

SCULPTORS IN WAR-TIME

★ **W**HAT does a sculptor do in war-time—a sculptor who lives on commissions and does not teach? We put this question to R. O. Gross the other day when he was in Wellington placing in position two bronze lions modelled by him for the new Government Fire Insurance building, but it did not greatly disturb him. He admitted that they have a lean time, but said that they were like the birds: they might be quiet in winter, but they did not die.

Besides, having a lean time was part and parcel of being an artist in a young country with a small population. Commissions were never numerous; they were never extravagantly rewarded; people who were concerned chiefly with the material things of life could not often understand how much preparation went on before any commission was executed—or how many designs often had to be submitted before a commission was received. In the meantime, the artist had to live; he had to buy materials and equip his studio; and it was not easy to persuade clients that he must make enough out of one commission to carry him on to the next. As for charging for what Whistler called “the knowledge of a life-time,” that was out of the question in a country like New Zealand.

Encouraging Things

However, encouraging things were happening, too. There were already in the Dominion, Mr. Gross said, several architectural firms who had what he called “the courage of their convictions” so far as sculptors were concerned. They knew what sculpture means to a building, they allowed for it in their designs, and they were sure enough of their ground to insist on it with their clients.

It was, for example, not an after-thought that the new Fire Insurance building should have lions on the outside and sculptured marble panels inside. These things were thought of in advance, discussed by the architect and sculptor, and then the plans were so drawn that they were an integral part in the building.

War Losses

It was not by slowing down building that the war was doing most harm to sculpture, Mr. Gross added, but by robbing us of sculptors. He had himself lost a real artist in his colleague Ronald Ranby, who came to him many years ago from Christchurch, and had now, he was afraid, fallen in Libya, and that kind of thing was going on all over the world. But when it happened to New Zealand, the loss was more severe than in countries in which there was a larger population.

And all this, Mr. Gross added as a parting shot, made it more necessary than it had ever been that the Broadcasting Services should spread a knowledge of art among ordinary people, and drive home its significance. It was, he thought, appalling that so many hours should be devoted to the cheapest forms of entertainment and so few to real culture. He knew that there were diffi-



R. O. GROSS
Like the birds in winter

culties, but it was distressing to him, as one interested in the movement for adult education, to stand by day after day and see so little done.

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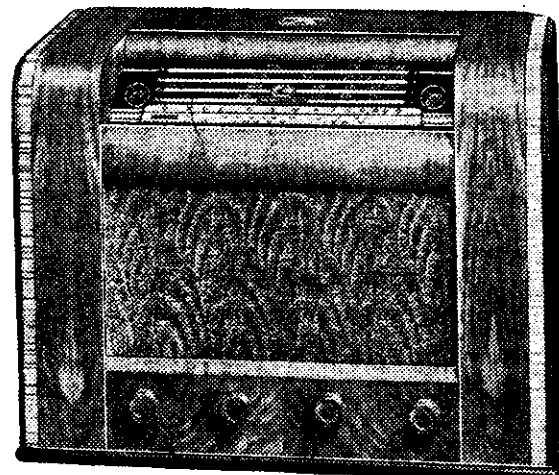
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