

Notes on Some Modern Drawings

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DRAWING BY PAUL GAUGUIN
GIFT OF MRS. EMILY CRANE CHADBOURNE

NOTES ON SOME MODERN DRAWINGS

“CHINESE painting,” says Mr. Roger Fry, “was always conceived as the visible record of a rhythmic gesture. It was the graph of a dance executed by the hand.” The tendency in European painting, in any event since Piero della Francesca, Michelangelo, and Rubens, has been away from the calligraphic, from the frank tracery of the hand’s movement. With the *quattrocento* Florentines—Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo—the linear contour is integral to the painting, but with the introduction of the concept of painting as atmospheric, or as three-dimensional, in illusion if not in fact, the more obvious recording of the manual gesture is lost. We can sometimes, of course, follow the hand’s action in the planting of the brushstrokes, but this does not correspond to, or compensate for, the “graph” of the first, free dance over the canvas in the plotting of the rhythmic scheme.

For this transcription of the artist’s initial, rhythmic impulse we must turn, in modern times, to drawings, which thus assume a rôle quite independent of mere preliminary aids to more elaborate works. Again Mr. Fry (this time in his stimulating new volume of essays, “Transformations”) makes succinct summary. The Renaissance, he says in effect, developed an impressive and learned anatomical vocabulary, upon which the artist drew for many years, instead of using his own unprejudiced visual observation. Knowledge of the locations

and relations of the muscles was considered more important than the actual, and often contradictory, appearance of the form to the eye. Gradually, impelled by the example of more primitive but newly rediscovered arts, the draughtsman has allowed himself to break away from the burden of this school-learning and has again set himself to draw what he sees, rather than what he has been taught to regard as factual.

Thanks to the generosity of friends, the collection of modern drawings in the Art Institute has been steadily growing. Mention has been made of some recent accessions in a previous issue of the BULLETIN, but the significance of the group as a whole and the tendencies exemplified there have not been considered in any detail. Not only are these drawings a background for study of the paintings in the Birch-Bartlett and other modern collections, but they also represent—especially the strictly contemporary group—a movement related but not subservient to the modern movement in painting. The absorption in the problems of three-dimensional form, which has characterized painting since Cézanne, has sent drawing in other directions, since the art of color (which has been the chief means of realizing form) is *ipso facto* outside the draughtsman’s immediate province.



DRAWING BY CONSTANTIN GUYS
GIFT OF ROBERT ALLERTON

To Ingres, for example, there was naturally not this difference in function between painting and drawing. His superb return to the tradition of Raphael was based primarily upon an art of *line* rather than of suggested *mass*, and it is therefore no surprise to find a classical serenity of line in his drawing in our collection of a nude figure and the same model's head. This line is just, telling, beautiful; behind it is the same deliberately sensuous, thoughtful impulse that guided the painting of the portrait of Madame Rivière and "La Source." In France, this concept of the meaning of drawing was gradually changed, or at any rate, new functions were admitted. In England, however, the tradition lingered longer. Burne-Jones kept it alive. Aubrey Beardsley did not materially alter it, and the exoticism of his subject matter should not lead one away from the essentially deliberate character of his draughtsmanship. We may study this ideal of the clean but careful line in the drawings of Muirhead Bone and Charles Ricketts. Albert Rothenstein is more diverse, but his portrait studies of Arnold Bennett and Rodin are in the tradition. Even that most versatile of British artists, Augustus John, whose agile mind helps him to bridge almost



DRAWING BY VINCENT VAN GOGH. GIFT OF THE FRIENDS OF AMERICAN ART

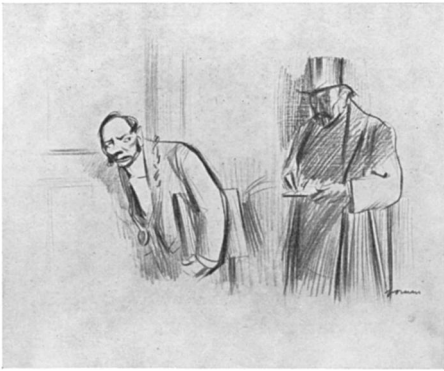
any gap between old and new, has much in common with the older school. But John, the Nashes, Walter Sickert, and Duncan Grant frequently cross into those new fields which drawing has taken as its own.

On the continent in the nineteenth century new ways of seeing affected drawing no less than painting, and at first similarly. Millet, uniting an old veneration for the human figure with a new regard for the homely truth, made drawings that were as monumental in their way as his paintings. To Millet the drawing was undoubtedly a preliminary to the painting; while he was modern in his readiness to rely upon what his own eyes told him of nature, he was probably too earnest to look upon a moment's fleet vision, set down by a dancing hand, as finished art. The moment's vision was, of course, the whole consideration of the Impressionists, but since they were preoccupied primarily with the analysis of the nature of light, they had little time or thought for the function of a black line on a white paper, a hard-and-fast contour that denied the very principles of their color-battle. Thus Pissarro's pastel of a woman and cows is essentially of the same stuff as his paintings, and Madame Morisot's slight little color drawing of a girl is approached as her paintings were approached, with an eye to the double problem of form and light.

Degas, on the other hand, as he was less strictly the Impressionist in his paintings, was more the essential draughtsman in his drawings. He had no theory of broken color to proclaim; he was simply an eye



DRAWING BY FERDINAND HODLER GIFT OF ROBERT ALLERTON



DRAWING BY JEAN-LOUIS FORAIN
GIFT OF THE PRINT AND DRAWING CLUB

and a hand, a marvellously accurate, if sometimes cold, eye, a hand whose dance was as schooled, as disciplined as that of the ballet girls whose movements he registered repeatedly. Whether the subject is a dancer, a jockey, a horse, it is evoked by Degas in its completeness, with strokes that are never too many and that never waver. Degas' drawings are truly Impressionistic: forms seen, grasped, recorded, with emphasis upon the visual truth, rather than upon the suggestive value of the line itself. In varying degrees Daumier, Forain, Rops, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Guys belong with Degas in this category. Daumier shares, of course, with Millet in a sense of the monumental inherited from Michelangelo; his modernity is the essential modernity of any art that is sure, true to its time and to its exponent, and he has likewise a social sense that is of his day. A social sense is common to the other masters of drawing we have mentioned: to Forain, with his ironical interpretations of the discrepancy between formal and abstract justice; to Toulouse-Lautrec, with his distortions masking pity; to Rops, with his insight into the feminine mood, and Guys, with his sharper appreciation of the mingled guile and charm of womankind. This social

basis would not interest us here, except that it has its reflection in a technique no less decisive than its inquiry. While the drawings of the men above-mentioned are documentary, sometimes doctrinal, they are also superb examples of draughtsmanship—Daumier's biting lines, the nervous energy of a Toulouse-Lautrec, the spare economy of a Forain, the elegance of line of a Rops or a Guys.

Two men brought drawing face to face with new possibilities, one because he opened up rich, forgotten veins of the past, the other through an intensity of personal feeling that made his own work flame. They were Gauguin and Van Gogh. In our collections Gauguin's influence is best illustrated in the water color of a Tahitian woman and child and in two other Tahitian drawings. The splendid head of a man is more literal, the water colors of a woman at a spring and a crouching child have not the decisive outlines which were Gauguin's contribution. Intelligently versed in Byzantine and Japanese art, he took from them their bold, undisguised outline, for his painting as well as for his drawing, which is here our concern. Art is not nature, according to Gauguin; in pictures, despite Cézanne, we cannot create a succession and recession of planes. Let us therefore acknowledge and exploit the convention of the outline, the contour. Van Gogh's drawing is more instinctively alive. That frenzied quill pen of his had not much time to achieve a long, sustained line, nor was his mind tranquil enough to visualize in undulations. The drawing, "Pastoral," illustrates the passionate quality of his short, impulsive strokes. We see them partially reflected in Hodler's drawings, but Hodler is more even; likewise, the painter lingers in him while he draws, and his wash drawing of soldiers need only be enlarged in scale to be mural. Van Gogh, on the other hand, is unconsciously draughtsman when he holds a pen, painter when a brush is his instrument.

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Thus we may trace, in these examples which line our corridors, a gradual release of drawing from the code of painting. The movement is not continuous, to be sure, and the new and the old are often indistinguishably united. In the case of Rodin, for example, it is interesting to note that the quivering surface of the bronzes is almost entirely absent in the rapid water color sketches. Here we have the roundness of the mass firmly suggested, but Rodin does not hesitate to confine it within a forthright line. Georg Kolbe, the German sculptor, carries still further this mingling of the Michelangelesque fullness of form with the modern draughtsman's frank affirmation of his initial visual concept in the line.

The more modernistic aspects of drawing, as exemplified in our collections, will be discussed in a later issue. R. M. F.

CHICAGO ARTISTS' AND ETCHERS' EXHIBITIONS

THE Thirty-first Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity and the Seventeenth Annual Exhibition of Etchings under the management of the Chicago Society of Etchers will remain in the galleries until March 8. In the former exhibition the following prizes have been awarded:

The Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan medal and prize of seven hundred fifty dollars to H. Amiard Oberteuffer for "The Yellow Dress";

The Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan medal and prize of five hundred dollars to Marques E. Reitzel for "The Morning Route";

The Fine Arts Building purchase prize of five hundred dollars for a painting to be given to the Chicago Public School Art Society, to Frederic Tellander for "Over the Seine to la Cité";

The Mr. and Mrs. Jule F. Brower prize of three hundred dollars to Rudolph F. Ingerle for "Sundown on the Holler";

The William Randolph Hearst prize of three hundred dollars to Frederic M. Grant for "The Thieves' Market";



DRAWING BY AUGUSTUS JOHN
GIFT OF MRS. EMILY CRANE CHADBOURNE

The Morris S. Rosenwald prize of three hundred dollars to Joseph A. Fleck for "A Pueblo Flower";

The Edward B. Butler purchase fund of two hundred dollars for a painting to be presented to the public schools of Chicago, to Marques E. Reitzel for "The Morning Route";

The Mrs. Julius Rosenwald purchase fund of two hundred dollars for a painting to be presented to the public schools, to H. Harrington Betts for "Glorietta";

The Joseph N. Eisendrath prize of two hundred dollars to Carl Wuermer for "From My Studio Window";

The Harry A. Frank prize of one hundred fifty dollars to E. Martin Hennings for "Spanish Beggars";

The Marshall Fuller Holmes prize of one hundred dollars to William S. Schwartz for "Friendly Enemies";

The Rogers Park Woman's Club prize of one hundred dollars to Ethel Spears for "Conservatory";

The Englewood Woman's Club prize of one hundred dollars to Carl Hoerman for "Navajo Point, Grand Canyon";

The Chicago Woman's Aid prize of one hundred dollars to Frances Bowman for "The Black Vase";

The Municipal Art League prize of one hundred dollars for portraiture to Edward A. Klauck for "Portrait of My Wife";

The Mrs. John C. Shaffer prize of one hundred dollars for sculpture to John Paulding for "Pyxie Peggy";