

# BREAKFAST WITH AN ART AUTHORITY

## Professor Sizer Discusses Pictures For The People

**N**EW ZEALANDERS who are proud of Maori arts and crafts and would like to see them exhibited in the U.S.A. may be surprised to learn that Americans probably wouldn't be interested. Most American art galleries and museums already have displays of Polynesian art, of which Maori art is just one branch.

This on the authority of Professor Theodore Sizer, professor of the History of Art at Yale University, who has been looking over New Zealand art on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation. One morning recently at his Wellington hotel *The Listener* had breakfast with him, and a conversation which travelled all the way from Archibald MacLeish, Congress's intellectual-baiting librarian, who is a friend of Professor Sizer, to surrealist art, ways and means of brightening up art galleries, and the sensational Rivera mural in the Rockefeller Centre, New York.

In Australia, Professor Sizer acted as adviser in connection with the exhibition of Australian art which is being sent to America by the Commonwealth Government. He has visited galleries and collections in New Zealand, and a smaller collection of New Zealand art will be added to the Australian.

With the canniness of the Carnegie traveller, Professor Sizer refuses to single out galleries for censure or any particular artists for special praise. However, he did find, he says, that a strong and virile art is growing up in Australia.

Primitive aboriginal art impressed him. Much of it abstract—it is amusing to think of the "abo" as one of the first abstractionists—but it is nevertheless frequently full of movement, excitement, and crude vigour, the Professor says.

### Horse-racing Not Honoured

What surprised him in Australia was the absence from public galleries of any representation of horse-racing, which he had been told was the national vice and which he expected would have been treated fully by Australian artists. He has noticed the same omission in New Zealand.

The few New Zealand galleries he has visited compare favourably with galleries overseas, says Professor Sizer. The Auckland War Memorial museum is as fine a museum of its type as he has seen anywhere, while the National Art Gallery in Wellington ranks with the Adelaide Gallery for presentation and arrangement.

### Those Days are Gone

In this connection America and certain Continental countries have of late years sponsored innovations which will

eventually change the whole conception of the art museums' place in the community. The days when bored families with tired feet walked miles round collections of paintings jammed frame to frame and stared with glazed eyes at the reflections of their own collars and ties, are gone forever. Galleries have learned from the stage that artistic lighting and a sense of the dramatic plays an important part in knocking an audience in the eye. Hidebound academicians may shudder at the idea of a painting being "stunted," but in the final analysis, art must be reconciled with the life of the average man, and if this reconciliation is aided by such devices, no complaint can be made.

And so it is that in America everything possible is done to make the man in the street acquainted with the heritage of art to be found in every gallery. For one thing, the functions of museum and art gallery are deliberately interwoven. An Etruscan vase, a Roman bas-relief, a Grecian urn would be found not in the museum but in the art gallery, where it properly belongs. Special exhibitions, widely advertised and carefully displayed, also play their part, while most art museums sponsor regular courses of lectures on such subjects as art appreciation.

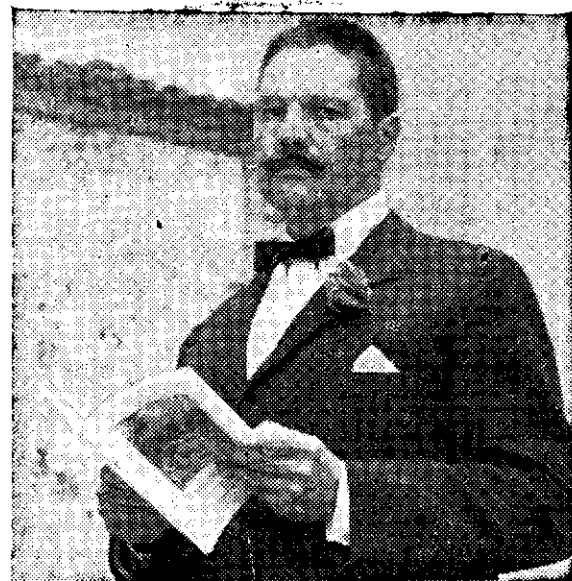
### The War's Effect

The war is naturally having its effect on art, not only in Europe but in America. An immediate and material effect has been the migration to America of many artists and critics. Works of art, some used as negotiable securities, have also flowed to America during the past few years, with the result that New York is now one of the acknowledged art centres of the world. War is also having its effect on the dialectics of art, as must be expected when a single event has such a profound effect on the lives of countless individuals. This was illustrated in a sense by the revulsion experienced by Picasso, who, before the aerial bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, had paid little attention to politics and ideological theories.

At any rate, what France and Germany have lost, America has gained, and countless American collections have been enriched. It is even said that no survey of the French impressionists would be complete without a visit to the U.S.A.

### New Movements

New movements in art Professor Sizer dismisses with a shrug. Impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism—America has experienced all the excitement attendant on the birth of these movements, and has long ago relegated them to their proper place.



PROF. THEODORE SIZER

*What! No horse-racing?*

Professor Sizer is scathing in his condemnation of the undignified antics of Salvador Dali, which would have been more fitting as an accompaniment to the beginnings of the Dada movement just after the last war; but he is also staunch in his defence of the serious merits of the surrealist movement. The "stream of consciousness" technique is, he says, just as legitimate in painting as it is in the writings of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. From a mechanical point of view—and this is borne out by the orthodoxy of Dali's actual craftsmanship—surrealism is a step back on the road to romanticism.

### "Intellectually Dishonest"

Significant in modern American art is the fame and prominence of two radical Mexican muralists, Orozco and Diego Rivera. Both have Indian blood in them and their emergence is symbolic of the revolution which brought new dignity and authority to the Mexican peon.

It was Rivera who created a sensation by giving a revolutionary theme to a mural he was commissioned to paint in the Rockefeller Centre, New York. Professor Sizer saw the finished mural before it was hastily screened from public view, and tells an interesting story of the furore which attended its temporary unveiling.

Instead of a quiet and dignified "capitalistic" mural, guaranteed not to offend the susceptibilities of the gentlemen who would be renting offices in the Rockefeller Centre, Rivera painted a violently coloured representation of all the evils of capitalism. The background was a motif of enlarged disease bacilli, while in the foreground leering, drunken financiers in top hats and with recognisable faces danced lewd dances with scantily-dressed chorus girls. Further atmosphere was added by a large portrait of Lenin!

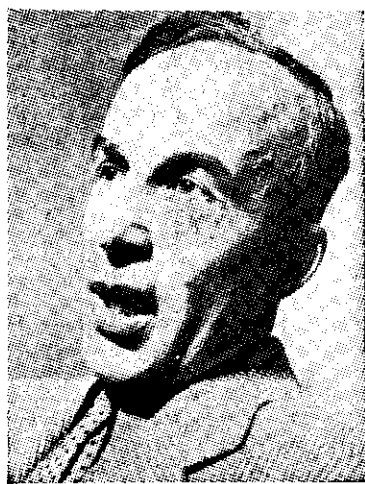
Since Rivera knew what would be fitting and what would not, the mural was intellectually dishonest, comments Professor Sizer.

## The Poet On Capitol Hill ☆

*[I]N spite of the outcry raised by the left-wing writers, American opinion is solidly behind Archibald MacLeish, the noted American poet who was appointed Congress Librarian, says Professor Sizer. In a speech he made in June last year entitled "Post-War Writers and Pre-War Readers" MacLeish, it may be remembered, charged such writers as Ernest Hemingway, Millais, Remarque and Dos Passos with undermining the foundations of democracy.*

*"The post-war writers whose work educated a generation to believe that all declarations, all beliefs are fraudulent, that all statements of conviction are sales-talk, that nothing men can put into words is worth fighting for, and that there is a lowdown to everything—those writers must face the fact that the books they wrote in the years just after the war have done more to disarm democracy in the face of Fascism than any other single influence," MacLeish said; and intellectual left-wingers rose like Spitfires to the attack.*

*MacLeish, who has been everything and written everything, materialised at precisely the right moment, observed one mildly sar-*



ARCHIBALD MacLEISH

*castic writer, to give him his chance to impress on his fellow citizens the fact that a Milton not only should be living at this hour but by miraculous good fortune was.*

*However, there can be no question that the Poet on Capitol Hill, as he has been called, has already done some outstanding work as Congress Librarian, says Professor Sizer. For one thing, he has welded the library's annual report, usually a dry-as-dust document, into a masterly piece of "reportage."*