

CONTEMPORARY ART

Sir,—The letters on "modern," or rather contemporary, art interested me greatly. To hear the work of a great army of sincere and honest men and women dismissed with the firm assurance that it is all "just a gigantic bluff" really staggered me. It strengthens one belief which I have held for some time, that there is no other subject which will drive people to express such violent opinions; the most reserved and taciturn of men will react with amazing energy if caught in a discussion of its merits or otherwise. Hardly anyone is willing to sit on the fence.

Contemporary art, and indeed all art, be it painting, sculpture, poetry, music or architecture, is to me something to be felt, and frankly I cannot feel about a thing and dissect it simultaneously. All works of art seem to me to be capable of rational analysis up to a certain point. But in the final assessment logic breaks down, for that which makes a work of art something to be enjoyed, and something else a daub of paint, heap of stones, medley of sounds or a tangle of words, is unexplainable.

Finally, I myself am very wary indeed of expressing an opinion about anything unless I am sure I have something substantial upon which to base it. To me, to hear someone ask, "what's all this about?" and in the next breath say, "I think it's all bunkum" instead of bothering to try and see what it is all about—well, I just go back to my book.

R. WARD (Auckland).

Sir,—I wonder how many of your correspondents have seen a Picasso—not a reproduction, however good, but a genuine original? I am prepared to hazard that 50 per cent. will have had to have been content with a *Listener* reproduction in monochrome, while probably not less than a further 40 per cent have seen anything better than a four-colour reproduction. How, then, can they judge something which they have seen only as a counterfeit? How can they deprecate something which they have never seen?

Could they ever imagine the sense of awe one feels on being confronted with a canvas twenty feet by ten, glowing richly as a stained glass window (and by that I don't mean the milk-and-water leadlights of our present-day churches), or the delight one feels on seeing for the first time a sketch in pure, vibrant, sensitive line by the modern master Picasso? It is little short of bad taste to suggest that a man who can accomplish these things would stoop to delude the public with his painting. In a semi-barbarous community, such as ours, Picasso is bound to be criticised; but if the cultured world acknowledges him should not we try not to deride him, but rather try to understand what makes him great? Sometimes the very great things need little understanding—the abstract beauty of a mass of flowers for instance. After all, apart from the fact that he set the ball rolling, why pick on Picasso? Without his influence, and the influence of others like him, the visual arts would still be wallowing in a morass of sentimental neo-classicism or Gothic romanticism, neither of which had much contact with reality.

JOHN PINE SNADDEN
(Wellington).

"EYES OF THE PIG"

Sir,—I really must quarrel with Mr. Maslen's attempt to create a half-way house between art and imitation. Any

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work of art has its own sphere of reference, its own universe of discourse, and is its own justification. It need have no recourse to reality whatsoever, except, perhaps, for its *materia prima*.

Mr. Maslen suggests that "the writer's imagination would be more likely to be helped . . . by the sight of a pig-hunt," and concludes "Imagination is not primarily the quality of picturing vividly things the artist has not seen before." What nonsense! Imagination is the tool of the artist. With regard to the first statement, I would hold that it needs no assistance at all from reality. With regard to the second, I can only ask where, if not with the imagination, can the writer possibly imagine things he has not seen before?

I am afraid that your correspondent's construction will not stand up. What he proposes is a mixture of art and imitation, a mixture which would embody the weaker qualities of each, and which would result in a degraded and hybrid form of artistic expression.

PETER CAPE (Auckland).

THE REFERENDUM

Sir,—Replying to "H.C.L.P.'s" criticisms in October 14 issue, my understanding of world problems includes the views that: national sovereignty is an illusion; nationalism is one of the widespread curses; what is called "the Christian Way of Life" is a myth developed from a myth; the superiority complex exhibited by the people of Britain and the United States is equalled in presumptuousness only by the Kremlin's smug assumption of lofty incorruptibility to cloak a sinister autocracy; that until the nations are prepared to surrender their alleged right to raise and equip their own armed forces, and agree that there shall be only one World Authority adequately armed to prevent armament manufacture and aggression, we shall not escape from the present stupid, wasteful and criminal armament race.

In the present state of affairs the Christian pacifist policy is just advocating lying down and allowing the brutal and vicious to walk over us. It seems that the organisation of the universe includes the principle of conflict. There is no being or power able and willing to prevent completely the resurgence of evil. The ethical demands made by the reputed gospel of Christ are incapable of fulfilment in our present existence. But we have accumulated experience enough, brains and skill enough, if we like to use them, to defeat that principle which results in suicidal wars, and give ourselves at least a better run during our pilgrimage through an abysmally mysterious universe. The first thing needed seems to me to be to submit myths and misunderstandings, prejudices and superstitions—national, economic, social and religious—to intelligent consideration.

J. MALTON MURRAY
(Oamaru).

Sir,—Mr. Murray's letter in your issue of September 16 moves me to point out that inevitability has not been shown to apply to everything. In particular it has not been shown to apply to social and political affairs. Nor has it been shown that individuals have no effect upon vast political events. At least in New Zealand no politician may disregard the opinions of the people.

Most of us would assert, on the basis of our experience, that we are able to make up our minds with some degree of freedom. We will act according to our opinions in political affairs. In short, the arguments allowing some freedom to the actions of persons seem more convincing than those for complete inevitability.

We can exert some influence on affairs. Each one of us therefore, it seems to me, should see that such influence as he has thrusts towards the increase of human happiness. Opinions and actions in support of conscription are basically in support of antagonism. Antagonism tends almost overwhelmingly to produce counter-antagonism. The cumulative effect has been the devastating wars we have seen.

The alternative is to be prepared to accept, if necessary, a temporary reduction in our standard of living so that a fairer distribution of the products of the world can be achieved. From this, steps may be taken towards the aim that all people in the world should live together. Only if we individuals are so prepared will our leaders be able to take co-operative steps. Only if these steps are taken can further destruction of human happiness be avoided.

Mr. Murray adverts to some passages in the New Testament. As to Luke XI, may I mention that love does not prevent one from pointing out, in the most forceful terms short of intimidation or physical violence, that people are doing the wrong thing. Christ's attitude and actions in regard to the Scribes and Pharisees and to the temple money-changers was, I think, on all the evidence, no more than that. A reading further in Luke XXII, together perhaps with a reference to the Veake and Gore commentaries on the verses dealing with buying a sword, would show that Christ's essential message on this issue is a pacifist one.

The question is, of course, a vast one, and I lament the lack of opportunity for its fuller treatment.

E. B. ROBINSON (Wellington).
(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

LOCAL ARTISTS

Sir,—For some time now 3YA has presented from its studio an almost endless succession of pianists and singers in their local artists' sessions. Are there no other instrumentalists available from the city? There must be performers from the various bands and orchestras capable of providing variety from the present unenterprising sessions.

C.E.B. (Timaru).

PLAYS FOR COUNTRY LISTENERS

Sir,—People living in the country rely very largely on the wireless for their entertainment, especially as far as plays and concerts go. We have little opportunity for going to the pictures, and then only after a tiresome car journey which means a late night and consequent tiredness the following day.

Why then, sir, is it not possible for us to have on the 27 stations at least one good play of reasonable length (one to two hours) per week? At the moment we get a good but fiddling play of very short duration on Wednesdays, providing there is nothing on in the Town Hall that pushes it out, and another play on Fridays, usually a minute or two larger, but again providing the

Town Hall or something does not push out the play, as is usually the case on Fridays.

Why must the only two plays of the week that are at reasonable "country listening" times be fiddled with when there are such masses of recitals, concerts, etc., that one more or less of them would not be noticed?

May we have more plays of reasonable length (at least one hour) or even two or three short plays to make up the hour and may we have them regularly with nothing pushing them out?

FRUSTRATED FARMWORKER
(Featherston).

BROADCAST POETRY

Sir,—It seems to me that "M.M." in his or her criticism of Molly Atkinson's programme—*Poets of our Time: Inspirers of Song* (Radio Review, October 7) is biased. For me, Miss Atkinson's programme was far more enjoyable than the BBC *Chapter and Verse*, and I wasn't in hospital, nor yet in bed.

The BBC performers may be "professional verse readers," so professional that they studied one style to perfection—the reading of serious and tragic verse. So expert are they in this particular branch, that they read all poetry, dainty nature poems and other light verse, in the same dirge-like tone.

Some months ago there was a controversy in *John o' London's Weekly* on the BBC rendering of poetry, and the majority of the writers expressed my sentiments. For me, any BBC interpretation of poetry is always disappointing.

NOT A PROFESSIONAL
(Wellington).

"FEMININE VIEWPOINT"

Sir,—Now that this session has been running about a year we IYA listeners are liable to take for granted the fact that we have someone of the calibre of Miss Dale to select a varied and excellent programme each morning. No doubt we all have our favourite items, the informative "background of the news," the intelligent beauty talks, the child training lectures or Mrs. Cummings's bits and pieces told in her dry individual style.

I think my favourite is "Country News Letter." The literary standard of these is always high, and though they describe only simple everyday experiences they are invariably told in such a human and humorous style that they make one feel the world is a good place and all the folk in it generous and kindly. Long may *Feminine Viewpoint* continue.

MARIE GRIFFIN (Auckland).

GREAT ANTICIPATIONS

Sir,—That was an excellent example given by E. K. Braybrooke of the difference between "expect" and "anticipate." Here is another. A woman may speak of "expecting" marriage, but if she is wise she doesn't speak of "anticipating" it.

A.M. (Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. J. Mawkes (Whakatane): We don't prepare the programmes; we only print them. But they have to be prepared so far in advance that some changes become unavoidable.

T. E. Mead (Tai Tapu): The features you mention have all been played extensively throughout New Zealand, and it is not likely that they will be repeated. Time on the air is needed for new material.