts to adapt himself to the life of the city. Again, and one cannot repeat it often enough, we find here a man in revolt against modern society and its morality, but his revolt is weakened by confusion; his consciousness of the miserable condition of modern painters is deaf, is not able to justify itself by a superior finality.

Cezanne turned for an instant to the church. "I lean upon my sister," he writes somewhere, "who confides in her confessor, and he, in turn leans upon

Rome," a pyramid which was capped by his exile in Aix-en-Provence, dyspepsia, and the development of that taste of the epoch, art for art's sake. Later would be time enough to settle things with God, this worthy man seemed to think. Everything went against him: family, Sunday distractions, the pleasure of Vesper services, the *kunstpolitik* of Paris. Everything seems a miracle in this life that was able to produce out of ashes and debris so considerable a work.

Poor, without hope of getting much from his profession, even without optimism other than a raw feeling of progress in his art, Cezanne cannot appear to us otherwise than as a man practicing scales, waiting for something working toward a future which he himself could hardly glimpse, much as a workman stands astonished before the strength of his machine, terrified by the riches he is creating—but for whom? Out of such emotions, such despair, spring real revolutions.

Jean Lurcat

AN IOWA MEMLING

(Continued from page 6)

nor completely organize, except up to the limit which the form they have chosen to dilute by subservience will permit them. There is no advantage in ceasing to imitate (or "see like") Matisse, over "seeing like" Memling, assuming of course it can be done.

Modern painting has not only its walls to cover, its medium to popularize, but its medium to actually use. A lyrical, intense eclecticism, a collective vision of what has been done and what can be done is the only thing that can save much of the painting of our most hopeful men from apologetic uselessness. In only one direction, the freedom of the surrealist technique has been in no essential way exploited. The dynamic, lyric rearrangement and mounting of associated objects, not in the "pure" subjective technique of Dali, but with his senseless purity corrupted into an objective, relevant, legible synthesis, is but one path toward strong expression. There is also the frank, tactful, enormously valuable aid of photographs, not as excuses for weak drawing or uninstructed sight, but for the power and truth of their unequalled documentation, an exactness ten times more unequivocal than any parody of the Van Eycks. Every age produces its own technique. The search for the mystery of an antique recipe for an emulsion of oil and water is not nearly so rewarding as a study of the quality of light in movie-stills, in Leica-snaps, in the different ranges of perspective in a moving camera's eye.

Grant Wood denied an academic impressionism and returned to an approximate medievalism, basically on account of the subjective, accidental similarity of some peasants' heads. The important thing in the resultant portrait is not the farmer, but the clean double-exposure on an older model. Neither Memling nor Hugo van der Goes were primarily neat; they were exact; for themselves—styleless; but they gave their age its style. The trouble with any pre-formulated way of seeing is that it's never sufficiently elastic for an artist, or if it should be, it is a proof the artist has no energy.

The nation and the time are by no means so rich in artists of merit that we can afford to easily dismiss even a talent as ambiguous as Grant Wood's. There is enough mother-wit, enough natural observation of a simple yet truthful order in his vision to make his future worth watching. But his problems are more difficult than those of others who have less prestige and not nearly as much inherent charm. He will have to deny that very sweetness upon which his prestige is largely based. He will have to cauterize that charm which, no matter how accurately he paints, clouds truth. And more than any mere technical mastery, he will have to gain some trace of insight into the real weather of his Middle West—dust storms and drought, slaughtered pigs, unsown crops or crops ploughed under. An element of tragedy would make his cleanly farmers less quaint, but closer to the spirit of the Gothic, which is no less beautiful because it is so grim.

Lincoln Kirstein.

THE UNION

(Continued from page 2)

dustry organizing into a craft union may go out on strike, and yet workers in other crafts in the same industry continue at work. This example will explain why the automobile workers today are fighting to be organized on an industrial basis, according to the principle "as we work, so we organize." The way in which the industrial form of union will affect us on the projects is as follows: We have as a concrete instance the case of a number of office workers who are working on Project 262, which is primarily an artists' project. It is evident that these workers do not belong in an artists' organization, but more correctly should join an office workers'

organization, such as the Association of Office and Professional Emergency Employees or the Office Workers' Union. But on the projects they are affected, similarly with the artists, by the conditions of work, so that, for practical purposes it is best that these office workers on Project 262 be members of the project organization and at the same time belong to their own particular union.

As to initiation fees and dues—the minimum initiation fee called for by the A. F. of L. is \$2 per member, or which \$1 goes to the Federation and \$1 remains in our local treasury. Up until now the initiation fee in the Artists' Union has been considerably less than this and I know that it will not be without sacrifice for the project workers to pay this sum. But let us remember that in all A. F. of L. unions the initiation fees are very much higher than the \$2 minimum. As an example we have the Motion Picture Operators' Union where the staggering initiation fee of \$1,000 is charged. So that, although the initiation fee presents a hardship, yet in view of what we wish to accomplish, it is a responsibility that should be observed by those who want organization. As to the dues, the minimum is \$1.00 per month. The union retains 65c and 35c is turned over to the A. F. of L. After one year as members of the A. F. of L. we are, in the event of strike activities, entitled to financial assistance from the Federation from the per capita tax that we have turned over to them. But what of the unemployed who cannot pay such fees? Here we intend to solve the problem organizationally. The unemployed section of The Union has begun activities through dances, house parties, portrait sketches and the like to raise a large sum of money to pay initiations for the unemployed.

In closing, let me say that we have no desire to hit any one over the head and drag him unconscious into the A. F. of L. What I have stated in this article will, I hope, be helpful in clarifying your attitude toward the action that the Artists' Union is taking in joining the A. F. of L. Discuss it with other artists. Attend the union meetings and participate in the discussions. But, once having discussed it, having been clarified, don't lose any time.

Take immediate action—*For 100 Percent Organization of All Projects! For Trade Union Wages! For Trade Union Recognition! For the Right to Organize! For Collective Bargaining Powers!*

Phil Bard, President of the Artists' Union.

WHOSE CONVENIENCE?

(Continued from page 3)

been in action thousands of single men have been lined up in pairs for blocks, waiting for long-delayed relief checks. In many cases grocery orders have been substituted for cash vouchers. Clothing allowances have been denied. Investigators, visiting the homes of the men, have ordered them to C.C.C. camps, hinting that this is one way to avoid starvation. More and more it becomes apparent that the convenience of the Relief Administration means bread lines for single people.

Many artists, because of their traditional precarious economic position, remain single, so that they especially are the target for this vicious ruling. The Artists' Union, working in unison with unemployed organizations, has won concessions from the Relief Bureau in the way of increased relief allowances, and cash payments for food and rent. These hard-won concessions are now being denied single people. Such discrimination against single men bodes no good to those either unemployed or working on relief projects. It forecasts the intention of the relief authorities to cut the present inadequate relief to convenient bread-line standards, and to pick on the most vulnerable persons first.

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