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ART EDUCATION FOR ADULTS IN FRANCEby Vige Langevin,
Group Leader at the Seminar on
the Teaching of the Visual Arts
in General Education

Museums, established in 1750 'to stimulate artists', and described in 1792 as a means of public education that should redound to the glory of the arts, have assembled works of art scattered among private collections and others commissioned by the State, so that the public may admire them at leisure. Alongside books on art, lectures and the annual Salon of painting and sculpture, museums, since their reorganization under the Second Republic, have been the main inspiration for the art education of large sections of the French people.

For the past fifty years or so, a few societies and organizations have striven for a more systematic type of adult education in France. By various methods, each has been seeking either:

- (1) to spread a knowledge of works of art;
- (2) to train the taste of the public; or
- (3) to encourage the practice of the visual arts.

For the attainment of the first aim, they have been organizing visits to museums and monuments and displaying reproductions of works of art. They encourage arrangements for the loan or cheap sale of specialist books and facilitate their study through talks, lectures and discussions.

Those organizations, holding that the capacity to select the setting in which one lives is a valuable attainment, have been attempting to train the taste of the general public. They display everyday objects carefully selected and tastefully arranged.

It was somewhat later that an attempt was made to fulfil the third aim, namely, to encourage painting, sculpture and engraving and to assist and advise those wishing, in their leisure, to get away from their regular occupation and turn to the applied arts.

A few organizations have been endeavouring to attain all three aims, which, moreover, are closely linked.

I. KNOWLEDGE OF WORKS OF ART

The following is a necessarily incomplete list⁽¹⁾ of the leading societies whose purpose it is to study the art treasures of the world or to give their members an expert knowledge of our country's monuments or merely of contemporary art. They hope to develop the aesthetic sense of the public by so introducing it to art.

Les Amis de l'Art,⁽²⁾ with their slogan: "learn to see and to love", organize:

- (1) conducted visits to the Paris museums and monuments, to provincial towns and to exhibitions;
- (2) short tours of art centres conducted by specialists;
- (3) exhibitions;
- (4) monthly showings of art films (on the entire work of an artist; on a single work, an art technique, a monument, a town or a theme in art);
- (5) they publish popular pamphlets on the arts, as well as a monthly reneographed news bulletin.

L'Union des Arts Plastiques seeks "freedom of expression in art for all". It organizes:

- (1) lectures on art subjects which have a bearing on contemporary life;
- (2) exhibitions of older or contemporary artists (a few of them then tour the provinces);
- (3) talks illustrated by reproductions of modern paintings and sculpture, in factories and workshops;
- (4) competitions open to both amateurs and artists, on contemporary subjects;
- (5) visits to exhibitions conducted by artists;
- (6) monthly meetings where discussions are introduced by a talk given by an expert.

It publishes:

- (7) two reneographed annual bulletins;
- (8) original engravings by contemporary artists.

L'Association Populaire des Amis des Musées, with the sub-title "art as a reflection of life", organizes:

- (1) lectures in factories or workshops on such subjects as art, history or the philosophy of art;
- (2) conducted visits to monuments and exhibitions (more particularly those dealing with abstract art);
- (3) discussions and exchanges of views with their members on the relationship between art and life.
- (4) It collects suggestions and informs the authorities of the wishes of museum visitors.

- (1) I apologise to the organizations or societies, and more especially to a large number of regional societies, which I have not room to mention in this report.
- (2) The subscription for active membership of any of these societies is very small.

- (5) It publishes an illustrated review in which members express their opinions and describe the aesthetic problems they encounter (monthly until 1949, since when a larger edition has been issued every six months).

La Société d'Esthétique studies the philosophic aspect of art problems.

- (1) It calls upon art experts to expound their informed point of view on a given subject; these lectures, often attended by a large audience, are followed by a general discussion during which questions can be put to the speakers.
- (2) It publishes a quarterly review.
- (3) It is preparing a dictionary of art terms, with the help of which aesthetic feelings may be given precise expression.

The following are a few of the other societies whose main aim is to organize leisure, tours and the study of history, etc., but at the same time are concerned with art education:

"Arts et Histoire" - "Tourisme et Travail" - "L'Art et la Vie" - "Vieilles Piorres et Urbanisme" - "Monuments Historiques" - etc.

The Ecole du Louvre, the Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie and Faculties preparing students for diplomas in art history give a few public courses or lectures.

In the leading museums, especially the Louvre, parties of visitors are regularly conducted by experts who talk to them on a particular period, style or school, commenting on points of historic or aesthetic interest (some of these experts are trained by the Department of Technical Education).

Some thirty museums in Paris and the museums in each of the main cities encourage visits in various ways, but nearly all organize series of lectures and have bookstalls.

In addition, many exhibitions of works from foreign museums have been held in Paris over the past few years.

EXHIBITIONS of old or contemporary masters, of particular schools of artists or of works with a common theme are frequently held in the main cities but less often in the smaller towns, and are totally unknown in the outlying country areas.

ANNUAL SALONS have become more numerous and specialized. They often group artists with common trends or following the same branch of art. The large crowds attracted to them often have only an alphabetic catalogue to guide them and thus accept unthinkingly the selections made by the critics.

The GALLERIES in three or four districts in Paris exhibit the works of modern artists (save for a few exceptions, admittance is free).

Lastly, mention should be made of:

UFOLEA: "Union française des Oeuvres Laïques d'Education Artistique", which is an offshoot of the Teachers' League, with its sub-title "All Forms of Art from the Theatre to Drawing". It distributes illustrated

publications among teachers and brings reproductions of works of art and information on art to the remotest country centres. It encourages teachers to sponsor local art activities. UFOLEA also issues prospectuses for courses of lectures on the main art periods and distributes them to the teachers in charge of cultural centres. In addition, it organizes one-week "study tours" on art subjects.

ART PROPAGANDA THROUGH REPRODUCTIONS. Apart from the above-mentioned museum bookstalls and societies, various State services are responsible for popularizing art.

Collections of lantern-slides (reproductions of works of art) are lent by the Ministry of Education through the Musée Pédagogique, where they are held, to communities wishing to use them to illustrate lectures.

The FORNEY LIBRARY, owned by the City of Paris, contains many publications on art and is open to the public. Five or six smaller local libraries also have a large stock of such works, which are lent to their customers.

Television programmes produced in a museum or on a "scheduled" site fulfil the same functions as the book on art in the lending library. They bring the general public in contact with the art treasures of the world in their own familiar surroundings.

The ART SHOP in the Louvre sells at reasonable prices and in several sizes reproductions of famous paintings and plaster casts of the best-known sculptures and engravings printed from copper plates preserved in the museum.

ART PUBLISHERS sell at widely varying prices books on art and photographs; several are making an effort to publish short, well-illustrated monographs at a price within everyone's means.

The ARTGO SOCIETY has developed a process for reproducing paintings on canvas, of exactly the same size as the original and faithfully reproducing the actual brush strokes. It is difficult to distinguish these canvases from the originals. Prices are high for individual amateurs wishing to assemble a collection of these reproductions, but they are within the means of a provincial museum of certain country centres.

The FRENCH FILM LIBRARY hires out art films, and the film service in the Youth Directorate lends some of them for educational purposes.

The weekly paper "ARTS", established in 1859, is amply illustrated and has contributions from the leading critics or artists; it publishes articles on all artistic events in France and other countries. The subscription rate is very low.

There are also luxury periodical reviews of the graphic and visual arts, but only wealthy amateurs can afford to subscribe to them.

ART DE FRANCE, a small-format art review is an exception to this rule.

II. TRAINING OF TASTE

There has often been little that is beautiful in the many factory-produced articles now taking the place of the traditional hand-made objects which in the course of time had acquired the purity of line of true works of art. The requirements of industrialization have forced upon a public with long-established customs new forms and materials which were introduced indiscriminately into old-fashioned surroundings. Their incongruity had a disturbing effect on taste.

A few manufacturers and distributors, alive to their own interest, gradually came to feel the need for developing the taste of the public. Decorators and art critics, though they were less immediately affected, joined in this educational campaign. It began at the turn of this century with the display of collections of antiques of unquestioned artistic value, masterpieces of craftsmanship, outstanding works by modern designers and costly and novel interior decoration in private homes or public buildings. The emphasis today is on "beauty in use" (the motto of the Union des Arts Décoratifs).

"We must move with the times", Daumier used to say, but this is not always easy. The task of putting the objects of another age to present-day uses, of discovering how best to employ a new material or the latest technique, and of learning, with the aid of scientific progress, to live at a new tempo, with a changed outlook, proved an overwhelming difficulty to those responsible for educating the taste of the public thirty or forty years ago. Their successors today feel that, while doing much good work, they made two mistakes: imitation and over-decoration.⁽¹⁾

Le Corbusier's manifesto of 1925 set forth the principles by which the taste of the general public is still guided in 1951:

"The decorative arts were incompatible with technology. They ran counter to the general spirit of the times in attempting to revive the handicrafts.

"Evolution must inevitably be governed by economic factors. Utility objects have meant the release of one-time slaves.

"The past has its beautiful and its unlovely objects.

"Functional, utility objects are the only ones possible.

"Let us proclaim the reign of Ripolin and whitewash, let us protest against the ornate in the name of happiness, well-being, reason, culture, morality and good taste".

The following are concerned with putting these principles into practice.

The weekly or monthly magazines of decorative art: ARTS ET TECHNIQUES, ARTS ET DECORATION, ART D'AUJOURD'HUI, etc., and the fashion journals: LE JARDIN DES MODES, L'ART ET LA MODE, ELLE, FEMINA and so on.⁽²⁾

(1) There have been and still are brilliant exceptions to this rule.

(2) Limitations of space prevent me from mentioning the many other excellent journals of this type.

Journals dealing with the home, gardening, cooking, etc., week by week or month by month, proclaim "the need for discerning the beauty our present day has to offer".(1)

They encourage discrimination by illustrating ways of arranging objects, interior decorations, models in which the best use is made of floor space, and publish photographs of homes designed by interior decorators, or of one particular aspect of the home. The aim is always to instruct by capturing the imagination. Advice is given on dress styles dictated by aesthetic considerations, fashion and common sense. Use is made of questionnaires, lists, tests and competitions, lessons in aesthetic appreciation in the form of entertainment.

LARGE STORES and SMALLER SHOPS display objects arranged to give a realistic, humorous or poetical effect, or they arrange the same series of objects in different shapes and patterns.

The window displays of some shops are changed every month and illustrate some seasonal or topical theme. Far from wasting their time, the passers-by who stop to gaze at those exquisite or impressive displays, are receiving an excellent training in good taste.

Special mention should be made of LES GALERIES LAFAYETTE, FASHIONABLE, nearly all the leading fashion houses and many of the luxury shops in the smart districts of Paris. There are other shops as well - perhaps more deserving of praise - that it is a pleasant surprise to come across in various parts of Paris away from the centres that can boast expensive window displays and antique shops.

WINDOW DRESSEERS are trained in Paris in a special school coming under the primary education authorities, and in a section of the Ecole Supérieure des Arts décoratifs. Courses on the arrangement, lighting and presentation of objects for sale are also provided for salesmen in the Seine Chambers of Commerce.

Once a year, the DECORATEURS, ARTS MENAGERS, IMAGERIE and UNION DES ARTISTES MODERNES exhibitions show new objects or arrangements suited to present-day needs. They also display the art of the past in a modern setting. Over the past few years their main concern has been to show how art can be brought into everyday life, and they have concentrated on cheap, multiple-purpose objects and furniture to which further parts can be added. They agree on the principle of "the beauty of utility" and in this respect are making every effort to develop the taste of the public for common-sense, simple objects.

There is also an educational aim in the illustration of a particular theme. Most successful exhibitions have been based on such themes as "Culinary Arts", "The Children's Corner", "Gardening", "Vehicles", "The Use of Fire in the Crafts", etc.

The FOLK AND ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUMS in Paris and the provinces, though they can count on limited resources only and are responsible for preserving all the past, are endeavouring to assume an active rôle and now show great skill in displaying their treasures.

(1) They are far from unanimous in their opinions.

LA SOCIETE DE DEFENSE MUTUELLE DES METIERS ET INDUSTRIES D'ART ET DE DECORATION (Society for the mutual defense of the trades and industries concerned with art and decoration) is attempting, in the name of art and French workmanship, to unite art schools and manufacturers in the aim of raising the standard of French and overseas products.

Mention should also be made of the UNION CENTRALE DES ARTS DECORATIFS, one of the oldest societies, which effectively carries out many different tasks; in assembling collections and organizing museums, a library (one of the largest in existence), a private school, and exhibitions, it has for sixty years been helping to mould French taste.

The INSTITUT D'ESTHETIQUE INDUSTRIELLE has recently been established for the purpose of helping industrialists to a better understanding of their own interests by studying the best shape and material for any given everyday object. The aesthetic success of this enterprise will be the guarantee of better economic returns - higher profits, expansion and maintenance of sales, reduced waste and increased output.

Discussions on certain themes for which a display of models were prepared have been arranged between manufacturers, artists and consumers.

III. PRACTICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

(a) PRACTICE OF WHAT ARE KNOWN AS THE MAJOR ARTS

Although there is no school to train amateurs of painting - a training that would, unfortunately, be beyond the means of the average Frenchman - there are many schools for amateur painters.

PUBLIC COURSES

In Paris and in a few of the larger towns, free courses of painting, sculpture, and engraving are provided for adults under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Trained teachers, with an established reputation as artists, are employed for these courses, which are given in the evenings, on Saturdays and Sundays, in studios in various parts of Paris. One centre for these art courses for adults is in Montparnasse, a favourite haunt of artists.

The TRAINING COURSES FOR SPECIALISTS organized by State-employed teachers, under the authority of the Directorate of Youth and Sport, each year attract many students of the visual arts.

The PRIVATE ACADEMIES, intended mainly for art students, charge low fees and are open to all amateurs, but do not provide a very thorough training.

TRAVAIL ET CULTURE, an organization sponsored by the Ministry of Education, has set up an ACADEMY OF THE VISUAL ARTS, charging an even lower fee. This academy is more actively concerned with the encouragement of art activities among workers. Very systematic art lessons are given between 7 and 9 p.m. The provinces have a few similar branches of Travail et Culture.

PEUPLE ET CULTURE is the same type of organization as the above. It endeavours to keep local art alive in the provinces, and holds competitions and exhibitions⁽¹⁾ that bring the best artists or craftsmen to the fore.

WORKERS AND EMPLOYEES ART SHOWS⁽²⁾

For some years, staff-and-management committees and the welfare clubs of large and medium-sized industries or State concerns have been encouraging workers and employees at all levels to practise the arts. They have introduced the scheme of an annual art show for the firm or administration. They have supplied equipment and some have set up studios and awarded prizes to the best works selected by a jury.

A counterpart is offered by the many Amateurs Salons that have also sprung up recently. They differ from the above in that the corporations taking part in them are usually intellectuals (doctors, lawyers and university men). Their contributors have usually had some training in art during their 'teens and these non-professional artists are in a position to have a first-hand knowledge of a wide range of works of art and to have acquired at least reproductions of them.

(b) PRACTICE OF WHAT ARE KNOWN AS THE MINOR ARTS

PAINTING, SCULPTURE and ENGRAVING are not the only arts open to workers and employees. Workshops for CERAMICS, MODELLING, WOODWORK, IRONWORK, GLASSWORK, etc. are available in a few factories for the increasing number of amateurs.

Mr. Georges FRIEDMAN, Professor at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, has been developing a theory that the economic requirements of industrial evolution have created a gap between planning and original invention and the actual carrying out of work. The worker should spend his spare time on some hobby that will make up for his being thus deprived of responsibility and losing touch with his materials. Work on the applied arts provides the fullest compensation.

TRAINING CENTRES FOR ACTIVE EDUCATIONAL METHODS each year train 14,000 students in various branches of art, attempt to bring out the relationship between the visual arts, drama, music and dancing and provide an all-round education in the arts.

Courses for art teachers in factories or offices are organized, at the request of staff-and-management Committees, by the four organizations⁽³⁾ sponsored by the Department of Education for the training of staff

- (1) UFOLM also organizes competitions and exhibitions.
- (2) The Union artistique et intellectuelle des cheminots français (Artistic and intellectual union of French railwaymen) and the Loisirs et Cultures des Usines Renault (Renault Factories Leisure and Culture Association), to mention only two instances.
- (3) The other three are: the "Union Française des Colonies de la Franco", a Catholic organization established in 1910; the "Comité d'Entente famille et éducation" and the "Comité protestant des colonies de vacances".

for holiday camps. In these courses, which are taken in working hours, an important place is given to practical work in the visual arts.

Correspondence Schools for Drawing: the A. B. C. University summer courses provide guidance for individual amateurs and those who lack confidence.

The TOURING CLUB and other tourist or landscape⁽¹⁾ associations and the Syndicats d'initiative (information agencies for tourists) have done much to provide practical education in the arts.

They have encouraged amateur photography and film work and requested their members to send in their best prints. The most successful have been assembled, published or exhibited. They have quickened the appreciation of their members for scenic beauty and have sponsored campaigns for the protection of unknown works of art scattered throughout France, for the tidiness of tourist centres, for the best-kept gardens, etc.,

They have given advice in active town-planning and have used the influence of their many members to induce a great number of municipalities to accept such advice.

The "SALON DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE" has served as a stimulus for the most artistically successful experiments.

The "PERENNIALIST" MOVEMENT: In contrast to the impulse that prompted Le Corbusier's query about folk art, in 1925: "What place is there in our lives for these suggested resurrections?", Mr. Varagnac has been working for a union between traditional civilization and "Urbanization", as he calls it. So far as the folk arts are concerned, his proposals for solving the problems of our transitional period have already had the happy result of drawing the attention of the ignorant to the beauty of such things.

C O N C L U S I O N

It would be arbitrary to attempt to separate the three aims pursued by the educationists. It goes without saying that those who spread a knowledge of our art treasures and those who teach painting and engraving are all alike helping to educate the public taste. In the same way, those who teach adults to select with discrimination the simple objects of their daily surroundings are helping them to appreciate great works of art, and implanting in them the wish to do creative work themselves.

ART EDUCATION

Those who have taken up the first of these tasks are successfully equipping adults with a respectable store of knowledge about works of art. The only objection that might be made is that the store sometimes becomes rather burdensome. Not that too much time is devoted to the subject by those who impart and those who receive the teaching, but both sides are apt to pay insufficient attention to selecting, comparing and contrasting the material.

(1) In particular, "Les Amis de la Nature" and "La société française d'architecture de jardins," etc.

To make the instruction too fragmentary or too one-sided is not always wise either. The happy medium has to be found. So far as our present subject is concerned, it seems undesirable to give information about art without at the same time developing the critical faculty. To enable an uncultivated person to acquire a real education, and awaken his judgment, time is even more important than equipment.

EDUCATION OF TASTE

To teach people to bring beauty into their daily surroundings - which is the essential result of educating taste (among producers and consumers alike) - is, in our opinion, just as important as teaching them to appreciate the great works of the principal branches of art.

This is a very difficult undertaking. Taste influenced by the styles of past centuries or derived from foreign countries may conflict with that which we are now trying to instil. Care must be used in administering antidotes. To be up-to-date is not, in itself, sufficient. Certain pioneers, working in solitude, may be paving the way for further progress in the arts. And a still more serious consideration is that our advice and our efforts are in constant danger of being overtaken by the rapid advance of technology.

We should nevertheless bear in mind Le Corbusier's dictum that "The capacity to judge for oneself is more useful than a beautiful object". It may still be our guide, even though the precepts formulated by that great pioneer are outdated.

The days of plain white tablecloths, electric light bulbs, and colour-washed walls are now over.

The arts of the table will be superseded, to some extent, by the presentation of food - processed, sterilized or steam-heated - in individual portions packed, ready for eating, in receptacles to be thrown away after the meal.

Lighting and heating are being provided to an ever-increasing extent by invisible appliances. The latest doors, glass-panelled, are invisible, too.

How do we know that rubber and plastics, which have already revolutionized our way of living, will not bring about still greater changes in the future?

Automobile and aircraft manufacturers vie with each other in their attempt to implant a taste for functional form. How can this taste be inspired by the propeller of a helicopter, which revolves so rapidly that its blades cannot be seen?

Art hastens, panting, in the wake of technical invention. It still plays a supporting rôle. Will that rôle endure?

Another stumbling-block in the path of art education is the variety of cultural levels in France. Towns, villages, centres of artistic creation or of folk customs, forlorn suburban areas; differences in the age,

employment and social status of those who live in them.... all constitute separate problems for which individual solutions must be found.

The return to traditional methods which Messrs. Varagnac and Friedman propose - each after his fashion - appear a priori to be incompatible with the progress of industrial civilization and with present-day taste.

The suggestions of these two sociologists cannot, however, be dismissed without careful consideration.

It may be that the extreme division of labour in modern industry will render craftsmanship, which requires an aesthetic effort, a necessity to the specialized factory-worker.

THE TRAINING OF AMATEUR ARTISTS

Amateur painters are to be found in all circles, and some of the reasons that lead them to take up painting - as an amusement, a way of escape from everyday cares, a means of arriving, by personal experience, at a better understanding of art - are common to all of them. There are, however, other and more urgent reasons that apply to the junior clerk in a big government department or to the chain-worker in a factory.

To some of these people, artistic creation, or the handicrafts advocated by Mr. Friedman, come to represent a vital need, counterbalancing the excessive mechanization of their daily employment.

In such cases, the help of the educationists is more than ever necessary, and their task more difficult. To guide young people is even more desirable than to advise adults. When an amateur's taste has gone astray, it takes a great deal of kindly persistence to rid him of the illusion that he is acquiring a wealth of artistic appreciation. We must rather try to prevent him from going astray in the first place. Time, too, is required. His modest creation may then be worth while, because it will have brought him into real contact with art.