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BOOKS

One Person's Opinion

YEAR BOOK OF THE ARTS IN NEW ZEALAND, No. 5, edited by H. H. Tombs; H. H. Tombs Ltd. Price, 30/-.

(Reviewed by A. J. C. Fisher)

I THINK the dust cover is unfortunate. Is it a visual drawing of the figure or the designed attempt to increase the circulation by attracting tired businessmen? In this edition too many subjects are dealt with in the space available. Some of the subjects I know nothing about. I will touch on only a few.

Under the heading, "In This Issue" I find mention of Mrs. Frankel's article on The Frances Hodgkins Controversy and Mr. Fairburn's article on The Wertheim Collection. I also find this: " . . . and while the arts proverbially cannot flourish without settled economic conditions, we hope the study of these pages will bring pleasure and refreshment as a relaxation from the more pressing problems of daily life."

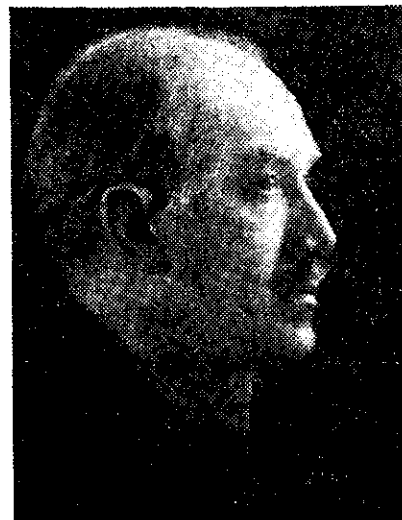
Poor New Zealand artists! Is the book worth buying? I went on to read Mrs. Frankel's article. I quote her: "For the New Zealander coming fresh into this work of contemporary British art it was an enviable experience to watch the experts at work." This is an interesting statement. The barbarian colonial sees the Imperial witch-doctors at work—a mystical revelation. But may I ask what kind of contemporary British art, and what kind of expert? Apparently an expert is an expert when you employ him and/or when you agree with him. Apparently the beautiful Regency rooms in Portland Place helped into the bargain. Mrs. Frankel has curious ideas about time and space, for she says: "We pointed out that virtually no modern art has reached New Zealand."

It is this sort of thing that makes people indulge in silly sayings like: "This is New Zealand painting that was," "Modern is Elsewhere." "My modern lies over the sea." The only relevant statements in Mrs. Frankel's article are: (1) that a much larger committee drawn from wider circles should have been appointed; (2) that Frances Hodgkins was a New Zealander.

In my own opinion the only way out of the difficulty would have been to take a vote of all the working members of all the Canterbury Societies of Arts. Mrs. Frankel's article is, in the main, a piece of emotional special pleading. She is apparently outraged when the opinion is expressed that Eric Newton, art critic of *The Sunday Times*, writes nonsense. She should not worry, for other London critics could be readily found to support that opinion. May I suggest that Mrs. Frankel be sent to London to consult with some other charming experts

with a view to the purchase of some paintings by the Hon. John Collier, Laszlo, etc., for the Auckland Gallery. I suggest this for the simple reason that very little Primitive Art has reached New Zealand recently. To reciprocate, I think our experts should be consulted with a view to sending some New Zealand Futurist Art to England. So little has reached there. I think Mrs. Frankel has weakened what might have been a strong case.

I find Mr. Fairburn's article about the Wertheim Collection interesting. He



A. J. C. FISHER

"Poor Titian, poor Rembrandt!"

mentions that there is a lack of present-day work in our galleries apart from a few paintings bought "locally." He goes on to say: "They wait until an artist is famous before they think of buying him . . . whether he is worth buying or not." Though I do not like the way Mr. Fairburn uses the word "locally," I do most heartily agree with him about the purchase of the work of artists who are not yet famous, though I am sure Mr. Fairburn will agree with me that it is making it rather hard for the poor

experts to decide "whether they are worth buying or not." They might become famous. Some of the Christchurch people found this problem rather difficult, apparently.

As to the Wertheim Collection, I think work of equal interest in that field of painting is produced in New Zealand. Nevertheless it is good to have a look at what the other fellow is doing—every now and then. But I do think it is disgraceful that it should be on permanent exhibition at the cost of hanging space for New Zealand work. The New Zealand contemporary work is appallingly crowded on to the walls, three and four deep—like an auction room—when it is exhibited. We are hypocritical, and suffer from a vulgar inferiority complex in this respect. We should treat New Zealand artists' work with equal consideration and respect. Some New Zealanders appear to be "hungry" and well fed at one and the same time. They must be black marketeers.

I notice that the Editor says, "Let us examine our standards in the light of contemporary standards." Again I ask, what contemporary standards? Shades of Victorian authoritarianism! For God's sake let the New Zealand artist have the liberty to honestly make his own judgments. What contemporary standards are there in England and France? The artists there are all casting stinking fish at one another and the experts. Some of the "Moderns," whatever they mean by the word, are terribly vociferous. They refute authority and then quote the "experts." They are possessed not merely of an affirmative spirit; they are self-virtuous and terribly sure of themselves—witness Mr. Gordon McAuslan's article. He says, "Unfortunately anyone can learn to draw." Maybe, but

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