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A Degenerate Work of Art: "Bathers" by Cézanne

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ing from him, was a complete surprise and much criticised at the time.

In the first place the lines of the composition are so zigzag that the work is irritating instead of soothing to the eyes. Then the sprawling of the badly drawn child over a low shrub, every leaf and branch of which would prick out of it all sense of sleep or even of comfort, is absurd.

Then the head of the mother is too large, and the hair that of a man rather than that of a woman. Then the man looks "sawed-off." For he is represented as standing with his knees against a seat in the boat. But where is the rest of his lower legs? The boat is either not deep enough or his lower legs are abnormally short, or sawed-off. This is also manifestly absurd. Then the head is so childishly constructed as to be ridiculous.

Moreover, what is he doing—praying, fishing, philosophizing over his destiny, or what? The whole thing is childish to a degree. Here we have a meaningless "individuality" with a vengeance.

The picture has but one redeeming feature—its charming color. A delicate general tone of mauve pervades the whole creation, and the gradation of the tones in the water are so skilfully painted that we are drawn into the far distance whether we will or no. That is, the *values* of the picture are remarkably true.

And for this alone he ignored everything else—elevation and common-sense of conception, beauty of line and truth in composition, clarity of meaning, and impeccableness in drawing and construction of the bodies. In short, it is futile in every element of our power except that of color and that is not enough to save any picture from hopeless triviality.

Why did he produce this work? Seemingly as a basis for solving a color problem; and, having solved it, his friends in the Modernistic art party induced the government to buy it for the Luxembourg Museum—oblivious of the fact that mere color in a picture is, in the final analysis, so secondary in importance in any work of art that it never did and never will save it from ridicule, if the other elements of art power in the work are not of a high order.

Compared with his marvelous and poetic "Peace" and "War" at Amiens, it is a sad commentary on how a great man can, under the spell of the propaganda of an "ism," forced on the world of art by his friends, abdicate his seat on high, descend and fuss about with a lot of bedaft and benighted chasers after salvation in such a foolish, narrow, uncreative ideal as "Individualism" à l'outrance, in the pursuit of which they gain nothing but a puerile, often degrading, but always artificial accent, and lose that which should be their chief glory—their own, true individuality.

In a future number we will reproduce the two fine decorations of Puvis at Amiens.

## A DEGENERATE WORK OF ART

### "BATHERS" BY CÉZANNE

See page 204

EXPERTS in insanity tell us that we have men who are totally insane and others who are half-insane. This latter class comprises men who are not so insane as to be dangerous maniacs, fit for strait-jackets, but who are nevertheless not really sane and who, now and then, reason with such cleverness in a circle round about a fallacy that most men incapable of the concentration needed to detect the joker in a system of metaphysics are often swept off their feet and fall victims to their false philosophy. Such men have besides a sense of detachment from their fellows and normal life that they willingly become martyrs and even find pleasure in it.

Such men become Saint Anthonys, Simon Stylites, Saint Jeromes, etc., and willingly make sacrifices of all that average men think essential to comfort when they are in pursuit of some bumble-bee of intellectual aberration that may have happened to cross their narrow mental vision early in life.

Experts in the various forms of semi-insanity tell us that one of the surest signs of semi-dementia is the inability:—

First: To see form as it actually is.

Second: A dislike for form as it actually is.

And that naturally, and by a tendency only half-human they actually prefer exaggerations of form, badly drawn form and disproportions in form.

Third: These semi-insane men are also harassed by an egotism so much greater than that the average normal man is blessed with, or even than that the average totally insane man is smitten with—that

the result is a veritable ego-mania, which drives them to seek to be so different from their fellow-men as to be often strange and grotesque. This, in order that passing mankind shall certainly not fail to notice them.

Now when these semi-insane happen to be bitten with a desire to shine in Art they are sure to quit the normal ways of seeing, feeling and doing things and to go to the abnormal; finally, under the stimulus of a love for suffering and of parading they creep farther and farther toward the abnormal until they are completely insane. Then it is they enter the field of a superman-metaphysics and spin out, as a spider his web, the most plausible theories of æsthetics; and they do this so cunningly that the gad-about who wander in and out of the avenues of the world of art are taken in, and to such an extent are they duped that they resent having these men called insane.

They remind one of a late philanthropist who some time ago was lured into the belief that a certain patient in a certain sanitarium was wrongly incarcerated. He went there determined to liberate him and took with him two witnesses to testify, from actually hearing the more than rational talk of the maniac, that he was sane.

All went well until the witnesses were thoroughly convinced. They were about to leave and prosecute the physician in charge for illegal sequestration when all of a sudden the maniac kicked and punched the deluded altruist so violently that the laugh was

altogether on the side of the physician. That maniac remained in the sanitarium.

In art also there is an increasing number of this class of semi-madmen. Cézanne was of this number. This is proved by the picture we illustrated on page 204.

Reader, remark first of all the utter extravagance of form displayed by the five figures in this picture, their childish drawing, their impossible construction, making the figure look more like those carved by the Chinooks of Alaska. This is already characteristically insane, whenever it is produced by a man born and raised in so cultivated a *milieu* as France is at the present epoch. Then note the detached unrelatedness of the figures—which is also a fantasy of a crooked mind. Then note that the second figure from the left is standing in the water up to the middle of the thigh. Then observe how the first and third figures immediately adjoining are sitting and lying on top of the same sheet of water. Remark again the fourth figure, also down to her knees in the water, while the fifth figure squats on top of the same water: an impossible state of affairs in the land of physics!

These aberrations are all characteristic of an insane man's way of doing things.

Finally look at the spotty blotches of color inside of these inept outlines, as if the skins were leopard skins and not human.

These characteristics make this an absolutely degenerate work of a man who is partially insane.

Many more and convincing proof could be marshalled to prove that Cézanne was semi-insane. Indeed we have only to look at the construction of his own head as any good photograph of him will show, to see evidences of degeneracy lurking in his eyes and radiating from his cranium. So patent is this that he seems to have felt it himself, as revealed

in some of his lucubrations which now and then appear in print.

And yet the corrupt and commercial art dealers of Paris, knowing that the public can always be successfully swindled when it is mystified long enough and cleverly enough—since even alienists are sometimes long in doubt as to the actual insanity of some patients—deliberately set about to exploit the work of the degenerate Cézanne. In this they were aided, of course, by the conscienceless excessivists among the perhaps sincere but misguided and misled modernists.

To what extent these dealers go is seen in the fact that in this city a heavy volume is offered for sale at the price of \$25.00, full of expensive illustrations in colors reproducing such degenerate creations as we have illustrated.

Verily the Spirit of Negation is moving among men when persons are found with the courage to invest capital to exploit such monstrosities as these under the sacred name of art, when other men of glib tongue and pen can be either deluded or bribed to lend support not only to the sale but even to the imitation and falsification of such creations and to the fictitious boosting of their prices at "wash" auction sales so-called, as has been brazenly done in the Hôtel Drouot at Paris and elsewhere.

But what shall we say of the really aberrated catholicity of our art museums, when, under the plea of "large-mindedness" and being "up-to-date"—hateful phrase—they place in exhibition on the costly wall-spaces of the building select specimens of this degenerate art made by this very semi-maniac Cézanne, to the bewilderment of well-meaning but modest tax-payers who are afraid to protest, and to the disgust and disheartening of all men having at heart the creation of great works of art by Americans?



