

THE ACADEMY, 1929

THIS year's Academy was awaited with unusual interest. A new President is always something of an excitement, and Sir William Llewellyn's frequent intercession for the expressionists and post-impressionists led some people to cherish expectations of a change in policy. But no epoch-making innovations are apparent, and, indeed, hopes of the sort indicated must inevitably remain chimerical, it seems. Once again we can rejoice in the high standard of technical achievement permeating the whole exhibition. But we shall find very little Art in the proper sense of the word. Academy artists are hopelessly provincial despite their undoubted talent and sensibility: *and provincial art does not count*. The real tradition on which art lives is ignored, and in losing touch with the European current we are weighed down by the slough of suburbanity. It is not as if an independent art was being worked out in a grand and isolated fashion. There can be no *deus ex machina* about art . . . ; it grows—often up the wrong tree—but it must draw its life blood from 'influences.'

There is a considerable improvement this year in organisation. Black-and-white drawings, etchings and engravings now have Gallery VI to themselves, and we are spared in some measure what has hitherto tended to mar previous exhibitions—namely, the somewhat indecent association of sculpture with mural paintings in a decorative *ensemble*—*The Picnic of the Borejoisy*—as an aesthetic butcher was once heard to describe the general effect produced. In any case, the combination was never really successful. In spite of this arrangement, however, certain discontented exhibits have strolled into the fields to frolic. Then, too, the hanging is better: Gallery III, the Salon d'hon-

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neur, is less crowded than usual, and strips of green and red silk have been arranged here and there to relieve the monotony of the long walls.

The first room is dominated by Mr. Glyn Philpot's extraordinary composition, entitled 'The Threefold Epiphany' (No. 50). This picture—an encyclopedic history of art—represents, in the centre, the Wise Men accompanied by their retinue; on the right, the Wedding Feast at Cana; and on the left, St. John and the Baptism in the Jordan—the whole dressed in the picturesque panoply of the Florentine fifteenth century. The three incidents are intended as a single design, and although generally coherent and rhythmic, the synchronisation breaks down here and there. Francis Thompson saw Our Lord walking 'not on Genesareth but Thames,' and there is equally no reason why a modern artist should not contemplate scripture through Renaissance eyes, especially if the anachronism is to yield such a refreshing piece of harmonious pageantry.

Sir William Orpen's portrait of 'Sir Ray Lankester, K.C.B.' (No. 18), on the opposite wall, is a fine painting, and perhaps a more sympathetic portrait has never been seen in the Academy. Although there is a pathetic weariness about the whole figure, it in no wise overshadows the intrinsic wisdom of which the face is full. It is probably the finest portrait in the exhibition. 'Les Salons Privés, Monte Carlo' (No. 3), by Sir John Lavery, is a kaleidoscopic interior impaired by faulty architecture. The riot of colour is somewhat dazzling, and one should get well away from the picture to realise fully the melodramatic atmosphere of the gambling room and the tense excitement prevailing. Next door to this scintillating work is Mr. Harold Knight's 'Lady at the Piano' (No. 2). Now this and all the pictures exhibited by this artist are utterly charming; he gives us modern Vermeers, *genre* paintings, delicately conceived and painted with svelte

accomplishment. One falls in love with them at once : they are intimate and real ; the colours are vivid but cool ; and the essential placidity of the great Delfter can be traced in all of them. 'A Toast' (No. 469) is possibly the finest. 'The Brass Goddess' (No. 71) is full of sensibility, though here one wishes he had left the wall bare : the two pictures tend to upset its serenity. On no account should any of Mr. Knight's exhibits be missed. Perhaps 'The Cottage Bedroom' (No. 496) indicates more clearly than the others the essence of his teaching—the ghostliness of all substance, whether rock or thistledown. If his pictures were hung together in a little room they would form a pool of beautifully ordered colour, and overworked critics would gladly refresh themselves there. Mr. Anning Bell's 'Christ with the Children' (No. 31) is a nicely balanced design with a *vitrail* suggestion about it. Just as Jan Toorop, whose work we saw in London at the recent Exhibition of Dutch Art, set the dunes of Katwyk and Domburg as a background to the Atonement, so Mr. Bell gives us chimneys and warehouses. Mr. A. J. Munnings breaks new ground in his 'Skating at Flatford' (No. 51) ; it is an exhilarating picture tingling with the frost of a fine winter day, and makes a pleasant change from his inevitable but none the less delightful horse portraits. 'The Return of Persephone' (No. 75), by Mr. A. K. Lawrence, in Gallery II, is a disappointment : an unusual deadness pervades the whole canvas ; the shadows are forced and unreal, and the entrance to the Underworld is unpleasantly suggestive of a group of howitzers. Mr. Maurice Greiffenhagen's 'A Portrait' (No. 93) is a refreshing study in 'cheek' ; it represents an Eton boy sitting on the ledge of a railing, and bubbling over with good spirits. The subject is strongly handled, but in the College buildings behind there is a noticeable weakness in architectural draughtsmanship.

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One always enters Gallery III—the adytum of the Academy—with bated breath, but there is nothing exceptional here this year. Sir David Murray shows us that he does not grow old: ‘Beneath the Bridge the Sleepy River flows’ (No. 119) is executed with his accustomed suave accomplishment. Notwithstanding the indisputable decorative charm in the airy colours of Mr. P. Connard’s ‘Susanna and the Elders’ (No. 141), the phantasy is rather silly, and the two Royal Academicians who play the part of the peeping elders will create little amusement. Mr. Harry Bush’s ‘The Old Pear Tree in Spring’ is a precise but wholly satisfying work with no word wasted; the atmosphere of early spring is complete. Mr. L. Campbell Taylor’s ‘The Anteroom’ (No. 183) has skilful lighting and certainty of values, but is too restless. In the next room Mr. G. Spencer Watson’s ‘A Breeze in the Goat Yard’ (No. 186) is worth lingering over; it threatens to damage itself in its efforts to blow Mr. Brockenhurst’s sombre but masterly portrait, ‘Henry Rushbury, Esq., A.R.A.’, off the wall. The late Mr. Henry S. Tuke’s ‘Aquamarine’ (No. 220) is sweet and opalescent, but a little sad. The outstanding work in Gallery V, which is otherwise rather dull, is Mr. Gerald Kelly’s ‘Jane XXIV’ (No. 253). He has now given us twenty-nine portraits of Mrs. Kelly, and one hopes for more. This is by far the best of his exhibits this year.

Dame Laura Knight shows us a plethora of circus scenes. The first, in Gallery VII, entitled ‘Laugh, Clown, Laugh’ (No. 313), is a small canvas unfortunately tucked away in a corner; but these pathetic creatures surely evoke little merriment, and the hard garish tones do not help matters. Her ‘Motley’ (No. 404) in the next room is a much larger affair, yet in spite of this picture’s striking realism it cannot please. It is too noisy, too showy. The artist fights

her canvas in her desire to paint strongly, and the result, though brilliant, is unsatisfactory. But where 'Motley' has purpose and ordered design, her other picture, 'Charivari' (No. 414), is cacophonous incoherency; it suggests the bedizened pay-box of a French circus—a regular *Klingklanggloria*. Undoubtedly her best contribution this year is 'Susie and the Wash Basin' (No. 443), an intimate study of enduring charm. Two other pictures in Gallery VII are interesting. The first, Mr. W. Russell Flint's 'The Serbian Dancer Desha' (No. 349), is conspicuous for the shimmering pallor of the flesh work: there is an almost diaphoretic quality about it. The second is Mr. John Keating's striking Irish picture, 'Ras-na-n-Gae-deal,' haunting and sensitive; it compares more than favourably with his allegorical 'Night Candles are Burnt Out' (No. 421) in Gallery VIII. This room is dominated by Mr. Sickert's portrait of 'Sir Nigel Playfair' in the part of 'Tony Lumpkin' in 'She Stoops to Conquer.' There is a great beauty of colour in this impressionist sketch, and its restrained ethereality outshines everything else in the room. Standing well away from the picture one sees the flat, featureless face take on life and expression that is startling in its intensity. The same room also contains an interesting portrait of Mr. Belloc in fighting mood by Mr. H. James Green (No. 392) and a sympathetic study of 'Father John Talbot, of the Oratory' (No. 407); the hands in this portrait are admirably painted. Mrs. Proctor's 'Young Roman' (No. 413) is a fragrant piece of delicate colouring.

Gallery IX has Mr. Knight's lovely things with which we have already dealt. Mr. George Belcher's 'Still Life' (No. 452) is decorative, and Miss Atkinson attains a very high standard of craftsmanship in 'The Drum' (No. 433). Mr. Alan Beton's 'Posing' (No. 450) and 'Decomposing' (No. 455) show fine

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workmanship, and Miss Sylvia Gosse achieves a rare luminosity in 'Yellow Orchids' (No. 495). In Gallery X Mr. Cecil G. J. Hay's 'The Porcelain Figure' (No. 529) deserves attention, together with 'An Inn Kitchen' (No. 540) by Mr. Frederick W. Elwell. The latter is a most refreshing picture with warm browns and a lovely touch of colour in the blue window curtain. The kitchen utensils on the right of the picture are painted with meticulous care, and so is the window. It is, in point of fact, the best executed window of any picture in the exhibition; slovenliness in the painting of windows is apparent in many of the exhibits. Mr. Knight unfortunately follows de Hooch rather than Vermeer in this respect.

The last room of all is singularly uninteresting. 'A Morning in Rome' (No. 578) is decorative—the splash of red made by the cassocks of the German seminarists on the right of the picture catches the eye, and the opposite wall contains a vivid portrait of Lord Darling (No. 596) by Mr. Edward I. Halliday. The finest portrait here, however, is unquestionably Mr. Alfred K. Lawrence's 'Miss Margaret Stirling' (No. 607). The subtle combination of portraiture with landscape is most effective.

A refined delicacy characterises most of the water-colours, but one wishes that artists would break away once and for all from the eternal bric-a-brac of Italian street corners, sea coasts, and picture postcard cottages. It seems they are afraid of an official areopagus which will condemn them for 'going a little too far' if they develop the 'eccentricity' of going to the scenes of ordinary life for their subject-matter; the tradition of a dry intellectualism plays a greater part than feeling in most of these sketches whose craftsmanship no one can deny. Mr. Peter F. Anson's 'Mid-Atlantic' (No. 631) is the most progressive effort; then come Miss Flora Twort's charming studies of Petersfield.

Mr. Russell Flint is, of course, the most expert water-colourist exhibiting, and his 'Brick Store, Venice' (No. 739) should attract some attention. Mr. A. Van Anrooy's interior 'Mausoleum of William the Silent, Delft' (No. 690) is a somnolescent poem over which one is disposed to brood. Of the flower-pieces, the decorative compositions of Miss P. Konody are the most scholarly. A very high standard of draughtsmanship is reached in the black-and-white exhibits, but here again old-fashioned tendencies linger. Mr. Brangwyn's splendid chalk study, 'A Baby' (No. 1,102), is magnificently executed. Mr. Charles Rickett gives us a series of stage settings for Shakspearian plays executed in line and wash. 'Othello' (No. 1,028) is, perhaps, the most striking. Sir D. Y. Cameron's 'The Hills of Tay' (No. 1,075) is extraordinarily delicate and expressive. The excellence of British etching to-day is well known: and no other nation can surpass us in this branch. Mr. Francis Dodd's 'Spanish Ox Drivers' (No. 1,025), Mr. Gerald L. Brockhurst's 'Amberley Boy' (No. 982), and the two drypoints of Mr. W. Russell Flint, 'The Three Poor Travellers' (No. 1,054) and 'A Spanish Christening' (No. 1,055), are works of which the country can be justly proud. Mr. Arthur Hogg's mezzotint after Vermeer's 'Head of a Young Girl' is a sheer delight. Among the wood engravers, Mr. Charles W. Taylor's 'To Childerditch' (No. 1,091) and Mr. Ian Macnab's 'The Canal, Annecy' (No. 1,134) deserve special mention. There are several architectural drawings this year of Catholic interest. St. Andrew's Church, Rothesay, by Mr. Reginald Fairlie; the proposed Catholic Memorial Chapel at Catterick Camp drawn by Mr. Joseph Pike from the design of Mr. John Rendham, A.R.I.B.A., and St. Joan's, Farnham, by Messrs. C. Nicholas and J. E. Dixon-Spain and H. Falkner and G. M. Aylwin.

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The sculpture, on the whole, is disappointing. 'The Goatherd's Daughter' (No. 1,535), by Mr. Charles L. Hartwell, is delicate and expressive; but the palm goes to Mr. Gilbert Bayes' 'Diana' (No. 1,545), which lives. Mr. Harold Youngman's 'Retro Satana' (No. 1,462) is a statuette group, carved in oak with a *Beuronese* touch about it. At one end of the Lecture Room is a model for Sir Bertram Mackennal's Statue of Cardinal Moran. Though a powerful and finished work, it lacks the true quality of life.

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