

CONTEMPORARY ART

Sir,—I have read with interest the opposing views of your correspondents. One clear fact would seem to emerge—that the root of appreciation of modern art (or indeed any form of art) lies in the ability of the beholder to understand the thought which prompted the execution of a particular work. Why were the 17th Century Dutch so pre-occupied with the accurate representation of food in abundance at a time when Holland was obliged to be thrifty? Why did painters of the Renaissance concentrate on the characters of mythology, often introducing them into paintings dealing with the teachings of Christendom? Why did the 18th Century artists of the French Courts centre their interest on the fripperies of court life in Arcadian setting? The answer is that the artist has ever been influenced by the surroundings and mass thinking of his time. It is his job to translate those surroundings into paint, or sculpture or architecture.

Any attempt by an artist to ape the manners of a preceding age must be regarded as conceit if the circumstances prompting that painting bear no relation to it. Thus it is conceit for an artist to follow blindly the distortions evolved by Picasso in his painting during the German occupation. During that period he painted largely in greys, yellows, sage green and blacks—tortured colours of tortured buildings recognisable to anyone who visited Europe during that tortured period. Again his monstrous children with faces a hundred years old were his protest against the famine of Europe as were his still life studies of frugal household possessions in a France stripped of her wealth. I should think he will paint no more of these things. He has made his point to those who can understand, as surely as did the artists of the Middle Ages who represented hellfire and damnation or a life everlasting.

JOHN PINE SNADDEN (Wellington).

Sir,—I am indeed sorry to have aroused the ire of your correspondent, Mr. Thornton, in using the word contemporary in preference to modern, and I hope that he will believe me when I say that I had no intention of trying to appear either intellectual or pointlessly profound. I use the word contemporary because so many people when confronted with the phrase "modern art," particularly in this case as applied to painting, immediately conjure up images or associations of extreme distortion, complete abstraction, apparently meaningless shapes and colours, and deliberate ugliness, all tied up with a firm conviction that they are being fooled which is offset by a firmer one not to be; and I wish to try not to become biased by such associations. This is not, heaven forbid, in any way to refute the wisdom of "overseas artists, critics and directors of galleries," but simply for my own clarity of mind. I attach no importance whatever to which word is used, or who uses it.

Contemporary art is to me like the delta of a great river, full of streams deep and shallow, now mingling, now dividing, not without its stagnant pools and backwaters; and in which, I think, one may perceive dimly a sort of direction. As for abstractionism and distortion, I will say this much: as far as I know there has been no art of any time from Paleolithic onwards which, if generally regarded by informed

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opinion as good, has been photographic. There have been Greek statues as daringly distorted as anything thought up by Epstein or Moore, figures in Byzantine mosaics as deliberately stylised as the best attempts of Van Gogh or Cezanne.

Mr. Thornton is right, however, when he calls me a local, and it is to his credit that he gathered as much from my letter. I find it a term which I am not ashamed of (even if it were not inevitable), for it serves to make me all the more aware of the abundant pleasures which lie in wait for such time, God willing, as I am economically able to avail myself of them.

May I be permitted also to say "thank you" to Mr. Summers?

R. WARD (Auckland).

HOUSEWIVES ARE HUMAN

Sir,—I sympathise with S. J. Strong, who does not care for verse mixed with her potato peelings. But my plaint is this: why have sessions for women at all? Housekeeping is housekeeping and art is art, and why mix the lot in an unholy jumble of Help for the Home Cook, What Poetry Means to Me, and Choosing a Camping Site?

Women are human beings, with a human being's diversity of interests. Why not take it for granted that they appreciate any intelligent discussion, whether by men or women, at any hour of the day? Certainly have talks on housekeeping, and take it as read that they interest those of us who keep house—a report of a football match isn't announced as being For the Gentlemen, bless them, or Mainly for the Males.

But seriously, this isn't as trivial as it may appear. There's a movement on foot among women's organisations to agitate for women members in Parliament to represent women only. This is hailed as the most revolutionary proposal since women's suffrage. But such an accomplishment would be disastrous. We would end with a nation of men and a nation of women, civil war, and segregation of the sexes.

So please couldn't we have sessions of football, of jam-making, of art in all its phases, of child-welfare, of boxing and *The Lilian Dale Affair*—in short, sessions not for women or for men, but for human beings?

RUTH FRANCE (Christchurch).

EDUCATION FOR THE WORLD

Sir,—Reading your leading article inspired by an interview with Dr. C. E. Beeby concerning improvements in world education, I was rather disgusted to find that the first and foremost

faults in present world education were not even mentioned. At present every youngster is being impressed with the fact that his own patch of earth is the hub of the universe. History books are being faked for that purpose and those "traditions," instead of being wiped out, are being most carefully preserved. We don't even seem to know that patriotism is at present the world's greatest evil, as it is the capitalists' mainstay against the creation of a world state. However, before a world state can be successfully established Esperanto must be taught in all schools. Yet Esperanto was not even mentioned by Dr. Beeby. Must our living standards continue to go down and down, with every war being more devastating than ever, just because we lack that small grain of common sense to hand all military powers over to United Nations and be done with armaments?

C. F. B. WEISS (Mangonui).

("For, Oh, for, Oh the hobby-horse is forgot."
—Ed.)

WOMEN'S SESSIONS

Sir,—A writer in *The Listener* recently expressed approval of the fare provided in the women's session. A more appropriate label for this half hour would be "The Housewives' session" and some of us would like to forget that we are housewives for this little break each day—to enjoy a mental holiday from domesticity. We do wish that it could be recognised that while perhaps some women are interested in food all of the time, and all of them some of the time, we are really not all interested all of the time. Add to food talks, dull domestic science talks, advice on bringing up children and reminders on other good works, and there isn't much time left for anything interesting or entertaining. This really could all be disposed of in a "Domestic Day"—take it or leave it.

At present Wednesday is usually the best day, though we did suffer a regrettable burlesque recently. There are good talks from time to time, but even one hitherto reliable speaker, who has given us pleasant talks in the past, turned on us recently. Through a whole series she upbraided us, and in brisk dictatorial tones threatened us, that unless—amongst other things—we caught tourists with oysters and held them with apple pie we'd get no dollars. Few of us ever see a tourist in the flesh anyhow so we leave it to the Tourist Department to roll out the oyster barrel in the dollar cause.

Then surely the session should not have to depend upon the same few people all the time. Wellington is said to be the intellectual city and should be

able to produce a sufficient number of well-informed women to provide a little variety during our daily, or even tri-weekly, half-hour.

A.C.G. (Wellington).

"TEMPO FOR SINGERS"

Sir,—Referring to F. K. Tucker's recent observations on this subject, I wish to endorse his further criticism of the wobbling vocalist. Excessive use of the vibrato by alleged artists was frequently alluded to in scathing terms by the late Robert Parker, and another well-known choirmaster said on one occasion: "This is bad enough with soloists, but abominable in a chorus." With regard to tempo, and liberties taken with it, the majority of conductors (it appears to me) vary the composer's intentions according to their several interpretations. A classic instance relates to the concluding bars of the "Thunder and Lightning" chorus (Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*). Mr. Tucker will doubtless recollect rehearsing this double chorus under directions to observe a *rallentando* at that point, which certainly results in a more impressive ending. In the latest edition of the oratorio, however, the editors have caused to be printed the implicit instructions "*Sempre in tempo al fine*."

W. H. WARREN (Christchurch).

THE WORK OF UNESCO

Sir,—I was deeply stirred by Dr. Beeby's talk on Unesco. It surely was an answer to any who would advise us to "cut down expenses" by not sending representatives abroad. For over two centuries the more powerful nations have been busily engaged in materialistic, imperialistic aims. He showed the need in half the world—hungry, naked, sick, and illiterate—for another kind of attention. Surely now is an opportunity to follow the words of One who said, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant."

If some of us are unwilling to bear our little share for altruistic reasons perhaps we can do it out of jealousy of the U.S.S.R. which in thirty years has made a flying start. Or shall we shut ourselves up, encrusted oddities, to be an archaeological specimen when the rest of the world has time to give us a look in?

WAYFARING MAN, YEA A FOOL
(Auckland).

ORGAN MUSIC

Sir,—I read with interest the letter from F. K. Tucker, and I wish to endorse his remarks and add a little more. He mentions 1YA and 3YA presenting repetition programmes; I would include also our own 2YA which seems recently to have been very partial to César Franck's Choral No. 3. Much as we appreciate this wonderful work, we feel that a little more variety would be welcome. What about the Franck *Pastorale*, *Opus 19*, the chorale preludes of Bach, or even some of the very fine earlier recordings, which we never hear these days? May we organ lovers rest assured that these programmes will in future be made more interesting?

DIAPASON (Trentham).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT
"Mac" (Petone): The regular 10.45 feature was not broadcast that morning, and selections from the musical show *The Good Road* were substituted. The records used were English Decca AKK 2155 and 2116. No more details are available.

THE KING'S BROADCAST

STATION 2YA Wellington will remain on the air after midnight on December 25 to broadcast the BBC Special Christmas Programme consisting of a round-up of scientific, industrial and agricultural highlights of the year in Empire countries, and the King's Message. The BBC Programme begins at 2.0 a.m. on Boxing Day (New Zealand time), and the King will speak at 3.0 a.m. Station 2YA will close down at 3.15 a.m. (approximately). The King's Message will be heard again from the four YA and YZ stations at 7.15 a.m., 12.30 p.m., and 6.45 p.m. on Boxing Day, and the four ZB stations and 2ZA will join in the link at 7.15 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. The BBC Programme, including the King's Message, will be repeated at 9.0 a.m. on Boxing Day from the YA and YZ stations.

Christmas messages from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition will be broadcast at 12.30 p.m. on Christmas Day. They will be heard over the YA and YZ stations, the four ZB stations and 2ZA.