

*by credit*

In a country such as Australia, which is geographically isolated, we are very conscious of the importance of our lines of communication.

But it is not of these geographical lines that I wish to speak, but of a more subtle line, the almost invisible line of communication that stretches from the great creative art of our time to the remote point of public understanding.

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This ~~may well be~~ one of the most important questions considered at this, the 2nd International Congress of Art Critics, that is if we consider the public understanding of art to be important.

The world of art is a pyramid, made up of an infinitesimal number of small pieces dovetailed together in an intricate pattern.

At the summit we find the great creative art of our time, the art in which artists, professional critics and students of all kinds are naturally absorbed; the art which links us to the great traditions of the past; the art of, say, Roualt, Kokoshka, Chagal, Picasso, Braque, etc., etc., to quote a few examples at random.

But beneath this upper strata, supporting the apex of the pyramid, is the vast mass of art, descending in succeeding layers from the nearly great and the very good, right down to the mediocre and the very bad.

At the base of the pyramid we find all the most unworthy elements growing like weeds. Here are 'the superficially clever', 'the popular' and all the things contributing generally to the fields of commercial exploitation.

It is from this base that the student, fresh from the art school, begins his ascent. During his stiff upward climb he must penetrate each successive layer. He penetrates them from the inside, like a borer, looking constantly for the most vulnerable spot.

But the layman cannot do this, for art is not his occupation, if he wishes to establish a point of contact he must have a guide.



To attempt to scale the pyramid without one is to court disaster. For right at the beginning he is confronted by a dazzling confect-ion of 'beautiful' sunsets, 'flattering portraits,' 'sentimental subject pieces' and so on - all the things which he thinks he likes, but which he subsequently discovers to be worthless.

At the mercy of every ambitious element he turns to the critic; he embarks along the line of communication.

It is the duty of the critic to maintain and preserve this line ; but only too often he loses sight of this fact and entrenches him-self on an aesthetic platform which his public cannot be expected to identify.

He should realise that the layman invariably, and quite naturally, begins by admiring ' bad' as well as 'good' art.

The critic himself began at this point ; I venture to say that there is no such thing as a critic who has not at some time in his career admired some extremely bad art.

The great difference between critic and layman is that through education, and the development of his natural sensitivity, the critic makes fewer mistakes.

The worst kind of art may have a functional use, for through a thorough understanding of it, the layman may be brought to the point of appreciation of something better ; bad art may have a place in the pattern of the whole which should not be overlooked.

But if it is necessary for the critic to take the layman by the hand, like a child, and lead him gently and sympathetically in the direction in which he should go, instead of trying to bludgeon him into submission; it is no less the responsibility of the layman to keep his mind flexible and responsive, to listen intelligently and not to insist on 'what he likes' as a criterion for judgement.



Left to his own devices for instance, a child will eat mud, pebbles, safety pins, unripe fruit or anything else he may happen to fancy, but these things are not necessarily good for his digestion.

I finish my brief remarks with a plea to the public to develop the habit of thinking in a liberal way on questions of art, to embark along the line of communication with an open mind ; and with a second plea, to my colleagues, to aim for simplicity and clarity in art writing.

For simplicity is a cardinal virtue, and clarity is a voice that sings in heaven.

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