

ART IS GOOD FUN

WE have heard a good deal during the last year or two about the new art, and a good deal about the new art teaching. Books have been written to prove that we are all artists when we are young, and pictures by the hundred have been reproduced to prove it. The other day an exhibition was opened in Wellington of really remarkable paintings and drawings by children of all ages and stages from tiny totism to adolescence. But the new methods have now reached the grown-ups too. We can be artists, we are now told, even when we have reached the sere and yellow, and exhibitions are being held to prove that too. Here is an account by one of the members of a W.E.A. class of an experiment carried out in Wellington last year, illustrated by reproductions of timed sketches by men and women of mature years, most of whom had never drawn or painted before. We are assured that the time in most cases was measured in minutes.

ROUND the walls of the brightly-lit room a group of people stood busily working. Equipped with large brushes, paint trays, and big sheets of paper, they were completely absorbed in the joy of creation. Every now and then a bearded man would say, "Ten minutes to go," or "Don't do any more to that one, you'll spoil it," and there would be a chorus of exclamations and anxious inquiries as to just how a woman's skirt looked when she stepped on a tram, or how a man's hat looked when it was on his head.

It was the W.E.A. class in "Expression Through Art," and despite the groans and the despair at not getting things to look right, every member of the group was thoroughly and happily expressing himself in paint.

The inspiration and leader of the class holds some novel theories on the teaching of art. He believes that everyone should be able to paint just as everyone can write. With the self-consciousness that comes with adolescence most people give up trying to draw, and

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only the two or three out of every class who show a real aptitude for art ever touch a paint-brush again once they leave school. So far some surprising results have been achieved with children of all ages.

Now under the auspices of the W.E.A., Wellington, the theory is being tried out in adults. Last winter a faithful band of grown-ups got together and proceeded to express itself. At first they did scribble drawings—using their imagination to see figures and designs in ordinary scribble. Then they graduated to life painting from an actual model who took a pose for three minutes only while everyone painted furiously. After an evening of this the class was heartened to find that these quick sketches really looked human and alive, and far removed from the wooden, badly proportioned efforts most of them had turned out at school.

The next week they used the knowledge of the human figure they had gained by making sketches and doing composition work from memory. Towards the end of the course of 10 lessons the whole class was capable of producing a recognisable large-size picture from memory in a space of 20 minutes of such a subject as "Getting on a Crowded Tram," or "Hot Sunday Morning." One of the most interesting evenings was spent in doing quick representations of a subject such as "Fear," "Noise," or "Heat." Whether everyone was getting rid of inhibitions or exercising wild flights of imagination the results were most entertaining. Indeed, half the fun was in wandering round looking at all the different efforts. "Fear," for instance, was shown in a Negro pursued by the Ku Klux Klan, a shark eating off a foot with lots of blood dripping down, a face at the window, and many more, not one even remotely resembling another, but all recognisable for what they were.

The relaxation and the pleasure that each member of the group derived from his efforts was immense. Not the least pleasure for the married members was taking home the results and showing them off to the family.

It will be most interesting to see what these new methods produce now that they are being adopted with young children and carried through High School. Meanwhile the adult W.E.A. class is very keen. It consists of the usual cross-section of the community which can be found in any W.E.A. group: housewives, teachers, and typists, factory workers, students, and clerks. One or two have definite artistic ability; the rest are just average, but all are united in enthusiasm for this new method of expressing themselves. It is not likely that any masterpieces will be born, but there is a fair chance that a form of folk-art may be evolved which will enrich all the participants.

Above: Sketch from life (three minutes). Below: Action Study (five minutes)



"LUNCH HOUR IN THE CITY"—preliminary sketch (five minutes)

