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# NEW ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ARTS

*Londoners Queue-up at the Galleries*

**W**HEN James Boswell left New Zealand in 1925 to study at the Royal College of Art in London, he had no long-term plans for the future. The decision whether he was to stay in England or return home later was left for circumstances to determine; and in their subtle and inexorable way they have made the decision for him over the intervening twenty-three years. To-day he is the art editor of *Lilliput*—having recently resigned the job of managing the Shell Company's big studio—and it seems less likely than ever that he will settle in New Zealand again.

Last week he arrived by air for a fortnight's visit, and saw New Zealand for the first time for nearly a quarter of a century. He felt at something of a loss. For the first day or two he found himself stepping out from the pavement to hail a Hampstead bus, or meeting a bit of himself he had known long ago and had forgotten about. I got together with him, and spent a couple of hours piecing together dates and places, asking him questions, and generally playing Boswell to Boswell's Johnson. "Surprisingly little change" was his judgment on Auckland after three days, during which time the weather had done its best to destroy memories of the halcyon summers of early youth. But he had not seen the new Government housing suburbs, or been up the East Coast from Takapuna to Brown's Bay, or climbed Mt. Eden and looked around.

\* \* \*

**BOSWELL** has painted a great deal during the past two decades. He has exhibited at the Royal Academy, with the London Group, and in the exhibitions of the Artists' International Association. He is one of the leading figures in the Society of Industrial Artists, of which he has the honour of being a Fellow. The Society, which is more like a guild than a trade union, has become very powerful during the past few years, and has done a great deal to improve the position of artists who work for industry—designers of pottery, poster-painters, illustrators, and so on. It has a select membership of something over 400 of the leading industrial artists.

For five years during the war period Boswell served with the Forces, first with the R.A.M.C. in Sicily, Iraq and elsewhere, and then for a year at the War Office in the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, editing the "Current Affairs Bulletin." While he was in the Middle East he did many war drawings, some of which were bought later by the War Artists Advisory Committee. His book, *The Artist's Dilemma*, has just been published in London, and has attracted a good deal of attention.

\* \* \*

"**THERE'S** an amazing enthusiasm for the arts in Britain at the present time," Boswell told me. "I went down to the Tate Gallery at ten o'clock on a rainy morning to see the Van Gogh show, and there was a queue of 500 people waiting to get in. The big exhibi-

An interview with **JAMES BOSWELL**, formerly of Auckland and now Art Editor of "*Lilliput*" Magazine, written for "*The Listener*" by **A. R. D. FAIRBURN**

tions in London to-day draw something like 100,000 people during the course of a month. The Picasso Exhibition was crowded all the time, with long queues."

"What about the general run of contemporary painters?" I asked. "Are they better off than they were?"

"Most of them find it hard nowadays to get enough stuff together to have a show. They sell their pictures as fast as they paint them."

"Is that because the public has fallen in love with art, or . . . ?"

"Partly because if you've got spare money to-day there's not much else to spend it on. But I think there's more than that in it. Some sort of general awakening has taken place. Art seems to be 'on the map' for the first time in ages. People get quite worked up about it—and that surely means that they think it's important."

"For instance, the National Gallery pictures were stored in a Welsh slate-mine during the war, and the trustees took the opportunity of having a lot of the Dutch, Flemish and Italian paintings cleaned up. They didn't say much about this. But when the paintings were hung again after the war people were saying, 'Aren't they lovely? I hadn't noticed before how beautiful they are!' Then it began to be realised what had happened, and a public controversy broke out. Old gentlemen wrote to the newspapers complaining that the pictures had been 'ruined,' with all their nice golden-brown colour taken away. Of course, the younger painters were delighted. There's been a long correspondence in *The Times* about it."

"And what's your own view?"

"I'm astonished at the results of the clean-up. For instance, they've disintegrated Constable's *Cornfield* from its layers of varnish—and you can understand now why it rocked the boat when it was first shown. It's more or less in its original state now, and it's as fresh and lively as a spring day. The landscape glitters, with the suggestion of new-fallen rain. Beautiful. It's the same with the Rubens paintings. It's quite evident now that Rubens was a great colourist. And so with all the other paintings they've cleaned up. It was hard to see what was going on in these pictures, behind all the clouds of thick varnish. But now the colours are as vivid as the painters meant them to be. And all sorts of things have appeared—birds in the undergrowth, and rabbits, and so forth. A lot of unsuspected things have come to light in the background of Rembrandt's *Woman Taken in Adultery*."

"The National Gallery trustees haven't budged in their defence of the clean-up. They're taking the thing very