

tion. Above all, let us remember that, when Henri Ghéon was hovering on the verge of conversion, it was Gide who, by declaring his hesitations at that point inexcusable, encouraged him to take the final step. Mindful of the parable of the Prodigal Son, we may hope, with François Mauriac, that, in his last moments, Gide finally discovered the endless vistas of that infinity which he had sought in vain along earthly paths.

## ROY DE MAISTRE

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ONE of the ablest critics of contemporary art has distinguished two groups among the more abstract types of painting today. The one, deriving through cubism from Cézanne and Seurat, is characterised by this critic as intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometric, rectilinear and classical. The other, deriving from Gauguin through *fauvisme*, and especially Matisse, he defines as instinctive and emotional, organic or biomorphic, curvilinear and romantic.

The opposition of these two groups is the modern equivalent of the old opposition of the classical and the romantic or, to formulate the distinction in still more general terms, it might be said to represent the eternal distinction between the draughtsman painter and the colourist. It is to the former that the art of Mr de Maistre belongs. He is the leading exponent in this country of the later developments of cubism. His conventions are personal to himself, being dictated by his personal experiences, but his point of view is analogous to that shewn in recent work by the continental artists who created cubism.

Like theirs, Mr de Maistre's pictures retain a relationship to natural appearances absent from the most extreme forms of contemporary abstract art. Mr de Maistre takes for his theme the emotional experience provoked by some event, real or imaginary, which has struck his imagination. The ceremony of the coronation, for example, has inspired a picture which he has named *The Procession*. Form and colour are his means of expression, so that the forms and colours of the scene which has inspired him are of

necessity intimately associated with the emotions which it has provoked. Consequently something of them persists in the finished picture. But it is the particular emotion which the event has roused in him, not the physical details of the event as such, which interests him. The problem for him consists in subtracting from the event all that is foreign to his intention and in adding to it all that his past experience has introduced into the present experience to make of it the emotion which constitutes his theme. To solve this problem Mr de Maistre generally makes use of a series of studies by means of which he passes gradually from a broadly realistic representation of the particular scene to an abstract design. Consequently his pictures vary in their degree of abstraction; but, with the exception of his intentionally representational portraits, none of his pictures aims at describing the visual facts of the events from which they sprang.

Belonging as he does to the group of draughtsmen painters, Mr de Maistre composes his pictures in clearly defined forms, every volume and line being carefully related to the others by the exercise of a conscious choice. There is no element of improvisation in the finished picture. But, unlike most artists of this group, Mr de Maistre shows a great sensibility to texture. The beauty of his paint as a substance and the expressiveness of his brushwork are notable qualities of his work, although they are characteristics rather of romantic painting than of classical. They are qualities which necessarily imply some degree of improvisation at a certain stage in the creation of the picture, but Mr de Maistre differs from the romantic painter in that he limits the improvisation to the preliminary studies, adjusting deliberately the effects so obtained to the design of the final work.

Picasso has been cited as an example of the violent and disturbed spirit of cubist and post-cubist painting in contrast to the serenity of the constructivist artists. Mr de Maistre has also shown evidence of this disquietude, but to a much lesser degree. In the recent art of Picasso, if one excepts perhaps the very latest work, the dominant spirit is an unalloyed pessimism. In that of Mr de Maistre there is much that suggests distaste for the present, perplexity and apprehension, but there is also much that suggests faith in the permanent values of ethical qualities. The anxiety and disquietude, together with the faith which disperses them, are very clearly expressed in the picture *Mother and Child*.

In the chaos of experiment which has followed the collapse of the renaissance tradition in the latter nineteenth century it is an interesting, although not a very practical or serious, occupation to conjecture what sort of tradition will ultimately emerge from the chaos to replace it. That some tradition will replace it, must, I think, be granted, if man survives as more than a beast in a welfare stable. It must, I think, also be granted that the new tradition cannot take one of the byways of art, byways made charming by the personality of individual artists, Bosch, Blake, Chagall, Kandinsky, for example, and existing only through the personality of the artist concerned. Judged in this fashion, cubism and post-cubist developments would seem to be the most probable link between past and future. Mr de Maistre's art deriving from cubism, based on a careful, conscious organisation of form, but showing a sensitiveness to texture and neither the extreme representationalism of the renaissance tradition nor the extreme abstraction of some modern styles, is the sort of contemporary painting from which, at however many stages removed, a new tradition might evolve.

### NOTICE

In the June issue of BLACKFRIARS, Sir Leo Page will continue the series of 'Personal Views' with an article on Prison Visiting, and Dr Karl Meyer will contribute a study of the German Law permitting Divorce after separation and its relevance for proposed reforms in the English Divorce Law.