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ARTISTS CANNOT AFFORD TO BE SLACK

"If Beauty Is Not Discernible At Lyttelton, It Is Vain To Look For It At Lugano"—

I HAVE been asked to speak to you for a few minutes on the place of Art in post-war New Zealand. Now this title suggests that there is something not altogether satisfactory about the place of Art in pre-war New Zealand, and that we must attempt to remedy this in the general shake-up that will doubtless follow the war. . . . But it would be true to say that most pre-war New Zealanders didn't like creative art, that it filled them with frank embarrassment or uncomfortable awe, that it didn't seem to them to be a part of our normal life in common, nor as the natural outlet of a natural impulse. Rather they thought of it as something strained, difficult and superfluous, the perquisite of queer people and the idol of a secret gang of connoisseurs and experts. And they found palatable and soothing a kind of art that put no strain on anyone's appreciation, that was so readily assimilated that one hardly even noticed it, that reflected ordinary ideas and commonplace sentiments, and that seemed brightly pretty and brightly hideous, according as one could or couldn't stomach it. And they hung things on their walls or put them in their window-ledges either because it was customary to do so, or because they thought it reflected credit on them socially, or merely because they had seen them displayed in great multitudes behind shiny glazed windows. All of which means that we in New Zealand were still submerged, before the war, in that great flood of crude taste which was inevitably bound up with the first use of machinery, a flood which was certainly the worst in history, but which is now abating in the present century with our new-found mastery over the machine.



"... A secret gang of connoisseurs and experts"

How Do We Begin?

Now what are the means by which genuinely inspiring and significant art may become an integral part of the ordinary life of New Zealanders? I shall confine myself, in the short time at my disposal, to the schools, the picture-galleries, and the local societies of artists. It seems clear, first of all, that some acquaintance with Art is an essential part of any modern scheme of education, and though it may be difficult to fit new subjects into our crammed curricula, we can nevertheless do something in the matter. There is, for instance, no reason why our schools should not build up a more or less comprehensive collection of prints and photographs of the vital art of various countries and periods, why children should not be surrounded with carefully selected and

Says PROF. J. N. FINDLAY, in this talk under the auspices of the Sunlight League, broadcast from 3YA

varied displays, and why they should not be given some notion of the reasons why certain works of art are considered great achievements. For our indifferent taste in New Zealand is largely due to the fact that children in their formative years do not see the

works of major artists, or do not see them in sufficient numbers, or see only a few arbitrarily-chosen masterpieces which are quite meaningless by themselves, and which have been so frequently reproduced in the past, that it would almost be a godsend if we buried them and forgot them for a period.

But if we show large numbers of pictures to New Zealand children, we shall, of course, have to make a psychologically proper selection, we shall have to have regard to what children of different ages are capable of admiring, and what the New Zealand child, in particular, is likely to find interesting. A picture of St. Sebastian pierced with arrows, gazing tranquilly on architecture and blue Italian distances, will scarcely be appropriate for the young New Zealand child, whereas sequences that tell stories, vivid pictures of communal activities in bygone ages, as well as simple domestic interiors, may very well prove suitable. The whole subject of children's art appreciation at various ages is, in any case, something that has been scientifically investigated, and that we can investigate further in regard to our own background and conditions. But it would be truly horrible if anyone were to do for Michelangelo what unenlightened pedagogy has so often done for Shakespeare.

Local Art

I should suggest further that local art should play a large part in any educational programme. For the local artist is the man who picks out whatever is arresting or significant in a given environment, and enables those who live in that environment to take note of it and enjoy it. And even if he is less eminent than a foreign artist, he is doing something for a community that a foreign artist cannot possibly do. And it is very important that a child should be responsive to the elements of form and beauty in the vegetation, landscapes, houses, faces, and social customs that are always with it, and that it should

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