Pictorial Composition and the Critical Judgment of Pictures

Henry Rankin Poore



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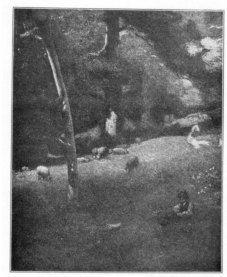
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Century Magazine LIGHT AND SHADE — GEO. INNESS

Pictorial Composition and the

Critical Judgment of Pictures

A Handbook for Students and Lovers of Art

By H. R. Poore

New York and London
G. P. Putnam's Sons

1903

[pg 2]
It is with sincere pleasure that I dedicate this book to my first teacher, Peter Moran, as an acknowledgment to the interest he inspired in this important subject

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Preface

This book has been prepared because, although the student has been abundantly supplied with aids to decorative art, there is little within his reach concerning pictorial composition.

I have added thereto hints on the critical judgment of pictures with the hope of simplifying to the many the means of knowing pictures, prompted by the recollection of the topsyturviness of this question as it confronted my own mind a score of years ago. I was then apt to strain at a Corot hoping to discover in the employment of some unusual color or method the secret of its worth, and to think of the old masters as a different order of beings from the rest of mankind.

Let me trust that, to a degree at least, these pages may prove iconoclastic, shattering the images created of superstitious reverence and allowing, in their stead, the result in art from whatever source to be substituted as something quite as worthy of this same homage.

The author acknowledges the courtesies of the publishers of *Scribners, The Century* and *Munsey's* magazines, D. Appleton, Manzi, Joyant & Co., and of the artists giving consent to the use of [pg 3] their pictures for this

book. Acknowledgment is also made to F. A. Beardsley, H. K. Freeman and L. Lord, for sketches contributed thereto.

Henry Rankin Poore

Orange, N. J., Feb. 1, 1903.

Preface to Second Edition

The revision which the text of this book has undergone has clarified certain parts of it and simplified the original argument by a complete sequence of page references and an index. The appendix reduces the contents to a working formula with the purpose of rendering practical the suggestions of the text.

In its present form it seeks to meet the requirements of the student who desires to proceed from the principles of formal and decorative composition into the range of pictorial construction.

H. R. P.

Preface to Tenth Edition

After twelve years *Pictorial Composition* continues with a steady demand. Through the English house it has become “a standard” in the British Isles and finds a market in India and Australia.

At the request of a few artists of Holland it has been translated and will shortly be issued in Dutch.

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PART I

"The painter is a compound of a poet and a man of science."

—Hamerton

"It is working within limits that the artist reveals himself."

—Goethe.

[pg 11]

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTORY

This volume is addressed to three classes of readers; to the layman, to the amateur photographer, and to the professional artist. To the latter it speaks more in the temper of the studio discussion than in the spirit didactic. But, emboldened by the friendliness the profession always exhibits toward any serious word in art, the writer is moved to believe that the matters herein discussed may be found worthy of the artist's attention—perhaps of his question. For that reason the tone here and there is argumentative.

The question of balance has never been reduced to a theory or stated as a set of principles which could be sustained by anything more than example, which, as a working basis must require reconstruction with every change of subject. Other forms of construction have been sifted [pg 12] down in a search for the governing principle,—a substitution for the “rule and example.”

To the student and the amateur, therefore, it must be said this is not a “how-to-do” book. The number of these is legion, especially in painting, known to all students, wherein the matter is didactic and usually set forth with little or no argument. Such volumes are published because of the great demand and

are demanded because the student, in his haste, will not stop for principles, and think it out. He will have a rule for each case; and when his direct question has been answered with a principle, he still inquires, “Well, what shall I do here?”

Why preach the golden rule of harmony as an abstraction, when inharmony is the concrete sin to be destroyed. We reach the former by elimination. Whatever commandments this book contains, therefore, are the shalt nots.

As the problems to the maker of pictures by photography are the same as those of the painter and the especial ambition of the former's art is to be painter-like, separations have been thought unnecessary in the address of the text. It is the best wish of the author that photography, following painting in her essential principles as she does, may prove herself a well met companion along art's highway,—seekers together, at arm's length, and in defined limits, of the same goal.

The mention of artists' names has been limited, and a liberal allusion to many works avoided because to multiply them is both confusing and unnecessary.

[pg 13]
To the art lover this book may be found of interest as containing the *reasons* in picture composition, and through them an aid to critical judgment. We adapt our education from quaint and curious sources. It is the apt correlation of the arts which accounts for the

acknowledgment by an English story writer that she got her style from Ruskin's “Principles of Drawing”; and of a landscape painter that to sculpture he owed his discernment of the forest secrets, by daily observing the long lines of statues in the corridor of the Royal Academy; or by the composer of pictures to the composer of music; or by the preacher that suggestions to discourse had come to him through the pictorial processes of the painter.

[pg 14]

CHAPTER II - THE SCIENTIFIC SENSE IN PICTURES

The poet-philosopher Emerson declared that he studied geology that he might better write poetry.

For a moment the two elements of the proposition stand aghast and defiant; but only for a moment. The poet, who from the top looks down upon the whole horizon of things can never use the tone of authority if his gaze be a surface one. He must know things in

their depth in order that the glance may be sufficient.

The poet leaves his geology and botany, his grammar and rhetoric on the shelf when he makes his word picture. After he has expressed his thought however he may have occasion to call on the books of science, the grammar and rhetoric and *these may very seriously interfere with the spontaneous product.* So do the sentries posted on the boundary of the painter's art protect it from the liberties taken in the name of originality.

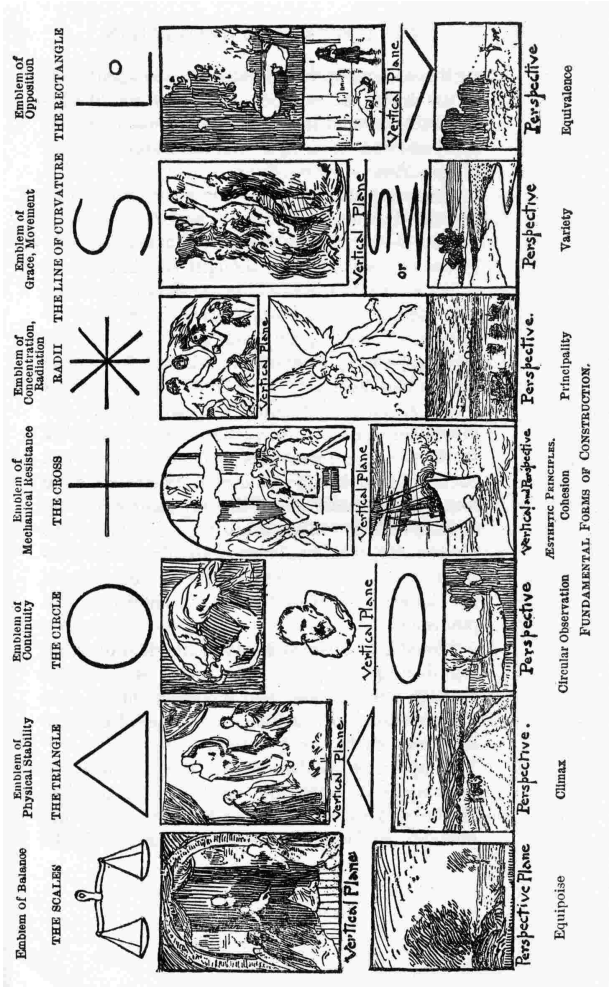
“The progressive element in our art,” says the author of “The Law of Progress in Art,” “is the scientific element. . . . Artists will not be any more famous for being scientific, but they are [pg 15] compelled to become scientific because they have embraced a profession which includes science. What I desire to enforce is the great truth that *within* the art of painting there exists, flourishes and advances a noble and glorious *science* which is essential and progressive.”

“Any one who can learn to write can learn to draw;” and every one who can learn to draw should learn to *compose* pictures. That all do not is in evidence in the work of the many accomplished draughtsmen who have delineated their ideas on canvas and paper from the time of the earliest masters to the present day, wherein the ability to produce the details of form is manifest in all parts of the work, but in the combination of those parts the first intention of their presence has

lost force.

Composition is the science of combination, and the art of the world has progressed as do the processes of the kindergarten. Artists first received form; then color; the materials, then the synthesis of the two. Notable examples of the world's great compositions may be pointed to in the work of the Renaissance painters, and such examples will be cited; but the major portion of the art by which these exceptions were surrounded offers the same proportion of good to bad as the inverse ratio would to-day.

Without turning to serious argument at this point, a superficial one, which will appeal to most art tourists, whether professional or lay, is found in the relief experienced in passing from the galleries of the old to those of the new art [pg 16] in Europe, in that one finds repose and experiences a relief of mental tension, discovering with the latter the balance of line, of mass and of color, and that general simplicity so necessary to harmony, which suggests that the weakness of the older art lay in the last of the three essentials of painting; form, color and composition. The low-toned harmonies of time-mellowed color we would be loath to exchange for aught else, except for that element of disturbance so vague and so difficult of definition, namely, lack of composition.



In the single case of portrait composition of two figures (more difficult than of one, three or more) it is worthy of note how far beyond the older are the later masters; or in the case of the grouping of landscape elements, or in the arrangement of figures or animals *in* landscape, how a finer sense in such

arrangement has come to art. Masterful composition of many figures however has never been surpassed in certain examples of Michael Angelo, Rubens, Corregio and the great Venetians, yet while we laud the successes of these men we should not forget their lapses nor the errors in composition of their contemporaries.

Those readers who have been brought up in the creed and catechism of the old masters, and swallowed them whole, with no questions, I beg will lay aside traditional prejudice, and regarding every work with reference to neither name nor date, challenge it only with the countersign “good composition.” This will require an [pg 17] unsentimental view, which need not and should not be an unsympathetic one, but which would bare the subject of that which overzealous devotion has bestowed upon it, a compound accumulation of centuries.

The most serious work yet written on composition, Burnet's “Light and Shade,” was penned at a time when the influence of old masters held undisputed sway. The thought of that day in syllogism would run as follows: The work of the Old Masters in its composition is beyond reproach. Botticelli, Raphael, Paul Potter, Wouvermans, Cuyp, Domenichino, Dürer, Teniers et al., are Old Masters. Therefore, we accept their works as models of good composition, to be followed for all ages. And under such a creed a work valuable from many points of view has been crippled by its free use of models, which in

some cases compromise the arguments of the author, and in others, if used by artists of the present day, would only serve to administer a rebuke to their simple trust, in that practical manner known to juries, hanging committees and publishers.



THE MADONNA OF THE VEIL — *Raphael*
Irrelevancy of subject and background, main lines of the latter repelling cohesion



THE LAST JUDGMENT — *Michael Angelo*
Composition in three tiers and subdivided vertically, a strain to unity



BIRTH OF THE VIRGIN MARY — *Dürer*
Subject relegated to background, picture divided through center



THE ANNUNCIATION — *Botticelli*
Subject disturbed by lack of reserve in background, the vision drawn across the foreground by continuing verticals



Photo. Munsey's Magazine
IN CENTRAL PARK
Figures supporting each other in vertical columns



THE INN — *Teniers*
Two complete pictures on one canvas, no element of union

WHY ART WITHOUT COMPOSITION IS CRIPPLED

The slight advance made in the field of painting during the past three centuries has come through this channel, and strange would it seem if the striving of this long period

should show no improvement in any direction.

Composition is the mortar of the wall, as drawing and color are its rocks of defence. Without it the stones are of little value, and are but separate integrals having no unity. If the [pg 19] reader agrees with this, then he agrees to throw out of the category of *the picture* all pictorial representations which show no composition. This classification eliminates most of the illustrations of scientific work; such illustrations as aim only at facts of incident, space or topography, photographic reproductions of groups wherein each individual is shown to be quite as important as every other, and which, therefore, become a collection of separate pictures, and such illustrations as are frequently met with in the daily papers, where opportunities for picture-making have been diverted to show where the victim fell, and where the murderer escaped, or where the man drowned—usually designated by a star. These are not pictures, but perspective maps to locate events. Besides these, in the field of painting, are to be found now and then products of an artist's skill which, though interesting in technique and color, give little pleasure to a well-balanced mind, destitute as they are of the simple principles which govern the universe of matter. Take from nature the principles of balance, and you deprive it of harmony; take from it harmony and you have chaos.

A picture may have as its component parts a

man, a horse, a tree, a fence, a road and a mountain; but these thrown together upon canvas do not make a picture; and not, indeed, until they have been arranged or composed.

The argument, therefore, is that without composition, there can be no picture; that the [pg 20] composition of pictorial units into a whole *is* the picture.

Simple as its principles are, it is amazing, one might almost say amusing, to note how easily they eluded many artists of the earlier periods, whose work technically is valuable, and how the new school of Impressionism or Naturalism has assumed their non-importance. That all Impressionists do not agree with the following is evidenced by the good that comes to us with their mark, —"Opposed to the miserable law of composition, symmetry, balance, arrangement of parts, filling of space, as though Nature herself does not do that ten thousand times better in her own pretty way." The assertion that composition is a part of Nature's law, that it is done by her and well done we are glad to hear in the same breath of invective that seeks to annihilate it. When, under this curse we take from our picture one by one the elements on which it is builded, the result we would be able to present without offence to the author of "Naturalistic Painting," Mr. Francis Bate.

"The artist," says Mr. Whistler, "is born to pick, and choose, and group with science

these elements, that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony. To say to the painter that Nature is to be taken, as she is, is to say to the player that he may sit on the piano. That Nature is always right is an assertion artistically, as untrue as it is one whose truth is universally taken for [pg 21] granted. Nature is very rarely right to such an extent, even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong; that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare, and not common at all."

Between the life class, with its model standing in academic pose and the pictured scene in which the model becomes a factor in the expression of an idea, there is a great gulf fixed. The precept of the ateliers is paint the figure; if you can do that, you can paint anything.

Influenced by this half truth many a student, with years of patient life school training behind him, has sought to enter the picture-making stage with a single step. He then discovers that what he had learned to do cleverly by means of routine practice, was in reality the easiest thing to do in the manufacture of a picture, and that sterner difficulties awaited him in his settlement of the figure into its surroundings—background and foreground.[1]

Many portrait painters assert that it is the

setting of the subject which gives them the most trouble. The portraitist deals with but a single figure, yet this, in combination with its scanty support, provokes this well-known comment.

The lay community cannot understand this. [pg 22] It seems illogical. It can only be comprehended by him who paints.

The figure is tangible and represents the known. The background is a space opened into the unknown, a place for the expressions of fancy. It is the tone quality accompanying the song, the subject's reliance for balance and contrast. An inquiry into the statement that the accessories of the subject demand a higher degree of artistic skill than the painting of the subject itself, and that on these accessories depend the carrying power of the subject, leads directly to the principles of composition.

“It must of necessity be,” says Sir Joshua Reynolds, “that even works of genius, like every other effect, as they must have their cause, must also have their rules; it cannot be by chance that excellencies are produced with any constancy or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance; but the rules by which men of extraordinary parts, and such as are called men of genius, work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observations, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit being expressed in words, especially as artists are not very frequently skillful in that mode of communicating ideas.

Unsubstantial, however, as these rules may seem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are still seen and felt in the mind of the artist; and he works from them with as much certainty as if they were embodied upon paper. It is true these refined principles cannot always be made palpable, as the more [pg 23] gross rules of art; yet it does not follow but that the mind may be put in such a train that it still perceives by a kind of scientific sense that propriety which words, particularly words of impractical writers, such as we are, can but very feebly suggest."

Science has to do wholly with truth, Art with both truth and beauty; but in arranging a precedence she puts beauty first.

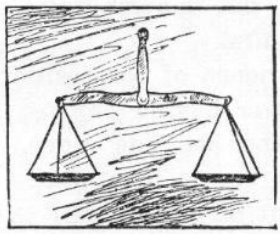
Our regard for the science of composition is acknowledged when, after having enjoyed the painter's work from the art side alone, the science of its structure begins to appear. Instead of the concealment of art by art it is the suppression of the science end of art that takes our cunning.

"The picture which looks most like nature to the uninitiated," says a clever writer, "will probably show the most attention to the rules of the artist."

Ten years ago the writer took part in an after-dinner discussion at the American Art Association of Paris over the expression "the rules of composition." A number of artists joined in the debate, all giving their opinion without premeditation. Some maintained that

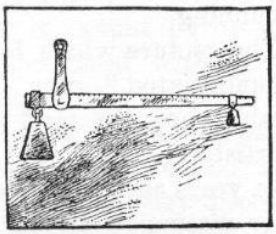
the principles of composition were nothing more than aesthetic taste and judgment, applied by a painter of experience.

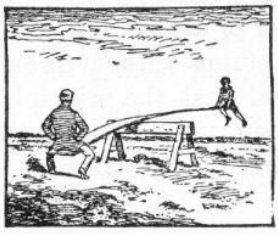
Others, with less beggary of the question, affirmed that the principles were negative rather than positive. They warned the artist rather than instructed him; and, if rules were to [pg 24] follow principles, they were rules concerning what should not be done. The epitome of the debate was that composition was like salt, in the definition of the small boy, who declared that salt is what makes things taste bad when you don't put any on.



The Classic Scales—equal weights on even arms, the controlling idea of decorative composition.

A later notion of balance—the Steelyard, a small weight on the long arm of the fulcrum, admitting great range in the placement of balancing measures.





The Scales or Steelyard in perspective, developing the notion of balance through the depth of a picture discoverable over a fulcrum or neutral space.

THREE IDEAS IN PICTORIAL BALANCE.

The Classic Scales—equal weights on even arms, the controlling idea of decorative composition.

A later notion of balance—the Steelyard, a small weight on the long arm of the fulcrum, admitting great range in the placement of balancing measures.

The Scales or Steelyard in perspective,

developing the notion of balance through the depth of a picture discoverable over a fulcrum or neutral space.

[pg 25]

CHAPTER III - BALANCE

Of all pictorial principles none compares in importance with Unity or Balance.

“Why all this intense striving, this struggle to a finish,” said George Inness, as, at the end of a long day, he flung himself exhausted upon his lounge, “but an effort to obtain unity, unity.”

The observer of an artist at work will notice that he usually stands at his easel and views his picture at varied distances, that he looks at it over his shoulder, that he reverses it in a mirror, that he turns it upside down at times, that he develops it with dots or spots of color here and there, points of accent carefully placed and oft-times changed.

What is the meaning of this thoughtful weighing of parts in the slowly-growing mosaic, but that he labors under the restraint of a law which he feels compelled to obey and

the breaking of which would cause anguish to his esthetic sense. The law under which his striving proceeds is the fundamental one of balance, and the critical artist obeys it whether he be the maker of vignettes for a newspaper, or the painter who declares for color only, or the man who tries hard to produce naivete by discarding composition. The test to which the sensitive eye [pg 26] subjects every picture from whatsoever creed or camp it comes is *balance* or equipoise, judgment being rendered without thought of the law. After the picture has been left as finished, why does an artist often feel impelled to create an accent on this side or weaken an obtrusive one on the other side of his canvas if not working under a law of balance?

Let any picture be taken which has lived long enough before the public to be considered good by every one; or take a dozen or more such and add others by artists who declare against composition and yet have produced good pictures; subject all these to the following simple test: Find the actual centre of the picture and pass a vertical and horizontal line through it. *The vertical division is the more important, as the natural balance is on the lateral sides of a central support.* It will be found that the actual centre of the canvas is also the actual pivot or centre of the picture, and around such a point the various components group themselves, pulling and hauling and warring in their claim for attention, the *satisfactory* picture showing as

much design of balance on one side of the centre as the other, and the picture complete in balance displaying this equipoise above and below the horizontal line.

Now, in order that what seems at first glance an exclusive statement may be understood, the reader should realize that every item of a picture has a *certain positive power,* as though each object were a magnet of given potency. Each has attraction for the eye, therefore each, [pg 27] while obtaining attention for itself, establishes proportional detraction for every other part. On the principle of *the steelyard,* the farther from the centre and more isolated an object is, the greater its weight or attraction. Therefore, in the balance of a picture it will be found that a very important object placed but a short distance from the centre may be balanced by a very small object on the other side of the centre *and further removed from it.* The whole of the pictorial interest may be on one side of a picture and the other side be practically useless as far as picturesqueness or story-telling opportunity is concerned, but which finds its reason for existing in the *balance,* and that alone.

In the emptiness of the opposing half such a picture, when completely in balance, will have some bit of detail or accent which the eye in its circular, symmetrical inspection will catch, unconsciously, and weave into its calculation of balance; or if not an object or accent or line of attraction, then some technical quality, or spiritual quality, such,

for example, as a strong feeling of gloom, or depth for penetration, light or dark, a place in fact, for the eye to dwell upon as an important part in connection with the subject proper, and recognized as such.

But, the querist demands, if all the subject is on one side of the centre and the other side depends for its existence on a balancing space or accent only, why not cut it off? Do so. Then you will have the entire subject in one-half the space to be sure, but its harmony or balance will [pg 28] depend on the equipoise when pivoted in the new centre.

BALANCE OF THE STEELYARD.

Let the reader make the test upon the "Connoisseurs" and cut away everything on the right beyond a line through the farther support of the mantel. This will place the statue in the exact centre. In this shape the picture composes well. In re-adding this space however the centre is shifted leaving the statue and two figures hanging to one side but close to the pivot and demanding more balance in this added side. Now the space alone, with very little in it, has weight enough, and just here the over-scientific enthusiast might err; but the artist in this case from two other considerations has here placed a figure. It opposes its vertical to the

horizontal of the table, and catches and turns the line of the shadow on the wall into the line of the rug. An extended search in pictorial art gives warrant for a rule, upon this principle, namely: where the subject is on one side of the centre it must exist close to the centre, or, in that degree in which it departs from the centre, show positive anchorage to the other side.



PINES IN WINTER
Unbalance



THE CONNOISSEURS — *Fortuny*
Balance of the Steelyards

It is not maintained that every good picture can show *this complete* balance; but the claim is made that the striving on the part of its designer has been in the direction of this balance, and that, had it been secured, the picture would have been that much better. Let this simple test be applied by elimination of overweighted parts or [pg 29] addition of

items where needed, *on this principle,* and it will be found that the composition will always improve. As a necessary caution it should be observed that the small balancing weight of the steelyard should not become a point causing divided interest.

It is easy to recognize a good composition; to tell why it is good may be difficult; to tell how it could be made better is what the art worker desires to know. Let the student when in doubt weight out his picture in the balances mindful that the principle of the steelyards covers the items in the depth as well as across the breadth of the picture.

POSTULATES

Every picture is a collection of units or items.

Every unit has a given value.

The value of a unit depends on its attraction; its attraction varies as to its placement.

An isolated unit near the edge has frequently more attraction than at the centre.

Every part of the picture space has some attraction.

Space having no detail may possess attraction by gradation and by association.

A unit of attraction in an otherwise empty space has more weight through isolation than the same when placed with other units.

A black unit on white or a white on black has more attraction than the same on gray.

The value of a black or white unit is proportioned to the size of space contrasting with it.

[pg 30]
A unit in the foreground may have less weight than a like one in the distance.

Two or more associated units may be reckoned as one and their *united centre* is the point on which they balance with others.

There is balance of Line,[2] of Mass,[3] of Light and Dark,[4] of Measure,[5] which is secured upon a *scale of attraction* which each possesses. Many pictures exhibit these in combination.

The “Lion of the Desert,” by Gerome shows three isolated spots and one line of attraction. The trend of vision on leaving the lion is to the extreme right and thence back along the pathway of the dark distance into the picture to the group of trees. Across this is an oppositional balance from the bushes of the foreground to the mountains of the extreme distance. The only line in the composition, better seen in the painting than in the reproduction, counts much in the balance over the centre. The placement of the

important item or subject, has little to do with the balance scheme of a picture. *This is the starting point, and balance is a consideration beyond this.*

In every composition the eye should cross the central division at least once. This initiates equipoise, for in the survey of a picture the eye naturally shifts from the centre of interest, which may be on one side, to the other side of the canvas. If there be something there to receive it, the balance it seeks is gratified. If it finds [pg 31] nothing, the artist must create something, with the conclusion that some element of the picture was lacking.

In the snow-scene the eye is attracted from the pine-trees to the houses on the left and rests there, no attraction having been created to move it to the other half of the picture.

What is known as divided interest in a picture is nothing more than the doubt established by a false arrangement of balance, too great an attraction being used where less weight was needed. The artist must be the judge of the degree of satisfaction he allows this feeling, but no one can ignore it and obtain unity.

The question of degree must have a caution placed before it; for in an attempt to create a balance on the opposite side of the vertical the tendency is to use too heavy a weight. The whole of the subject is sometimes made to take its place well on one side and another item would seem redundant. Two points will be noticed in all of such cases: that the

opposing half may either be cut off without damage, or greatly elongated, and in both forms the picture seems to survive.[6] The fact becomes an argument for the theory of balance across a medial upright line; in the first instance by shifting the line itself into the centre of the subject, and in the second by securing more *weight of space* with which to balance the subject.



PORTRAIT OF SARA BERNHARDT — *Clairin*
Balance Across the Natural Axis

The portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, an excellent composition from many points of view, finds its most apparent balance on either side of the [pg 34] sinuous line of light through the centre exhibiting the *axis,* which many pictures show in varying degrees. The opposing corners are well balanced, the plant over against the dog, with a trifle too much importance left to the dog. Place the finger in

observation over the head and forelegs of the dog, taking this much off and the whole composition gains, not only because the diagonal corners then balance, but because the heads of both woman and dog are too important for the same side of the picture.

It would be perfectly possible in the more complete composition to have both heads as they are, but this would demand more weight on the other side; or a shifting of the whole picture very slightly toward the left side.

In the painting this is not felt, as the head of the dog is so treated that it attracts but little, though the object be in the close foreground.

This picture also balances on the horizontal and vertical lines.

Here we have the dog and fan balancing the body and plant. The balance *across the diagonal* of the figure, by the opposition of the dog with the plant is very complete. Joined with the hanging lamp above, this sinuous line effects a letter S or without the dog and leaf Hogarth's line of beauty.

In the matter also of the weakening of the necessary foundation lines which support the figure (the sofa), and cut the picture in two, this curving figure, the pillow and the large leaf do excellent service.

[pg 35]
When one fills a vase with flowers he aims at both unity and balance, and if, in either color

combination, or in massing and accent, it lacks this, the result is disturbing. Let the vase become a bowl and let the bowl be placed on its edge and made to resemble a frame, entirely surrounding the bouquet; his effort remains the same. To be effective in a frame, balance and unity are just as necessary. The eye finds repose and delight *in the perfect equipoise of elements,* brought into combination and bound together by the girdle of the frame.

A picture should be able to hang from its exact centre. Imperfect composition inflicts upon the beholder the duty of accommodating his head to the false angle of the picture. Pictures that stand the test of time do not demand astigmatic glasses. We view them *balanced,* and they repeat the countersign —"*balanced.*"

After settling upon this as the great consideration in the subject of composition and reducing the principle to the above law, I confess I had not the full courage of my conviction for a six month, for now and then a picture would appear that at first glance seemed like an unruly colt, to refuse to be harnessed to the theory and was in danger of kicking it to pieces. After a number of such apparent exceptions and the ease with which they submitted to the test of absolute balance from the centre, on the scheme of the steelyards, I am now entirely convinced that what writers have termed the "very vague subject of composition," "the perplexing question of [pg 36] arrangement of parts,"

etc., yields to this simplest law, and which, in its directness and clearness, affords the simplest of working rules. Those whose artistic freedom bids defiance to the slavery of rule, as applied to an artistic product, and who try to produce something that shall break all rules, in the hope of being original, spend the greater part of the time in but covering the surface so that the principle *may not be too easily seen,* and the rest of the time in balancing the unbalanced.

As the balance of the figure dominates all other considerations in the statue or painting of the human form, so does the equipoise of the picture, or its balance of parts, become the chief consideration in its composition. The figure balances its weight over the point of support, as the flying Mercury on his toes, the picture upon a fulcrum on which large and small masses hang with the same delicate adjustment. In Fortuny's "Connoisseurs," the two men looking at a picture close to the left of the centre form the subject. The dark mass behind them stops off further penetration in this direction, but the eye is drawn away into the light on the right and seeks the man carrying a portfolio. At his distance, together with the lighted objects he easily balances the important group on the other side of the centre. Indeed, with the attractiveness of the clock, vase, plaque, mantel and chest, his face would have added a grain too much, and this the artist happily avoided by covering it with the portfolio.

[pg 37]



LADY WITH MUFF — *Photo A. Hewitt*
Steelyard in Perspective

In the portrait study of “Lady with Muff,” one first receives the impression that the figure has been carelessly placed and, indeed, it would go for a one-sided and thoughtless arrangement but for the little item, almost lost in shadow, on the left side. This bit of detail enables the eye to penetrate the heavy shadow, and is a good example of the value of

the small weight on the long arm of the steelyard, which balances its opposing heavy weight.

This picture is trimmed a little too much on the top to balance across the horizontal line, and, indeed, this balance is the least important, and, in some cases, not desirable; but the line of light following down from the face and across the muff and into the lap not only assists this balance, but carries the eye into the left half, and for that reason is very valuable in the *lateral* balance, which is *all important to the upright subject.*

One other consideration regarding this picture, in the matter of balance, contains a principle: The line of the figure curves in toward the flower and pot which become the radius of the whole inner contour. This creates an elliptical line of observation, which being the arc on this radius receives a pull toward its centre. There is a modicum of balance in the mere weight of this empty space, but when given force by its isolation, plus the concession to its centripetal significance, the small item does great service in settling the equilibrium of the picture. The lines are precisely those of the Rubens recently added to the Metropolitan Museum, wherein the [pg 40] figures of Mary, her mother, Christ and John form the arc and the bending form of the monk its oppositional balance.

In proof of the fact that the half balance, or that on either side of the vertical is sufficient

in many subjects, see such portraits in which the head alone is attractive, the rest being suppressed in detail and light, for the sake of this attraction.

It is rarely that figure art deals with balance over the horizontal central line *in conjunction* with balance over the vertical.

One may recall photographs of figures in which the positions on the field of the plate are very much to one side of the centre, but which have the qualifying element in *leading line* or *balance by an isolated measure* that brings them within the requirements of unity. The “Brother and Sister” [7] by Miss Kasebier—the boy in sailor cap crowding up to the face and form of his younger sister,—owes much to the long, strongly-relieved line of the boy's side and leg which draws the weight to the opposite side of the picture. In imagination we may see the leg below the knee and know how far on the opposite side of the central vertical his point of support really is. The movement in both figures originates from this side of the picture as the lines of the drapery show. Deprive such a composition of its balancing line and instead of a picture we would have but two figures on one side of a plate.

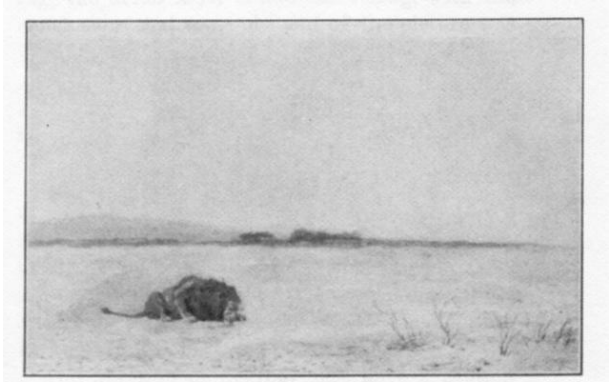
[pg 41]
The significance of the horizontal balance is best understood in landscape, with its extended perspective. Here the idea becomes reminiscent of our childhood's “teeter.” Conceiving a long space from foreground to

distance, occupied with varied degrees of interest, it is apparent how easily one end may become too heavy for the other. The tempering of such a chain of items until the equipoise is attained must be coordinate with the effort toward the lateral balance.

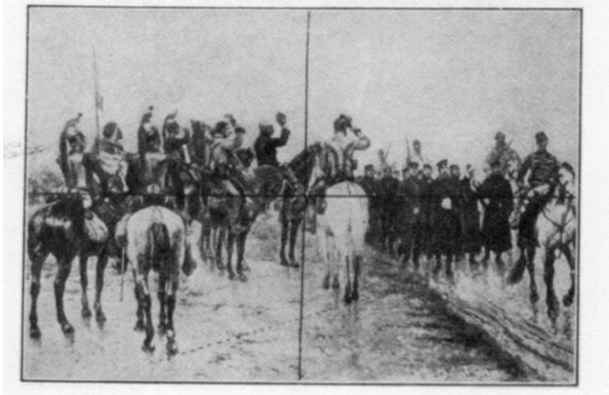
VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL BALANCE.

In the "Salute to the Wounded,"by Detaille, complete and formal balance on both the vertical and horizontal line is shown. The chief of staff is on one side of centre, balanced by the officer on the other, and the remaining members of staff balance the German infantry. Although the heads of prisoners are all above the horizontal line, three-fourths of the body comes below—a just equivalent—and, in the case of the horsemen, the legs and bodies of the horses draw down the balance toward the bottom of the canvas, specially aided by the two cuirassiers in the left corner. In addition to this, note the value of the placement of the gray horse and rider at left, as a means of interrupting the necessary and objectionable line of feet across the canvas and leading the eye into the picture and toward the focus, both by the curve to the left, including the black horse, and also by the direct jump across [pg 42] the picture,

through the white horse and toward the real subject—i.e., the prisoners.



LION IN THE DESERT — *Gérôme*
Balance of Isolated Measures



SALUTE TO THE WOUNDED — *Detaille*
Balance of Equal Measures

Much has been written by way of suggestion in composition dealing with this picture or that to illustrate a thought which might have

been simplified over the single idea of balance which contains the whole secret and which if once understood in all of its phases of possible change will establish procedure with a surety indeed gratifying to him who halts questioning the next step, or not knowing positively that the one he has taken is correct.

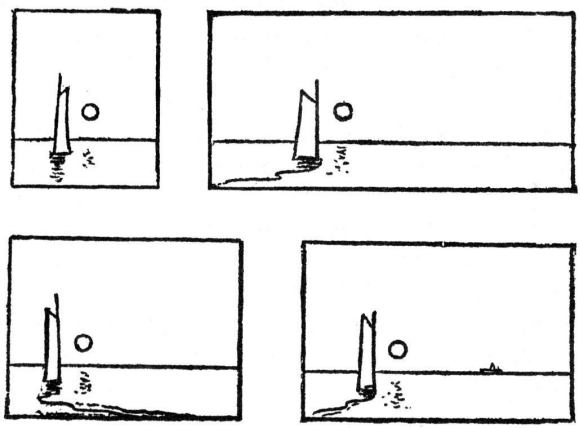
These criticisms vaguely named “confusion,” “stiffness,” “scattered quantity,” etc., all lead in to the root, unbalance, and are to be corrected there.

Balance is of importance according to the number of units to be composed. Much greater license may be taken in settling a single figure into its picture-space than when the composition involves many. In fact the mind pays little heed to the consideration of balance until a complication of many units forces the necessity upon it. The painter who esteems lightly the subject of composition is usually found to be the painter of simple subjects—portraits and non-discursive themes, but though these may survive in antagonism to such principles their authors are demanding more from the technical quality of their work than is its mission to supply.

The first two main lines, if they touch or cross, start a composition. After that it is necessary to work upon the picture as it hangs in the balances.

[pg 43]
The inutility of considering composition in

outline or in solid mass of tone as a safe first analysis of finished work is evident when we discover that not until we have brought the picture to the *last* stage of detail finish do we fully encompass balance. The conception which looks acceptable to one's general idea in outline may finish all askew; or the scheme of Light and Dark in one or two flat tones *minus the balance of gradation* will prove false as many times as faithful, as it draws toward completion. It is because of this that artists when composing roughly in the presence of nature seldom if ever produce note-book sketches which lack the unity of gradation. It is the custom of some artists to paint important pictures from such data which, put down hot when the impression is compulsory, contain [pg 44] more of the essence of the subject than the faithful “study” done at leisure.



The possibilities of balanced arrangement being so extensive, susceptible in fact of the most eccentric and fantastic composition, it follows: that its adaptability to all forms of presentation disarms argument against it. In almost every case, when the work of an accomplished painter fails to convince, through that completeness which of all qualities stands first, when, after the last word has been said by him, when, nature, in short, has been satisfied and the work still continues in its feeble state of insurrection, which many artists will confess it frequently requires years to quell, it is sure proof that way back in the early construction of such a picture some element of unbalance had been allowed.

THE NATURAL AXIS

In varying degrees pictures express what may be termed a *natural axis,* on which their components arrange themselves in balanced composition. This axis is the visible or imaginary line which the eye accepts connecting the two most prominent measures or such a line which first arrests the attention. If there be but one figure, group or measure, and there be an opening or point of attraction through the background diverting the vision from such to it, then this line of direction becomes the axis. The axis does not merely connect two points within the picture, but

pierces it, and the near end of the shaft has much to do with this balance.

[pg 45]
Balance across the centre effects the unity of the picture in its limitations with its frame. Balance on the axis expresses the natural balance of the subject as we feel it in nature when it touches us personally and would connect our spirit with its own.

We discern the former more readily where the subject confronts us with little depth of background. We get into the movement of the latter when the reach is far in, and we feel the subject revolving on its pivot and stretching one arm toward us while the other penetrates the visible or the unknown distance.

Balance constructed over this line will bring the worker to as unified a result as the use of the steelyard on the central vertical line.

In this method there is less restraint and when the axis is well marked it is best to take it. Not every subject develops it however. It is easily felt in Clairin's portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, the "Lady with Muff," "The Path of the Surf," and in the line of the horse, Indian, and sunset. When the axis is found, its force should be modified by opposed lines or measures, on one or both sides. In these four examples good composition has been effected in proportion as such balance is indicated; in the first by dog and palm, in the second by flower-pot, in the third by the light on the stubble and cloud in left hand corner, and in

the last by the rocks and open sea.

A further search among the accompanying illustrations would reveal it in the sweeping line [pg 46] of cuirassiers, 1807 balanced by the group about Napoleon, the line of the hulk and the light of the sky in "Her Last Moorings," the central curved line in "The Body of Patroclus" the diagonal line through the arm of Ariadne into the forearm of Bacchus.

APPARENT OR FORMAL BALANCE.

Raphael is a covenient point at which to commence a study of composition. His style was influenced by three considerations: warning by the pitfalls of composition into which his predecessors had fallen; confidence that the absolutely formal balance was safe; and lack of experience to know that anything else was as good. To these may be added the environment for which most of his works were produced. His was an architectural plan of arrangement, and this well suited both the dignity of his subject and the chaste conceptions of a well poised mind.

Raphael, therefore, stands as the chief exponent of *informal composition.* His plan was to place the figure of greatest importance in the centre. This should have its support in

balancing figures on either side; an attempt then often observable was to weaken this set formality by other objects wherein, though measure responded to measure, there was a slight change in kind or degree, the whole arrangement resembling that of an army in battle array; with its centre, flanks and skirmishers. The balance of equal measures—seen in his “Sistine Madonna,” is conspicuous in most ecclesiastical pictures of that [pg 47] period, notably the “Last Supper of Leonardo” in which two groups of three persons each are posed on either side of the pivotal figure.

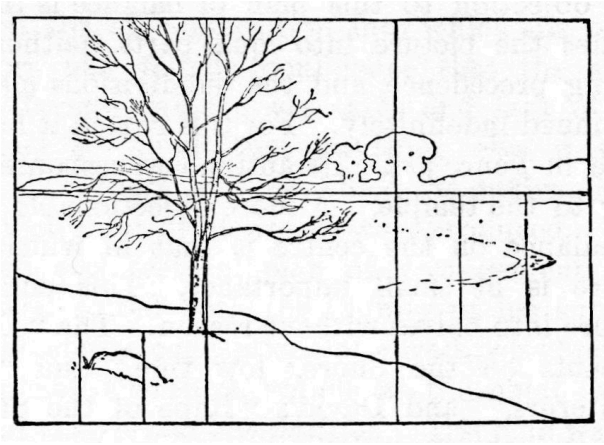
This has become the standard arrangement for all classical balanced composition in pictorial decoration. The doubling of objects on either side of a central figure not only gives to it importance, but contributes to the composition that quietude, symmetry and solemnity so compatible with religious feeling or decorative requirement. The objection to this plan of balance is that it divides the picture into equal parts, neither one having precedence, and the subdivisions may be continued indefinitely. For this reason it has no place in genre art. Its antiphonal responses belong to the temple. A more objectionable form of balance on the centre is that in which the centre is of small importance. This cuts the picture into halves without reason. The “Dutch Peasants on the Shore,” “Low Tide,” and “The Poulterers,” and David's “Rape of the Sabine Women,” are examples.

These pictures present three degrees of formal balance. In the first a lack of sequence impairs

the picture's unity. In the second, though the objects are contiguous there is no subjective union, and in David's composition the formality of the decorative structure is inapplicable to the theme.

The circular group of Dagnan-Bouveret's “Pardon in Brittany,” where the peasants are squatted on the left in the foreground is a daring bit of balance, finding its justification in the [pg 48] movement of interest toward the right in the background.

In all forms, save the classic decoration it should be the artist's effort to conceal the balance over the centre.



In avoiding the equal divisions of the picture plane a practical plan of construction is based upon the strong points as opposed to the

weak ones. It assumes that the weak point is the centre, and that in all types of composition where formality is not desired the centre is to be avoided. Any points equidistant from any two sides are also weak points. The inequalities in distance should bear a mathematical ratio to each other as one and two-thirds, two and three-fifths. These points will be strongest and best adapted for the placement of objects which are distant from the boundary lines and the corners, *in degrees most varied.*

[pg 48]
If we take a canvas of ordinary proportion, namely, one whose length is equal to the hypothenuse on the square of its breadth, as 28×36 or 18×24 and divide it into unequal divisions as three, five or seven, we will produce points on which good composition will result.

The reason for this is that the remaining two-thirds becomes a unit as has the one-third. If the larger is given the precedence it carries the interest; if not it must be sacrificed to the smaller division. On this principle it may be seen that a figure could occupy a position in the centre if it tied itself *in a positive* way to that division which carried the remainder of the interest thus becoming unobjectionable as an element dividing the picture into equal parts.

The formula is always productive of excellent results. (See Howard's “Sketcher's Manual.”)

This proportional division of the picture one may find in the best of Claude Lorraine's landscapes, with him a favorite method of construction. It suggests the pillars and span for a suspension trestle. When, as is invariably seen in Claude's works the nearest one is in shadow, the vision is projected from this through the space intervening to the distant and more attractive one. A feeling of great depth is inseparable from this arrangement.

BALANCE BY OPPOSITION OF LINE.

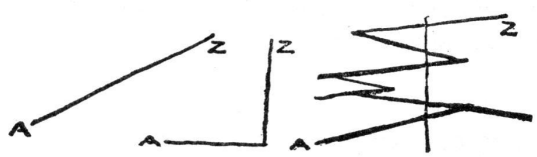
A series of oppositional lines has more variety and is therefore more picturesque than the tangent its equivalent. The simplest definition of [pg 49] picturesqueness is variety in unity. The lines of the long road in perspective offer easy conduct for the eye, but it finds a greater interest in threading its way over a track lost, then found, lost and found again. In time we as surely arrive from *a* to *z* by one route as by the other, but in one the journey has had the greater interest.

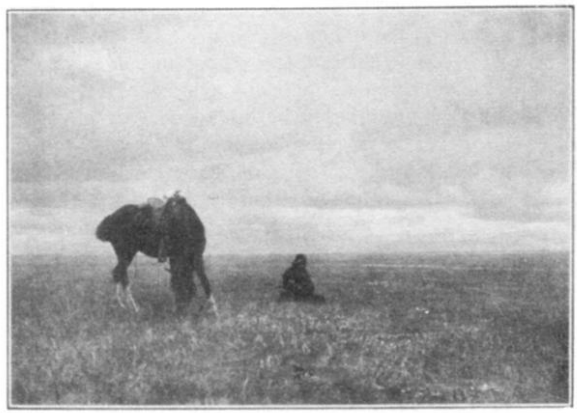
Imagine a hillside and sky offered as a picture. The hillside is without detail, the sky a blank. The first item introduced attracts the eye, the second and third are joined with the first. If they parallel the line of the hillside they do nothing toward the development of the picture but rather harm by introducing an

element of monotony. If, however, they are so placed in sky and land as to accomplish opposition to this line they help to send the eye on its travels.

No better example of this principle can be cited than Mr. Alfred Steiglitz's pictorial photograph of two Dutch women on the shore. The lines of ropes through the foreground connect with others in the middle distance leading tangentially to the house beyond.

To one who fences or has used the broad sword a feeling for oppositional line should come as second nature. A long sweeping stroke must be parried or opposed frankly; the *riposte* must also be parried. A bout is a picturesque composition of two men and two minds in which unity of the whole and of the parts is preserved by the balance of opposed measures. The analogy is appropriate. The artist stands off brush in hand [pg 51] and fights his subject to a finish, the force of one stroke neutralizing and parrying another. This is as true of linear as color composition, where the scheme is one producing harmony by opposition of colors.





INDIAN AND HORSE — *Photo A. C. Bode*
Opposition of Light and Dark Measures



THE CABARET — *L. L'hermitte*
Opposition Plus Transition

In the photograph of the Indian and horse we have a subject full of fine quality. The demonstration occurs in the sky at just the right place to serve as a balance for the heavy

measures of the foreground and the interest is drawn back into the picture and to the upper left hand corner by the two cloud forms, over which is sharply thrown a barricade of cloud which turns the vision back into the picture. The simplicity of the three broad tones is appropriate to the sentiment of vastness which the picture contains. The figure seated in revery before this expanse supplies the mental element to the subject, the antithesis of which is the interest of the horse, earthward. Each one has his way, and in the choice by each is the definition of man and brute, a separation which the pose of each figure indicates through physical disunion. The space between them widens upon the horizon line. To establish the necessary pictorial connection or at least a hint of it suggests three devices. A lariat in a curving line might be slightly indicated [pg 52] through the grass: the foreground might be cut so as to limit the range toward us; or a broken line may be constructed diagonally from the horse's left foot by a few accents in the light of the stubble. In the first, the union is effected by transition of line; in the last by opposition of the spot of the figure to the line of the horse's shoulder and leg extended by a line through the grass.

With the coalition of these two figures there would no longer be felt a procession of three items in a straight perspective line: the horse, the man, and the distant river. Instead it would be the horse and owner over against the notion of prairie, river, and sky.

BALANCE BY OPPOSITION OF SPOTS.

Spots or accents are in the majority of cases equivalent to a line. The eye follows the line more easily, but the spot is a potent force of attraction and we take the artist's hint in his use of it, often finding that its subtlety is worth more than the line's strength. In the case of a simple hillside back-stopped by a dense mass of trees, a flat and an upright plane are presented, but until the vision is carried into and beyond the line of juncture the opposition of mere planes accomplishes little, the only thing thus established being a strong effect of light and shade and not until the eye is coaxed into the sky so that there be established a union between the pathway or other object on the hill and the distance, will balance by transition be effected.

[pg 55]
This is one of the subtlest and most necessary principles in landscape composition. The illustration herewith is of the simplest nature but the principle may be expanded indefinitely as it has to do both with lateral and perspective balance.

In the "Death of Cæsar," the perspective line of the statues and the opposite curve in the floor are continued through the opposing mass of columns and wall to the court beyond, a positive control of the distance by the foreground, being thus secured.

TRANSITION OF LINE.

More effective than opposition, as the cross bar is more effective for strength than the bar supported on only one side, is *Transition,* or the same item *carried across,* or *delivered to* another item which shall cross a line or space.

In the group of peasants in the Cabaret note the use of lines of opposition and transition, in the single figures and when taken in twos. The laborer (with shovel) in his upper and lower extremities exhibits a large cross which becomes larger when we add the table on which his extended arm rests and the figure standing behind him. The ascent of this vertical is stopped by the line of the mantel and then continued by the plate and picture. So in minor parts of this group one may think out the rugged energy of its composition, nor anywhere discover a single curved or flowing line. Nor does it require an experienced eye to note the pyramidal structure of the various parts. In the action of the heads [pg 56] and bodies of the two central figures is another strong example of oppositional arrangement. The heavily braced table is typical of the whole.



ALONG THE SHORE — *Photo by George Butler*
Transitional Line



PATHLESS — *Photo by A. Horsley Hinton*
Transitional Line

In landscape the transitional line from land

into sky is often impossible and objectionable. The sentiment of the subject may deny any attempt at this union. Here the principle only, should be hinted at. In the case of a sunset sky where the clouds float as parallel bars above the horizon and thus show the character of a quiet and windless closing of day, a transitional line such as a tree, mast or spire may be unavailable. Oppositional spots or lines attracting the vision into the land and thus diverting it from the horizontals are the only recourse. In the shore view the sun's rays create a series of lines which admirably unite with the curve of the wagon tracks. The union of sky and land is thus effected and meanwhile the subject proper has its ruggedness associated with the graceful compass of these elements.

In fact transitional line is so powerful that unless it contains a part of the subject it should seldom be used.

In the "Annunciation" by Botticelli the introduction of a long perspective line beyond the figures, continuing the lines of the foreground, railroads the vision right through the subject, carrying it out of the picture. If the attention is pinned perforce on the subject, one feels the interruption and annoyance of this unnecessary landscape. The whole Italian school of the Renaissance weakened the force of its portraits [pg 57] and figure pictures by these elaborate settings which they seemed helpless to govern. In Velasquez we frequently find the simplification of background which saves the

entire interest for the subject; but even he in his “Spinners” and to a lesser degree in some other compositions, makes the same error. In the greatest of Rembrandt's portrait groups, “The Syndics,” his problem involved the placement of six figures. Four are seated at the far side of a table looking toward us, the fifth, on the near side, rises and looks toward us. His head, higher than those of the row of four, breaks this line of formality; but the depth and perspective of the picture is not secured until the figure standing in the background is added. This produces from the foreground figure, through one of the seated figures, the transitional line which pulls the composition forward and backward and makes a circular composition of what was commenced upon a line sweeping across the entire canvas.

The hillside entitled “Pathless,” by Horsley Hinton is a subject easily passed in nature as ordinary, which has been however unified and made available through the understanding of this principle. So much of an artist is its author that I can see him down on his knees cutting out the mass of blackberry stems so that the two or three required in the foreground should strike as lines across the demi-dark of the lower middle space. The line of the hill had cut this off from the foreground and these attractive lines are as [pg 58] cords tying it on. From the light rock in the lower centre the eye zigzags up to the line of hillside, cutting the picture from one side to the other. Fortunately nature had

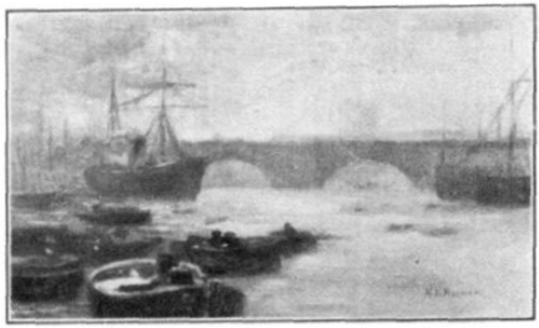
supplied a remedy here in the trees which divert this line. But this is insisted on in the parallelism of the distant mountains. The artist, however, has the last word. He has created a powerful diversion in the sky, bringing down strong lines of light and a sense of illumination over the hill and into the foreground. The subject, unpromising in its original lines, has thus been redeemed. This sort of work is in advance of the public, but should find its reward with the elect.

BALANCE BY GRADATION

Gradation will be mentioned in another connection but as a force in balance it must be noticed here. It matters not whither the tone grades, from light to dark or the reverse, the eye will be drawn to it very powerfully because it suggests motion. Gradation is the perspective of shade; and perspective we recognize as one of the dynamic forces in art. When the vision is delivered over to a space which contains no detail and nought but gradation, the original impulse of the line is continued.



HILLSIDE
Graded Light Upon Surfaces. Cloud Shadows



RIVER FOG
Light Graded by Atmospheric Density



THE CHANT
Gradation Through Values of Separated Objects

Gradation, as an agent of light, exhibits its loveliest effect and becomes one of the most interesting and useful elements of picture construction.

As a force in balance it may frequently replace detail when added items are unnecessary. [pg 59] In “Her Last Moorings” the heavy timbers, black and positive in the right foreground, attract the eye and divide the interest. The diversion from the hulk to the sky is easy and direct and forms the natural axis. A substitution for the foreground item is a simple gradation, balancing a like gradation in the sky.

The measure of light and dark when mixed is tonically the same as the gray of the gradation—but its attraction is weakened.

BALANCE OF PRINCIPALITY OR ISOLATION

These qualities are not synonymous but so nearly so that they are mentioned together. In discussing the principle of the steelyard it was stated that a small item could balance a very large one whose position in point of balance was closer to the fulcrum, but to this point must be added the increase of weight and importance which isolation gives. These considerations need not be mystifying.

In the charge to Peter, “Feed my sheep,” Raphael has produced something quite at variance with his ordinary plan of construction. Christ occupies one side of the canvas, the disciples following along the foreplane toward him.

Here is an isolated figure the equivalent of a group.

The sleeping senator of Gerome's picture effects a like purpose among the empty benches and pillars. The main group is placed near the centre, the small item at the extreme edge. Even Cæsar in the foreground—covered by [pg 62] drapery and in half shadow—is less potent as an item of balance, than this separate figure.

BALANCE OF CUBICAL SPACE.

Finally the notion that the picture is a representation of depth as well as length and height develops the idea of balance in the chain of items from foreground to distance. A pivotal space then will be found, a neutral ground in the farther stretch from which may be created so much attraction as to upend the foreground, or in the nether reach toward us there may be such attraction as to leave the distance without its weight in the convention of parts. The group with insufficient attraction

back of it topples toward us, to be sustained within the harmonious circuit of the picture only by such items of attraction behind it as will recover a balance which their absence gave proof of. This is a more subtle but none the less potent influence than the vertical and lateral balance and may best be apprehended negatively. The “aggressiveness” of many foreground items which are in themselves essential as form and correct in value is caused by the lack of their balancing complements in the back planes of the picture.

Balance is not of necessity dependent upon objects of attraction. Its essence lies in the movement from one part of the picture to another, which the arrangement compels, and this may often be stimulated by the intention or suggestion of motion in a given direction.

[pg 63]

CHAPTER IV - EVOLVING THE PICTURE

The artist gets his picture from two sources.

He either goes forth and finds it, or creates it. If he creates it the work is deliberate, and the artist assumes responsibility. If he goes to nature, he and nature form a partnership, she supplying the material and he the experience. In editing the material thus supplied, the artist discovers how great is the disparity between art and nature, and what a disproof nature herself is to the common notion that art is mirrored nature, and that any part of her drawn or painted will make a picture.

The first stage of the art collector is that in which his admiration dwells on imitation such as the still-life painter gives him, but soon his art sense craves an expression with thought in it, the imitation, brow-beaten into its proper place and the creative instinct of the artist visible. In other words, he seeks the constructive sense of the man who paints the picture. “The work of art is an appeal to another mind, and it cannot draw out more than that mind contains. But to enjoy is, as it were, to create; to understand is a form of equality.”[8] With the horse before the cart and the artist holding the reins, he gets a [pg 64] fresh start, and is in a fair way to comprehend Richard Wagner's assertion that you cannot have art without the man. In the same manner does the student usually develop. With the book of nature before him he is eager to sit down anywhere and read, attracted by each separate item of the vast pattern, but he finds he has opened nature's dictionary and that to make poetry or even good prose he must put the separate words

and phrases together.

After the first roll of films has been printed and brooded over, the kodac person is apt to ask in a tone of injured and deceived innocence, "*Well, what does make* a picture?"

He with others has supposed it possible to go to nature and, taking nothing with him, bring something back. Though one does not set out with the rules of composition, he must at least present himself before nature with fixed notions of the few requirements which all pictures demand. Having looked at a counterfeit of her within four sides of a frame and learned to know why a limited section of her satisfied him by its completeness he approaches her out of doors with greater prospects of success than though he had not settled this point. Good art, of the gallery, is the best guide to a trip afield. Having seen what elements and what arrangements have proved available in the hands of other men, the student will not go astray if he seek like forms in nature. Armed with defininite convictions he will see, through her bewildering meshes the faithful lines he needs. The star gazer with a [pg 65] quest for the constellations of the Pleiades or the Great Bear, must close his eyes to many irrelevant stars which do not fit the figure. Originality does not require the avoidance of principles used by others. Pictorial forms are world's property. Originality only demands "the causing to pass into our own work a *personal* view of the world and of life."[9] Personality in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred is a graft.

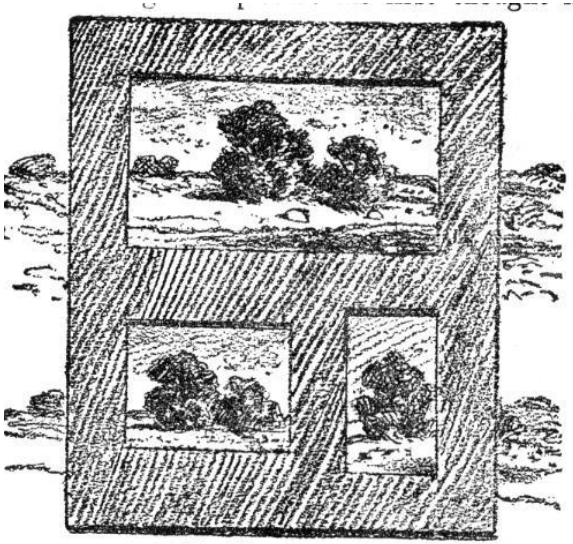
The forms of artistic expression have been preempted long ago. The men who had the first chances secured the truest forms of it and in a running glance through a miscellaneous collection of prints one's attention is invariably arrested by the force of the pictures by the older masters; so dominating is the first impression that we concede the case upon the basis of effect before discovering the many obstacles and omissions counting against their greater efficiency. But the essence is of the living sort. With this conceded and the fact that nature's appeal is always strongest when made through association with man it is for us to cultivate these associations.

“Study nature attentively,” says Reynolds, “but always with the masters in your company; consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals, with whom you are to contend.”

A wise teacher has said the quickest road to originality is through the absorption of other men's ideas.

Before going forth therefore with a canvas or [pg 66] plate holder, it behooves us first to know what art is. Certainly the most logical step from the study of constructive form is through the practical technique of work which we would emulate. To copy interpretations of outdoor nature by others is commendable either at the experimental period, when looking for a technique, or as an appreciation.

Besides this mental preparation, the next best equipment for finding pictures is a Claude Lorraine glass, because, being a convex mirror, it shows a reduced image of nature *in a frame*. The frame is important not only because it designates the limitations of a picture, but because it cuts it free from the abstracting details which surround it. If one has not such a glass, a series of small pasteboard frames will answer. The margin should be wide enough to allow the eye to rest without disturbance upon the open space. Two rectangular pieces that may be pushed together from top or side is probably the most complete device. The proportion of the frame is therefore adaptable to the subject and the picture may be cut off top, bottom or sides as, demanded.



THE VIEW-METRE.

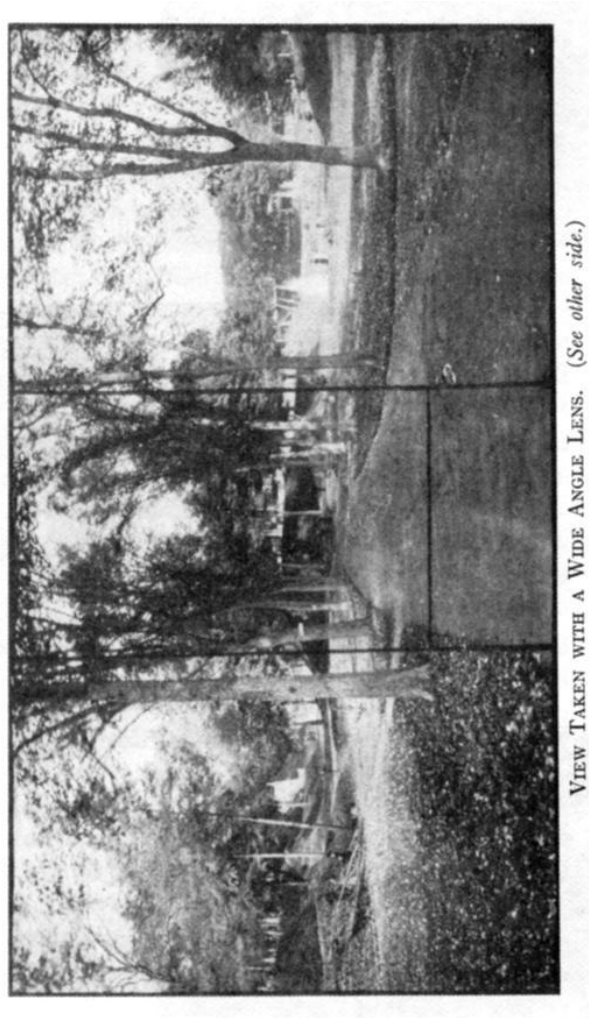






THREE PICTURES FOUND WITH THE VIEW-METRE (*See page 69*)

Many artists reduce all subjects to two or three sizes, which they habitually paint. The view-meter may in such cases be further simplified by using a stiff cardboard with such proportions cut out. By having them all on a single board a subject may be more rapidly tested than by the device of the collapsible sides. A light board, the thickness of a cigar-box cover, 4×5 inches, [pg 67] and easily carried in the pocket, will enable one to land his subject in his canvas exactly as he wants it, and avoid the grievance of reconstruction later. By leaving a broad margin about the openings, one obtains the impression of a picture in its mat or frame, and may judge of it in nature as he will after regard it when completed and on exhibition.



VIEW TAKEN WITH A WIDE ANGLE LENS. (*See other side.*)

The accompanying photograph was produced by a revolving camera encompassing an area of 120 degrees. As a composition it is not bad, but unfortunate here and there. It has a well-defined centre, and the two sides balance well, the left clogging the vision and thus

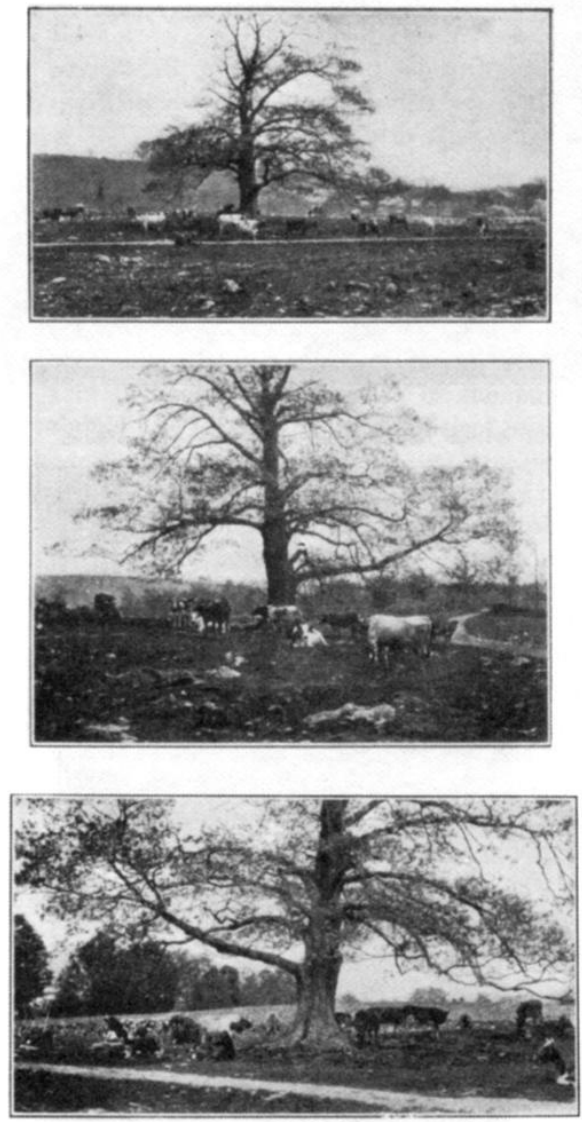
giving way to the right, which allows the eye to pass out of the picture on this side beyond the fountain and across the stretch of sunlight. At a glance, however, one may see three complete pictures, and with the aid of the view-meter a number of other combinations may be developed. Its construction is that of Hobbema's “Alley near Middelharnes,” in the National Gallery, London, of so pronounced formality that a number of such construction in a gallery, would prove monotonous.

Beginning on the left, we may apply the view-meter first to exclude the unnecessary branch forms and sky space on the top; second, to cut away the tree on the right, which, in that it parallels the line of the margin, is objectionable, and is rendered unnecessary as a side for the picture by the two trees beyond in the middle plane; and, third, to limit the extent of the picture on [pg 69] the bottom, tending as it does to force the spectator back and away from the subject proper. The interest is divided between the white building and rustic bridge and the pivot of this composition adjusts itself in line with the centre tree. In the next picture the first tree on left of avenue is cut away for the same reason as in the previous arrangement, and although one of a line of trees in perspective, the trunk as an item is unserviceable, as its branches start above the point where the top line occurs, and can therefore render no assistance in destroying an absolute vertical as has been done in the left tree by the

bifurcation, and the first on the right by the encroaching masses of leaves. The eye follows the receding lines of roadway beneath the canopy and is led out of the picture by the light above the hill. The last arrangement is more formal than either of the others but gives us the good old form of composition frequently adopted by Turner, Rousseau, Dupré, and others, namely of designing an encasement for the subject proper, through which to view it. For that reason after the arch overhead has been secured all else above is cut away as useless. The print has been cut a little on the right, as by this means the foreground tree is placed nearer that side and also because the extra space allowed too free an escapement of the eye through this portal, the natural focus of course being the fountain where the eye should rest at once. It has been cut on the bottom so as to exclude the line where the road and the grass meet—an [pg 69] especially bad line, paralleling the bottom of the picture and line of shadow upon the grass. This shadow is valuable as completing the encasement of the subject on the bottom and in starting the eye well into the picture toward its subject.

Our natural vision always seeks the light. Shadows are the carum cushions from which the sight recoils in its quest for this. Letting the eye into the picture over a foreground of subdued interest, or better still, of no interest is one of the most time-honored articles of the picture-maker's creed. If the reader will compare the first and last of these three

compositions he will see how in this respect the first loses and the last gains. The element of the shaded foreground in the first was cut out in preserving a better placement for the subject proper, which lay beyond.



PHOTOGRAPHY NEARING THE PICTORIAL

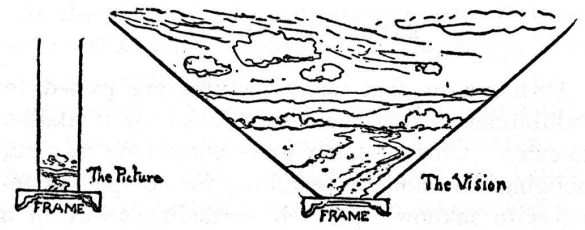
The photographer comes upon a group of

cows. “Trees, cattle, light and shade—a picture surely!” Fearful of disturbing the cows he exposes at a distance, then stalks them, trying again with a different point of sight and, having joined them and waited for their confidence, makes the third attempt. On developing, the first one reveals the string-like line of road cutting the picture from end to end, the cattle as isolated spots, the tree dividing the sky space into almost equal parts. In the second, the lower branch of tree blocks the sky and on the other side there is a natural window, opening an exit into the distance. This is desirable but unfortunately the bending roadway on the right [pg 72] accomplishes the same purpose and so two exits are offered, always objectionable. With this out, the value of the rock and foreground cow is also better appreciated as leading spots taking us to the natural focus, the white cow lying close to the tree. The rock in left corner having no influence in a leading line should be suppressed. The cattle now swing into the picture from both sides and one of them opposes the horizontal of her back to the vertical of the tree, thus easing the force of its descent.

In the last there is much more concentration. The road does not parallel the bottom and though passing out of the picture the vision is brought back again along the distant line of trees. The objection to this arrangement lies in the equal division of the subject by the tree-trunk. The white cow focalizes the vision but the sky and the more graceful branches

soon capture it. The cow in the right foreground is only valuable as an oppositional measure to the *line* of cows stretching across the picture which it helps to divert, otherwise she carries too much attraction to the side.

The best arrangement for the subject would have been the tree one-third from the left side, the white cow touching its line, one or two of those lying on the ground working toward the foreground in a zigzag, little or no diversion from the distance on the left of tree. The swing of the picture would then have been from the foreground to the focus, the white cow and tree, thence to the group under the tree and out [pg 73] through the sky. This would have divided the picture-plane into thirds instead of halves, bringing it into the form elsewhere recommended as being the arrangement of Claude's best pictures.



[pg 74]

CHAPTER V - ENTRANCE AND EXIT

GETTING INTO THE PICTURE

One reason that many pictures are passed in exhibitions is that the visitor lacks an invitation to enter. Others frankly greet one a long way off, obliging the wanderer searching for compelling interest to acknowledge their cordiality, aware of a gesture of welcome in something which he may later pause to analyse and at length apprehend.

It may appear in the freedom of an empty foreground, which, like a stage unadorned, merely supports the action upon it; or, if this foreground be adorned then happily by items of slight interest leading to the subject; or it may insist with such an emphatic demand for attention that the common places of receding perspective have been employed.

One spot or circumference there should be toward which through the suppression of other parts the eye is led at once. When there, even though the vision has passed far into the canvas, one is at the focal point only, the true goal of the pictorial intention. Any element

which proves too attractive along this avenue of entrance is confusing to the sight and weakening to the impression.

[pg 75]
One item after another, in sequence, the visitor should then be led to, and, having made the circuit and paid his respects to the company in the order of importance with that special care which prevails at a Chinese court function, the visitor should be shown the exit. Getting out of a picture is almost as important as getting into it, but of this later.

If the artist, in the composition of his picture, cannot so arrange a reception for his guests, he is not a successful host.

This disposal of the subject matter into which *principality* enters so acutely is more patent in the elaborate figure subject than in any other, with the distinction between an assemblage of, and a crowd of figures, made plain.

The writer once called, in company with a friend of the painter, upon the late Edmond Yon, the French landscapist. We found him in his atelier, and saw his completed picture, about to be sent to the Salon. He shortly took us into an adjacent room, where hung his studies, and thence through his house into the garden, showed us his view of the city, commented on the few fruit trees, the flowers, as we made the circuit of the little plot, and, at the porte, we found the servant with our hats. It was a perfectly logically sequence. We had come to the end; and how complete!

"He always does it so," said the friend. We had seen the man, his picture, his studies, his house, caught the inspiration of his view, had made the circuit of the things which daily [pg 76] surrounded him, and what more—nothing; except the hats. Bon jour!

The new picture, like any new acquaintance, we are tempted to sound at once, in a single glance, judging of the great and apparent planes of character, seeking the essential affinity. If we pass favorably, our enjoyment begins leisurely. The picture we are to live with must possess qualities that will bear close scrutiny, even to analysis. If we are won, there is a satisfaction in knowing why.

It must be remembered that the actual picture space in nature is that of a funnel, its size varying according to the extent of distance represented. The angle of sixty degrees which the eye commands may widen into miles. The matter of equipoise or unity therefore applies to most extended areas and no part of this extent may escape from the calculation.

The objection of formal balance over the centre is that it produces a straddle, as, in hopscotch one lands with both feet on either side of a dividing line. In all pictures of deep perspective the best mode of entrance is to triangulate in, with a series of zigzags, made easy through the *habit of the eye to follow lines,* especially long and receding ones. It is the long lines we seize upon in pinning the action of a figure, and the long lines which stretch toward us are those which help most to get us

into a picture.

The law here is that of perspective recession, and, it being the easiest of comprehension and the most effective in result, is used extensively [pg 77] by the scene-painter for his drop-curtain and by the landscapist, whose subject proper lies often in the middle distance—toward which he would make the eye travel.

When the opportunity of line is wanting an arrangement of receding spots, or accents is an equivalent.

The same applies, though in less apparent force, to the portrait or foreground figure subject.

Where the subject lies directly in the foreground, the eye will find it at once, but the care of the artist should even then be exercised to avoid lines which, though they could not block, might at least irritate one's direct vision of the subject.

Conceive if you can, for one could rarely find such an example in pictorial art, of the forespace corrugated with lines paralleling the bottom line of a frame. It would be as difficult for a bicyclist to propel his machine across a plowed field as for one to drive his eye over a foreground thus filled with distracting lines when the goal lay far beyond.

Mr. Schilling, in his well-known “Spring Ploughing,” has treated this problem with

great discernment. Instead of a multiplicity of lines crossing the foreplane, the barest suggestion suffices to designate plowed ground, the absence of detail allowing greater force to the distant groups.

In the Marine subject, especially with the sea running toward us, long lines are created across the foreground, but with respect to these, as [pg 78] may be noted in nature, there is a breaking and interlacing of lines in the wave form so that the succession of such accents may lead tangentially *from* the direction of the wave. A succession of horizontal lines is however the character of the marine subject. When the eye is stopped by these it has found the subject. Only through the sky or by confronting these forms at an angle can the force of the horizontals be broken. Successful marines with the camera's lens pointed squarely at the sea have been produced, but the best of them make use of the modifying lines of the surf, or oppositional lines or gradations in the sky.

In a large canvas by Alexander Harrison, its subject a group of bathers on the shore, one single line, the farthest reach of the sea, proves an artist's estimate of the leading line. On it the complete union of figures and ocean depended. Its presence there was simple nature, its strong enforcement the touch of art.

The eye's willingness to follow long lines may however become dangerous in leading away from the subject and out of the picture. What

student cannot show studies (done in his earliest period) of an interesting fence or stone wall, blocking up his foreground and leading the eye out of the picture? It is possible to so cleverly treat a stone wall that it would serve us as an elevation from which to get a good jump into the picture. Here careful painting with the intent of putting the foreground out of focus, could perhaps land the eye well over the obstruction, [pg 78] and if so, our consideration of the picture begins beyond this point. If the observer could take such a barrier as easily as a cross country steeple-chaser his fences and stone walls, there would be no objection, but when the artist forces his guest to climb!—he is unreasonable. For two years a prominent American landscape painter had constantly on his easel a very powerful composition. The foreplane of trees, with branches which interlaced at the top, made, with the addition of a stone wall below, an encasement for the picture proper, which lay beyond. The lower line, i.e., the stone wall, was in constant process of change, obliterated by shadow or despoiled by natural dilapidation, sometimes vine-grown. In its several stages it showed always the most critical weighing of the part, and a consummate dodging of the difficulties.

When finally exhibited, however, the wall had given way to a simple shadow and a pool of water. The attempt to carry the eye over a cross-line in the foreground had been a long and conclusive one, and its final abandonment an admonition on this point. A

barrier across the middle distance is almost as objectionable. In the subject of a river embankment the eye comes abruptly against its upper line, which is an accented one, and from this dives off into the fathomless space of the sky, no intermediate object giving a hint of anything existing between that and the horizon.

In order to use such a subject it would be necessary to oppose the horizontal of the bank [pg 80] by an item that would overlap and extend above it, as a hay wagon with a figure on top of it or the sail of a boat, and if possible to continue this transitional feeling in the sky by such cloud forms as would carry the eye up. Attraction in the sky would create a depth for penetration which the embankment blocked.



THE PATH OF THE SURF — *Photo*
Triangles Occurring on the Leading Line



THE SHEPHERDESS — *Millet*
Composition Exhibiting a Double Exit

The "Path of the Surf" is a splendid leading line ending most beautifully in a curve.

Many readers will recall the notable picture

by Mr. Picknell, now deceased, of a white road in Picardie. Here all the lines converged at the horizon. The perspective was so true as to become fascinating, a problem of very ordinary deception. More subtle is Turner's "Approach to Venice," see Fundamental Forms, in which the lines are substituted by spots—the gondolas—which, in like manner, bear us to the subject. The graceful arch of the sky also presses us toward the subject.

One may readily use the placement of the spots and substitute cattle instead of gondolas and woods for the spired city; or groups of figures, sheep, rocks, etc. The composition is fundamental, and will accommodate many subjects.

GETTING OUT OF THE PICTURE

This is important because necessary. It is much better to pass out than to back out. Pictures show many awkward methods of exit. In some there are too many chances to leave; in others there are none. Pictures in which there [pg 81] is no opportunity for visual peripatetics require no such provision. In the portrait we confront a personality, and some painters plainly tell us by the blank space of the background that there shall be but one idea to the observer's mind. In this event he has but to bow and withdraw. But

suppose the curtain of the background be drawn and a glimpse is disclosed of a landscape beyond. This bit of attraction leads us toward it. Instead therefore of breaking off from the subject we are led away from it. The associations with the subject are ofttimes interesting and appropriate and the great majority of portraits include them. As soon therefore as we begin on any detail in the background we connect the portrait with the pictorial and the sitter becomes one of a number of elements in the scheme, the fulcrum on which they balance. A patch of sky, besides creating an expansion in the diameter of the picture introduces color, often valuable, as noted later.

But more than this, these sky spots in a dark background are air holes. They enable us to breathe in the picture, giving a decided sense of atmosphere. When well subordinated they offer no distraction to the subject, but give to the picture a depth. When no other object is introduced, a gradation is serviceable. Much may be thus suggested and besides the depth and air properties thus introduced, such variety of surface excites visual motion. The eye always follows the course of light from the shadow. The artist may make use of this fact in balancing the picture and of leading the eye out where he [pg 81] will. As the elaborate subject is often approached through a curve or zigzag, in like manner it should be left, though the natural finish of such a series should connect easily with its start.

The eye should *never* be permitted to leave

the principal figure or object and go straight back and out through the centre. If this is allowed the width of the picture is slighted. Therefore if the attraction of the natural exit is greater than other objects they exist in vain.

The exit should be so guarded that after the visitor has moved about and seen everything, he comes upon it naturally. For example conceive a subject—figures or cattle—with the principal object in the foreground. From this the other objects, all placed on the left side, move in a half circle back and into the picture, this circuit naturally leading to an opening in the trees or to a point of attraction in the sky or to a glimpse of distance. If this be not of less interest than any object of the progression, the unity of the picture disappears, for from the principal object in the foreground the vision goes direct to the distance.

Providing two or more exits is a common error of bad composition. This is the main objection to the form of balance on the centre, which produces two spaces of equal importance on either side.

In the drawing of the "Shepherdess" by Millet the attraction of two alleys which the eye might take is largely regulated by the subordination of one of them by proportional size and a lowering of the tone of the sky. At best, however, it is a case of divided interest, though the deepest dark [pg 83] against the highest light helps to control the situation. If

for the balance of the pines in the snow scene a small tree on the right were added, the objection would then be that from the central point of attraction, the pines, the vision would go in two directions, toward the houses and the tree. The visual lines connecting these two points would cross the first or principal object instead of leading from this to one and thence to the other as would not be the case if the added tree appeared in the extreme *distance* on the right. Under this arrangement there would be progression into the picture. A still better arrangement would have been direct movement from the mass of trees to the houses placed on the right, with the space now occupied by them left vacant.

CHAPTER VI - THE CIRCULAR OBSERVATION OF PICTURES

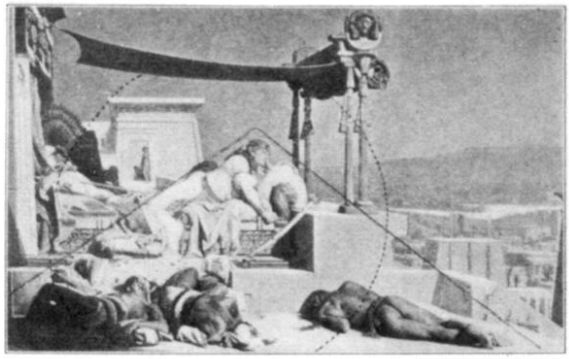
The entrance into a picture and obstacles thereto, as applied to landscape, has already been considered, from which it is evident that wisdom renders this as easy as possible for the vision, not only negatively, but through positive means as well. An obstruction through which penetration must be forced, diverting the attention, is like the person who claims us when we are trying to listen to

someone else.

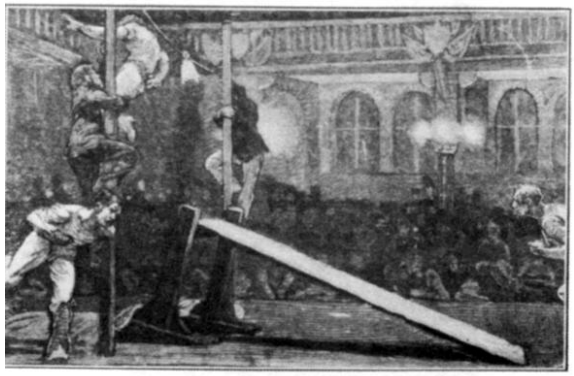
When in nature we observe a scene that naturally fits a frame and we find ourselves gazing first at one object and then at another and *returning again to the first,* we may be sure it will make a picture.

But when we are tempted to turn, in the inspection of the whole horizon (though this be circular observation), it proves we have not found a picture. Our picture, on canvas, must fit an arc of sixty degrees. The other thing is a panorama. The principle is contained in the illustration of the athletes. This picture has the fascination of a continuous performance and so in degree should every picture have.

In the foreground, or figure subject the same principles apply. The main point is to capture [pg 85] the observer's interest with the theme, *which to his mental processes shall unfold according to the artist's plan.* With twenty objects to present, which one on the chessboard of your picture shall take precedence and which shall stand next in importance, and which shall have a limited influence, and which, like the pawns, shall serve as little more than the added thoughts in the game?



THE SLAYING OF THE UNPROPITIOUS MESSENGERS
Triangular Composition — Circular Observation



CIRCULAR OBSERVATION — THE PRINCIPLE

In "The Slaying of the Unpropitious Messengers," a picture of great power and truly sublime in the simplicity of its dramatic expression, the vision falls without hesitation on the figure of Pharaoh, easily passing over the three prostrate forms in the immediate foreground. These might have diverted the attention and weakened the subject had not

they been skillfully played for second place. Their backs have been turned, their faces covered, and, though three to one, the single figure reigns supreme. Note how they are made to guide the eye toward him and into the picture and discover in the other lines of the picture an intention toward the same end, the staircase, the river, the mountain, the angular contour of the portico behind tying with the nearer roof projection and making a broken stairway from the left-hand upper corner. See, again, the lines of the canopy composing a special frame for the master figure.

Suppose a reconstruction of this composition. Behold the slain messengers shaken into less recumbent and more tragic attitudes, arranged along the foreplane of the picture; let all the [pg 88] leading lines be reversed; make them antagonistic to the principles upon which the picture was constructed. The subject indeed will have been preserved and the story illustrated, but the following points will be lost and nothing gained: A central dominating point of interest; the disparity between monarch and slave; the sentiment of repose and quietude suggested by a starlit night and the coordination of recumbent lines; the pathos of the lonely vigil, with the gaze of the single figure strained and fixed upon, the distant horizon whence he may expect the remnants of his shattered army.

The artist's first conception of this subject was doubtless that of a pyramid; the head of Pharaoh is the apex and the slaves the base

and side lines. The other lines were arranged in part to draw away from this apparent and very common form of composition. One has but to look through a list of notable pictures to find evidence of the very frequent use of these concentric lines drawing the vision from the lower corners of the picture to an apex of the pyramid.

Now, herein lies the analogy between the simplest form of landscape construction and the foreground or figure subject. The framework of both is the pyramid, or what is termed *the structure of physical stability*. In the landscape the pyramid lies on its side, the apex receding. It is the custom of some figure painters to construct entirely in pyramids, the smaller items of the picture resolving themselves into minor pyramids. In the single figure picture—the portrait, [pg 89] standing or sitting—the pyramidal form annihilates the spaces on either side of the figure, which, paralleling both the sides and the frame, would leave long quadrilaterals in place of diminishing segments.

Whether the pyramid is in perspective or one described on the foreplane of a picture, the principle is, *leading lines should carry the eye into the picture or toward the subject,* a point touched upon in the preceding chapter.

When reverie begins in a picture, one's vision involuntarily makes a circuit of the items presented, starting at the most interesting and widening in its review toward the circumference, as ring follows ring when a

stone is thrown into water. The items of a picture may arrange themselves in elliptical form, and the circuit may bend back into the picture; or the form may be described on a vertical plane, but the circuit should be there, and if two circuits may be formed the reverie will continue that much longer. The outer circuit finished, the vision may return to the centre again. If in a landscape, for instance, the interest of the sky dominates that of the land, the vision will centre there and come out through the foreground, and it is important that the eye have such a course marked out for it, lest, left to itself, it slip away through the sides, and the continuous chain of reverie be broken.

It is interesting to note in what cycles this great wheel of circular observation revolves, directing the slow revolution of our gaze.

In one picture it takes us from the corner of [pg 90] the canvas to the extreme distance and thence in a circuit back; in another it moves on a flat plane like an ellipse in perspective. Again, first catching the eye in the centre, it unfolds like a spiral.

Much of a painter's attention is given to keeping his edges so well guarded that the vision in its circuit may be kept within the canvas. A large proportion of the changes which all pictures pass through in process of construction is stimulated by this consideration—how to stop a wayward eye from getting too near the edge and escaping from the picture. When every practical device

has been tried, as a last resource the centre may be strengthened.

In order to settle this point to the student's satisfaction no better proof could be suggested than that he paint in black and white a simple landscape motif, with no attempt to create a focus, with no suppression of the corners and no circuit of objects—a landscape in which ground and sky shall equally divide the interest. He may produce a counterfeit of nature, but the result will rise no higher in the scale of art than a raw print from the unqualified negative in photography. The art begins *at* that point, and consists in the production of unity, in the establishment of a focus, in the subordination of parts by the establishment of a scale of relative values, and in a continuity of progression from one part to another. The procedure will be somewhat as follows: Decision as to whether the sky or ground shall have right of way; the production [pg 93] of a centre and a suppression of contiguous parts; the feeling after lines which shall convey the eye away from the focal centre and lead it through the picture, a groping for an item, an accent, or something that shall attract the eye away from the corner or side of the picture, where, in following the leading lines, it may have been brought, and back toward the focus again. Here then, will have been described the circuit of which we speak. In the suppression of the corners the same instinct for the elliptical line has been followed, for the composition, by avoiding them, describes

itself within the inner space.



HUNTSMAN AND HOUNDS
Triangle with Circular Attraction



PORTRAIT OF VAN DER GEEST — *Van Dyck*
A Sphere within a Circle

A composition in an oval or circle is much more easily realized than one occupying a rectangular space, as the vexing item of the corners has been disposed of, and the reason why these shapes are not popularly used is that hanging committees cannot dispose of them with other pictures. The attempt in the majority of compositions, however, is to fit the picture proper to the fluent lines of the circle or oval. In “Huntsman and Hounds,” a picture which is introduced because the writer is able to speak of points in its construction which these principles necessitated, the pyramidal form of composition is apparent, and around this a circuit is described by the hand, arm, crop, spot on dog's side, elbow of dog's foreleg, line of light on the other dog's breast, the light on table and chair in background—all being points which catch the eye and keep it moving in a circuit. In the first arrangement of this [pg 94] composition a buffet occupied the space given to the indication of chair and table. This did not assist sufficiently in diverting the awkward line from the left shoulder, down the arm, into the dog's head and out of the picture. Judgment here lay between filling the space with the dog's head, which would have separated it too far from the man, or striving to divert it as noted. The space between this line and the side of the canvas was *the* difficult space of the picture. There is always a rebellious member in every picture, which continues unruly throughout its whole construction, and this one did not settle itself until several arrangements of the

part were tried. In order to divert the precipitate line a persistence of horizontals was necessary—the table, the chair and the shadow on the floor. The shadows and the picture on the wall block the top and sides, and the shadow from the fender indicated along the lower edge complete the circuit and weaken the succession of verticals in the legs of dog and man.

CIRCULAR COMPOSITION

Circular observation in pictures whose structure was apparently not circular leads to the consideration of *circular composition,* or that class of pictures where the evident intention is to compose under the influence of circular observation—where the circle expresses the first thought in the composition.

This introduces us to the widest reaches of pictorial art, for in this category lie the greatest [pg 95] of the world's pictures. Slight analysis is necessary to discover this arrangement in the majority of the strongest compositions which we encounter. In the Metropolitan and Lenox Galleries of New York, the following pictures may be looked at for this form of structure, showing the circle either in the vertical plane or in perspective. Auguste Bonheur's large cattle-piece, Inness' “Autumn Oaks,” Corot's “Ville d'Avray,”

Knaus' “Madonna,” Cabanel's kneeling female figure, Koybet's “Card Players,” “Jean d'Arc,” by Bastian Lepage; “The Baloon,” by Julian Dupré; Wylie's “Death of the Vendean Chief,” Leutze's “Crossing of the Delaware,” Meissonier's “1807,” the three pictures of Turner, “Milton Dictating to His Daughters,” by Munkacsy, and Knaus' “Bow at a Peasants' Ball.” This list contains the most important works of these collections, and others might easily be added.

The head by Van Dyck carries with it the repose which belongs to *the completeness of the circle.*

Like Saturn and his ring, this sphere within the circle is typical of harmony in *unity,* and for this reason, though detached as we know it to be, it has a greater completeness than though joined to a body. It is on this general principle that all circular compositions are based—absorption of the attention *within the circuit.*



MARRIAGE OF BACCHUS AND ARIADNE — *Tintoretto*
Circle and Radius



ENDYMION — *Watts*
The Circle — Vertical Plane

In Tintoretto's “Marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne,” the floating figure offers us a shock not quite relieved when we recall the epoch of its production or concede the customary license [pg 96] to mythology. At a period in art when angels were employed through a

composition as a stage manager would scatter supernumeraries—to fill gaps or create masses—in any posture which the conditions of the picture demanded, it is not strange that the artist conceived this figure suspended from above in an arc of a circle, if in these lines it served his purpose. In this shape it completes a circuit in the figures, fills the space which would otherwise open a wide escape for the vision, and, by the union of the three heads, joins the figures in the centre of the canvas, completing, with the legs of Ariadne, five radial lines from this focus.

To the mind of a sixteenth century artist, these reasons were more convincing than the objection to painting a hundred and forty pounds of recumbent flesh and blood, with the support unseen. To the modern artist such a conception would be well-nigh impossible, though Mr. Watts gives us much the same action. Here, however, the movement of the draperies supplies motion to the figure of Selene, and as a momentary action we know it to be possible. Were the interpretation of motion by hair and drapery impossible, and the impression, as in the Tintoretto, that of the suspended nude model, it would be safe to say that no modern painter would have employed such a figure. This touch of realism, even among the transcendental painters, denotes the clean-cut separations between the modern and mediaeval art sense.

While these two examples show the “vortex” [pg 97] arrangement with fluent outlines, the portrait[10] by Mr. Whistler expresses the same

principles in an outline almost rectangular, but is to be placed in the same category as the other two. The chair-back, the curtain, the framed etching, are all formally placed with respect to the edges of the canvas, and as we observe them in their order, we return in a circuit to the head.

The circle in composition is discoverable in many pictures where there is no direct evidence that the intention was to compose thus, but wherein analysis on these lines proves that, led by unity, balance and repose (cardinal beacon-lights to the mind artistic), the painter naturally did it.

It is of interest to review this picture through its simple evolution. The head conceived in its pose, the next line of interest is one from neck to feet. This, besides being the edge of the black mass of the body, is the more apparent against the light gray wall and as a line is attractive in forming Hogarth's “Line of Beauty.” But beautiful as it may be, it commits an unlovely act in cutting a picture diagonally, almost from corner to corner. Interruption of this is effected by the hands and increased by the handkerchief. Shortly below the knee this is diverted by the base-board and at the bottom squarely stopped by the solid rectangle of the stool.

Suppose that the picture on the wall were missing; not only would the long parallelogram [pg 98] of the curtain be unrelieved, but the return of the line to the subject in the ensemble of the picture would

be broken. This, therefore, becomes the keystone of the composition. Other considerations besides its diversion from the curtain are, its curtailing of wall space, and, by its close placement to the curtain, its union therewith as a balance for head and body—in bulk of light and dark almost identical with them, though less forcible in tonal value.

In Wiertz's group about the body of Patroclus, though its contour is more decidedly circular (and in the use of this term is always meant a line returning on itself), it fails to prompt circular observation to the same extent as the foregoing. The eye seesaws back and forth along the lines of the hammock arrangement of light, and we are conscious of the extreme balance and the careful parcelling out of the units of force.

With all its evident abandon the method is painfully present, as though the artist, given so much Greek, was careful to add the same amount of Trojan. The level and plummet setting of the group exactly within the sides of the frame, with no suggestion of anything else existing in the world, puts it into the class of formal decoration, with which old masterdom abounds, and whence Wiertz received the inspiration for most of his great compositions.



FIGHT OVER THE BODY OF PATROCLUS — *Weirtz*



"1807" — *Meissonier*



VILLE D'AVRAY — *Corot*

THE CIRCLE IN PERSPECTIVE

More studiable is the vortex arrangement of

the “1807,” with its magnificent sweep of cavalry, where the tumultuous energy of one part is augmented by fine antithesis of repose in [pg 101] another. Meissonier's composition was expanded after the first conception was nearly completed. The visitor at the Metropolitan Museum may discover a horizontal line in the sky and a vertical one through the right end. This slight ridge in the canvas shows the dimensions of the original thought. The added space gave larger opportunity for the maneuvres of the cuirassiers, and set Napoleon to the left of the exact centre, where, by the importance of his figure, he more justly serves as a balance for the heavier side of the picture.

As in the Whistler portrait, the keystone was the picture on the wall, in this composition the group of mounted guardsmen on the left gives a circle's unity to it, helps to join the middle distance with the foreground, becomes the third point in the triangle, which gives pyramidal solidity to the composition and is altogether quite as important to the picture as the right wing to an army.

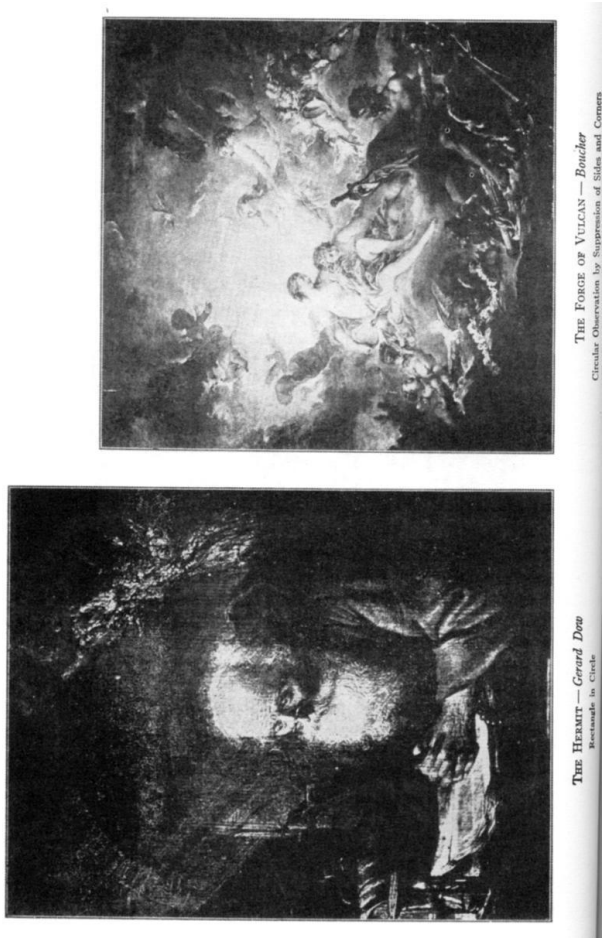
Corot was wont to rely on Nature's gift as she bestowed it, merely allowing his sensitive picture-sense to lead him where pictures were, rather than upon any artful reconstruction of the facts of nature. His “Little Music,” as he called it, came for the most part ready-made for him, and he simply caught it and wrote the score. His art is less impressive for composite quality, than, for example, that of Mauve, who, in the same

simple range of subject, sought to produce a perfect composition every time. In the “Lake at Ville d'Avray,” we have one of Corot's [pg 102] happiest subjects, though not especially characteristic. A considerable part of its charm lies in our opportunity to girdle it with our eye, and in imagination from any point along its rim to view its circumference as a page from Nature, complete.

RECONSTRUCTION FOR CIRCULAR OBSERVATION.

Circular composition traceable in what has been first conceived as pyramidal or rectangular, circular composition as the first intention, expressed either on a vertical plane or in perspective, i.e., circular or elliptical—and composition *made circular* not by any arrangement of parts, but by sacrifice and elimination of edges and corners are the three forms of composition which produce circular observation. The value of the circle as a unifying and therefore as a simplifying agent cannot be overestimated, especially in solving the problems which occur in composition where the circle has not been a part of the original scheme, but where, when applied, it seems to bring a relief to confusion and disorder. In many cases where all essential items are happily arranged, but, as a whole,

refuse to compose, the addition of some element or the readjustment of a part which will produce circular observation, will ofttimes prove the solution of the difficulty.



THE FORGE OF VULCAN — *Boucher*
Circular Observation by Suppression of Sides and Corners

THE HERMIT — *Gerard Dow*
Rectangle in Circle

Just as progression in a straight line will soon carry us out of the picture, will circular

progression keep us within its bounds. If then, circular observation affords the best means of appreciation, [pg 103] it follows that circular composition is the most telling form of presentation. There are many subjects which naturally do not fall in these lines, but which may ofttimes be reedited into this class. This reediting means composition, and two examples from a vast number are here given to show the working out of the problem. In the "Hermit," by Dow, the figure, book and hour glass compose in a simple left angle, but the head becomes the centre to a circular composition by the presence of the arch above and the encircling shadow behind and beneath the arm. The corners sacrifice their space to strengthen the centre and the vision is thus completely funneled upon the head. In striking contrast to this is the composition by Boucher. Here are the elements for two or three pictures thrown into one, and in some respects well governed as a single composition. Conceive, however, this subject bereft of the darkened corners, and the gradations which create a focus. The figures would lie upon the canvas somewhat in the shape of a letter Z, devoid of essential coherence, with the details in the foreground hopelessly exposed as padding.

Another resort in order to secure a vortex, or a centre bounded by a circle, is to surround the head or figure with flying drapery, branch forms, a halo or any linear item which may serve both to cut out and to hem in. It accomplishes something of what the hand

does when held as a tunnel before the eye. Such a device offers ready aid to the decorator whose figures must often [pg 104] receive a close encasement, fitted as they are into limited spaces, when many an ungracious line in the subject is made to disappear through the accommodation of pliant drapery or of varied tree forms.

In this class of compositions especially must the background be made the *complement* of the subject. What the subject fails to contain may there be supplied, a sort of auxiliary opportunity.

The subject, or most interesting part, should lie either *within* the circuit or be the most important item *of* the circle. It should never be *outside* the circle. If it appears there, the eye is thrown off of the elliptical track. If the reader will compare the "Lake at Ville d'Avray" by Corot with his "Orpheus and Eurydice," the charm in the former may reveal itself more completely through the jar to which the latter subjects us. The figures of the divine lyrist and his bride escaping out of one corner of the canvas do not enter at all into the linear scheme and in their anxiety to flee Hades they are about to leave art and the spectator. The picture is a strange counterpart of the Apollo and Daphne of Giorgione at Venice, and since it is known of Corot that he cared infinitely more for nature than art, it is fair to suppose that he had never seen this picture either in the original or reproduction. Had he been governed by the feeling for unity which his works usually display this pitfall in

the borders of plagiarism would not have snared him.

[pg 105]



ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE — *Corot*
Figures outside the natural line of the picture's composition



THE HOLY FAMILY — *Andrea del Sarto*
The circle overbalanced

The “Holy Family,” by Andrea del Sarto, is a composition in which the good intention of the artist to make a complete line within the sides of the canvas seems a matter of greater concern than other principles of composition, quite as important. The ellipse of the three figures is beautifully carried out, but it leaves one of them, the most important, in the least important place. The whole composition sags in this direction, the weight of Joseph, in half shadow, being insufficient to recover the balance. With these figures all well drawn and especially adapted in their contours to the organic lines of composition, several rearrangements might be made, as well as other arrangements, with any one of the four figures omitted, its place used for reserved space. No better practice in linear and mass composition could be suggested than slight modification of parts by raising or lowering or spacing or by the reconstruction of the background, of well known pictures in which the composition is confused.

A common mistake in the use of the circular form is that of making it too apparent. A list of pictures might be made wherein the formal lines of construction are very much in evidence. Such could be well headed by Raphael's “Death of Ananias,” where the formality of the arrangement is on a par with the strain and effort expressed in every one of its figures. The curved peristyle of kneeling disciples offers a temptation to push the end man and await the result on the others, more to witness a rearrangement than [pg 106]

create any further commotion in the infant church. The fact that this work is decorative rather than pictorial in intention cannot relieve the representation of an actual occurrence of the charge of being struck off in an oft-used and well worn mold. Compare with this Rembrandt's famous circular composition, “Christ Healing the Sick,” wherein though the weight on either side of Christ is about evenly divided, the formality of placement has been most carefully avoided, and where the impression is merely that the Healer is the centre of a body of people who surround him.

With the great principle of linear composition in mind, namely, that the vision travels in the path of least resistance, no rule need be formulated and no further examples produced to prove that the various items of a composition are taken at their required value *to the extent to which they adhere to and partake of the established plan of observation.*

[pg 107]

CHAPTER VII - ANGULAR COMPOSITION, THE LINE OF

BEAUTY AND THE RECTANGLE

The Triangle.

In angular composition the return of the eye over its course, as in circular observation, is practically eliminated. While the circle and ellipse offer a succession of items and events, one the sequence of the other, so that the vision concludes like a boomerang, angular composition sends a shaft direct, with no return.

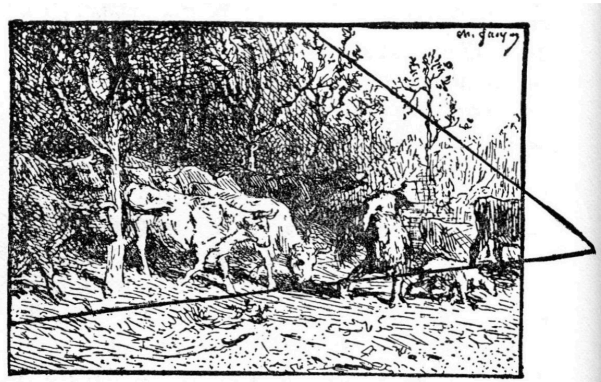
Here the pleasure of reverie through an endless chain must be exchanged for the stimulation of a shock, for force by concentration, for ruggedness at the expense of elegance.

Pure triangular composition is a form rarely seen, as, in most cases where the lines of the triangle are detected as the first conception, other lines or points have been added to destroy or modify them.

Jacque has been successful in the management of what is considered a difficult form. In the herder with cattle although we feel in the next moment the subject will have passed, while it lasts the artist has kept the eye upon it by the use of dark figures at either end and a concentration of light in the centre; also by the presence of the tree in the distance

which turns the eye into the picture as it leaves the cow on the right.

[pg 108]



THE HERDER—JACQUE.

Another example more complete as a composition is his famous "Shepherd and Sheep,"[11] in which the angle is formed by the dark dog at the extreme right, the lines expanding through the figure of the shepherd and thence above into a group of trees and below along the edge of the flock. In this example the base line runs into the picture by perspective and thence back into the picture to the trees.

The "Departure for the Chase," by Cuyp, shows an unsuccessful use of this shape.

In "The Path of the Surf," the main form—the surf—is a triangle and the two supporting spaces triangles. Such a construction is particularly stable, as these focalize on the

line of interest. Some artists construct most of their pictures in a series of related triangles. The [pg 109] writer calling upon Henry Bacon found him painting a group of transatlantic travellers on a steamer's deck. He pointed out a scheme of triangles which together formed one great triangle, but said he was looking for the last point for the base of this. A monthly magazine was suggested, which, laid open on its face, proved *le dernier clou.*

THE VERTICAL LINE IN ANGULAR COMPOSITION

When Giotto was asked for his conception of a perfect building, he produced a circle. When Michael Angelo was appealed to, he designated the cross. On both bases may good architecture and good pictures be founded. If the extremities of the Greek cross be connected by arcs, a circle will result, and if the Latin cross be so bounded we will have a kite-shape, or ellipse. The two designs are, therefore, not as dissimilar as may at first be supposed. In both, from the pictorial standpoint, they are the framework by means of which the same given space may be filled.

The simple vertical line is monotonous. Its bisection produces balance; a cross is the

result. Again, two crosses placed together, the arms touching, and three crosses in like position, will represent the picture plan of the grouping so frequently used by Raphael—a central figure balanced by one on either side, the horizon joining them, and behind this the balance repeated in trees and other figures.

[pg 110]
Pictorially, the vertical line is much more important than any other. It is the direction of gravity; it represents man upright, in distinction from the brutes; it also can stand alone, all other lines demanding supports. Of two equally forcible lines, this would first be seen. In composition, therefore, it has the right of way.

Let us start with a subject represented by a vertical line—a tree or figure. The directness, rigidity, isolation and unqualified force of such a line demands balance; otherwise, extension is the sole idea. With the thought of a frame or sides of the picture comes the necessary horizontal line, bisecting the vertical. Length and breadth have then been represented, something in two dimensions started, and the four sides of a frame necessitated.

In sculpture this consideration weighs nothing. A statue is framed by all outdoors. The vertical of a single figure pierces the unlimited sky, and the only consideration to the artist is that the mass looks well from any point of view. The group by Carpeaux is a sample of plastic art unusually picturesque,

and would easily fit a frame, because in it the vertical figure is supported by horizontals, both of lines and in the idea of lateral movement. It is, therefore, solid and complete and sets forth in its structure the thought of Alexander the Great when he had his artists represent, in a design painted upon his equipments, lasting power as a sword within a circuit.

This piece of sculpture is a cross within a [pg 113] cylinder, but on a flat plane the principle is just as forcible, as will further be shown in the picture by Israels.



ALONE — *Josef Israels*
Constructive Synthesis Upon the Vertical



THE DANCE — *Carpeaux*
The Cross within a Circle

"The Crucifixion," by Morot, is more

statuesque than picturesque, and would gain in effect if seen unembarrassed by the limitations of a frame. Its strength in one situation is its weakness in another. The presence of the frame creates three spaces, one above the horizontal and one on either side of the vertical, and these are empty. Therefore, although the single thought of the dying Saviour is sufficiently great to bear—nay, even, perhaps, demand—isolation, it unites itself with nothing else within our compass of vision, and, therefore, cannot be said to compose with its frame. The reader is now in a position to appreciate the simple mechanics which underlie the composition by Israels. In “Alone” the artist starts with the figure of the man—a vertical. The next thought closely allied is the woman. The two complete a cross. From either end two more verticals are erected. On the left another horizontal joins the vertical in the top of the table and unites it with another vertical, the shutter, and so on to the edge of the picture. On the other side the basket top leads off from the vertical and thence down the side to the floor and to the edge of the picture by the lines of fagots. The circuit, which helps to keep the vision in the picture and serves to render more compact the subject proper, is developed by the shelf, weights of the clock, basket, cap, items upon table, shutter and bedpost. For [pg 114] proof that the horizontal lines in this composition were all placed there for the relief of the verticals, with the first of which the picture starts, let us remove the table, basket and bench and see

how the arrangement becomes one of quadrangles, paralleling instead of uniting with the sides. In every case, in the accompanying illustrations, there has been an effort to reach out toward the sides and take hold there. Those that have established these points of contact most fully are the most stable and the most satisfying.

In the composition of the "Beautiful Gate," by Raphael, the two pillars, in that they span the whole distance from bottom to top, destroy all chance for unity. Three pictures result instead of one—a triptych elaborately framed. Even with these verticals cutting the picture into sections, had horizontals been introduced between them and in front, or even behind, some of the necessary unity of pictorial structure could have been secured. What connection exists between these several parts is all subjective, but not structural, the impulse to exhibit the wonderful columns in their remarkable perfection of detail being a temptation to which the picture was sacrificed.

Such an exhibition of the uncontrolled vertical produces an effect on a par with a football carried straight across the field and placed on the goal line without opposition. All the strategy of the game is left out, and although the play produces the required effect in the score, a few [pg 115] repetitions of the procedure would soon clear the benches. The interest to the spectators and players alike enters in when the touch-down is accomplished after a series of zigzags toward

the outer line, where force meeting force in a counter direction results in a tangent, when the goal is reached by the subtlety of a diagonal. A cushion carom is an artistic thing; a set-up shot is the beginner's delight. In the "Allegory of Spring," by Botticelli, we have a sample of structure lacking both circular cohesion and the stability of the cross adhesion. Like separate figures and groups of a photographic collection, it might be extended indefinitely on either side or cut into four separate panels. The accessories of the figures offer no help of union. Besides the lack of structural unity, no effort toward it appears in the conception of the subject. Each figure or group is sufficient unto itself, and the whole represents a group of separate ideas. This is not composition, but addition.

But what of the single figure in standing portraiture, when only the person is presented, and no thought desired but that of personality, when the outline stands relieved by spaces of nothingness? Though less apparent, the principle of union with the sides still abides. What is known as the lost and found outline is a recognition of this, an effort of the background to become homogeneous with the vertical mass, the line giving way that the surrounding tone may be let in. Such is the feeling with which many of the most subtle of Whistler's full-lengths have been [pg 116] produced. The portraits of Carriere are still more striking examples of absolute dismissal of outline.

In the well-known portrait of "Alice," by Mr.

Chase, where the crisp edges of a white dress are relieved against a dark ground, such treatment is impossible. Here, however, the device of flying ribbons is a most clever one, which, besides giving the effect of motion, causes an interruption in these clean-cut outlines, as also in the formal spaces on either side. The horizontal accent of dark through the centre of the canvas, suggesting a grand piano in the dim recesses behind, fulfills a like obligation from the linear as well as tonal standpoint.

ANGULAR COMPOSITION BASED ON THE HORIZONTAL

As the vertical may be termed the figure painters' line so the horizontal becomes the line of the landscape painter. Given these as the necessary first things, the picture is made by building upon and around them. The devices which aid the figure painter in disposing of one or many verticals have been briefly viewed. A consideration of the horizontal will necessarily take us out of doors to earth and sky, where nature constructs on surfaces which follow the horizon.

The problem in composition which each of these lines presents is the same and the

principle governing the solution of each identical; balance by equalization of forces. [pg 117] *Given a line which coincides with but one side of the picture it becomes necessary for the poise of the quadrilateral to cross it with an opposing line.* The rectangular cross, though more positive and effective, is no more potential in securing this unity than the crossing of lines *at a long angle.* A series of right angles will in time arrive at the same point as the tangent, but less quickly. Each angle in such an ascent produces the parity of both horizontal and vertical. The tangent expresses their synthesis. In Fortuny's "Connoisseurs," the right angle formed by the line of the mantel and the statue takes the eye to the same point as the tangent of the shadow. Again, the principle allows the modification of any arm of the cross, maintaining only the fact of the cross itself. When a line passes through the first or necessary line of construction it has, so to speak, incorporated itself as a part of the picture, and what it becomes thereafter is of no great importance. If the reader will make simple line diagrams of but a few pictures, this point will be made clear, and it will be found that such diagrams which represent either the actual lines of direction or lines of suggestion from point to point or mass to mass will comfortably fill the quadrilateral of the frame *as a linear design.*

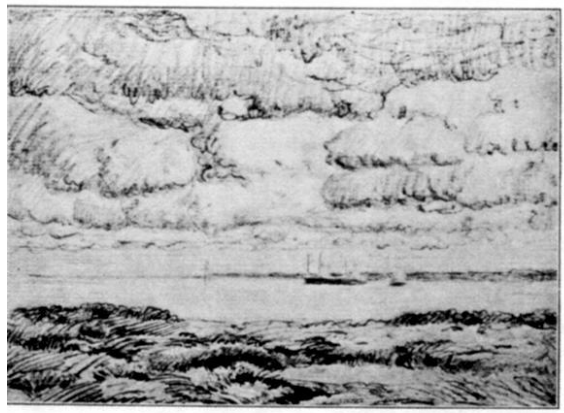
In all analyses of pictures the student should select the first or most commanding and necessary line of the conception. Having

found this thread the whole composition will unravel and disclose a reason for each stitch.

[pg 118]
Let a horizontal base line be assumed and verticals erected therefrom, *without crossing it.* The reason why no picture results is because there is no cross. Such a design would suggest many of Fra Angelico's decorations of saints and angels; or the plan of the better known decoration of “The Prophets” at the Boston Library by Sargent. These groups, it must be remembered, are not pictorial and are not compositions from the picture point of view. Their homogeneity depends not on interchange of line or upon other mechanics of composition, but only upon the unity of associated ideas. In instances, however, where some of the figures of these groups are *joined* by horizontal lines or masses which bisect these verticals the pictorial intention begins to be felt.



Parity of Horizontals and Verticals



Crossings of Horizontals by Spot Diversion

SKETCHES FROM LANDSCAPES BY HENRY RANGER

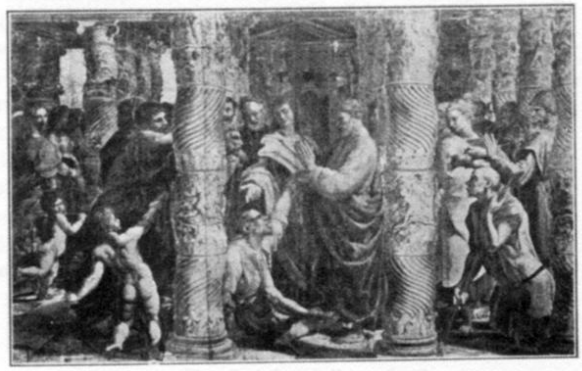
Of the accompanying illustrations that of the view on the shore with overhanging clouds shows a most persistent lot of horizontals with nothing but the lighthouse and the masts of the vessels to serve for reactive lines. At

their great distance they would accomplish little to relieve this disparity of line were it not for the aid of the vertical pillar of cloud and the pull downward which the eye received in the pool below the shore. The most troublesome line in this picture is the shore line, but an effort is made here to break its monotony by two accents of bushes on either side. What, therefore, would seem to be a composition "going all one way," displays, after all, a strong attempt toward the recognition of the principle of crossed lines.

[pg 121]
The sketch shows the constructive lines of a picture by Henry Hanger, and lacks the force of color by which these points are emphasized.



SKETCH FROM THE BOOK OF TRUTH — *Claude Lorraine*
Rectangle Unbalanced



THE BEAUTIFUL GATE — *Raphael*
Verticals Destroying Pictorial Unity

In the wood interior the stone wall is the damaging line. Not only does it parallel the bottom line, always unfortunate, but it cuts the picture in two from side to side. Above this the bottom line of the distant woods gives

another paralleling line, running the full length of the picture. Given the verticals together with these, however, their force becomes weakened until there ensues an almost perfect balance, the crossing lines weighing out even. The sketch from Claude Lorraine, out of the "Book of Truth," shows a great left angle composition of line not very satisfactory, owing to its lack of weight for the long arm of the steelyard. The principle, however, which this sketch exhibits is correct, and its balance of composition would be easily effected by the addition of some small item of interest to the extreme left. It is not, however, a commendable type of composition, owing to the difficulty of obtaining a rational balance, but when this is to be had in just its right force the plan of lines is excellent. In the matter of measures, were the whole composition pushed to the left we would at once feel a relief in the spaces. But the impressionist queries why not take it as it stands! So it might be taken, and a most balanced picture *painted from it;* but these considerations apply to the black and white, without the alteration which color might effect.



MOTHER AND CHILD — *Orchardson*
Horizonta-s Opposed or Covered



STREAM IN WINTER — *W. E. Schofield*
Verticals and Horizontals vs. Diagonal

No less aggravated a case of horizontals is the [pg 122] charming picture of mother and child by Mr. Orchardson. The long cane sofa and the recumbent baby are the two unaccommodating lines for which the mother's figure was especially posed.

Howsoever unconscious may appear the renderings of this figure, plus the fan, the underlying structure of it conforms absolutely to the requirements of the unthinking half of the subject. It is an instance of an unpromising start resulting with especial success through skillful playing to its awkward leads.

The principle of the diagonal being equivalent as a space filler to the crossed horizontal and vertical is shown by comparison of the wood interior with the winter landscape, in which the foreground has been thus disposed of. The force of a horizontal is more cleverly weakened by such a line because besides adding variety it accomplishes its intention with less effort. As a warning of what may happen when these principles are neglected or overdone one glance at the equestrian picture by Cuyp is sufficient. His subject, a man on horseback, is an excellent cross of a horizontal and vertical in itself and simply required to be let alone and led away from. The background destroys this and, instead of being an aid to circular observation, persists in *adding* a line to one in the subject which should have been parried, and thus cuts the picture in two.

Cuyp in this as in another similar picture had in mind light and shade rather than linear composition, but even so, the composition shows little [pg 123] intelligence. No amount of after manipulation could condone so vicious a slaughter of space and line opportunities which the background, with its reduplicating edge, accomplishes.

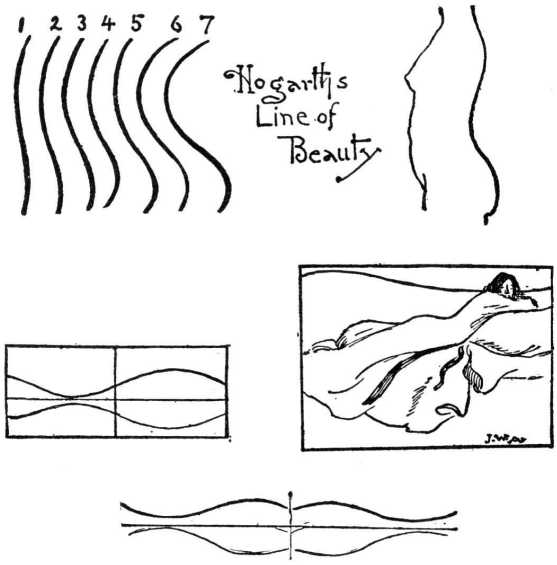
Study in that vast and changeful realm the sky offers a greater opportunity for selection than any other part of nature.

The sky is but one of two elements in every landscape and in the majority of cases it is the secondary element. If the sky is to agree with an interesting landscape it must retire behind it. If it causes divided interest, its interest must be sacrificed. Drawings, photographs and color studies of skies with the intention of combining them with landscape should be made in the range of secondary interest and with the calculation of their fitting to the linear scheme of landscape. Skies which move away from the horizon diagonally, suggesting the oppositional feeling, are more useful in an artist's portfolio than a series of clouds, the bottoms of which parallel the horizon, especially when these float isolated in the sky. When the formal terrace of clouds entirely fills the sky space, its massive structure is felt rather than the horizontal lines, just as a series of closely paralleled lines becomes a flat tint.

THE LINE OF BEAUTY.

The most elastic and variable of the fundamental forms of composition is the line of beauty, the letter S, or, conceived more angularly, the letter Z. This is one particularly

[pg 124] adapted to upright arrangements and one largely used by the old masters. We are able to trace this curvilinear feeling through at least one-third of the great figure compositions of the Renaissance. Note the page of sketches in the chapter on Light and Shade. Though selected for this quality they show a strong feeling for the sweeping line of the letter S. “The Descent from the Cross,” a most marked example, can well be considered one of the world's greatest compositions. Over and over again Rubens has repeated this general form and always with great effect. Whether the line is traceable upon the vertical plane or carries the eye into the picture and forms itself into the graceful union of one object with another, its great pictorial power is revealed to any who will look for it.



In Hogarth's essay on “The Line of Beauty,” he sets forth a series of seven curves selecting No. 4 as the most perfect. This is duplicated in nature by the line of a woman's back. If two be joined side by side they produce the beautiful curve of a mouth and the cupid's bow. Horizontally, the line becomes a very serviceable one in landscape. As a vertical it recalls the upward sweep of a flame which, ever moving, is symbolic of activity and life. To express this line both in the composition of the single figure and of many figures was the constant effort of Michael Angelo and, through Marcus de Sciena, his pupil, it has been passed down to us. By the master it was considered most important advice. “The greatest grace,” he asserts, “that a picture can have is that it express life and motion, as that

of a flame of fire." Yet in the face of such a statement from the painter of the "Last Judgment" it is difficult to reconcile the lack of it in this great picture.

The compound curve which this line contains is one of perfect balance, traceable in the standing figure. As an element of grace, alone, it affords the same delight as the interweaving curves of a dance or the fascination of coiling and waving smoke. Classic landscape, in which many elements are introduced, or any subject where scattered elements are to be swept [pg 126] together and controlled is dependent upon this principle. An absolute line is not of course necessary, but points of attraction, which the eye easily follows, is an equivalent. Many simple subjects owe their force and distinction entirely to a good introduction through a bold sweeping curved line. Thanks to the wagon track of the seashore, which may be given any required curve, the formality and frequent emptiness of this subject is made to yield itself into good composition. When the subject rejects grace and demands a rugged form, the sinuous flow of line may be exchanged for an abrupt and forcible zigzag. In such an arrangement the eye is pulled sharply across spaces from one object to another, the space itself containing little of interest. In the short chapter on Getting out of the Picture, the use of this zigzag line was emphasized.

The opportunity offered in the film-like cirrus clouds, which so frequently lie as the background to the more positive forms of the

cumulous, for securing the oppositional feeling, is one frequently adopted by sky painters. Besides strengthening the structure pictorially such arrangement frequently imparts great swing and movement in the lines of a sky, carrying the eye away from the horizon. When positive cloud motion is desired these oppositional masses may become very suggestive of wind, different strata showing a contrasted action of air currents.

As an adjunct to any other form of composition this line may be profitably employed. It plays second with graceful effect in the [pg 127] “Path of the Surf,” “The Lovers,” “The Stream in Winter,” “The Chant,” “1807,” and is traceable in many of the best compositions.

THE RECTANGLE

The last of the great forms of composition is the rectangle, but this always in connection with oppositional balance. Such a form attaches itself to two sides of the picture and the importance of a reacting measure is obvious. In this lies the warrant for its use, for without it unity is impossible. Of the six fundamental forms of composition this is the only one which is dependent, all the others containing within themselves the element of

balance.

The rectangle plus the isolated measure approaches the completeness of the cross and in the degree it lacks this completeness it develops opportunities for originality.

In the landscape by Corot the letter L is plainly shown. In the diagram of Fundamental Forms also, the tree-mass, cow and river bank in shadow serve as a sombre foil for the clump of trees upon the opposite shore which are bathed in the soft luminous haze of early morning. This is the real attraction which, grafted upon the heavy structure of the foreground affects us the more through the contrast. In Mr. Pettie's picture of "James II and the Duke of Monmouth," we have the opposition of the two lines, the attraction in the open space being the line of seats along the wall. These, in the dimly lighted [pg 130] interior, are scarcely assertive enough to effect the diversion which the open structure demands.

In perspective this arrangement merges into the triangle which has already been discussed. The "Sheep and Shepherd," by Jacque is constructed upon the L reversed and is an unusually strong example of a rare arrangement.

LINE

Structural line, or that which stands for the

initial form of the picture and conjunctive line, or that which joins itself naturally to such form are the two phases of line which engage the scientific study of the artist. Line for line's sake is an opportunity offered him quite apart from structural considerations. Line has a distinct aesthetic value no less than one contributive to picture mechanics. Thus pictures conceived in vertical lines bespeak dignity, solemnity, quietude; pillars, trees of straight shaft, ascending smoke and other vertical forms all voice these and allied emotions. With slightly less force does a series of horizontals affect us and with a kindred emotion. But when the line slants and ceases to support itself, or becomes curved, movement is suggested and another set of emotions is evoked. The diagonal typifies the quick darting lightning. The vertical curved line is emblematic of the tongue of flame; the horizontal curve, of a gliding serpent. In the circle and ellipse we feel the whirl and fascination of continuity. The linear impulse in composition therefore plays [pg 131] a part in emotional art independent of the subject itself.



THE ALTAR
The vertical: line of power, grandeur, solemnity, severity



ROMAN INVASION — *F. Lamayer*
Vertical line in action: dignified, measured, ponderous



THE FLOCK — *P. Moran*
The horizontal, typifying quietude, repose, calm, solemnity



The curved line: variety, movement



MAN WITH STONE — *F. V. Spitzer*
Transitional line, cohesion



THE DANCE — *Rubens*
The ellipse: line of continuity and unity



SWALLOWS — *From The Strand*
The diagonal: line of action, speed

AESTHETICS OF LINE



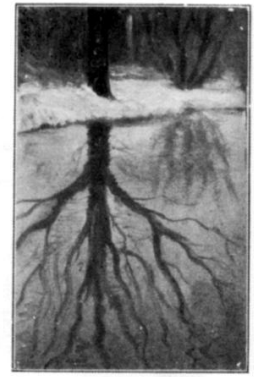
VINTER LANDSCAPE — *After Photograph*
Line of grace, variety, facile sequence



LINE VERSUS SPACE
The same impulse with angular energy
The line more attractive than the plane



RECONCILIATION — *Glackens*
Composition governed by the decorative exterior iine



DECEMBER — *After Photograph*
Radial lines with strong focalization

Where Pure Line is the motive and Decoration the impulse

AESTHETICS OF LINE

Pictorial art owes a large and increasing debt to decorative art and no small part of this is its simple beauty of line. It is rare however to find the painter governed in his first conception by any *positive* linear form. The outlines of great compositions only hint of decorative structure and give no evidence that they were planned as linear designs. The

requirement of linear design that she beautifully fill a space is met by pictorial composition through the many correlative opportunities which in her broader range are open to her, by which she *adds* to the fundamental forms of construction (which often prove bad space fillers) such items as connect their outlines with the encasement or frame. With some ingenuity advocates of pure design as the basis of pictorial structure, point out the similarity of certain compositions to formal, ornamental design or type forms of plants, flowers, etc., yet omit to state how many of the best compositions they reject in their search for the happy hit or to allow for the fact that in those which they cite, cruel disturbance of the beautiful scheme could easily be wrought by slight reconstruction, leaving the work quite as good. The author's contention is directly opposed to the notion that pictorial art is dependent on the flat plan of the design, which is only contributory, but that its essence is known by an apprehension of balance through the depth of the picture. Pictorial art is not an art of two dimensions but of three.

[pg 132]

CHAPTER VIII - THE COMPOSITION OF ONE, TWO, THREE AND MORE UNITS

Starting with a single idea represented by a single unit the coexistent thought must be the frame or canvas circumference. Supplying this we may then think of the unit as a matter of proportion. When the amount of space allowed the unit has been decided, the space between its circumference and the dimensions of the canvas, or what may be called the surplus or contributing area is the only thing that remains to engage us. Let the unit be a standing figure, or a portrait, head and shoulders.

The unification of a unit, enclosed in four sides, *with those sides* can only be accomplished by either having the mass of the figure touch the sides of the canvas, or stretch toward them with that intent. According to the *strength or number* of such points of attachment will the unit be found to maintain a stable existence amid its surroundings. In the case of the single figure standing within the frame where no chance of contact occurs, the background should show an oppositional mass or line attaching at some point the vertical sides of the figure to the sides of the canvas. An equivalent of such a line is a gradation, often the shadow from the figure serving to effect this union. If the shadow unites the outline with the background in

such a tone as to subdue or destroy this [pg 133] outline, the attachment becomes stronger and at the same time the positiveness of outline on the light side finds its contrast and balance in this area of mystery and envelopment.

A development by chiaroscuro is a necessity to the pictorial unity of the single figure.

In the portrait of Olga Nethersole (see “The Pose in Portraiture”), the photographer presents the section of a figure; not a picture. The spaces in the background form no scheme with the figure and have not been used to relieve the lines of the skirt. The sacrifice in half-tone of the lower part would have given prominence to the upper and more important part. Owing to the interest and attraction of the triplicated folds of the dress the vision is carried all the way to the lower edge, where it is irritated by the sudden disappearance. The picture has no conclusion. It is simply cut off, and so ended.

It is the opinion of some artists that the portrait having for its purpose the presentation of a personality should contain nothing else. With the feeling that the background is something that should not be seen, more art is often expended in painting a space with nothing in it than in putting *something there* that may not be seen. In doing nothing with a background a space may be created that says a great deal that it should not.

There is nothing more difficult than the composition of two units especially when both are of equal prominence. The principle of Principality sets its face sternly against the attempt.

[pg 134]
One must dominate, either in size, or attraction, either by sentiment or action.

Art can show distinguished examples of two figures of equal importance placed on the same canvas, but pictorially they lack the essential of complete art,—unity. The critical study of this problem by modern painters has secured in portraiture and genre much better solutions than can be found in the field of good painting up to the present. We may look almost in vain through old masterdom and through the examples of the golden age of portraiture in England, discovering but few successes of such combination in the works of Gainsborough, Reynolds and others.

The foreplacement of one figure over another does not always mean prominence for it. Light, as an element, is stronger than place. On this basis where honors are easy with the two subjects one may have precedence of place and one of lighting.

The difficulty in the arrangement of two is in their union. If, for instance, they are opposed in sentiment as markedly as two fencers there yet must be a union secured in the background. If placed in perspective, perspective settles most of the difficulty.



THE LOVERS — *Gussow*



THE POULTERERS — *Wallander*

UNITY AND ITS LACK

The accompanying pictures are examples at both ends of the scale. "The Lovers," in construction, shows what all pictures demand, the centripetal tendency. All the elements consist. As a picture it is complete; another figure would spoil it for us and them. Not so the [pg 135] "Poulterers"; persons could come and go in this picture without effecting it. It is but a section at best. One can imagine a long row of pickers, or we could cut it through the centre and have two good *studies.* There is no union. The other contains principality, transition of line, balance of light and shade, circular observation, opposition of color values and the principle of sacrifice.

In Mr. Orchardson's "Mother and Child" the first place is given to the child in white; the background carries the middle tint and the mother has been reserved in black. Greater sacrifice of one figure to another, the mother to the child, is seen in Miss Kasebier's picture of a nude infant held between the knees of the mother whose face is so abased as to be unseen; or in John Sargent's portrait of a boy seated and gazing toward us into space while his mother in the half-shadow of the background reads aloud. The greatest contributing force to contrast is sacrifice. The subject is known to be important by what is conceded to it.

The portrait of two gentlemen by Eastman Johnson is one of the most successful attempts at bringing two figures of equal importance on to one canvas. They are in conversation, the one talking and active, the

other listening and passive, and the necessary contrast is thus created.

In the combination of three units the objection of formal balance disappears. If one be opposed by two, the force gained by the one through [pg 136] isolation commensurates the two. In such arrangement the two may be united by overlapping so that though the sense and idea of two be present it is shown in one mass as a pictorial unit. This general disposition, experience shows to be the best. Two other good forms are two separated units joined by other items and opposed to one, or the three joined either directly or by suggestion, the units balanced like a triangle by opposition. The Madonna and St. John with the Infant Christ is a sample of the first. In the "Connoisseurs" by Fortuny we have the second form, and in the "Huntsman and Hounds" the third. A most original and commendable arrangement of three figures by W. L. Hollinger appears in "The Pose in Portraiture," the members of a trio, violin, cello and piano. The pianist is designated by the suggestion of her action which is completed out of the picture. In her position however she accomplishes the balancing of two figures against one.

THE FIGURE IN LANDSCAPE

A writer on the use of the figure in out-of-door photography after leading the reader through many pages concludes by saying: after all you had better leave them out.

In two works on photography from an English and American press the writer has seen this article quoted in full and therefore infers that the author has been taken seriously.

The relation of Man to Nature, and the [pg 137] sentiment, interchangeable, proceeding from one to the other, is a link binding the one to the dust from which he sprang and the other to the moods of man to which she makes so great an appeal. It is a union of a tender nature to the real lover of the voiceless influences which surround him:

> "Tears, idle tears,"
> "I know not what they mean,"
> "Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes"
> "In looking on the happy Autumn fields."

Can a sentiment so strong in fact, be divorced in art? It is the fulcrum on which the art of Mauve and Millet and Walker lifts and turns us. It is not necessary to mention other painters; but to the case in point observe that at Barbizon a photographer of artistic perceptions has for years followed in the footprints of Millet. If nature moves us directly she will move us through our own kind. We feel the vastness of a scene by the presence of a lone figure. The panoramic grandeur of the sky attracts us the more if it has also appealed to a figure in the picture.

But beyond this affinity in the subject there are sufficient reasons why the figure should be included. The figure can be moved about as a knight in the game, hither and yon as the fixed conditions of topography demand. Many a landscape which would be entirely useless without such an element is not only redeemed, but is found to be particularly prepared and waiting for this keystone. Take for example [pg 138] a picture in which lines are paralleling one another in their recession from the foreground or where there is a monotony in any horizontal sequence. The vertical of the figure means the balance of these. The principle is one already noted, action balancing action in contrary direction.

What of the nymphs of Corot, or the laveuses bending at the margin of the lake, the plowman homeward plodding o'er the lea, the shepherd on the distant moor, the woodsman in the forest, the farmer among his fields. We associate our vision of the scene with theirs. When as mere dots they are discerned, the vastness of their surroundings is realized at their expense and the exclamation of the psalmist is ours: “What is man that thou art mindful of him.”

The danger in the use of the figure is that it is so frequently lugged in. The friends that happen to be along are often made to do. There is no case where the fitness of things is more compulsory than in the association of figures with landscape. The haymaker creates a sensation on Broadway but no more so than Dundreary crossing a plowed field in Oxford

ties. As the poetry of a Corot landscape invites the nymphs to come and the ruggedness of the Barbizon plain befits the toiling peasants of Millet, so should our landscape determine the chord in humanity to be harmoniously played with it.

A fault in construction is frequently seen in the lack of simplicity of foreplane and [pg 139] background. It must first be determined whether it is to be a landscape with figures or figures in landscape. The half one and half another picture is a sure failure.

The most serviceable material one may collect in sketching are such positions which play second or third parts in composition; cattle or other animals in back or three-quarter view which readily unite with and lead to their principals.

In the selection of the subject the main object has most of one's thought. This however usually “goes” without thought, asserting itself by its own interest. Figures which are less interesting than this and still less, such as will combine with the subject proper, are what the painter and illustrator long for. As with the background, those things which are not of sufficient interest to be worth while in themselves are, owing to their lesser significance, of the utmost importance to the composer. Note in the usual Van Marke cattle picture of five cows, the diminishing interest in the other four, or the degree of restraint expressed in most of the figures successfully introduced into landscape.

[pg 140]

CHAPTER IX - GROUPS

In the statuesque group the outline is important because this is seen against the background of wall, or sky, and frequently in silhouette. Any fault in its contour as a mass is therefore emphasized. This consideration applies pictorially to groups which are complete in themselves and have no incorporation with backgrounds, such for instance as the photographic group of a number of people. Here personality is the first requirement, but harmony of arrangement and picturesqueness may be united thereto. The two best shapes are the oval and the pyramid. In either of these outlines there is opportunity for a focal centre, always important. In forming such an arrangement the focus should be the first consideration, item by item being added. As the group approaches the outline it must be governed according to the form desired. A more artistic combination of figures will be found to be a separation into a large and a small group, the principal figure placed in either. If in the former, the figures of the smaller group must be sacrificed to this figure, either in pose or lighting. If the principal figure is in the

smaller group or entirely separate, this isolation will prove sufficient for the distinction.

[pg 141]
Where greater liberties may be taken and the intention is for a purely artistic composition, the curvilinear S shape will be found a good line to build upon. When this is too apparent a single oppositional figure will destroy its formality.

The possibilities of the single figure as a reserve, kept to be placed at the last moment where something is necessary, are worth noting. If the group be too formal in outline, lateral arrangement, or expression, the reserve may be played as a foil to create a diversion.

In all successful groups the principle of sacrifice must play havoc. Here the artist should expect to pay for his art scruples. Rembrandt was the first painter sacrificed to these instincts. When the order to paint the "Municipal Guard" came to him he saw in it an opportunity toward the pictorial. Knowing what this entailed he persevered, despite the mutterings of his sitters, the majority of whom were ill pleased with their respective positions. When finally the canvas was finished, full of mystery and suggestiveness and those subtle qualities, such as before had never been seen in Dutch art, those for whom it had been executed expressed their opinion by giving an order for the same to a rival. His picture is a collection of separate individuals,

each having an equal importance. Here was the sudden ending of Rembrandt's career as a painter of portraits, only one canvas of an important group being painted thereafter—the "Syndics." A certain reason in this popular criticism cannot be denied. The composition is unnecessarily [pg 142] scattered and the placements arbitrary, though through the radial lines of pikes and flag pole the scattered parts are drawn together. The composition partakes of the confusion of the scene depicted, yet in its measure of parts one can doubt not that the comparative values of his sitters have been considered.

The democracy of man in his freedom and equality is the despair of the artist who knows that the harmony of the universe is conditional on kingship and principalities and powers, and the scale of things from the lowest to the highest.

Says Mr. Ruskin: "The great object of composition being always to secure unity—that is, to make many things one whole—the first mode in which this can be effected is by determining that one feature shall be more important than all the rest and that others shall group with it in subordinate position."

Principality may be secured either by attraction of light as in a white dress or by placing the figure as the focus of leading lines as are supplied by the architecture of a building, or such lines as are happily created by surrounding figures which proceed toward the principal one, or by including such a

figure in the most important line. Again the figure for such a position may be the only one in a group which exhibits unconcern or absolute repose, the others by expression or action acknowledging such sovereignty.

The summer time out-of-door group which is [pg 143] so frequently interesting only to "friends," in many cases affords opportunities for pictures attractive to all. The average photographer is concerned only with his people; the background is brought to mind when he sees the print. Although little or no interest may be found in the background it should be appropriate, and should play a reserve part, serving the chiaroscuro and therefore the illumination of the subject and creating an opportunity for the exit which always gives depth and an extended interest. A mass of foliage with little penetration by the sky except in one or two places and at the side, not the centre, may always be found safe. If the attraction is too great the group suffers. Appreciating the importance of his setting for groups the photographer must select these with three points in view; simplicity, uninterest and exit in background; simplicity, uninterest and leading line or balancing mass or spot (if required) in foreground. When looking for backgrounds he may feel quite sure he has one if it is the sort of thing he would never dream of photographing on its own account. Besides being too interesting, most backgrounds are inappropriate and distracting. The frequent commendations and prizes accorded to good

subjects having these faults and therefore devoid of unity tell how little even photographic judges and editors think on the appropriate and essential ensemble in composition.

With the background in unobjectionable evidence the photographer should rapidly address [pg 144] his posers a little lecture on compositional requirements and at the end ask for volunteers for the sacrificial parts, at the same time reminding them that the back or side *view* is not only characteristic of the person but often very interesting. He should maintain that a unity be evident in the group; of intent, of line, and of gradation. The first is subjective and must be felt by the posers. The other two qualifications are for the artist's consideration. At such a time his acquaintance with examples of pictorial art will come to his aid. He must be quick to recognize the possibilities of his material which may be hurriedly swept into one of the forms which have justified confidence.

When a continuity of movement has been secured, a revisionary glance must be given to determine if the whole is balanced; background, foreground and focus, one playing into the other as the lines of a dance, leading, merging, dissolving, recurring.

Mindful of the distractions of such occasions, the wise man has done his thinking beforehand, has counted his figures, has noted the tones of clothing and has resolved on his focal light. With this much he has a start and

can begin to build at once. His problem is that of the maker of a bouquet adding flower to flower around the centre.

To make a rough sketch from the models themselves posed and thought over, with the opportunity for erasures of revisions before leading them out of doors, often proves economy of time.

[pg 144]
It is a custom of continental painters to compose extensive groups and photograph them for study in arrangement. The author has seen numerous compositions in photography in which artists have posed as characters of well-known paintings.

Much can be learned of good grouping from the stage, especially the French stage. The best managers start with the picturesque in mind and are on the alert to produce well arranged pictures. The plays of Victorien Sardou and the classic dramas of the state theatre are studies in the art of group arrangements.

It will be noticed in most groups that there is an active and a passive element, that many figures in their reserve are required to play second to a few. The active principle is represented by these to whom a single idea is delivered for expression.



RETURN OF ROYAL HUNTING PARTY — *Isabey*



THE NIGHT WATCH — *Rembrandt*

In "The Return of the Hunting Party" the group of hounds, huntsman and deer is such an element of reserve, contrasting its repose with the bustle and activity of the visitors. It is a diversion also for the long line stretching across the picture. This is the more evident

through the repetition of it in the line of the second-story and roof and below in the line of game which unnecessarily extends the group of hounds. A relief for the insistent line of the figures could have been supplied by lighter drapery back of the table. This then would have created a cross tone connecting the hounds in a curve with the upper centre panel. It is a picture in five [pg 146] horizontal strips, and is introduced for the warning it contains in its treatment of a group which is in itself *a line*. The well-known "Spanish Marriage" by Fortuny also shows the reserve group, but the contrast is more positive both in repose and color. The main and more distant group is well centralized and there is a clever diminuendo expressed in its characters.



DEPARTURE FOR THE CHASE — *Cuyp*
Background Compromising Original Structure



Manzi, Joyant & Co.
REPOSE OF THE REAPERS — *L. L'hermitte*
The Curvilinear Line

In "The Reapers" this idea has apt illustration. The figure in the foreground is in contrast with the remaining three, both as an oppositional line and in his action, the three being in repose. The single figure, though

active, does not attract as much as the child who receives importance from the attention of the two figures. Her position, opposed to the two, turns the interest back into the group. In all the compositions by this master one is impressed by the grace and force of the arrangement. A small portfolio of his charcoal reproductions or a few photographs of his pictures should be a part of the print collection of every artist. No better designer of small groups ever lived.

With the amount of good art now coming from the camera it is strange that no groups of note have been produced.[12] In the field of *pure portraiture* the attempt may as well be abandoned. The photographer can at best but mitigate conditions. The picture group can only apply when sacrifice and subordination are possible.

A study of famous groups will settle this and other points mentioned, beyond question. In the [pg 149] religious group, where the idea of adoration was paramount, the principal figure was usually, though not always, given place in the upper part of the picture toward which by gestures, leading lines or directed vision our attention is drawn at once. Note the figures which sacrifice to this effect in the "Transfiguration," "The Immaculate Conception," "The Sistine Madonna," "The Virgin Enthroned," "The Adoration of the Magi," and in fact all of the world famous compositions of the old religious art.



ALLEGORY OF SPRING — *Botticelli*
Separated concepts expressing separate ideas



DUTCH FISHER FOLK — *F. V. S.*
Separated concepts of one idea



THE COSSACK'S REPLY — *Répin*
Unity through a cumulative idea

THE DECORATIVE AND PICTORIAL GROUP



THE COSSACK'S REPLY — *Répin*
Unity through a cumulative idea
THE DECORATIVE AND PICTORIAL GROUP

In one of the most famous of modern groups "The Cossacks Reply to the Sultan of Turkey," by the greatest of Russian painters Elias Repine, the force given to the hilarious frenzy of the group by the occasional figure in repose is easily apparent.

The answer to a summons for surrender is being penned upon a rude table around which press close the barbaric leaders of the forces gathered in the distance. Some are lolling on wine casks, others indifferently gaze at the fingers of the clerk as he carefully pens the document, others smoke silently, one is looking out of the picture as though unconcerned. Yet life and movement are instinct in every part, for though the action is consigned to but a few,—these form a series of small climaxes through the entire circumference of the group and we feel in another moment that the passive expressions will in their turn be exchanged for the mad ribaldry of laughter which has seized their brethren. The group is a triumph for several æsthetic realities [pg 150] produced and heightened by contrast and subordination.

The principality of repose is well illustrated in the group of "The Chant" where the inaction of the woman dominates through its contrast with the effort expressed by the other members of the group.

There are three types of group composition;

first, where the subject's interest is centred upon an object or idea within the picture as in “The Cabaret” or Rembrandt's “Doctors” surrounding a dissecting table; second, where the attraction lies outside the picture as in the “Syndics” or the “Night Watch,” and third, where absolute repose is expressed and the sentiment of reverie has dominated the group, as in “The Madonna of the Chair,” and the ordinary family photograph.

The spiritual or sentimental quality of the theme should have first consideration and dictate the form of arrangement. A unity between the idea and its form of expression constitutes the desideratum of refinement in composition.

[pg 151]

CHAPTER X - LIGHT AND SHADE

In this familiar term in art the importance of the two elements is suggested in their order.

The effort of the painter is ever in the

direction of light. This is his thought. Shade is a necessity to the expression of it.

Chiaroscuro,—from the Italian, *light obscure,* in its derivation, gives a hint of the manufacture of a work of light and shade.

Light is gained by sacrifice. This is one of the first things a student grasps in the antique class. Given an empty outline he produces an effect of light by adding darks. So do we get light in the composition of simple elements, by sacrifice of some one or more, or a mass of them, to the demands of the lighter parts. “Learn to think in shadows,” says Ruskin. Rembrandt's art entire, is the best case in point. A low toned and much colored white may be made brilliant by dark opposition. The gain to the color scheme lies in its power to exhibit great light and at the same time suggest fullness of color.

As we have discussed line and mass composition as balanced over the central vertical line, so is the question of light and shade best comprehended, as forces balancing, over a broad [pg 152] *middle tint.* The medium tint is the most important, both for tone and color. This commands the distribution of measures in both directions; toward light and toward dark. Drawings in outline upon tinted paper take on a surprising finish with a few darks added for shadow and the high lights touched in with chalk or Chinese white. The method in opaque water color, employed by F. Hopkinson Smith and others, of working over a tinted paper such as

the general tone of the subject suggests, has its warrant in the early art of the Venetian painters. If a blue day, a blue gray paper is used; if a mellow day, a yellow paper.

In pictorial art the science of light and dark is not reducible to working formulae as in decoration, where the measures of *Notan* are governed on the principle of interchange. Through decoration we may touch more closely the hidden principles of light and shade in pictures than without the aid of this science, and the artist of decorative knowledge will always prove able in "effect" in his pictorial work.

With that clear conception of the power of the light and the dark measure which is acquired in the practice of "spotting" and filling of spaces, especially upon a middle tint, the problem of bringing into prominence any item of the picture is simplified upon the decorative basis.

Pictorially the light measure is more attractive than the dark, but the dark in isolation is nearly as powerful.

[pg 153]
With this simple notion in mind the artist proceeds upon his checker-board opposing force to force.

With him the work can never be as absorbing as to the decorator whose items are all of about the same value and of recurring kinds. The subject dictates to the painter who must

play more adroitly to secure an effect of light and shade by the use of devices such as nature offers.

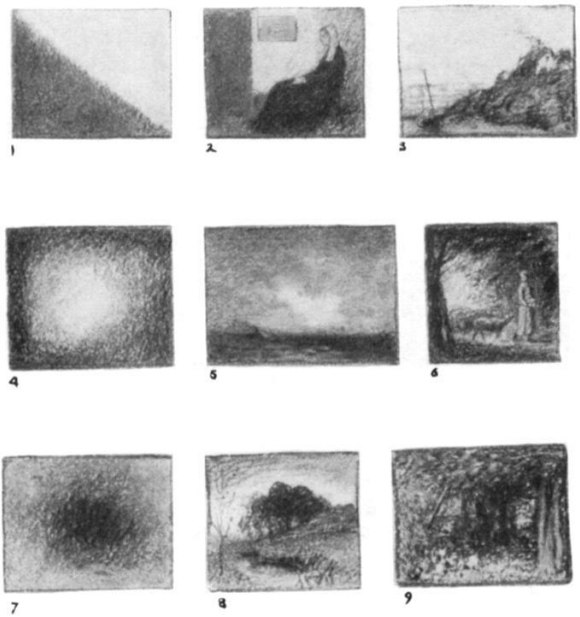
As a matter of *brilliancy of light,* with which painting is concerned, the effect is greater when a small measure of light is opposed to a large measure of dark than when much light is opposed to little dark. Comparison between Whistler's “Woman in White,” a white gown relieved against a white ground, the black of the picture being the woman's hair, and any one of the manger scenes of the fifteenth century painters with their concentration of light will prove how much greater the sense of light is in the latter.

When much light and little dark produces great brilliancy it is usually by reason of a gradation in the light, giving it a cumulative power, as is seen in the sky or upon receding objects on a foggy day. A small dark added, intensifies the light, not only by contrast of measure, but in showing the high key of the light measures.

Accents of dark produce such snappiness as is commended by the publisher who esteems the brilliancy which a rapid interchange of lights and [pg 154] darks always yields, a sparkle, running through the whole and easily printed. The works of Mr. Wenzell as a single example of this quality, or of Mr. Henry Hutt, in lighter key, will be found to gain much of their force from a very few accents of dark. On the other hand when the work deals with a medium tone and darks, with few high

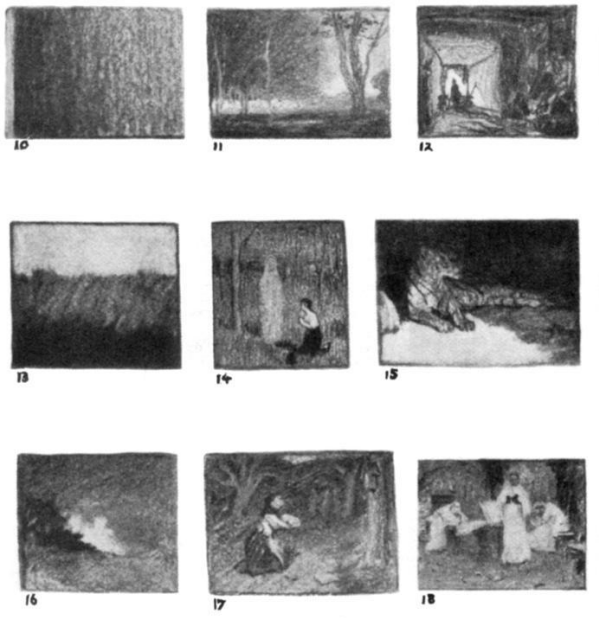
lights, these gain such importance as to control the important items.

The value of the middle tint, *when not* used as the under tone of a picture is apparent as balancing and distributing the light and dark measures of objects. When, for instance, these three degrees of tone are used, if the black and white are brought together and the middle tone opposed a sense of harmony results. The black and white if mixed would become a middle tone. We feel the balance of measures without synthesis or inquiry. Many of the compositions of Tolmouche of two and three female figures are thus disposed, one figure having a gray dress and one a black dress and white waist, or a black figure and white are placed together and opposed to a figure in gray. In Munkacsy's “Milton Dictating to His Daughters,” the broad white collar of the poet contrasted with his black velvet suit, is well balanced and distributed by the medium tones of the three dresses.



1. Light and Dark
2. Whistler's Portrait of His Mother
3. Low Tide — *C. A. Palmer*
4. Light with Dark Complement
5. Moorland — *E. Yon*
6. Charcoal Study — *Millet*
7. Dark with Light Complement
8. Twilight Study
9. The Arbor — *Ferrier*

FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF CHIAROSCURO



10. Dark to Light — Gradation
11. Landscape — *Geo. Inness*
12. The Kitchen — *Whistler*
13. Grey with Black and White Complement
14. St. Angela — *Robt. Reid*
15. An Annam Tiger — *Surrand*
16. Black and White with Grey Complement
17. The Shrine — *Orchardson*
18. Monastic Life — *F. V. Du Mond*

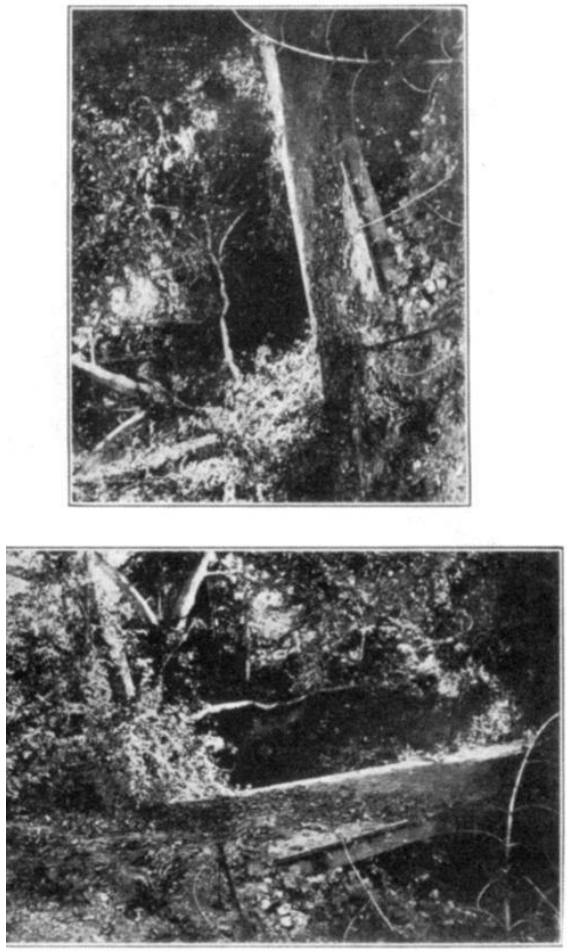
FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF CHIAROSCURO — Continued

An accent is forcible in proportion as its own unit of intensity is distributed over the space on which it is placed. Take for instance a picture in India ink of a misty morning wherein the [pg 155] whole landscape may be produced with a small drop of ink spread in light gradations upon ten by fourteen inches square. An object in the foreground one by two inches in which the same measure of black is used will of course possess powerful attraction. If, however, this measure

be expanded the gain in bulk will be balanced by the loss in intensity. Less attraction for the object is given either by increasing the intensity of the surrounding tint or decreasing its extent. In the two pictures by Gerome of lions, the one in the midst of the vast space of desert obtains its force from its dark isolated in a large area. In the other picture the emerald green eyes of the lion are the attraction of the picture, as points of light relieved by the great measures of dark of the lion, together with the gloom of the cave.

The message of impressionism is *light,* as the effort of the early painters was *to secure light,* the quest of all the philosophies. The impressionist calls upon every part of his work to speak of light, the middle tint, the high lights and the shadow all vibrating with it. From the decorative point of view alone, the picture, as a surface containing the greatest amount of beauty of which the subject is capable is more beautiful when varied by many tones, or by few, *in strong contrast,* than when this variety or contrast is wanting. Those decorative designs have the strongest appeal in which the balancing measures are all well defined. There are schemes of much dark and little light, or the reverse, or an even [pg 156] division, and in each case the balance of light and dark is sustained; for when there is little dark its accenting power is enhanced and when little light is allowed, it, in the same manner, gains in attraction. But light and dark every work of art must have; for to think of light without

dark is impossible. When, therefore, the artist begins a picture his first thought is what is to be the scheme of light and shade? The direction or source of the light helps a decision. The illumination of the subject is a study most easily proceeded with by induction, from particular cases to general conclusions.



A Reversible Effect of Light and Shade
The Same Subject Vertically and Horizontally Presented

The effectiveness of the first of the two reversible photographs is as great as the last and the subject as picturesque though it be [pg 157] discovered that the first is the second placed on end. It is able to satisfy us

not only because of the happy coincidence that the leaves upon the bridge represent bark texture and the subdued light upon its near end creates the rotundity of the trunk or that a distant tree serves as the horizontal margin of a pool, but because its light and shade is conceived upon the terms of balance expressing in either position one of the fundamental forms of light and shade and lineal construction, that of the rectangle in either light or dark together with an oppositional measure—the light through the distant trees.

With the history of art and the world's gallery of painting spread out before us, we may take a continuous view of the whole field. Leaving out the painters of the experimental era let us begin with the great masters of effect.

Sir Joshua Reynolds tells us it was his habit in looking for the secrets of the masters of painting to make rough pencil notes of those pictures that attracted him by their power of effect as he passed from one gallery to another. He found almost all of them revealed a broad middle tone which was divided again into half dark and half light tones, and these, added to the accents of light and dark *made five distinct tones.* The Venetian painters attracted him most and, he says, speaking of Titian, Paul Veronese and Tintoret, “they appeared to be the first painters who reduced to a system what was before practised without any fixed principle.” From these [pg 158] painters he declares Rubens extracted his scheme of composition which was soon

understood and adopted by his countrymen, even to the minor painters of low life in the Dutch school.

“When I was in Venice,” he says, “the method I took to avail myself of their principle was this: When I observed an extraordinary effect of light and shade in any picture I darkened every part of a page in my note-book in the same gradation of light and shade as the picture, leaving the white paper untouched to represent light and this without any attention to the subject or the drawing of the figures. A few trials of this kind will be sufficient to give the method of their conduct in the management of their lights. After a few experiments I found the paper blotted nearly alike: their general practice appeared to be *to allow not above a quarter of the picture for light, including in this portion both the principal and secondary lights; another quarter to be as dark as possible and the remaining half kept in mezzo-tint or half shadow.*”

“Rubens appears to have admitted rather more light than a quarter and Rembrandt much less, scarce an eighth; by this conduct Rembrandt's light is extremely brilliant, but it costs too much; the rest of the picture is sacrificed to this one object. That light will certainly appear the brightest which is surrounded with the greatest quantity of shade, supposing equal skill in the artist.”

“By this means you may likewise remark the various forms and shapes of those lights as well [pg 159] as the objects on which they

are flung; whether a figure, or the sky, a white napkin, animals, or utensils, often introduced for this purpose only. It may be observed likewise, what a portion is strongly relieved and how much is united with its ground; for it is necessary that some part (though a small one is sufficient) should be sharp and cutting against its ground whether it be light on dark, or dark on a light ground, in order to give firmness and distinctness to the work. If, on the other hand, it is relieved on every side, it will appear as if inlaid on its ground."

"Such a blotted paper held at a distance from the eye would strike the spectator as something excellent for the disposition of the light and shadow though he does not distinguish whether it is history, a portrait, a landscape, dead game, or anything else; for the same principles extend to every branch of art. Whether I have given an exact account or made a just division of the quantity of light admitted into the works of those painters is of no very great consequence; let every person examine and judge for himself: it will be sufficient if I have suggested *a mode of examining pictures this way and one means at least of acquiring the principles on which they wrought.*"

The accompanying page of sketches has been produced in the spirit of this recommendation.

Turning from examples of figure art, to outdoor nature, it will be found that these

principles apply with equal force to landscape composition. No better advice could be offered the beginner [pg 160] in landscape than to resolutely select and produce three, four or five distinct and separate tones in every study. The incoherency of beginner's work out of doors is largely due to its crumbling into a great number of petty planes, a fault resulting from observation of detail instead of the larger shapes. For this reason the choice of subjects having little or no detail should be insisted on: sky and land, a chance for organic line and a division of light and shade, such as may be found in an open, rolling country where the woodland is grouped for distant masses.

PRINCIPALITY BY EMPHASIS, SACRIFICE, AND CONTRAST.

Under the discussion of Balance it was shown that a small measure often became the equivalent of a larger measure by reason of its particular placement. The sacrifice of many measures to one, also is often the wisest disposition of forces. Upon the stage, spectacular arrangement is constructed almost entirely on this principle. The greater the number of figures supporting, or sacrificing to the central figure, the greater its importance. The sun setting over fields or through the

woods though covering but a very limited measure of the picture is what we see and remember, the remaining space serving this by subordination. Note how masters of landscape reach after such a point either by banking up abruptly about it as in the wood interior, or by vast gradations toward it. The muzzle of the [pg 161] cannon is the only place where the fire and smoke are seen, but how much weight is necessitated back of this for the recoil, and how much space must be reckoned on for the projectile of the gun. A terrific explosion takes place; but we do not realize its power until it is noted that sound reverberated and the earth trembled for miles around. For its full realization the report of the quiet miles is important. The lack of this support in the light and shade scheme, whereby the principal object is made to occupy too much space is one of the commonest of faults in photography and illustration.

One familiar with woodland scenery knows well how often a subject is lost and found as the sun changes in its course. At one moment a striking composition is present, the highest light giving kingly distinction to one of the monarchs of the forest. Passing on to return in a few minutes one looks in vain for the subject. He is sure of the particular spot, but the king stands sullen in the shadow, robbed of his golden mantle which is now divided to bedeck two or three striplings in the background. For the painter the only recourse is to make a pencil note of the original

scheme of light and shade and hold resolutely to it. The photographer must patiently wait for it.

Says Reynolds:

"Every man that can paint at all can execute individual parts; but to keep these parts in due subordination as relative to a whole, requires a comprehensive view of art that more strongly [pg 164] implies genius than perhaps any quality whatever."[13]

No more forcible examples of this truth may be had than the art of Claude Lorraine. Claude whose nature painting Ruskin berates but whose composition is strong, had two distinct arrangements, both based on the principle of Principality. In the first he created sides for the centre which were darkened so that the light of the centre might gain by contrast. It is the formal Raphaelesque idea; the other and much better one shows a division of the picture into thirds. The first division is given to the largest mass but usually not the most important. This, if trees or a building, is shadow covered, reserving the more distant mass, which is the most attractive, to gain by the sacrifice of the foreground mass.

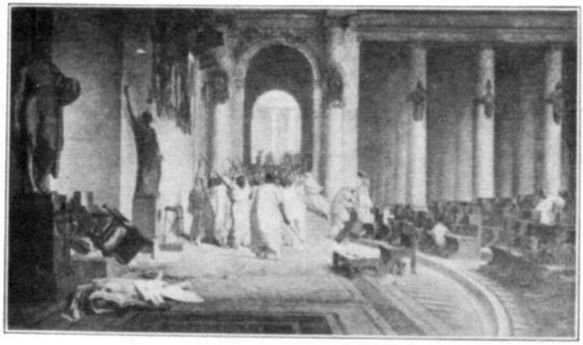


NOTE-BOOK SKETCHES FROM RUBENS, VELASQUEZ, CLAUDE LORRAINE AND MURILLO

SPOTS AND MASSES

The first of these forms was evidently most esteemed by Claude, for his greatest works are thus conceived: “Cleopatra Landing at Tarsus,” “The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba,”. “The Flight into Egypt,” “St. Paul leaving Ostia,” “The Seaport with the Large Tower” and others. In all of these the light proceeds toward us through an avenue which the sides create. Under this effect we receive the light as it comes to us. In the other form the vision is carried into the picture by a

series of mass attractions the balance being less apparent. “The Landscape of the Dresden Gallery,” “The Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca,” “The Finding of Moses,” “Egeria and Her Nymphs,” and “Driving Cattle to the Meadows,” [pg 165] together with many etchings, are based on the second form. In all these about one third of the picture is put into shadow, a great right angle being constructed of the vertical mass and the shadow which it casts, generally across the entire foreground.



DEATH OF CAESAR — *Gérôme*



Century Magazine

THE TRAVEL OF THE SOUL — *After Howard Pyle*

In "The Travel of the Soul" by Howard Pyle, reproduced from the *Century Magazine,* is remarkably expressed the fullness of quality resulting from these few principles. The force

of the light is increased first by juxtaposition with the deepest dark merging so gradually into the darkness behind as to become the end or culmination of the great gradation of the background. As in many works by the older masters the source of light is conceived within the picture, so by its issuance from the inward of the wing, the valuable principle of radiation has resulted, the light passing upward through the wan face behind to the crescent moon and below through the sleeve and long fold of the dress to the ground. On the side it follows the arm disappearing through the fingers into the shadow.

Beyond this circuit lies the great encasement of another gradation darkening toward the sides and corners. This has been interrupted by the tree masses and sky of the upper side, as the idea of radiation was changed on the left by the oppositional line of branch forms. In the other pictures of this remarkable series may be found three distinct type forms of composition.

Together they set forth the structure of the circle or ellipse, the letter S or line of beauty, [pg 166] the triangle, and the cross. The one before us discloses a triangle or letter V, on which the figures compose, within a triangle formed of the rock fracture and path.

It must be remembered that the effort of the artist is to secure light *in the degree* which his subject demands. There are many degrees of light and they must not be confounded. The light of a lantern is not sufficient illumination

for an effect under gas and a window on the north side won't do to call sunlight into a room upon a posed figure. The fault of many pictures is that the proprieties just here are violated. Some of the lowest toned interiors of Israels are satisfactory when judged from the standpoint of light, while out of door attempts in high key fail to suggest the fact of a sun in nature. The fault is that *the exact degree* of illumination which the subject demands is not present.

There may be a greater feeling of light in a figure sitting in the shadow than in the same figure next to a window.

To the painter, light and air are but degrees of the same idea. If the figure seated in the shadow is well enveloped and relieved by the exact temper of reflected lights, it takes its place in his scheme of brilliant lighting as much as any other part.

The purpose of shadow is first to produce light, second to secure concentration, third to dismiss space not required and incidentally to suggest air and relief by the gradation which every shadow must have.

The idea of *Notan,* or the Light and Dark [pg 167] combination of Japanese art, differs from this in its intent, which is merely to set forth an agreeable interchange of light, dark and medium toned spaces. To the decorative intentions of the oriental artist natural fact is of small concern and the fact of shade produced by light is dismissed as are many

other notions which are non-conformable to his purpose. The great value of this concept, however, should be recognized, and in formulating a scheme of light and shade for any picture its light and dark masses may be so arranged as to suggest much of the beauty which its flat translation by Notan would yield. The practice of laying out the flat light and dark scheme of every picture which is to be finished in full relief is therefore most helpful, and directly in line with Sir Joshua's habit with the old masters.

It is not sufficient that pictures have lights and darks. The balance here is quite as important as line and measure. The proportion of light to dark depends on the importance required by certain parts of the picture. Effectiveness is given to that end of the scale which is *reserved in small quantity*. The white spot attracts in the "Dead Warrior," the dark spot in the "Lion of the Desert." A comparison of the "Night Watch" and the "Landscape" by Inness will show that both are constructed on a medium tone on which strong relief is secured by contrasts of light and dark. Isolated spots occur through each contributing an energy opposed to the subtle gradations of the large spaces. The [pg 168] rich depths of the background and the frequent opposition of shadow with light in the landscape are very typical of Inness' art and we know that the "Night Watch" contains the best thought and richest conclusions of the greatest master of light and shade.

The type forms in light and shade are less

pronounced than those of linear construction, though through all compositions of effect, certain well defined schemes of chiaroscuro are traceable. As soon as any one is selected it rests with the artist to vary its conventional structure and make it original.

Lack of a well-defined scheme of light and dark however, is ruinous to any pictorial or decorative undertaking.

The accompanying wood interiors are introduced in proof that light and shade rather than form is the pictorial element of greatest value. In both pictures the principles of chiaroscuro are strongly expressed, and we look closely before discovering that the first one is the second placed on end.

Analysis of pictures into light, dark, and halftone develops the following forms.

GRADATION

Light being the happy and positive side of art presentation, any form or modification of it partakes of its quality. The gradation bespeaks its tenderness, and, much as we may admire light's power, this, by its mere variety, is more attractive.

[pg 171]

We well endure the shadow if in it can be noticed a movement toward the light. Technically, an ungraded shadow means mud. One in which reflection plays a part speaks of the life of light and in it we feel that promise. We know it to be on its travels, glancing and refracting from every object which it touches. The shadows which it cannot penetrate directly, receive its gracious influence in this way and always under a subtler law which governs its direct shining—by gradation.

Most good pictures are produced in the medium range and the ends of the scale are reserved for incisive duty. A series of gradations in which the grace and flow of line and tone are made to serve the forcible stroke which we see, presents a combination of subtlety and strength. Again the art of Inness affords illustration.

There are three forms of this quality: that in which light shows a gradual diminution of power, as seen upon a wall near a window, or in white smoke issuing from a funnel; that in which the color or force of a group of objects weaken as they recede, as may be observed in fog; and that in which the arrangement secures, in disconnected objects a regular succession of graded measures. In each case the pictorial value of this element is apparent. The landscape painter may avail himself of it as the figure painter does of his screen, counting on the cloud shadow to temper and unite disjointed items of his picture. He makes use of it where leading lines are wanting or are undesirable, or to give [pg 172] an

additional accent to light by such contrast or to introduce a note of dark by suppressing the tone of an isolated object. Gradation is the sweetening touch in art, ofttimes making unity of discordant and unartful elements. The vision will pierce the shadow to find the light beyond. It will dwell longest on the lightest point and believe this more brilliant than it is if opposed by an accent of dark which is the lowest note in a dark gradation.

Turner and Claude often brought the highest light and deepest dark together in close opposition through a series of big gradations of objects, the most light-giving device known in painting. The introduction of a shadow through the foreground or middle distance, over which the vision travels to the light beyond, always gives great depth; another of the devices in landscape painting frequently met with in the work of Claude, Ruysdael, Corot, Vandevelde, Cuyp, Inness, Wyant, Ranger, and all painters of landscape who attain light by the use of a graded scale of contrasts. A cumulative gradation which suddenly stops has the same force in light and shade as a long line which suddenly changes into a short line of opposed direction. They are both equivalent to a pause in music, awakening an attention at such a point, and only to be employed where there is something important to follow.

EQUIVALENTS

It is the experience of all picture makers that under the limitations which special subjects [pg 173] impose they are often obliged to search for an equivalent with which to comply with the requirements of composition.

If, for instance, in the arrangement of a picture it is found necessary to move an object—a tree, figure or other item of importance, instead of obliteration and repainting, the result is attained by creating an attraction on the side from which it is to be moved.

By so doing the range of the picture is increased and its space seems to take in more than its limits presupposed: If an isolated tree standing against a mass of trees, by opening the sky through that mass or by creating attraction of color or form therein, the vision is led to the far side of the object to be moved, which is thereby crowded out of its position in the balancing scheme.

An object upon a surface may frequently give place to a dark or light variation of the surface itself which becomes an equivalent of attraction.

Several objects may be made to balance without rearrangement though the marginal proportions of the picture are altered. The ship and moon compose as an upright, but not in long shape without either the following line which indicates the ship's course; or an object of attraction in the opposing half either in the distance or foreground, much less being

required in the latter than the former. The equivalent therefore of the leading line is the object on the farther shore.

[pg 174]
The necessity of either the one or the other is more clearly shown when the line from the boat swings in the opposite direction.

An object may be rendered less important by surrounding it with objects of its own kind and color.

An abrupt change in the direction of a line may have attraction equal to an object on that line.

With two spaces of equal size, importance may be given to one of them by increasing its light; by using leading lines toward it, by placing an accent upon it, by creating a gradation in it.

Spots often become the equivalent of lines in their attractive value.

A series of oppositional lines has more picturesqueness than the tangent, its equivalent.

A gradation may have the equivalent attraction of an object.

A line in its continuity is more attractive than a succession of isolated objects.

The attractive value of an object in the scale of balance may be weakened by moving it

toward the centre or extending the picture on that side.

Motion toward, either in intention or by action, is equivalent to balancing weight in that space of the picture to which the action is directed.

Light is increased by deepening contiguous tones; dark, by heightening contiguous tones.

A still-life may be constructed on the same lines as any form on the vertical plane and many of the perspective plane of composition. See Fundamental Forms.

[pg 177]

CHAPTER XI - THE PLACE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN FINE ART

Since the time that photography laid its claim to be reckoned among the fine arts the attention of artists has been attracted first by

the *claim* and thereafter, with acknowledgments, to the *performance.*

The art cry of the newly baptized had the vehement ring of faith and determination. Like the prophecy of the embryo premier it sounded: "My lords, you will hear me yet."

The sustained interest of the "Photographic Salon" and the utterance of its exhibitors in the language of art, has long since obtained concession to the claim for *associate membership.* To make this relationship complete became the effort of many writers of the photographic circle. "The whole point then," writes Prof. P. H. Emerson, B. A., M. D., of England, "is that what the painter strives to do is to render, by any means in his power, as true an impression of any picture which he wishes to express as possible. A photographic artist strives for the same end and in two points only does he fall short of the painter—in color and in the ability to render so accurately the relative values, although this is to a great extent compensated by the tone of the picture. How then is photography superior to etching, wood-cutting, charcoal drawing? The [pg 178] drawing of the lens is not to be equalled by any man. There is ample room for selection, judgment and posing, and, in a word, in capable hands a finished photograph is a work of art. Thus we see that the art has at last found a scientific basis and can be rationally discussed, and I think I am right in saying that I was the first to base the claims of photography as a fine art on these grounds

and I venture to predict that the day will come when photographs will be admitted to hang on the walls of the Royal Academy."

Since the appearance of the above which comes as close to the real reason in question as its logic might intimate, but which is worth quoting from the prophecy which it contained, there have been many expressions of opinions by photographers. None, however, are more to the point than the following from the pen of Mr. F. H. Wilson: "When, fifty years ago, the new baby, photography, was born, Science and Art stood together over her cradle questioning what they might expect of her, wondering what place she would take among their other children. Science soon found that she had come with her hands full of gifts and her bounty to astronomy, microscopy and chemistry made her name blessed among these, her elder sisters. Art, always more conservative, hung back. But slowly jealous Art who first frowned and called the rest of her brood around her, away from the parvenue, has let her come near, has taken her hand, and is looking her over with questioning eyes. Soon, [pg 179] without doubt, she will have her on her lap with the rest."

"Why has she been kept out so long? Almost from the beginning she claimed a place in the house beautiful of art. In spite of rebuffs she knocked at its doors, though the portrait painter and the critic flung stones at her from the house-top, and the law itself stood at the threshold denying her entrance. Those early

efforts were not untinctured with a fear that if she should get in she would run the establishment, but the law long since owned her right, and instead of the crashing boulders of artistic dislike and critical indignation the volleys they drop at her feet now are mere mossy pebbles flung by similarly mossy critics or artist-bigots. Still, the world at large hears them rattle and does not give her the place and estimation she has won."

"Art began with the first touch of man to shape things toward his ideal, be that ideal an agreeable composition, or the loftiest conception of genius. The higher it is the more it is art. Art is head-and-hand work and a creation deserves the name of art according to the quality and quantity of this expended on it. Simply sit down squarely before a thing and imitate it as an ox would if an ox could draw, with no thought or intention save imitation and the result will cry from every line, 'I am not art but machine work,' though its technique be perfection. Toil over arrangement and meditate over view-point and light, and though the result be the rudest, it will bear [pg 180] the impress of thought and of art. I tell you art begins when man with thought, forming a standard of beauty, commences to shape the raw material toward it. In pure landscape, where modification is limited, it begins when the artist takes one standpoint in preference to another. In figure composition, where modification is infinite, it begins with the first touch to bring the model into pose. When he bends a twig or turns a

fold of drapery the spirit of art has come and is stirring within him. What matters the process! Surely it is time that this artistic bigotry was ended."

The kernel lies in the sentence "when he bends a twig," etc., "the spirit of art has come." In other words when he exhibits choice and preference, when, in short, he *composes.*

Recognizing that composition was the only portal through which the new candidate for art recognition could gain an entrance into the circle of Art, the single effort of the past photographer, viz.; the striving for detail and sharpness of line, has been relegated to its reasonable place. A comprehension of composition was found to demand the knowledge of a score of things which then by necessity were rapidly discovered, applied and installed. Composition means sacrifice, gradation, concentration, accent, obliteration, replacement, construction of things the plate does not have, destruction of what it should not have.

Supplied with such a magician's wand no effect was denied: all things seemed possible.

[pg 181]
Gratified by recognition in a new realm the new associations should be strengthened. Whereas photography had been spanned by the simple compass of Mr. and Mrs. A. and their daughter, in figures; or topographical accuracies in landscape, revellers in the new

art talked of Rembrandt and Titian, Corot and Diaz. To do something which should put their art in touch with these, their new-found brethren, was the thing! A noble ambition, but only a mistaking of the effect for the cause. These men *composed*. The blurred outline, the vacant shadow, the suppressed corners, the clipped edges. This all means composition in the subduing of insistent outline, in the exchange of breadth for detail, in the centralization of light, in the suppression of the unnecessary.

But no, the employment of these devices of the painter from the photographer's point of view of composition is not sufficient. Photography is now busy complimenting every school of painting under the sun. Yesterday it was Rembrandt's school. Now that is passed, and Carrière is better and to-morrow, perchance, it will be Raphael or Whistler or some Japanese, why not?

The one and only good sign which marks imitation is that it shows appreciation, and this of the standards is a good thing. Let each have its turn. Their synthesis may be *you*.

But to a man of the professions or business whose time for study in these vast fields of the classics is so disproportionate to their extent [pg 182] and who, though supplied with search warrants and summons, still fails to make a capture, how ineffectual and wearying this chase after ideals—subjective. Why not shorten your course? Why not produce Rembrandts and Corots because you

apprehend the principles on which *they* work and anticipate a surprise in discovering, as by chance, that you have produced something which *recalls them.* In this way and by these means there will be meaning in your claim of brotherhood.

One may scarcely call an estimate in art matters complete without an opinion from Mr. Ruskin. “In art we look for a record of man's thought and power, but photography gives that only in quite a secondary degree. Every touch of a great painting is instinct with feeling, but howsoever carefully the objects of a picture be chosen and grouped by the photographer, there his interference ends. It is not a mere matter of color or no color, but of Invention and Design, of Feeling and Imagination. Photography is a matter of ingenuity: Art of genius.”

On these lines however the philosopher of Coniston hardly proves his case.

Invention and design, feeling and imagination, are all a part of the photographer's suite. He employs them all. And these too are qualities the most artistic. Technique, which is manual and not spiritual, is the one point at which art and photography cannot coalesce. To Art's sentient finger-tips, Photography holds up only steel, [pg 183] wood and glass. Art therefore holds the winning cards.

P. G. Hamerton, England's safest and surest critic of art, writing a generation ago on the

"Relation between Photography and Painting," says: "But all good painting, however literal, however pre-Raphaelite or topographic, is full of human feeling and emotion. If it has no other feeling in it than love or admiration for the place depicted, that is much already, quite enough to carry the picture out of the range of photography into the regions of real art."

"And this is the reason why good painting cannot be based on photography. I find photographic data of less value than hasty sketches. The photograph renders the form truly, no doubt, as far as it goes, but it by no means renders feelings and is therefore of no practical use (save for reference) to a painter who feels habitually and never works, without emotion."

It is very much to be questioned if Mr. Hamerton in the face of what has since been done with the camera by men who *feel* and are led by the emotional in art, would claim a distinction to the painter and deny that the photographic product was unaffected by the emotional temperament.

A friend shows us a group of his pets, either dogs, horses or children, done by an "artist photographer." We find it strongly composed, evincing a clear knowledge of every point to be observed in extracting from the subject all the picturesqueness there was in it. We notice a soft painter-like touch, shadows not detailed —simply [pg 184] graded—aerial envelopment everywhere suggested.

It would be pedantry for the painter to correct the expression of his friend and suggest that the man who produced the picture was not an artist. It is the product of a man who felt exactly as an artist would have felt; an expression of views upon a subject entirely governed by the principles of art, and the man who made it, by that sympathy which he exhibits with those principles, is my brother in art to a greater degree than the painter who, with youthful arrogance, throws these to the winds "mistaking," as has been cleverly said, "the will-o'-the-wisp of eccentricity for the miracle working impulse of genius." In whatsoever degree more of the *man* and less of the *mechanics* appear, *in that degree* is the result a work of art.

The reliance of photography on composition has provoked an earnest search for its principles. The photographer felt safe in going to the school of painting for these principles and accepted without question the best book written for painters, that by John Burnet, penned more than a century ago at a time when the art of England was at a low imitative ebb, and unduly influenced by imitation. This has been abundantly quoted by photographic teachers and evidently accepted, with little challenge, as final.

The best things, discoverable to the writer, in the field of composition, have been by the photographers themselves—the best things as well as the most inane; but in the face of so many [pg 185] results that earnest workers with the camera produce and continue to put

forth, which cannot find a place in the categories of Art, it would seem that these preachments have been unheeded, or were not sufficiently clear to afford practical guidance for whom they were intended. Mr. P. H. Robinson[14]declares most strenuously for composition. “It is my contention,” he says, “that one of the first things an artist should learn is the *construction* of a picture.” On a par with this is the opinion of Mr. Arthur Dow, the artist, who declares that “art education *should begin* at composition.”

It is for lack of this that the searcher for the picturesque so frequently returns empty handed.

[pg 187]

PART II - THE ÆSTHETICS OF COMPOSITION

CHAPTER XII - BREADTH VERSUS DETAIL

Subjectively the painter and the photographer stretch after the same goal.

Technically they approach it from opposite directions.

The painter starts with a bare surface and creates detail, the photographer is supplied therewith.

Art lies somewhere between these starting points; for art is a reflection of an idea and ideas may or may not have to do with detail.

According to the subject then is the matter of detail to serve us. In the expression of character a certain amount of detail is indispensable; by the painter to be produced, by the photographer saved. But detail is often so beautiful in itself! and is not art a presentation of the beautiful, pleads the photographer. And the reply in the Socratic method is: “Look at the *whole* subject: does the idea of it demand this detail?”

The untutored mind always sees detail. For this reason most education is inductive, but [pg 188] though the process is inductive, the goal is the eternal synthesis. It is the reporter who gathers the facts: the editor winnows therefrom the moral.

The artist must—in time—get on top and take this survey. Looking at any subject with eyes half closed enables him to see it without detail, and later, with eyes slowly opening, admitting that much only which is necessary to character.

The expression of character by masses of black and white proves this. Bishop Potter is unmistakable, his features bounded by their shadows. From such a start then it is a question of procedure cautiously to that point where the greatest character lies, but beyond which point detail becomes unnecessary to character.



The pen portrait of Thackeray by Robt. Blum is a careful delineation of the characteristic head of the novelist set on shoulders characteristically bent forward and the body characteristically tall. What more can be told of Thackeray's [pg 189] personality? Would the buttons and the wrinkles of the clothing help matters! No, as facts they would not, and when art has to do only with character, the simplest statement is the most forcible.

Millet, at one time, was known as “the man who painted peasants without wrinkles in their breeches.” Not because wrinkles were too much for him, nor because they were not thought worth while, but because, in his effort to prune his picture of the unessentials, the wrinkles were brushed aside.

When, however, art has to do with filling an entire space with something, and the clothing occupies a considerable part of it, what shall be done? This changes the details of the

question. Yet all portraits that hit hard in exhibitions are those conceived in simplicity, those in which the personality is what stops and holds us.

There are certain large organic lines of drapery which the character demands, but beyond this point opinion divides authoritatively from the complete silence of obliteration to the tumultuous noisiness of "the whole truth"

In the portraits by Carrière all detail is swept away, and the millinery artists are shocked. Simplicity should never compromise texture and quality. This side of the truth cannot prove objectionable.

"You have made my broadcloth look like two-fifty a yard and it really cost four," was a criticism offered by a young lady who posed in a riding habit. Such practical criticism is [pg 190] frequently necessary to bring the artist down from the top height observatory where he is absorbed with "the big things."

Breath does not signify neglect of detail or neglect of finish; it means simplification where unity had been threatened. It is seeing the big side of small things, if the small things cannot be ignored.

The lighting of a subject has much to do with its breadth. A light may be selected that will chop such a well organized unit as the body into three or four separate sections, or one that produces an *equal* division of light and

shade—seldom good. Shadows are generally the hiding-places for mystery; and mystery is ever charming. None better than Rembrandt knew the value of those vague spaces of nothingness, in backgrounds, and in the figure itself, a sudden pitch from light and positiveness into conjecture. We hear in photography much of the "Rembrandt-esque effect," which when produced, proves to be just blackness. There can be no shadow without light, and Rembrandt's effort was to obtain this, rather than produce darkness.

The feeling of light may also be broadly expressed by a direct illumination. Here the shadow plays a very small part, and the subject is presented in its outline. Under such an effect we lose variety but gain simplicity. This brings us close to the region of two dimensions, the realm of Japanese art and mural decoration. The portraits of Manet, the decorations of Puvis de Chavannes, and the early Italians, display the [pg 191] quality of breadth because of the simplicity of lighting which these subjects received.

Breadth in the treatment of the figure may be obtained by *graded* light. If a shadow be produced at the bottom of the picture sufficiently strong to obliterate both the light and shade of detail, and thence be made to weaken as it proceeds upward and finally give place to light, where light is most needed, great simplicity as well as the element of variety will be the result.

Thus, in the most effective treatment in mural

decoration, one sees only the grand forms, the movement, the intention, those things which most befit the inner surface of the building being also those which bear the greater importance. The fact is used as an argument for the assumption that painting should, after all, be an art of two dimensions, length and breadth, reserving thickness and its representation, for sculpture. This robs painting of the quality of natural aspect, except under the single effect of absolutely direct lighting and ignores its development beyond the flatly colored representations of the ancient Egyptians, our American Indians and the Japanese, a development inaugurated by the Greeks and since adhered to by all occidental nations.

The student who goes to nature and sees mass only, discarding all detail, will run the chance of being a colorist as well as a painter of breadth, two of the most important qualifications; for if he refuses to be stopped by detail his intelligence will crystallize upon that other thing which attracts him. He will think the harder upon the [pg 192] simple relations of tones and the exact color. Slowly dexterity will add a facility to his brush and he will, while aiming at character, through breadth, unconsciously introduce characteristic detail. This is the hope of the new method which is now being introduced into the system of public school instruction.

The scheme as developed by Mr. Dow is decorative rather than naturalistic, the aesthetic side with “Beauty,” as the

watchword being in greatest point. The filling of spaces in agreeable and harmonious arrangement does not demand strict acknowledgment to natural aspect. Indeed this is denied in most cases where the limitations of decoration are enjoined. With the first principle, truth, upon which all education rests, as the basis of such study, the nature part of this system will fall into its logical channels. If nature's largeness and simplicity contributes to its value, then nature should be consulted when she is large and simple. Studies of trees in gray silhouette, should be made at twilight, either of evening or early morning, when the detail, which is useless to the decorative scheme, is not seen. Under such conditions no slight or sacrifice is necessitated. Nature then contributes her quantity directly and the student has no warrant in assuming to change her. There are times also when the face of nature is so varied that the most fantastic schemes of *Notan*[15] are observed; a harbor filled with sails and sea-gulls, a crowd of people speckling the shore, the houses of a village dotted over a hillside. Under a direct [pg 193] light these become legitimate subjects offered by nature herself to the scheme which, however, she only now and then honors.

The system therefore accompanies the student but part way and leaves him still knocking at the door of the complete naturalistic presentation of pictorial art, a development which stretches into limitless possibilities by the use of the third dimension.

Work in two dimensions by reason of its greater simplicity should naturally precede the complications involved in producing the completely modelled forms of nature, and therein the argument for its use in the early stages of the student's development is a strong one.

SUGGESTIVENESS.

Breadth, so often accountable for mystery, leads to suggestiveness. It is at this point that graphic art touches hands with the invisible, —where the thing merges into the idea. Here we deliver over our little two by four affair with its specifications all marked, into the keeping of larger hands which expand its possibilities. If then Imagination carries us beyond the limits of graphic art let us by all means employ it. Upon this phase of art the realist can but look with folded arms. The dwellers in the charmed world of Greek mythological fancy came on tiptoe to the borders only of the daily life of that age.

The still-life painter has to do with fact, and for many other subjects also the fact alone is [pg 193] sufficient. It is generally so in portraiture where rendition of externals is attempted, but the portrait may suggest revery and reflection, or, by *intimate accessory,* provoke a discursive movement in

thought.

The realist is a man of drawing and how to do it, of paint and putting it on, of textures and technique; he is a painter; and stops with that. But the maker of pictures would step to another point of sight. He would so aim as to shoot over the hilltop. He would hit something which he cannot see.

Suggestion is both technical and subjective. There is suggestion of detail, of act and of fact. In producing the effect, instead of the detail, of a bunch of grass or a mass of drapery, we substitute suggestion for literalism.

Fortuny, as a figure painter, was master of this art, his wonderful arrangements of figures amongst drapery and in grasses bearing evidence. Here, out of a fantastic crush of color, will be brought to view a beautifully modelled hand and wrist which connect by the imagination only, with the shoulder and body. These however, are ready to receive it and like other parts of the picture are but points of fact to give encouragement to the quest for the remainder. The hide and seek of the subject, the “lost and found” in the line, the subsidizing of the imagination for tribute, by his magic wand stroke were the artifices by which Fortuny coquetted with nature and the public, fascinating the art world of his day.

[pg 195]
Fortuny, however, never took us beyond the

bounds of his picture. It was his doctrine that avoidance of detail was artful; that to carry the whole burden when imagination could be tricked into shouldering some of it was fool's drudgery. Millet, who was his antipode as a clumsy handler of his tools, declared himself fortunate in being able to suggest much more than he could paint.

In one of the competitions at the Royal Academy in England, the prize was awarded to that rendering of the expression of Grief which showed the face entirely covered, the suggestion being declared stronger than the fact.

In the realm of suggestion however the landscape artist has much the wider range. Who has not experienced the fascination of a hilltop? The hill may be uninteresting—on your side,—but there is another. There is a path winding over it, telling of the passing of few or many; your feet have touched it and imagination has you in her train, and you follow eagerly to the beck of her enchantment.

Suppose the scene at twilight on one of the great plains of northern France where beets are the sole crop. A group of carts and oxen shut out the background and no figures are seen. If however against the sky are the silhouetted forms of two handfuls of beets, the sight of a figure or even a part of him would seem unnecessary to a casual observer who wished to know if there was any one about. These inanimate things moving

through the air mean life. The painter has [pg 196] created one figure and suggested the likelihood of others by these few touches. Herein we have the suggestion of a fact. The suggestion of an act, may further be developed by showing the figure, having already finished with the handful, bending to pick up others. Such a position would be an actual statement regarding the present act but a suggested one concerning the former, the effect of which is still seen. If then the figure were represented as performing something in any moment of time farther removed from that governing the position of the beets than natural action could control, he has forced into his figure an accelerated action which ranges anywhere between the startling, the amusing, and the impossible.

The power of implied force or action by suggestion is the basis of the Greek sculptured art of the highest period. Much of the argument of Lessing's elaborate essay on the “Laocoon” is aimed at this point, which is brought out in its completeness in his discussion of Timomachus' treatment of the raving Ajax. “Ajax was not represented at the moment when, raging among the herds he captures and slays goats and oxen, mistaking them for men. The master showed him sitting weary after these crazy deeds of heroism, and meditating self-destruction. That was really the raving Ajax, not because he is raving at the moment, but because we see he has been raving and with what violence his present reaction of shame and despair vividly

portrays. We see the force of the tempest in the [pg 197] wrecks and the corpses with which it has strewn the beach."

In the photographic realm of the nude, this quality is compulsory. We don't want to have offered us so intimate a likeness of a nude figure that we ask, "Who is she, or he?" The general and not the particular suffices; the type not the person. The painter's art contains few stronger touches through this means than the incident of the sleeping senator in Gérôme's "Death of Cæsar".

In the suggestion of an idea, graphic and plastic art rise to the highest levels of poetry. The picture or the poem then becomes the surface, refracting the idea which stretches on into infinity.

The dying lion of Lucerne, mortally pierced by the shaft, the wounded lion of Paris, striking under his forepaw the arrow meant for his destruction are symbols memorializing the Swiss guard of Louis XVI, and the unequal struggle of France against Germany in '72.

At the death of Lorenzo the arts languished and Michel Angelo's supine and hanging figures in his tomb are there to indicate it.

MYSTERY.

Suggestion with its phantom guide-posts leads us through its varied mazes to the dwelling-place of mystery. Here the artist will do well to tarry and learn all the oracle may teach him.

The positive light of day passes to the twilight of the moon and stars.

[pg 197]
What things may be seen and forms created out of the simple mystery of twilight!

Its value by suggestion may be known technically to the artist, for through the elimination of detail, the work is sifted to its essence and we then see it in its bigness, if it has any, and if not we discover this lack. When the studio light fails our best critic enters and discloses in a few moments what we have been looking for all day long.

There should be in most pictures an opportunity of saying that which shall be interpreted by each one according to his temperament, a little place where each may delight in setting free his own imagination.

To account for the popularity of many pictures in both color and black and white on any other ground than that of mystery seems ofttimes impossible. The strong appeal made to all classes by subjects containing mysterious suggestion is evidenced by the frequency of awards to such in photographic and other competitions.

The student of photography asks if blurred edges, empty shadows and vaporous detail mean quality. They certainly mean mystery, which when applied to an appropriate subject signifies that the artist has joined his art with the imagination of the beholder. He has therefore let it out at large usury.

A cottage near a wood may be a very ordinary subject at three in the afternoon, but at eight in the evening, seen in palpitating outline against the forest blackness or the low toned sky, it becomes an element in a scheme of far larger [pg 199] dimensions. The difference between the definite and indefinite article, when coupled with that house, is the difference in the quality of the art of which we speak.

Mystery by deception is a misguided use of an art quality.

In photography one man delights in the etching point and cannot stop until he has made a net work all over his plate and led us to look at this instead of his picture, which, if good, would have been let alone—a clever device of throwing dust into our eyes. Another produces what appears to be a pencil drawing, and a very good imitation some of them are, but at best a deception. To make something look like something else is a perversion of a brilliant discovery in photographic processes, which offers the means for securing unity (and in this word lies every principle of composition) by adding to or subtracting from the first product.

This may involve the destruction of two-thirds or three-fourths of the plate or it may demand many an accent subtly supplied before unity is satisfied, before the subject is stripped of its non-essentials or before it may be regarded complete. Let such good work go on—and the other sort too, if you will, the stunts, the summersaults and the hoop performances, but in the dignity of photographic competitions give the deceptions, the imitations of other things, no standing or quarter.

No one will deny the interest there is in a sensitive, flexible line and in the rendition of [pg 200] mass by line. But photography is an art dealing with finished surfaces of perfect modelling, and workers in this art should preserve the “nature” of their subject. The man who feels line had better etch or use a pencil.

SIMPLICITY.

Breadth while fostering suggestiveness gives birth to simplicity; a subjective quality.

When applied to pictorial art, simplicity's first appeal is a mental one. We are attracted by neither technique nor color, nor things problematic to the painter; but by *his* mental attitude toward his subject. If we determine that the result has come of elimination, that

to produce it, much has been thrown away and that the artist prefers what he has left at a sacrifice, to what might have been, acknowledgment for this condensation is coupled with respect. There is however a type of simplicity, the Simple Simon sort, or an indisposition to undertake difficult things, which leads to a selection of the easy subject in nature. Having found some modest bit of charm, the Simple Simon turns and twists it to attenuation, with the earnest declaration that there is no greater quality than simplicity; but purposeful emptiness lifts its hands in vain for the baptismal sanctification of the poetic spirit.

Where simplicity really serves the artist in his task is in those cases demanding the unification of many elements.

In painting, Rubens and Turner thus wrought, [pg 201] bringing harmony from an organ of three banks and a score of stops, setting themselves the task of strong men.

Whatsoever subject be projected, the quality of principality takes precedence over all others. This is the first step toward simplicity; some one thought made chief; therefore some one object in the composition of quantities and some one light in the scheme of chiaroscuro dominant. With this determined, the problem which follows is, how shall principality be maintained and to what degree of sacrifice must all other objects be submitted. In the rapid examination of many works of art, those that appeal strongest will

be found to be those in which the elements are simple, or, if complex, are governed by this quality through principality.

RESERVE.

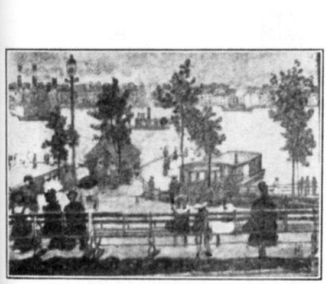
Another bifurcation of simplicity is Reserve. In the simple statement of the returning Roman general: "I came, I saw, I conquered," all that the senate desired to know was stated and it gained force by virtue of what was left unsaid. Anything else might have gratified the curiosity of his auditors, but the man, in holding this secret, made *himself* an object of interest. Rembrandt has told us that the legitimate gamut of expression lies some distance between the deepest dark of our palette and its highest light. Expression through limitations is dignified, a quality which the strain to fill all limits sacrifices. It is the force quickly squandered by [pg 202] the young actor, who "overacts," disturbing the balance of forces in the other parts.

Upon the pivot of Reserve the opposing creeds of the Impressionists and Tonists bear with most contention. The former would lash their coursers of Phoebus with unsparing hand from start to finish; the latter prefer the "Waiting Race," every atom of force governed and in control, held for the opportunity, when increasing strength is necessary. It is the

difference between aiming at the bull's-eye or the whole target.

The recent tendency of illustration to produce a result in three or four flat tones is another voice proclaiming for reserve. The new movement in decorative art may rightly claim this acknowledgment to it. In the work of Jules Guérin it is interesting to note how the bit and bridle of these two factors of breadth have been applied to every stroke, now and then only, detail being allowed its say, and in but a still small voice.

With the large number of pictorial ideas now being recast in the decorative formula it is necessary to have a clear notion of the purpose and the limitations of decorative art, that this new art may not be misunderstood nor confounded with the purely pictorial.



THE NORTH RIVER — *Prendegast*



AN INTRUSION — *Bull*



Scribner's Magazine

LANDSCAPE ARRANGEMENT — *Guérin*

DECORATIVE EVOLVING THE PICTORIAL

Decoration is essentially flat. It represents length and breadth. It applies primarily to the flat vertical plane. It deals with the symbols of form, with fact by suggestion, with color in mass. It substitutes light and dark for nature's [pg 205] light and shade. Conceptions evolved upon the flat vertical plane deal with pictorial data as material for heraldic

quartering, with natural fact as secondary to the happy adjustment of spaces. Nature to the decorative mind presents a variegated pattern from which to clip any shape which the color design demands.

The influence on pictorial art of the decorative tendency, has brought much into the pictorial category which has never been classified.

The Rose Croix influence has witnessed its seed maturing into the *art nouveau,* and what was nurtured under the forcing glass of decoration has suddenly been transplanted into the garden of pictorial art. In consequence it would appear that the constitution of the latter required amendments as being scarce broad enough to accommodate the newer thing. It is difficult, for instance, to reconcile the crowded and spotted surfaces in Mr. Maurice Prendergast's pictures, to the requirements of the balanced conception. It must be recognized however that their first claim for attraction is their color which is usually a harmony in red, yellow and blue, and when the crowds of people or buildings do not form balancing combinations they oft-times so fill the canvas as to leave excellent spaces, more commanding through their isolation than the groups choking the limits of the canvas. More often however these crowds may be found to hang most beautifully to a natural axis and to comply with all the principles of pictorial structure.

[pg 206]
In his park scene, showing several tiers of equestrians one above the other, the chief charm is the idea of continuous movement which the scene conveys. The detail, wisely omitted, if supplied would arrest the attention and a challenge on this basis would follow. It would then be found that what we accepted as an impression of natural aspect we would demand more of as a finished picture. It is because it is more decorative than pictorial and because its pictorial parts are rendered by suggestion, that it makes so winning an appeal.

The quaint and fascinating concepts of Mr. Bull in the range of animal delineation are all struck in the stamp of this newer mould, and the list is a constantly increasing one of the illustrators whose work bears this sign.

RELIEF.

The popular notion concerning pictures is that they should stand out; but as has been aptly said, “they should stand in”; so stand as to keep their places within the frame and to keep the component parts in control. A single object straining itself into prominence through the great relief it exhibits, is just as objectionable as the one voice in a chorus heard above the rest.

It is a law of light that all objects of the same plane receive identically the same illuminations. If then, one seems favored, it must be by suppression of the rest. Now and then this is necessary, but that it occurs by this means and not by unnatural forcing must be evident.

[pg 207]
It is not necessary for the artist to lift his sitter off the canvas by a forced light on the figure and an intense shadow separating him from the wall behind.

Correggio knew so well to conserve breadth just here. Instead of this cheap and easy relief, he almost invariably chose to offset the dark side with a darker tone in the background, allowing the figure's shadow to melt inperceptibly into the back space. Breadth and softness was of course the result.

Occasionally however a distinct attempt at relief may be witnessed in the work of good painters. Some of Valesquez' standing portraits are expressive of the painter's joy in making them “stand out.” In all these pictures however there are no other objects, no items added to the background from which the figure is separated. The subject simply stands in air. In other words it is an entity and not a composition.

The process technically for the subduing of relief is flattening the shadows, thus rendering the marked roundness of objects less pronounced. The envelopment of air

which all painting should express,—the detachment of one object from another,—goes as far toward the production of relief as is necessary.

FINISH.

But the enquiry is naturally made, "if deception is undesirable, should the artist pause before he has brought his work to a complete finish?" Finish is not dependent upon putting in [pg 208] everything which nature contains, else would art not be a matter of selection. Finish, though interpreted singularly by different artists as to degree, is universally understood to mean the same thing. Finish is the expression of the true relations of objects or of the parts of one object. When the true relations or *values* of shade and color are rendered the work is complete. That ends it. The student for the first year or so imagines his salvation depends on detail and prides himself on how much of it he can see. The instructor insists on his looking at nature with his eyes half closed in the hope that he will take the big end of things. There is war between them until the student capitulates, after which the instructor tells him to go as he pleases knowing with this lesson learned he will not go wrong.

As a comprehensive example of finish without

detail, one may take the works of Mauve which aim to represent nature as truly as possible in her exact tints. No one can observe any picture ever painted by this master and not be drawn down close to the ground that he may walk on it or elevate his head into the air and breathe it or feel it possible to send a stone sailing into its liquid depths; but finish! when we look for it where or what is it? At the Stewart Gallery the attendant was accustomed to offer the visitor a magnifying glass with which to examine the lustre of a horse's eye or the buckles upon Napoleon's saddle, in the “Review of Cuirassiers at the Battle of Friedland” by Meissonier. These [pg 209] items are what interested the great detailist and they are perfect; but with all the intense effort of six close years of labor the picture has less real finish than any work ever signed by Mauve. The big thing in finish has been missed and I doubt if any artist or connoisseur has ever come upon this picture, now in the Metropolitan Museum, without a slight gasp at the false relation of color existing between the green wheat, the horses trampling through it and the sky above it. The unity of these elements was the first step in finish and the artist with all his vast knowledge of little things never knew it.

If then, perfect finish is a matter beyond detail, it follows it must be looked for elsewhere than at this end of nature.

The average man soon takes the artist's intention and accepts the work on this basis, thinking not of finish nor of its lack, but of

nature; acknowledging through the suggestions of the picture that he has been touched by her.

“During these moments,” says John La Farge in his “Considerations on Painting,” “are not the spectators excusable who live for the moment a serene existence, feeling as if they had made the work they admire?”

The argument then is that the master painter is one who selects the subject, takes precious care that its foundation quantities and qualities are furnished and then hands it over to any one *to finish*. That it falls into sympathetic hands is his single solicitude.

[pg 209]
“It requires two men to paint a picture,” says Mr. Hopkinson Smith, “one to work the brush and the other to kill the artist when he has finished his picture and doesn't know it.”

[pg 211]

PART III - THE CRITICAL JUDGEMENT OF PICTURES

> "With the critic all depends on the right application of his principles in particular cases. And since there are fifty ingenuous critics to one of penetration, it would be a wonder if the applications were in every case with the caution indispensable to an exact adjustment of the scales of art."—*Lessing's Laocöon.*

CHAPTER XIII - THE MAN IN ART

"Art is a middle quality between a thought and a thing—the union of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human."[16]

For the every-day critic much of the secret lies in the proposition art is nature, with the man added; nature seen through a temperament. Nature is apparent on the

surface of pictures. We see this side at a glance. To find the man in it requires deeper sight.

If a painter of portraits, has he painted the surface, or the character? Has he gone halting after it, or has he nailed it: has he won with it finally? Is he a man whose natural refinement [pg 212] proved a true mirror in which his sitter was reflected or has the coarse and uneven grain of the artist become manifest in the false planes of the character presentation? With respect to portraits less than other subjects, can we expect to find them reflections of the artist's personality. But some of the ablest, while interpreting another's character, frequently add somewhere in it their own. The old masters rarely signed, feeling that they wrote themselves all through their works.

The sure thing regarding the great portraitist is that he is a man of refinement. This all history shows.

Is our artist a genre painter: then does his mind see small things to delight *in* them, or to delight us—if this, he is our servitor or little better,—does he go at the whole thing with the sincerity of an artistic purpose and somewhere place a veritable touch of genius, or only represent one item after another until the whole catalogue of items is complete, careful that he leave behind no just cause for reproach? Has the man dignified his subject and raised it to something above imitative art, or does he clearly state in his treatment of it

that imitation is the end of art?

Is he a painter of historic incident; then does he convince you that his data are accurate, or allow you to conjecture that his details are makeshifts? Is the scene an inspiration or commonplace? Has he been able to put you into the atmosphere of a bygone day, or do his figures look like models in hired costume and quite [pg 213] ready to resume their own clothes and modern life?

Is he a painter of flowers; then is he an *artist* or a botanist? Is he a marinist; then, as a landsman has he made you feel like one, or has he painted for you water that can be walked on without faith? Has he shown you the dignity, the vastness, the tone, and above all the movement of the sea?

Is he a landscape painter? Then is he in a position to assert himself to a greater degree than they all? The farther one may remove himself from his theme, the less of its minutiae will he see. The process of simplification is individual. What he takes from nature he puts back out of himself. The landscape painter becomes an interpreter of moods, his own as well as nature's, and in his selection of these he reveals himself. Does he show you the kingdoms of the world from some high mount, or make you believe they may be found if you keep on moving through the air and over the ground such as he creates? Does he make you listen with him to the soft low music when nature is kindly and tender and lovable, or is his stuff of that

robust fibre which makes her companionable to him in her ruggedness and strength?

As the hidden forces of nature control man yet bend to his bidding—electricity, air, steam, etc.—so do the open and obvious ones which the painter deals with. They dictate all the conditions and yet somehow—he governs. The different ways in which he does this gives to art its [pg 214] variety and enables us to form a scale of relative values.

The work of art which attracts us excites two emotions; pleasure in the subject; admiration for the artist. Exhibitions of strength and skill claim our interest not so much for the thing done, which often perishes with the doing, as for the doer. The poet with a hidden longing to express or a story to tell, who binds himself to the curious limitations of the Italian sonnet, in giving evidence of his powers, excites greater admiration than though he had not assumed such conditions.

It is the personal element which has established photography and given it art character. Says J. C. Van Dyke, “a picture is but an autobiographical statement; it is the man and not the facts that may awaken our admiration; for, unless we feel his presence and know his genius the picture is nothing but a collection of incidents. It is not the work but the worker, not the mould but the moulder, not the paint but the painter.”

Witness it in the work of Michel Angelo, in both paint and marble. How we feel *the man*

of it in Franz Hals, in Rembrandt, in Rubens, Van Dyck, Valasquez, Ribera and Goya, in Watteau and Teniers, in Millet and Troyon, in Rousseau and Rico, in Turner, Constable and Gainsborough, in Fildes and Holl, in Whistler, in Monet, in Rodin and Barnard, in Inness, in Wyant and Geo. Fuller.

Like religion, art is not a matter of surfaces.

[pg 215]
Its essence is to be spiritually discerned. It is the spirit of the artist you must seek;—find the man.

Back of the canvas that
throbs, the painter is hinted
and hidden;
Into the statue that breathes
the soul of the sculptor is
bidden;
Under the joy that is felt lie
the infinite issue of feeling;
Crowning the glory revealed
is the glory that crowns the
revealing.
Great are the symbols of
being, but that which is
symboled is greater;
Vast the create and beheld,
but vaster the inward
creator;
Back of the sound broods the
silence, back of the gift
stands the giving;
Back of the hand that
receives thrill the sensitive
nerves of receiving.

[pg 216]

CHAPTER XIV - SPECIFIC QUALITIES AND FAULTS

If we recognize the manly qualities in a picture, the work has at least a favorable introduction. Farther than this point it may not please us, but if not, it should remain a question of taste between the artist and yourself; and, concerning taste there is no disputing. It is just at this point that the superficial critic errs. Dislike for the subject, however ably expressed, is never cause for condemnation. The fair question to ask is, what was the artist's intention? Its answer provokes your challenge; “Is it worth the expression!” If conceded, the real judgment begins. Has he done it; if not wholly—in what degree?

The question of degree will demand the patience of good judgment. There may be much or little sanity in condemning a picture owing to a single fault. It depends on the kind. There are errors of selection, of

presentation (technique) of natural fact, and of art principle. We can excuse the first, condone the second, find small palliation for the third, but he for whom art principles mean nothing, is an art anarchist.

Errors of selection are errors of judgment. A man may choose a subject which is unprofitable and which refuses to yield fruit; and yet in his [pg 217] effort at reediting its elements he may have shown great skill and knowledge and may have expended upon it his rarest gifts—fine technique and good color. The critic must read between the lines and blame the judgment, not the art. Feeble selection and weak composition will be more easily specified as faults than bad drawing and unworthy color.

To the profession, the epithet “commonplace” weighs heavily against a work of art. Selection of what is fitting as an art subject means experience. The “ungrateful” subject and bad composition are therefore likely to mark the *nouveau* in picture making—the student fresh from the atelier with accurate drawing and true color and who may be full of promise, but who has become tangled with what the French term the soujet ingrat. Every artist has studies of this sort which contain sufficient truth to save them from being painted over as canvas, and most painters know the place for such—the storeroom. Exhibition of studies is interesting as disclosing the means to an end, and the public should discern between the intention of the “study” and of the picture.

Herein lies the injustice of acquiring the posthumous effects of an artist and exposing for sale every scrap to be found. The ravenous group of dealers which made descent upon the Millet cottage at the death of that artist effected as clean a sweep as an army of ants in an Indian bungalow. In consequence we see in galleries throughout Europe and this country many trifles [pg 218] in pastel which are not only incomplete but positively bad as color. Millet used but a few hard crayons for trials in color suggestion, to be translated in oil. Some were failures in composition and in most the color is nothing more than any immature hand could produce with such restricted means. To allow these to enter into any estimate of Millet or to take them seriously as containing his own estimate of art, or as intrinsically valuable, is folly.

The faults of selection may also be open to difference of opinion. “Who would want to paint you when no one wants to look at you?” said an old epigrammatist to a misshapen man. “Not so,” says the artist; “I will paint you though people may not like to look at you and they will look at my portrait not for your sake but for my art, and find it interesting.”

The cult that declares for anything as a subject, its value dependent upon that which the artist adds, stands as a healthy balance to that band of literary painters which affected English art a generation ago, the school of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Maddox-Brown, who strove to present *ideas* through art. With them the idea was paramount, and the

technical in time dwindled, the subject with its frequently ramified meaning, proving to be beyond their art expression.

Again, the popular attempt to conceive in pictures that which the artist never expected us to find is as reprehensible in graphic as in musical art. There is often no literary meaning whatever in some of the best examples of [pg 218] both. Harmony, tone, color and technique pure and simple are the full compass of the intention. What this may suggest to the individual he is welcome to, but the glib dictum of certain preachers on art as to hidden intentions would indicate that they had effected an agreement, with the full confidence of the silent partner to exploit him. Beware of the gilt edged footnote, or the art that depends upon it. A writer of ordinary imagination and fluent English can put an aureole about any work of art he desires and much reputation is secured on this wise.

In the presentation of a subject through given pictorial elements, the critic will know whether the most has been made of the opportunity. If the composition prove satisfactory and the theme as presented still fails to move the critic, he must shift from the scientific analysis to those qualities governing the artist subjectively. He is lacking in “temperament,” and without temperament who in art has a chance? With years in the schools and a technique of mechanical perfection he lacks the divine fire and leaves us cold. It is for the critic to say this, and herein he becomes a teacher to public and

artist.

The patron who agreed that a picture under discussion had every quality which the salesman mentioned and patiently heard him through but quietly remarked, “It hasn't that,” as he snapped his finger, is the sort of a critic who does not need to know the names of things in art. He felt a picture should have snap, and if it did not, it was lacking.

[pg 220]
But beyond the presentation of a theme having in it the mark of genius, is that of workmanlike technique. The demand of the present age is for this. If a subject is *not painted* it will scarce hold as art. Ideas, composition, even color and harmony plead in vain; the spirit of the times sits thus in judgment.

The presentation also should be individual, the unmistakable sign of distinction. To be able to tell at a glance by this mark puts us on the footing of intimate acquaintance. A difference exists between this and the well-known mannerisms of individuals. The latter applies to special items in pictures, the former to the individual style of expression. An artist may have one way of seeing all trees, or the similarity of one picture with another may be because there is only one sort of tree that interests him, or one time of day when all trees attract his brush. In the first case he is a mannerist, in the other a worker in a chosen groove. It cannot be denied that many artists making a success in a limited range of subject

consent to stop, and go no further, under pressure of dealers or the public. The demand for specialists has much more reason in science and mechanics than in art, which is or should be a result of impulse.[17]

Corot declared he preferred the low sweet music of early dawn and to him there was enough variety in it to keep him employed as long as he could paint; but the thralldom of an artist who follows in the groove of a bygone success because if he steps out of it the dealer [pg 220] frowns and will not handle his work, is pitiable, exposing to view year by year the remonitory canvas with such slight changes as newness demands. It would be a healthier sign in art if the press and public would applaud new ventures when it was clear that an artist, thereby, was seeking to do better things and perhaps find himself in a newer vein. But variety in art it is maintained need not come of variety in the individual but of a variety of individuals. So Van Marke must paint cows, and Jacque sheep and Wouvermanns must be told by the inevitable white horse, and have the mere mention of the artist's name mean the same sort of picture every time. This aids the simplification of a many-sided question. The public, as Mr. Hamerton declares, hates to burden itself with names; to which might be added that it also hates to differentiate with any single name. A good portraitist in England one year exhibited at the Royal Academy a wonderfully painted peacock. The people raved and thereafter he was allowed to

paint nothing else. Occasionally it is shown that this discrimination is without reason, as many men rise above the restriction. The Gainsborough portrait and landscape are equally strong, the works of painters in marble, and sculptors who use color, have proved a surprise to the critics and an argument against the “specialty.”

There are two degrees in the subversion of the natural fact.

If, for example, under the rule in physics, the [pg 221] angle of incidence being equal to the angle of reflection, it be found that a cloud in the sky will reflect into water too near the bottom of the picture, a painter's license may move it higher *in its vertical line;* but if the same cloud is made to reflect at an angle several degrees to right or left, the artist breaks the simplest law of optics. The painter's art at best is one of deception. In the first case the lie was plausible. In the second case any schoolboy could have “told on” the artist.

There are good painters who appear to know little and care less for physical fact. Their business is with the surface of the earth; the whys and wherefores of the universe they ignore, complacent in their ignorance until it leads them to place the evening star within the arc of the crescent moon, when they are annoyed to be told that the moon does not grow from this shape to the full orb once a month. But ofttimes, though the artist may not flout the universe, he shows his

carelessness of natural fact and needs the snubbing. It is in this range that the little critic walks triumphantly posing as a shrewd and a discerning one. He holds up inconsistencies with his deft thumb and finger and cries, “what a smart boy am I.” And yet in spite of him Rubens, for the sake of a better line in the foreground of one of his greatest compositions dares to reconstruct a horse with his head issuing from his hind quarters, allowing the tail to serve as the mane, and Turner kept on drawing castles all wrong.

[pg 223]
But these critics have their place. Even Ruskin accepted this as a part of his work.

There are occasions, as every artist will admit, when the artless critic with his crude commonplaces is most welcome.

As to the violator of *art principles,* his range in art must perforce be short, his reward a smile of pity, his finish suicide. Originality may find all the latitude it requires within the limits of Art Principles.

Ruskin in his principles of drawing enumerates these as “Principality, i.e., a chief object in a picture to which others point: Repetition, the doubling of objects gives quietude: Symmetry develops solemnity, but in landscape it must be balanced, not formal. Continuity: as in a succession of pillars or promontories or clouds involving change and relief, or else it would be mere monotonous repetition. Curvature: all beautiful objects are

bounded by infinite curves, that is to say, of infinitely changing direction, or else made up of an infinite number of subordinate curves. Radiation: illustrated in leaves and boughs and in the structure of organic bodies. Contrast: of shapes and substances and of general lines; being the complement of the law of continuity, contrast of light and shade not being enough. Interchange: as in heraldic quartering. Consistency: or breadth overriding petty contrast and giving the effect of aggregate color or form. Harmony: art is an abstract and must be harmoniously abstracted, keeping the relations of values."

[pg 224]
With the above principles of composition Mr. Ruskin aims to cover the field of architecture, sculpture and painting, and he declares there are doubtless others which he cannot define "and these the most important and connected with the deepest powers of art. The best part of every work of art is inexplicable. It is good because it is good."

Mr. Hamerton enumerates the duties of the critic as follows; "to utter unpopular truths; to instruct the public in the theoretical knowledge of art; to defend true living artists against the malice of the ignorant; to prevent false living artists from acquiring an influence injurious to the general interests of art; to exalt the fame of dead artists whose example may be beneficial; to weaken the fame of dead artists whose names have an injurious degree of authority; to speak always with absolute sincerity; to give expression to

vicissitudes of opinion, not fearing the imputation of inconsistency; to make himself as thoroughly informed as his time and opportunities will allow, about everything concerning the Fine Arts, whether directly or indirectly; to enlarge his own powers of sympathy; to resist the formation of prejudices." The above requirements are well stated for critics who, by reason of the authority of their position as press writers, are teachers of art. As to the personnel and qualifications of this Faculty of Instruction, investigation would prove embarrassing. The shallowness of the average review of current exhibitions is no more surprising, than that responsible [pg 225] editors of newspapers place such consignments in the hands of the all-around-reporter, to whom a picture show is no more important than a fire or a function. Mr. Hamerton in his essay urges artists to write on art topics, as their opinions are expert testimony, a suggestion practically applied by a small group of daily papers in America. Says Mr. Stillman, "No labor of any human worker is ever subjected to such degradation as is art to-day under the criticism of the daily paper." Probably no influence is more responsible for the apathy and distrust of the public regarding art than these reviews of exhibitions for the daily press. The reader quotes as authoritative the dictum of a great journal, seldom reflecting that this is the opinion of one man, who, with rarest exception, is the least qualified of any writer on the staff to speak on his theme. Such is the value which the average manager

puts upon the subject. To review the picked efforts of a year, of several hundred men, a scant column is deemed sufficient. Howsoever honest may be the intention toward these, the limitations render the task hopeless, for all efforts to level the scales to a nicety may be foiled by the shears of the managing editor if perchance another petit larceny should require any part of the space.

So the critic gives it up, mounts a pedestal, waves whole walls, aye galleries, to oblivion, and with the sumptuousness of a Nero, adopts the magnificent background, in the light of which for a moment he shines resplendent, as a gilded setting for his oracles.

[pg 226]

CHAPTER XV - THE PICTURE SENSE

“Fortunate is he, who at an early age knows what art is.”[18]

Howsoever eloquent may be the artist in his work, it is convincing only in that degree to which his audience is prepared to understand his language and comprehend his subject.

"The artist hangs his brains upon the wall," said the veteran salesman of the National Academy, and there they remain without explanation or defense. The crowd as it passes, enjoys or jeers, as the ideas of this mute language are comprehended or confounded. Art requires no apology and asks none; all she requests is that those who would affect her must know the principles upon which she works. An age of altruism should be able to insure to the artist sufficient culture in his audience so that his language be understood and that his speech be not reckoned as an uncertain sound. The public should form with him an industrial partnership, not in the limited sense of giving and taking, but of something founded on comprehensibility.

What proportion of the visitors to an annual exhibition can intelligently state the purpose of impressionism, or distinguish between this and [pg 227] tonal art; what proportion think of art only as it exploits a "subject" or "tells a story"; how many look at but one class of pictures and have no interest in the rest; how many go through the catalogue with a prayer-book fidelity, and know nothing of it all when they come out! How many know enough to hang the pictures in their own houses so that each picture is helped and none damaged?

Could it be safely inferred that every collector of pictures knows and feels to the point of *giving a reason* for his choice of pictures, or even *reasonable* advice to a friend who would also own pictures? Is not much of what is bought taken on the word of a reliable dealer and owned in the satisfaction of its being "all right," and perhaps "safe," as an investment? Is it unreasonable to ask the many sharers in the passing picture pleasures of a great city to make themselves intelligent in some other and more practical way than by *contact,* gleaning only through a lifetime what should have been theirs without delay *as a foundation* and to exchange for the vague impression of pleasure, defended in the simple comfort of *knowing what one likes,* the enjoyment of sure authority and a reason for it.

The best of all means for acquiring *art sense* is association; first, with a personality; second, with the product. The artist's safest method with the uninitiated is to use the speech which they understand. In conversation, artists, as a rule, talk freely, and one may get deeper into art from a fortnight's sojourn with a group [pg 228] of artists than from all the treatises ever written on the philosophy of art. The most successful collectors of pictures know this. They study artists as well as pictures. But on the other hand must it not also be conceded that acquaintance with fine examples of art is in a fair way of cultivating the keen and intelligent collector in the pictorial sense to a degree beyond that of those artists whose associations are altogether

with their own works or with those who think with them, who must of necessity believe most sincerely in themselves and who are thus obliged to operate in a groove, and with consequent bias. For this reason association should be varied. No one has the whole truth.

Music scores a point beyond painting, in necessitating a personality. We see the interpreter and this intimacy assists comprehension. But howsoever potent is association with art and artist, one may thus never get as closely in touch with art as by working with her. The best and safest critic is of course one who has performed. Experts are those persons who have passed through every branch and know the entire “business.”

The years of toil to students who eventually never arrive are incidentally spent in gaining the knowledge to thus know pictures, and though the success of accomplishment be denied, their compensation lies in the lengthened reach of a new horizon which meantime has been opened to them. Whether the picture be found in nature [pg 229] and is to be rescued, as is the bas-relief from its enveloping mould, cut out of its surroundings by the four sides of the canvas and brought indoors with the same glow of triumph as the geologist feels in picking a turquoise out of a rock at which others had stared and found nothing; or whether it be found, as one of many in a collection of prints or paintings; or whether the recognition be personal and asks the acceptance of something wrought by one's own hand—to know a picture when one sees

it—this is art *sense*. Backed by a judgment presenting a defense to the protests of criticism, it becomes art *knowledge*.

To find and preserve pictures out of the maze of nature is the labor of the artist: to recognize them when found, the privilege of the connoisseur.

The guileless prostrations which the many affect regarding art judgments evoke the same degree of pity as the assertion of the beggar that he needs money for a night's lodging when you and he know that one is awaiting him for the asking at the Bureau of Charities. The many declare they know nothing about art, the while having an all around culture in the humanities, in literature, poetry, prose composition, music, æsthetics, etc. The principles of all the arts being identical, how simple would it be to apply those governing the arts which one knows to what is unknown. The musician and poet make use of contrast, light and shade, gradation, antithesis, balance, accent, force by opposition, [pg 230] isolation and omission, rhythm, tone-color, climax, and above all unity and harmony.

Let the musician and him who knows literature challenge the work of art for a violation of any of these and the judgment which results may be accepted seriously; and yet the essence lies beyond—with nature herself. It is just here that the stock writer of the daily paper misses it. He may have science enough, but lacks the love, the revelation

through communion.

But, with this omitted, critical judgment is safer in the hands of a person of broad culture, who knows nothing of the tools of painting and sculpture, than when wielded by a half-educated student of art with his development all on one side. Ruskin warns us of young critics.

As a short cut, the camera fills a place for the many who *feel* pictures and wish to create them, but at small cost of time and effort. A little art school for the public has the small black box become, into which persons have been looking searchingly and thoughtfully for the past dozen years. To those who have thus regarded it and exhibit work in competition, revelations have come. Non-composition ruins their chances. Good composition is nine-tenths of the plot. When this is conceded the whole significance of their art is deepened. Then and not until then does photography become allied with art, for this is the only point at which *brains may be mixed* with the photographic product.

Any one who has experienced a lantern slide exhibition of art, where picture after picture [pg 231] follows rapidly and the crowd expresses judgment by applause, will not long be in doubt what pictures make the strongest appeal. The “crowd” applauds three types; something recognized as familiar, the “happy hit,” especially of title, and, (not knowing why) all pictures, without regard to subject, *which express unity.* The first two classes are

not a part of this argument, but of the last, the natural, spontaneous attraction of the healthy mind by what is complete through unity contains such reason as cannot be ignored. Subjects of equal or greater interest which antagonize unity fall flat before this jury.

There is no opportunity more valuable to the amateur photographer than the lantern slide exhibition, and the fact that even now no more than ten or twelve per cent. of what is shown is pictorially good should provoke a search for the remedy.

For the student, to fill the eye full of good compositions and to know why good, is of equal value with the study of faulty composition to discover why bad.

The challenge of compositions neither good nor bad to discover wherein they could be improved is better practice than either.

This is the constant exercise of every artist, the ejection of the sand grains from his easy running machinery.

Before photography became a fashion it was the writer's privilege to meet a county physician who had cultivated for himself a critical picture sense. The lines of his circuit lay among the [pg 232] pleasantest of pastoral scenes. Stimulated by their beauty it became his habit, as he travelled, to mark off the pictures of his route, to note where two ran together, to decide what details were

unnecessary, or where, by leaving the highway and approaching or retiring he discovered new ones. After a time he bought a Claude Lorraine glass. It was shortly after this purchase that I met him. His enthusiasm was delightful. With this *framing of his views* his judgment grew sensitive and as he showed these mirrored pictures to friends who rode with him he was most particular at just what point he stopped his horse. The man for whom picture galleries were a rarity, talked as intelligently upon the fundamental structure of pictures as most artists.

"I buy the pictures of Mauve," remarked a clergyman in Paris, "because he puts into them what I try to get into my sermons; simplicity, suggestiveness and logical sequence."

[pg 232]

CHAPTER XVI - COLOR, HARMONY, TONE

In viewing a picture exhibition the average man, woman and child would be attracted by different aspects of it; the man by the tone of the pictures, the woman by their color, the child almost wholly by the form or subject. The distinction is of course epigrammatic, but there is a basis for it in the daily associations of each of the three, the man with the conventional appointments of his dress and his business equipment, the woman with her gowns, her house decorations and flowers, the child with the world of imagination and fancy in which he dwells.

The distinction has much to do with the method and the degree of one's æsthetic development. That a picture must have a subject is the first pons asinorum to be crossed, the child usually preferring to remain on the farther side. The delight in color belongs to the lighter, freer or more barbaric part of the race. Tone best fits the sobriety of man.

The distinction is the difference in preference for an oak leaf as it turns to bronze, and a maple as it exchanges its greens for yellow and scarlet.

In the latter case two primaries are evolved from a secondary color and in the other a [pg 234] tertiary from a secondary. In the case of the oak bronze there is more harmony, for the three primaries are present.

In the case of the yellow and red, there is contrast and effect, but less harmony, since

but two primaries appear.

As the walls are studied that sort of color art is found to be most conspicuously prominent which is in the minority and probably one's unsophisticated choice, from the point of view of color, would be that which has the distinction of rarity, as the red haired woman is at a premium in the South Sea isles. If, however, the tonal and the coloresque art were in even interchange, the former would have much of its strength robbed, to the degree of the excessive color of its neighbors. If, however, the pictures of tone and of color, instead of being hung together were placed apart, it would be found that the former expressed the greater unity and presented a front of composure and dignity and that the varied color combinations would as likely quarrel among themselves as with their former neighbors.

That a just distinction may be had between tonal and coloresque and impressionist art, the purpose of each must be stated. The “tonist” aims primarily at unified color, to secure which he elects a tone to be followed, which shall dominate and modify every color of his subject. This is accomplished by either painting into a thin glaze of color, administered to the whole canvas so that every brushful partakes of some of it; or by modifying the painting subsequently by transparent glazes of the same tone.

The conscientious impressionist, on the contrary, produces harmony by juxtapositions

of pure color. Harmony results when the three primary colors are present either as red, yellow and blue or as a combination of a secondary and primary: green with red, orange with blue or purple with yellow.

The impressionist goes farther, knowing that the complementary of a color will tend to neutralize it, supplying as it does the lacking element to unity, he creates a vivid scheme of color on this basis. In representing therefore a gray rock he knows that if red be introduced, a little blue and yellow will kill it, and the three colors together at a distance will produce gray. Instead, therefore, of mixing upon his palette three primaries to produce the tertiary gray, he so places them on the canvas that at the proper distance (though this consideration is of small concern to him) the *spectator* will *mix* them—which he often does. The advantage of this method of color presentation lies in the degree of purity which the pigment retains. Its disadvantage appears in its frequent distortion of fact and aspect of nature, sacrificed to a scientific method of representation. An estimate of impressionism is wholly contained in the reply to the question, “Do you like impressions? Yes, when they are good;” and in the right hands they are.

They are good only when the real intention of [pg 236] impressionism has been expressed, when the synthesis of color has actually produced light and air, and an impression of nature is quickened. But the voice from the canvas more frequently cries “nature be

hanged—but this is impressionism."

The little people of impressionism finding it possible to represent more light than even nature shows in very many of her aspects, delight in exhibiting the disparity existing between nature and, forsooth, impressionism. Thus we see attempts to "*knock out*" with these scientific brass knuckles all those who refuse to fight with them. The rumpus grows out of the different attitudes in which nature is approached.

The one, drawn by her beauty, kneels to her, touching her resplendent garments; the other grasps her with the mailed hand, bedecking her with a mantle of his own. The knights wooing the same mistress are therefore lorn rivals.

For effect, no one can deny that produced by the savage in war paint and feathers is more startling than the man wearing the conventional garb of civilization, or that the stars and stripes have greater attraction than the modified tones of a gobelin tapestry or a Persian rug. We put the flag outside the building but the daily course of our lives is more easily spent with the tapestry and rug.

An "impression"[19] among tonal pictures [pg 237] appears as foolish as a tonal picture among impressions and the sane conclusion is that the attempt to combine them should not be made.

The clear singing tones of the upper register

are better rendered under this formula than by any other, but the feeling of solidity and the tonal depth of nature are qualities which it compromises. Impressionism expresses frankly by the use of smaller methods what the tonists attain by larger and freer ones. The individual must decide whether he prefers to tell the time as he watches the movement of the works or will take this for granted if he gets the result.

For charm in color no one will deny that in the works of old masters this is found in greater degree than in painting of more recent production, and the reason is, not because the pigments of the fourteenth century are better than ours, but it is to be found in the alterative and refining influences of time and varnish, which have crowned them with the glorious aureole of the centuries.

Guided by this fact the modern school of tonists seeks to shorten the period between the date of production and this final desirable quality, by setting in motion these factors at once. They therefore paint with varnish as a medium, multiplying the processes of glazing with pure color so that under a number of surfaces of varnish the same chemical action may be precipitated which in the earlier art came about with but few exceptions as a happening through the simple necessary acts of preservation. The consequence [pg 238] of this adoption of kindred processes is that the tonal pictures and the old masters join hands naturally and can stand side by side in the gallery of the collector.

This, though a wholly practical reason for the growing popularity of tonal art is one of the powerful considerations for the trend from that sort which is liable to create discord. The simplest illustration of harmony, and unity and tone may be had in nature herself, for though these qualities have their scientific exposition, the divisions of the color scale are not so easily comprehended by many people as the chart which may be conceived in extended landscape. The sky, inasmuch as it spreads itself over the earth and reflects its light upon it, dictates the *tone* of the scene. The surface of the lake reveals this fact beyond dispute, for the water takes on any tone which the sky may have. The sky's power of reflection is no less potent in the landscape.

Reflection is observable in that degree in which the surface, reflected upon, is rough or smooth. The absorbent surface allows the light to fall in and disappear and under this condition we see the true or local color. Note, for example, the effect of light on velvet or the hide of a cow in winter. When the hair points toward the light the mass is rich and dark, but when it turns away in any direction its polished surface reflects light, which like the lake becomes a mirror to it.

Light falling upon a meadow will influence it [pg 239] by its own color only in those places where the grass is turned at an angle from its rays.

From these few observations it becomes obvious that unity of tone is a simple matter

when understood by the painter and that unity, being a most important part of his color scheme, may be increased by additions of objects bearing the desirable color which nature fails to supply in any particular subject. Thus if the day be one in which a warm mellow haze pervades the air, those tones of the sky repeated upon the backs of cattle, a roadway, clothing, or what not, may effect a more positive tonality than the lesser items would give which also reflect it. Herein then is the principle of Tonality: That all parts of the picture should be bound together by the dominating color or colors of the picture.

With the indoor subject the consideration is equally strong. Let the scheme be one as coloresque as the Venetian school took delight in, vivid primaries in close juxtaposition (see small reproduction in Fundamental forms—The Cross). The central figure, that of St. Peter is clothed in dark blue with a yellow mantle. The Virgin's dress is deep red, her mantle a blue, lighter than that of Peter's robe. Through the pillars is seen the blue sky of still lighter degree. Thus the sky enters the picture by graded approaches and focalizes upon the central figure. In like manner do the light yellow clouds repeat their color in the side of the building, in the yellow spot in the flag and the mantle of the central figure. The red of [pg 239] the Virgin's robe and the yellow mantle together form a combination of a yellow red in the flag, the blue and red of the central figures become purple and garnet in the surplices of the kneeling churchmen

and doges. The repetition of a given color in different parts of the figure is pushed still further in the blue gray hair of the kneeling figures, the red brown tunics of the monks and the yellow bands upon the draperies.

In the picture by Henry Ranger (the crossing of horizontals effected without a line), a canvas in which the color is particularly reserved and gray, the tone is created by precisely the same means. The cool gray and warm white clouds are reflected into the water and concentrated with greater force in the pool in the foreground, the greens and drabs of the bushes being strikingly modified by both of the tones noted in the sky. In landscape a cumulative force may be given the progress of the sky tones by the use of figures, the blue or gray of the sky being brought down in stronger degree upon the clothing of the peasant, his cart or farm utensils. Just here inharmony easily insinuates itself through the introduction of elements having no antiphonal connection.

Fancy a single spot of red without its echo. Our sense of tonal harmony is unconsciously active when between two figures observed too far away for sight of their faces we quickly make our conclusions concerning their social station, if one be arrayed in a hat trimmed with purple [pg 241] and green, a garnet waist and a buff skirt, while the other, though dressed in strong colors expresses the principles of coloration herewith defined. The purple and green hat may belong to her suit if their colors be repeated by modification, in it;

or the garnet and buff become the foundation for unity if developed throughout the rest of the costume.

The purchaser of a picture may be sure of the tone of his new acquisition if he will hang it for a day or two upside down. This is one of the simplest tests applied by artists, and many things are revealed thereby. Form is lost and the only other thing remains—color.

Harmony being dependent only on the interrelations of colors, their degree or intensity are immaterial.

On this basis it is a matter of choice whether our preference be for the coloresque or the more sober art.

It must however be borne in mind that the danger lies in the direction of color. Inharmony is more frequently found here than in the picture of sober tone.

Precisely the same palette is used to produce an autumnal scene on a blue day, when the colors are vivid and the outline on objects is hard and the form pronounced, as on an overcast day with leaden clouds and much of the life and color gone from the yellow and scarlet foliage.

The reason why chances for harmony in the first are less than in the second is that the synthetic union of the colors is not as obvious or [pg 241] as simple as in the latter, in which to produce the gray sky, red and

yellow have been added to the blue, and the sky tones are more apparently added to the bright hues by being mixed into dull colors upon the palette. The circle of harmony is therefore more easily apparent to our observation.

It is for this reason that tonality is more easily understood when applied to the green and copper bronze of the oak tree against a cool gray sky than the red and yellow hillside and the blue sky.

VALUES.

Another important consideration in an estimate of a picture is its truth of values. The color may be correct and harmonious but the degree of its light and shade be faulty. This is a consideration more important to the student than the connoisseur as but few pictures see the light of an exhibition which carry this fault. It is the one most dwelt upon in the academies after the form in outline has been mastered. On it depends the correctness of surface presentation. If, for instance, the values of a face are false, the character will be disturbed. This point has been made evident to all in the retouching, which many photographs receive. Likeness is so dependent on those surfaces connecting the features or upon the light and shade of the features, that

any tampering with them in a sensitive part is ruinous.

Values represent the degree of light and shade [pg 243] which the picture demands, the relations of one part to another on the scale assumed. Thus with the same light affecting various objects in a room, if one be represented as though illumined by a different degree of light it is out of value; or, in a landscape, if an object in the distance is too strong in either color or degree of light and shade for its particular place in perspective, it is out of value. There are therefore values of color and of chiaroscuro, which may be illustrated in a piece of drapery. A light pink silk will be out of value in its shadow if these are too dark for the degree of light represented, and out of color value, if, instead of a salmon tone in the crease which a reflection from the opposing surface of the fold creates, there be a purplish hue which properly belongs to the outer edge of the fold in shadow, where, from the sky or a cool reflecting surface near by, it obtains this change of color by reflection.

The most objectionable form of false values is the isolated sort, whereby the over accentuation of a part is made to impress itself unduly; “to jump” in the technical phraseology of the school.

The least objectionable and often permitted form is that where a large section is put out of its value with the intent of accenting the light of a contiguous part.

In landscape the whole foreground is frequently lowered in tone beyond the possibility of any cloud shadow, for the sake of the light beyond, which may be the color motif of the picture and which thereby is glorified.

CHAPTER XVII - ENVELOPMENT AND COLOR PERSPECTIVE

Allied to values is the idea of envelopment: of a kindred notion to this is aerial perspective. On these two depends the proper presentation of a figure *in air*.

If at any place on the contour of a figure the background seems to stick, the detachment from its surroundings, which every figure should have, is wanting.

The reason for it is to be found in a false value which has deprived it of rotundity of envelopment.

The solid object which resists the attempt to

put one's hand around it or to stretch beyond into the background, lacks this quality. A fine distinction must be here drawn between simple envelopment and relief, which is a more positive and less important quality.

However flatly and in mass figures may be conceived, the impression of aerial envelopment must be unmistakable. Here a nice adjustment of values or relative tones will accomplish it.

Naturally, the greater space between the spectator and an object, the more air will be present. To the painter the color of air is the color of the sky. This then will be *mixed* with the local color of the object, giving it atmosphere.

[pg 245]
Envelopment is unmistakably represented by the out of door Dutch painters, for in the low countries atmosphere *is seen* in its density, and at very short range. Holland is therefore an ideal sketching ground for the painter and the best in the world for the student, since the ideas of values and envelopment are ever present. In this saturated air the minute particles of moisture which, in the case of rain or fog can affect the obliteration of objects, partially accomplishes it at all times, with the result that objects seem to *swim in atmosphere.*

In such a landscape perspective of value and color is easily observed, making positive the separation of objects. The painter, under these conditions, is independent of linear

perspective to give depth to his work, which being one of the cheap devices of painting he avoids as much as possible.

It is because aerial perspective is paintable and the other sort is not that artists shun the clear altitudes of Colorado where all the year one can see for eighty miles and, on the Atlantic border, wait the summer through for the fuller atmosphere which the fall will bring, that by its tender envelopment the vividness and detail which is characteristic of the American landscape may give place to what is serviceable to the purposes of painting.

It is because of misunderstanding on this point that we of the Western Hemisphere may wrongly challenge foreign landscape, judging it upon the natural aspect of our own country. The [pg 246] untravelled American or he who has “been there” without seeing things, is not aware that distinctly different conditions prevail in Europe than with us, especially above latitude 40°.

Advantage in the paintability of subject therefore lies distinctly with the European artist, and it may be because he has to labor against these odds that the American landscapist has forged to the front and is now leading his European brethren. It must, however, be acknowledged that he acquired what he knows concerning landscape from the art and nature of Europe—from Impressionism with its important legacy of color, which has been acknowledged in

varying degree by all our painters, and from the “school of 1830,” on which is based the tonal movement of the present.

Other than perspective of values, no importance should be attached to that which, with the inartistic mind, is regarded so important a quality. The art instruction which the common school of the past generation offered was based on perspective, its problems, susceptible of never ending circumventions, being spread in an interminable maze before the student. Great respect for this “lion in the path” was a natural result and “at least a two years' study” of these problems was thought necessary before practical work in art could commence. (See Appendix.)

Mr. Ruskin's fling at the perspective labyrinth would have been more authoritative than it proved, had he not too often lessened our faith by the cry of wolf when it proved a false alarm.

[pg 247]
There is a single truth which, though simple, was never known to Oriental art, namely; that in every picture there must be a real or understood horizon—the level of the painter's eye,—that all lines above this will descend and all lines below will rise to it as they recede.

But upon aerial perspective depends the question of detail in the receding object and this to the painter is of first importance. To

temper a local color so that it shall settle itself to a nicety at any distance, in the perspective scheme, and to express the exact degree of shadow which a given color shall have under a given light and at a given distance are problems which absorb four-fifths of the painter's attention.

If the features of a man a hundred yards away be painted with the same fidelity as though he stood but ten yards distant the aerial balance is disturbed, the man being brought nearer than his place on the perspective plan allows.

At a mile's range a tree to the painter is not an object expressing a combination of leaves and branches, but a solid colored mass having its light and shade and perhaps perforated by the sky. It is with natural *aspect* and not natural *fact* that the painter deals.

Pre-Raphaelite art practised this phase of honesty, which, in our own day was revived in England. In this later coterie of pre-Raphaelite brethren was but one painter, the others, men of varying artistic perceptions and impulses. To the painter it in time became evident that he was out of place in this company and the [pg 248] commentary of his withdrawal proved more forcible than any to be made by an outsider.

When, therefore, judgment be applied to a work of painting it must be with a knowledge of natural aspect in mind, not necessarily related, even vaguely, to the scene under consideration, but such as has come *by* the

absorption of nature's moods, whereby, with the cause given, the effect may be known as a familiar sequence. The public too should be sufficiently knowing to catch the code signals of each artist whereby these natural facts are symbolled.

Herein has now been set forth, as concisely as possible, the few considerations which are ever present to the painter. The connoisseur who would judge of his work, either subjectively or technically, must follow in his footprints and be careful to follow closely. He must appreciate the differences in the creeds of workers in color and not apply the formulas of impressionism to works in tone. He must not emphasize the importance of drawing in the work which clearly speaks of color and by its technique ignores all else; nor expect the miracle of luscious, translucent color in a work demanding the minute drawing of detail. He can, however, be sure that the criteria of judgment which under all circumstances will apply are:

Balanced and unified composition, both of line and mass.

Harmony of color, expressed by the correlation of all colors throughout the picture.

[pg 249]
Tone, or the unification of all colors upon the basis of a given hue.

Values, or the relation of the shades of an

object to each other and the degree of relation between one object and another.

Envelopment, or the sense of air with which objects are surrounded.

With these five ideas in mind the critic of Philistia may enter the gallery, constituting himself a jury of one, assured he is armed with every consideration which influenced the artist in his work and the art committee in its acceptance thereof.

Judgment however does not end here. These constitute the tables of the law, and law finds its true interpretation only in the spirit of the living principle.

[pg 250]

CHAPTER XVIII - THE BIAS OF JUDGMENT

If discernment was ours to trace through the

maze of fashion and experimental originality the living principle of true art, the caprice of taste would have little to do with the comfort of our convictions or the worth of our investments.

Fallacy has its short triumphs and the persuasive critic or the creator of art values may effect real value but for a day. The limit of the credulity of the public, which Lincoln has immortalized, is the basis of hope.

The public in time rights itself.

Error in discerning this living principle in art is cause for the deepest contrition at the confessional of modern life. Unsigned and unrecognized works by modern masters have been rejected by juries to whom in haste the doors of the *Salon* or *Society* have been reopened with apologies. The nation which assumes the highest degree of aesthetic perception turned its back on Millet and Corot and Courbet and Manet and Puvis de Chavannes, rejecting their best, and has honored yesterday what it spurns to-day. The feverish delirium of the upper culture demands “some new thing,” and Athens, Paris, London and New York concede it.

But what has lived? What successive generations have believed in may be believed by us; a [pg 251] thought expressed by the author of “Modern Painters” in one magnificent sentence, containing 153 words and too long for quotation. The argument is based on the common sense of mankind. It

has however this objection. Judgment by such agreement is bound to be cumulative. What is good in the beginning is better to-day, still better to morrow, then great, then wonderful, then divine.

This is the Raphaelesque progression, and if fifty persons were asked who was the greatest painter, forty-nine would say Raphael, without discrimination. The fiftieth might have observed what all painters know, that Raphael was not a great painter, either as colorist or technician. The opinion in this contention of Velasquez that of all painters he studied at Rome, Raphael pleased him least, is a judgment of a colorist and a technician, the more valuable because rendered before the ministrations of oil and granular secretion had enveloped his work in the mystery from which it speaks to us. As a painter and draughtsman Raphael is perhaps outclassed by Bouguereau, Cabanel or Lefevre of our own time, and as a composer of either decorative or pictorial design he has had superiors. But the work of Raphael possesses the loving unction of real conviction and nothing to which he put his well trained hand failed of the baptism of genius. Through this mark, therefore, it will live forever. Nor should any work require more than this for continuous life. Each age should be distinctive.

The bias of judgment through the cumulative [pg 252] regard of successive centuries is what has created the popular disparity between the old and modern masters, and it

must not be forgotten that the harmony of color and its glowing quality is largely the gift of these centuries, a fact made cruelly plain to those who have restored pictures and tampered with their secrets.

It will be a surprise to the average man in that realm of perfect truth which lies beyond, to mark, in the association of artists of all ages, when the divisions of schools, periods and petty formulas are forgotten, that Raphael will grasp the hand of Abbott Thayer, saying to him in the never dying fervor of art enthusiasm and with the acknowledgment of limitations, which is one of the signs of greatness;

“O, that I had had thy glorious quality of technical subtlety in place of the mechanical directness in which I labored!” and he in turn to be reminded that had he paused for this, the span of his short life were measured long before he had accomplished half his work.

A kindred bias is the eventual acceptance of whatever is persisted in. Almost any form in which a technically good artist may express his idea will in time find acceptance. It has the persuasion of the advertisement, offering what we do not want. In time we imagine we do. Duplications of Cuyp's very puerile arrangement of parts, as in the “Departure for the Chase” to be found in others of his pictures, work in our minds mitigation for those faults. The belief in self has the singular magnetic potency of [pg 253] drawing and turning us. A stronger magnet must then be

the living principle. We find it in unity. Originality compromises this at its peril.

And that discrimination against the prophet in his own country! Under its ban the native artist left his home and dwelt abroad; but the expatriation which produced pictures of Dutch and French peasants by native painters was in time condemned. The good of the foreign experience lay in the medals which were brought back out of banishment. These turned the tide of thoughtless prejudice, and international competitions have kept it rising.

But the worth of the foreign signature is now of the lesser reckonings; for with the same spirit in which the native artist would annihilate the tariff on foreign art, have the best painters of Europe declared “there shall be no nationality in art”; for art is individual and submits to the government stamp only by courtesy.

Happy that nation which, when necessary, can believe in its own, not to exclusion, from clannish pride, but on the basis of that simple canon adopted by the world of sport; “Let the best win.”

The commonest bias to judgment is also the most vulgar—price. The reply of the man of wealth to the statement that a recent purchase was an inferior example of an artist's work; “I paid ten thousand for it. Of course it's all right,” was considered final to the critic. The man whose first judgment concerning an elaborate picture of roses was

turned to surprise and [pg 254] wonder when told the price, which in time led to respect and then purchase, may find parallels in most of the collections of Philistia. “The value of a picture is what some one will pay for it” is a maxim of the creators of picture values and upon it the “picture business” has its working basis. And so together with the good of foreign art have the Meyer Von Bremens and the Verbeckhovens, the creations of the school of smiles and millinery, and the failures and half successes of impressionism, together with its good, been cornered, and unloaded upon the ingenuous collector.

The most insidious bias of judgment is that developed by the art historian, the man who really knows.

Serene and above the petty matters which concern the buyer of art and perplex the producer, he pours forth his jeremiads upon the age and its art, subjecting them to indefensible comparisons with the fifteenth century and deploring the materialism of modern times.

The argument is that out of the heart the mouth must speak; can men gather figs from thistles: is it reasonable to expect great art when men and messages are transported by steam and electricity, in the face of Emerson's contention that art is antagonistic to hurry? The argument neglects the fact that this present complex life is such because it has added one by one these separate interests to those which it has received as an inheritance,

each of which in its own narrowing niche having [pg 255] been preserved under the guardianship of the specialist.

The art instinct has never died out; but art, which aforetime was the only thought of the humanists, has been obliged to move up and become condensed. But mark, the priests who keep alive her fires can still show their ordination from the hands of the divine Raphael. The age may be unsympathetic, but for those who will worship, the fire burns. Whereas art was once uplifted by the joyous acclaim of the whole people, she must now fight for space in a jostling competition. But is it not more reasonable that the prophet lay aside his sackcloth and accept the conditions of the new era, acknowledging that art has had its day in the sanctuary and has now come to adorn the home and that of necessity therefore the conditions of subject and of size must be altered? The impulse which aforetime expressed itself in ideals is now satisfied to become reflective of the emotions. The change which has restricted the range in the grander reaches of the ideal has resulted in the closer and more intimate friendship with nature. The effort which was primarily ideal now turns its fervor into the quality of its means.

[pg 256]

CHAPTER XIX - THE LIVING PRINCIPLE

If there be a basis of reliance for continuous life and consequent value, a search for the living principle must be made in those works which the world will not let die. And this labor will be aided by the exclusion of such as have had their day and passed. Although the verdict suggested in the fostering care of the people or in its lack, may be wrong, as future ages may show, yet for us in our inquiry in the twentieth century this jury is our only court of appeal and its dictum must be final.

We command a view of the long line of art unfolding as a river flows, in winding course from meagre sources, and through untoward obstructions into a natural bed which awaits it, now deep and swollen, now slender, now graceful, now turbid, here breaking into smaller threads stretching into opposed directions, here again uniting and deepening, and we mark in all of its variety of course and depth, the narrow line of the channel. A slender line there is touching hands through all generations from the painters of the twilight of Art to the painters of the present who have seen all of its light and for whom too much of its brilliancy has proved bewildering. The history of art is perforce full

[pg 257] of the chronicles of unfruitful effort and the galleries as replete with unprofitable pictures. Our ardent though rapid quest will, unaided by the catalogue, discover for us the real, and sift it free of the spurious if we have settled with ourselves what art *is* and what its purpose. If we hold to the present popular notion that art is imitation, the results will come out at variance with the popular opinion of five centuries. If, on the other hand, we delegate to its proper place fidelity to the surface of nature, we must of necessity seek still further for its essence. This is subjective and not objective.

To make apparent a statement the edge of which strikes dull from much use in purely philosophical lingo, let us take the case of a picture representing a laborer with his horse. The idea for the expression of which the few elements of field, man and beast, are employed is *Toil.* Whether then the man and beast be in actual labor or not, the dominant idea in the artist's mind is that they are or have been laboring; that that is what they stand for, *that idea* to be presented in the strongest possible way. “The strongest possible way” is the question to be debated. Individual artists interpret this as suits their temperament, the jury therefore sits in judgment upon the temperament as the exponent of “the strongest possible way.” With the idea of toil in mind one artist is moved to present its unadorned force, careful not to weaken the conception by the addition of anything superfluous or extraneous to the

idea. Its force is therefore [pg 258] ideal force and the presentation appeals to and moves us on this basis. Another will see in the subject of a landscape, a man and a horse, an opportunity presented of detail and of surfaces and will delight in expressing what he knows to do cleverly. Under this impulse the dexterity of his art is poured forth; the long training of the workshop aids him. He paints the horse and makes it look not only like a real horse, but a particular one. The bourgeois claps his hands exclaiming, “See it is unmistakably old Dobbin, the white spot on his fetlock is there and his tail ragged on the end; and the laborer, I know him at once. How true to life with side whiskers and that ugly cut across the forehead and his hat with the hole in it. The field too is all there, the stones, the weeds, the rows of stubble, nothing slighted. And the action of the light too, what a relief the figures possess, how like colored photographs they stand out, clear, sharp and unmistakable.”

A third artist, without sacrificing the individual character of the horse will yet represent him in such a way that one feels first the idea, of a laboring horse and afterward notes that he is a particular horse, and in like manner with the man of the picture. This artist's conception lies midway between the two extremes and in consequence expresses greater truth than either. He poises himself on the magic line spanning the chasm between these opposing walls, supported by the balancing pole of the real and ideal,

lightly gripped in the centre.

[pg 259]
But to return to the first in the spirit of nature-love and truth to prove if it be worthy. Judged on this scale does it stand? Coordinately with the idea of toil, does it violate the laws of the universe; do the surfaces thereof reflect the light of day; is the color probable; is the action possible? If under this scrutiny the work fails, its acceptable idealistic expression cannot save it.

It is here that the idealist pleads in vain for the painters of the groping periods of art, or for the pre-Raphaelites of the nineteenth century, who in their spirit beg that we accept their unctuous will for the deed completely wrought. When however they do fill the condition of natural aspect in its fundamental essence, in its condition of non-violation of physical law, when, uncompromised by such discrepancy, the presentment of the idea is complete and this alone engages us, the work by virtue of its higher motive takes higher rank in the scale of art than that in which the idea has been delegated to a place second to the shell which encloses it. It is the art which fulfills both requirements *with the idea paramount* that has survived in all ages. The reverse order is not sustained by the history of art. Mark the line from the early masters to the present, do you not find the description includes “the idealists” *who could paint?* The list would be a long and involved one, taking its start in Italy with Botticelli, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci,

Michael Angelo, Andrea del Sarto, Fra Bartolomeo, [pg 260] Titian, Giorgione, and extending thence to our own time inclusive of Millet, Corot, Watts, Turner, Blake, Rousseau, Mauve, Puvis de Chavannes and Ryder—men of all complexions in art, and typical of many more quite as diverse in their subjects and modes of expression but who place the idea, the motive, the emotion, the type, before the thing depicted. For them the letter of the law killeth, but the spirit giveth life. This of course raises issue with the naturalistic school —a school which believes in rendering Nature as she is, without rearrangement, addition, substraction or idealization; a school presuming the artist to be a copyist, and founded not on the *principles of design,* but the *love of nature.*

Says W. J. Stillman in his impassioned polemic on "The Revival of Art": "The painter whose devotion to nature is such that he never leaves or varies from her, may be, and likely is, a happier man than if he were a true artist...To men of the other type, the external image disturbs the ideal which is so complete that it admits no interference. To them she may offer suggestions, but lays down no law."

The complaint of Turner that Nature so frequently *put him out* contains for us what it should have expressed to Ruskin, the real attitude which he held toward nature, but which Ruskin in his enthusiastic love of nature did not, or would not perceive. What the master artist saw and utilized in nature were forms for his designs and sentiment for

emotional expression. [pg 261] Yet the recorder of his labors followed after, verifying his findings with near-sighted scrutiny, lauding him with commendations for keen observation in noting rock fractures, the bark of trees, grass, or the precise shape of clouds, undismayed when his hero neglected all these if they interfered with his art.

The point of the argument as stated by the idealists can be understood only save through the element in our nature from which art draws its vitality. Its deduction is thus bluntly expressed; “the nearest to nature, the farther from art,” an apparent paradox paralleled by the epigram, “the nearer the church, the farther from God.”

Both of them, out of their hollow clamor, echo back a startling truth: Not *form,* but *spirit.* Thus did Rembrandt work for the spirit of the man and *the art to be got* from the waiting subject. Thus did Millet reveal in his representation of a single toiler the type of all labor. Thus did Corot stop, when he had produced the spirit of the morning, knowing well his nymphs would have vanished if the mystery of their hiding-places was entirely laid bare, nor ever come to him again had he exposed the full truth of form and feature.

It is the touch of poesy which has glorified these works and those of their kind, the spring of the unwritten law yielding preeminence to the emotional arts. Impulse is the life of it: it dies when short tethered by specific limitations.

On this basis the way seems opened to settle [pg 262] the changeful formulas of taste; why the rejection of what for the moment has held the pinnacle of popular favor; why, for instance, the waning of interest in the detailists of the brilliant French-Spanish School, the school of Fortuny, Madrazzo, Villegas, Rico, or of the work of Meissonier, who as a detailist eclipsed them all. A simple analysis of their work in toto will prove that their best pictures are those in which a sentiment has dominated and in which breadth and largeness of effect is strongest. Thus Meissonier's “Return of Napoleon from Moscow,” is a better picture than his “Napoleon III surrounded by his staff in Sicily,” which latter is only a marvellous achievement at painting detail in the smallest possible size, and lacks entirely the forceful composition of mass and light and shade of the former. Thus does the “Spanish Marriage” of Fortuny outclass his “Academicians Choosing a Model,” which besides lacking the reserve force of the former has its source in flippant imagination; and so may the many other shifts of time and tide in the graphic arts be measured and chronicled upon the basis of the emotions and the formative touch of the poetic, upon the sequence of the artist's regard for the ideal and the real, and the degree of his approach toward either. The concensus of the ages regarding finish, dexterity, cleverness, and *chic* is that in the scale of art they weigh less than the simple breadth of effect which they so frequently interrupt. The school of Teniers with all of its

detail was preservative of this.

[pg 263]
It is on the question of detail and the careful anxiety concerning the surface that the art instinct avoids science, refusing her microscope in preference for the unaided impression of normal sight. The living art of the ages is that in which the painter is seen to be greater than his theme, in which we acknowledge the power first, and afterward the product. It is the unfettered mode allowing the greatest individualism of expression; it is, in short, the man end of it which lives, for his is the immortal life.

[pg 264]

APPENDIX

The argument of the book is here reduced to a

working basis.

The Concept

The first point settled in the making of a picture after the subject has germinated, is the shape into which the items of the concept are to be edited; the second is the arrangement of those items within the proscribed limits; the third is the defining of the dark and light masses. This consideration forces the question whence the light, together with its answer, hence the shadow.

The Procedure

The detail of the direction of light and the action of the shadows cuts the pictorial intention clear of the decorative design. Design is a good basis, its simplicity yielding favorably to the settlement of spaces and the construction of lines, but its chief purpose ends when it has cleared the field of little things and reduced the first conception, which usually comes as a bundle of items, to a broad and dignified foundation into which these little things are set.

Design

A severe, space-filling design in three tones or four will place the student in a position of confidence to proceed with detail which, until the design has settled [pg 266] well into its four sides, should be persistently excluded. It may, however, be found that the *essence* of certain subjects lies in a small item of detail. This, when known, must be allowed for in the design.

Line

Of first importance in composition is the notion of Light and Dark, to which Line is second. In the tone design line is but the edge of the masses. Line as the basis of the form of the design is reduced to a few forms which with modifications become the framework for all pictorial structure. (See Fundamental Forms.) Line as an element of beauty sufficient of itself to become subjective is rare, an exception in pictorial art. (See Line)

The æsthetics of Line must be comprehended and felt in its symbolism. The form into which lines may lead the subject should have the full knowledge of the composer.

The Vertical

The uplift of the simple vertical is spiritual as well as mechanical. It may carry the thought to higher levels or may support therewith an opposed line. In either case its strength is majestic and in so far as this line dominates does the picture receive its quality.

The Horizontal

A group of pines or the columns of the Greek or Egyptian temple alike induce solemnity, quietude and dignity. The horizontal is a line less commanding than the vertical with its upright strength, the symbol of repose, serenity, and reserved motion.

[pg 267]

The Diagonal

The diagonal being an unsupported line naturally suggests instability, change, motion, transit. Its purpose frequently is to connect the stabler forms of the composition or lead therefrom.

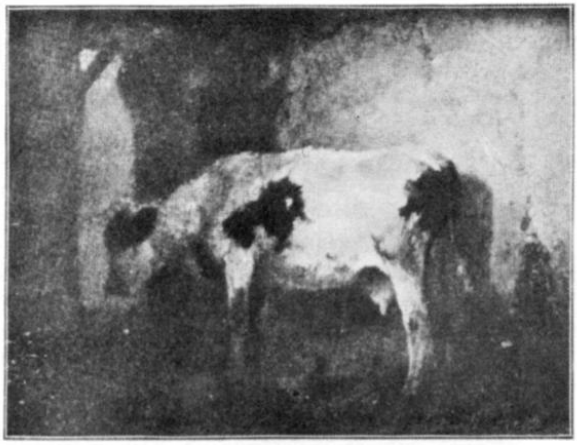
The curvilinear line is the basis of variety and graceful movement. As an adjunct, it assists the sequence of parts. In the latter capacity it is of great importance to the composer. It is of course the basis of the circle as well as the important notion of circular construction and observation.

Given the subject and means of expression the final labor is the restraint or enforcement of parts in the degree of their importance. This requires ingenuity and knowledge and frequently demands a reconstruction of the original scheme.

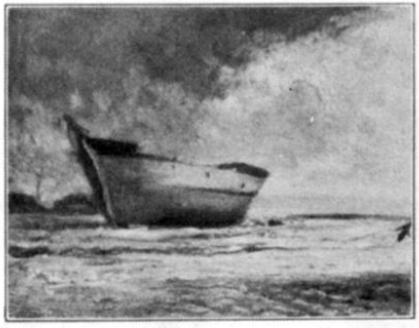
Principality and Sacrifice

The most absolute and the most important idea in the production of art is *Principality,* that one object or idea shall be supreme. Its correlative idea contains in it the hardships of composition, namely, Sacrifice. This forces a graded scale of importance or attraction throughout the entire work.

The idea has complete exposition in the vase or baluster in which the commanding lines of the body find both support and extension through the lesser associated parts. These stand as types of complete art revealing the uncompromising principles of domination and subordination.



STABLE INTERIOR — *A. Mauve*
A simple picture containing all the principles of composition





HER LAST MOORINGS — *From a Photograph*

In the picture, complete in its chiaroscuro, these principles are as easily apprehended as [pg 268] with the more tangible line and space of the solid form. The "Cow in a Stable," by Mauve, contains by his management of this rude and simple subject all the possibilities opened to and demanded by compositions involving many elements. It might stand as the light and dark scheme for some of the allegories of Rubens, Wiertz or Correggio, or for many genre interiors, or for an "arrangement" of flowers.

When once the importance of this principle is realized many of the pitfalls into which beginners are so prone to fall are covered, and that forever. Time and regrets are both saved to the student who will pause for the absorption of the few principles on which all the arts are founded.

This idea may seem to disturb the notion of balance across the centre, especially when the object which receives our first consideration occupies one side of the picture. A study of the postulates together with the principle of the steelyard and the knowledge of picture balance will clear any apprehension of conflict.

The Dominant Idea

Above and beyond the object which

dominates all others is the idea which dominates the picture. Such may be light, gloom, space, action, passion, repose, communion, humor, or whatever has stimulated and therefore must govern the composition. If with the sentiment of Repose as subjective, the principal object expresses action, there must necessarily be conflict between the idea and the reality.

Action, however, may very appropriately be [pg 269] introduced into a conception of repose, its contrast heightening this emotion; the creeping baby, the frolicking kitten, the swinging pendulum, the distant toilers observed by a nearer group at rest.

The point where a counter emotion weakens and where it strengthens the idea is determined on a scale of degree, many necessary parts taking precedence thereto before the opposed sentiment shall attract us. These ideas, correlative to their principal, have also their scale of attraction, and only in the formal arrangement of allegory and decoration may two units be allowed the same degree of attraction. This is one of the most frequent forms in which weak composition develops, leaving the mind uncertain as to the sequence, and the eye wavering between the equal claims of separated parts. The neglect of leading lines, or of forcing a logical procedure from part to part, so that no part may escape the continuous inspection of all, produces *decomposition*. The avoidance of inharmony must of course yield harmony.

Harmony

Harmony, therefore, though a necessary principle in all art, does not push herself to the front as does Principality. She follows naturally, if allowed to.

The Must Be's and May Be's of Composition

Of the other principles, Consistency or breadth, Continuity and its complement, Contrast, associate themselves in greater or less degree with Principality and Harmony, which are the must [pg 270] be's; while Repetition, Radiation, Curvature and Interchange are reckoned as the may be's of composition.

Perspective

The basis of all plane presentation is founded on perspective, an absolute science giving absolute satisfaction to all who would have it. *Knowing* that a figure must be of a certain height if it occupy a given space is often a shorter road to the fact even though it demand a perspective working plan than

feeling for it with the best of artistic intentions. One may feel all around the spot before finding it, and meanwhile the scientist has been saving his temper.

In all compositions demanding architectural environment or many figures, perspective becomes essential, at least as a time saver. Yet if the science never existed such art as embraces many figures and architecture could find adequate expression at the hands of the discerning artist.

The science of perspective does no more than acquaint the artist with any given angle. His knowledge of cause and effect in the universe, with an added art instinct, are equipment sufficient to obtain this.

No part of art expression commands more of the mysterious reverence of the *atechnic* than perspective. It is that universal art term that includes very much to many people. When, after writing a thorough treatise on the subject, Mr. Ruskin remarked the essence of the whole thing can be known in twenty minutes, it was doubtless [pg 271] in rebuke of the unqualified suppositions of the artless public.

Balance

The conception of balance clearly understood

in the length, the height and the depth of a picture contains the whole truth of pictorial composition. The elements which war against unity and which we seek to extract, reveal themselves as the disturbers of balance and are to be found when the principles of balance are put into motion.

Does divided interest vex us, the foreground absorbing so much interest that the background, where the real subject may lie, struggles in vain for its right; then we may know that the balance through the depth of the picture has been disturbed. Does the middle distance attract us too much in passing to the distance where the real subject may lie; then we may know that its attachment to the foreground or its sacrifice to the background is insufficient and that its shift in the right direction will restore balance. Do we feel that one side of the picture attracts our entire attention and the other side plays no part in the pictorial scheme, then we may know that the items of the lateral balance are wanting.

It is rare to find apart from formality a composition which develops to a finish in an orderly procedure. Once separated from the even balance the picture becomes a sequence of compromises, the conciliation of each new element by the reconstruction of what is already there or the introduction of the added item which unity necessitates.

[pg 272]
The argument reminds the picture maker that

he is in like case with the voyageur who loads his canoe, sensible of the exquisite poise which his craft demands. Along its keelson he lays the items of his draught, careful for instance that his light and bulky blanket on one side is balanced by the smaller items of heavier weight in opposed position. The bow under its load may be almost submerged and the onlooker ventures a warning. But again balance is restored when the seat at the other end is occupied as a final act in the calculation.[20]

The degree of attraction of objects in the balanced scheme must be a matter of individual decision as are many other applied principles in temperamental art.

Color representing the natural aspect of objects, color containing “tone,” and color containing tone quality or “tonal quality,” are three aspects of color to be met with in accepted art.

Color

As with the sentiment of the art idea, whether it incline toward the real or the ideal, so the distinction applies between what is reflective only of nature and what is reflective also of the artist's temperament. It is a simple proposition in the scale of value and it works as truly when applied to color as to the art

concept: the more of the man the better the [pg 273] art. Were it not so the color-photograph would have preeminence.

The first degree in the scale of color is represented by that sort which applied to canvas to imitate a surface seems satisfying to the artist as nature-color. The second degree is that in which the color is made to harmonize with all other colors of the picture on the basis of a given hue. This tonal harmony may fail to reveal itself in many subjects in nature or in such arrangements of objects as the still-life painter might and often does collect, and is therefore clearly a quality with which the artist endows his work. Such painters as Whistler and his following see to it that this tonality inheres in all subjects which may be governed in the composition of color (such as his “arrangements” in the studio), so that the production of this harmony results naturally by following the subject.

Tone

The color key is given in that selected hue which influences to a greater or less degree all the colors, even when these make violent departures in the scheme of harmony. Solicitous only of the quality of unified color, the majority of these painters (though this frequently does not include Mr. Whistler himself) concern themselves wholly with that

thought, employing their pigment so directly that the *vibration* of color is sacrificed.

The production of this vibration is by agreement on the part of all great colorists impossible through impasted color or that applied flatly to the surface, which they declare cannot be as [pg 274] powerful, as significant or as beautiful as that which vibrates, either by reason of the juxtaposition of color plainly seen, as with the impressionists, or of its broken tone, or by virtue of the influence of a transparent glaze of color which enables two colors to be seen at once.

The last method is that of Titian, the second in combination with the last that of Rembrandt in his latest and best period, the first that of Monet, which contains the principle of coloration in its scientific analysis. The chasm between these men is not known in any such degree as a superficial notion of their respective arts might presuppose. The real disparity in color presentation exists between all such painters and those who paint directly on white canvas, neglecting the influence of the undertone and the enrichment which enters into color by glazes (transparent color).

Such painters may be able to represent most faithfully the true tints of Nature but not the true impression, for Nature is always expressive of that depth and strength which lies far in and which the painter of “quality” insists to render. To him it is that something

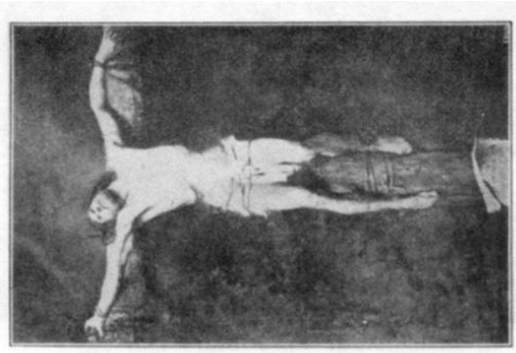
containing the last word of a thorough statement, and without it the statement is a surface one.

Technically, it may mean the labor of many repaintings, of color glazes, and of procedure from one process to another, so that the first statement on the canvas becomes the general but not the final dictum. Through these the work takes on that unctuousness of depth and strength [pg 275] by which one experiences the same thrill as through the deep reverberations of a musical tone from many instruments, simple tone being producible by one instrument. Practically, it is the pulsation of color in every part of the picture felt by either the play of one color through another or by such broken color as may be administered by a single brush stroke loaded with several colors or by a single color so dragged across another as to leave some of the under color existent.

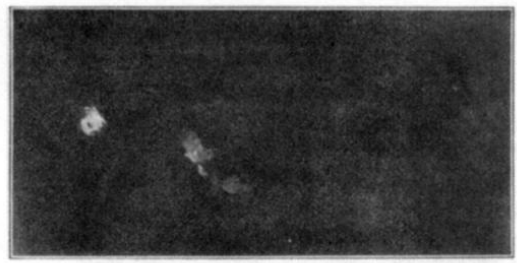
Quality

Such technique produces the highest tonal quality. It cannot be supposed that Rembrandt glazed and repainted on his portraits for a lesser reason than to supply them with a quality which direct painting denied, nor that Frank Holl, of our own times, employed a like method *for the sake of being like Rembrandt.*

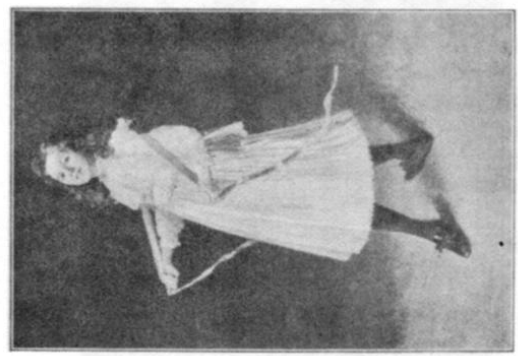
Natural Color; Tonal Color, representing nature; and Tonality plus “Quality” (the last a vague term denoting depth and fullness of color) are three grades represented, the first by Meissonier in his “1807”, a picture devoid of tone; the second by the portraits of Alice, by Chase, and Lady Archibald Campbell, by Whistler; and the last or tonal quality, by the later works of George Fuller and Albert Ryder. Under these specified classes the lists of names in art are now lengthening and shortening, the indications of our present art pointing to a revival of the color quality of a former age.



THE CRUCIFIXION — *Amié Morot*
Verticals Opposed



LADY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL — *Whistler*
Verticals Obliterated



ALICE — *W. M. Chase*
Verticals Diverted

Don'ts

It was stated in the introduction that the [pg 275] commandments of this book would be the "must nots," yet for him who apprehends principles, commandments do not exist. A few conclusions from the foregoing arguments may, however, be of service to beginners in the practice of composition.

Structures to be avoided are:—

Those in which the lines all run one way without opposition:

Those especially in which the bottom of the frame is paralleled:

Those in which the perspective of a line or the edge of a mass happens to be a vertical:

Those in which an opposing plane or attractive mass barricades the entrance of the picture:

Those in which two masses in different planes happen to be the same size:

Those in which objects of equal interest occur in the same picture:

Those in which an object awkwardly prolongs a line:

Those in which the line of the background duplicates the lines of the subject:

Those in which the picture is cut by lines too long continued in any direction:

Those in which radial lines fail to lead to a focal object:

Those in which the items of a picture fail to present a natural sequence:

Those in which the subject proper is not dignified by a conspicuous placement or is swamped by too attractive surroundings:

[pg 276]
Those in which the most energetic forms of construction are not allied to the principal but to secondary parts of the picture:

Those formal compositions in which greater interest is shown at the sides than in the centre:

Those in which the aesthetic principle of the constructive form is antagonistic to the sentiment of the subject.

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