



FINE ARTS

The Rutland Group

Written for "The Listener"
by ARTHUR C. HIPWELL

I HAVE observed that the little red spots which denote sales at our art exhibitions usually break out in the wrong places and have come to the conclusion that public support of art in this country is in inverse ratio to the real ability of the artist. New Zealand painting includes a large number of popular performers who have applied themselves closely to the development of technical devices. They succeed only in impressing one as having laboured for years to be able to do the trick. Nevertheless, they have acquired for themselves a recognition withheld from a number of our more gifted painters. This misjudged patronage has stimulated the growth of a species of little parochialisms in paint which are sponsored and maintained for apparently no other reason than to preserve an established market. These clichés are of no importance to the art of this Dominion. There is a great difference between pictures painted for exhibition and paintings by artists who are expressing themselves with perception and feeling. It is refreshing, therefore, to see the work of painters who are inspired by sincere purpose and who fearlessly pursue their aspirations without affectation or pretence. It is this spirit which animates a number of Auckland painters known as the Rutland Group. I would not hesitate to say that it is the most vital art group in the Dominion. It is alive with the exuberance of painters who delight to use their brushes for frank and personal statement, but never at the expense of sound and enduring qualities.

The work at the Group's annual exhibition, showing at the rooms of the Auckland Society of Arts, is particularly good. I have seen few exhibitions attain such a uniformly high level.

IT is a point strongly in favour of smaller art groups that, with the painters working in close association, they are able to adopt methods not applicable to larger societies. Practically all the exhibits in this show had been through the mill of open criticism at studio gatherings of the Group, a procedure which disperses false values, stimulates self-criticism and inspires confidence in the ultimate choice of work submitted for public exhibition.

The present exhibition consists of over 100 works—oils, water-colours and an interesting collection of drawings. I was glad to see the drawings. Nothing so clearly reveals an artist's abilities. A rule made by the Rutland Group stipulates that each member

must submit drawings for exhibition. The value of this wise condition is reflected in sound draughtsmanship throughout the show.

It puzzles me why distinctions are made between mediums. A curious assumption is abroad that an oil painting possesses some inherent superiority over a water-colour and that a drawing is inferior to them both—a kind of preliminary canter as it were—quite unworthy to exist in its own right. I can subscribe to no such class-distinction. A good drawing may exercise an appeal and have a value in excess of many ambitious essays in colour. The drawings considerably enhance interest in the Rutland Group's show, especially the sensitive yet solidly-constructed figure study, "Girl Reclining," by H. E. Read, the head studies in pencil by Margaret Thompson, and "Cat and Three Kittens," an expressive drawing by Joan Lillicrap.

THE strength, directness and individuality of the water-colours is impressive. Here there are no caressed and purring landscapes, but bold, broad impressions swept in with a powerful brush; no summer vacationist views, but subjects which have caught and held the artists' imagination. Helen Brown's group of dilapidated buildings, "Deserted Corner," conveys all the feeling of decay and neglect in these old wooden struc-

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"HEAD of a Girl," an oil by Alison Pickmers