

he certainly accepted a good deal that makes us uncomfortable. But the Tennyson who gruffly challenged Henry Van Dyke, the first time that great admirer turned up at his study door, with "Are you a journalist?" and received the wholly satisfactory reply "No, my lord, I am a gentleman," is the Tennyson who wrote the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"; and it is not easy to see how he could have been the one without being the other.

That Mr. Auden should not have noticed what is so obvious seems curious because he himself has faced a similar problem, with resources not so unlike Tennyson's and in a world where the chances of being trivial, though not of being naive, are quite as great. He too has been trying to talk about familiar subjects in something like a conventional way, as for instance in the Yeats and Freud elegies; there has even emerged from the background of his poetry a kind of domestic imagery of wash basins and Christmas decorations and the seasons and scenery "on this island." Perhaps this development has been partly unconscious, as it must almost wholly have been with Tennyson; but with so clever a man as Mr. Auden it must have been partly also a deliberate willingness to accept losses in the hope of achieving something which is necessary for great poetry. If it has been, then he ought to have sympathized a little with Tennyson's effort to do the same kind of thing, even though that effort may sometimes have been ill-advised, as Mr. Randall Jarrell thinks Mr. Auden's has, and even though Tennyson sacrificed something of what he had for certain minor compensations but without ever achieving what he wanted, as it may yet turn out Mr. Auden has.

ARTHUR MIZENER

Old Masters for Tomorrow

ABSTRACT AND SURREALIST ART IN AMERICA. By *Sidney Janis*.
Reynal and Hitchcock. \$6.50

IT IS told that "Alice in Wonderland" having found favor with Queen Victoria, Her Majesty graciously allowed Lewis Carroll to dedicate his next work to her. This happened to be *The Fifth Book of Euclid Treated Algebraically, So Far As It Relates to Commensurable Magnitudes*. Some similar mischievousness rules the sequence of publication of the two books

that Sydney Janis dedicates to contemporary painting.

In the first, *They Taught Themselves*, he presented with a keen outlook and refreshing respect for the artists concerned, the wonderland sight of men who succeeded in lifting themselves by their bootstraps and were caught in this levitating act. Many of the pictures analyzed were of the story-telling type, monkeys upsetting fruit trays, cops in pursuit and such. Accused of favoring Sunday painters over professionals, Janis was suspected by purists of being somewhat of a practical joker.

His second book is so at variance with the first that it could mean an aesthetic *mea culpa* for those who do not know that Janis has long been a pioneer champion of non-representational art, who acquired difficult and mature Picassos when most other collectors were flirting with this artist's "Blue" juvenilia.

The riotous and the quaint are absent from *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*. Austerity marks its text from the first sentence, "Science is the open sesame of 20th Century art . . ." to the parting tableau, "Man, manipulating the lever of contemporary culture upon the fulcrum of science, attains the vital balance for twentieth-century art." Would scientists care to uphold this thesis or choose to deny it, as did Sigmund Freud when he refused a proffered stake in the expensive subconscious of Dali? It matters little, for the attitude exists as an aim, a spring, a passion—and in aesthetic matters, will often equals fact.

Today, when children bring home as a matter of course the abstract finger paintings that they smear in nursery schools, when surrealism proves a hit in advertising, and stroboscopic photography featured in magazines familiarizes us with the plastic patterns of time-movement, it would be disingenuous to pretend shock or even surprise at the contents of this book. An extraordinarily well-informed and lucid text recites the factual record without crowding it with irrelevancies. Janis taps worthwhile provincial sources scarcely touched by New York galleries, gives their chance to the very young, while denying space to deans among practitioners, George L. K. Morris and Albert Gallatin among them.

To match in art today's globe-circling activities, stylistic relationships between continents are emphasized at the expense of national flavor. After reading the opening chapter, "Sources in 20th Century European Painting," that suggests an America dependent on Europe for its art forms, one sighs for a complementary chapter on American sources. Europe freely acknowledges the role of America in the formation of abstract and surrealist art.

Gleize and Metzinger mention and illustrate in 1912 American Indian totem patterns as forerunners of cubism. Pioneer American skyscrapers, pioneer American machines, inform both the dynamics of futurism and Bauhaus functionalism, while Mack Sennett cinema comedies with their fantastic plots prefigure Dada. If, as Janis says, it be true that "to participate in today's culture it is only necessary that a country be infused with a modernization of its physical equipment," one understands why an American plumbing fixture dated A.D. 1917 was exhibited by Marcel Duchamp as *objet d' art*.

Janis asserts rightly that non-objective painting is the legitimate exponent of its era, which is undeniably noble enough quarters for any type of art. But the price to pay for such genuineness is the merging of individual works into period homogeneity. When the artists have been long dead, as those of Egypt and Byzantium, we expect single achievements to agglutinate into one communal mass. In this book we surprise a similar metamorphosis in the making. As one goes through the plates of the abstract section, paint acquires a hieratic quality in the ratio that it shuns the incidents of natural vision. Picture after picture falls into the groove as discs to an automatically fed phonograph. Abstract works, intended as exasperated affirmations of uniqueness, melt their already faceless features into a still deeper sediment of dehumanization— anonymity.

To the layman, surrealism diverges sharply from abstractionism, and should present a bric-a-brac of unrelated objects, watches, rags, organs, ants, patiently rendered in make-believe style. It has thus become synonymous with the reappearance of subject matter, a change of mood, deep as a chasm, that splits modern art ca. 1930 and gives to the second third of the century a complexion far different from that of the first. The Picasso of 1915 shied from representation. To quote loosely a contemporary text of Cocteau, having built a scaffold of planes and lines around a lady or a bottle, the artist made bottle or lady vanish from the finished picture. Fourteen years later, Dali crowds unabashed thirty-eight bicycle riders in three square inches of "Illumined Pleasures" as an answer to the challenge of his paragon, Meissonier, who could fit in one picture a whole Napoleonic army down to the last brass button, gaiter and moustache. The surrealism that Janis sponsors in this book is more abstract in hue than is its popular version, inasmuch as it inclines to the orthodox line of the surrealist party that favors automatism and chance techniques over patient rendering, and anathematizes Daliism for vernacular.

This first corpus of American non-objective art, impressive both in quantity and quality, needs no strengthening at the expense of realism. One regrets what Janis says of abstract painters turned realists: ". . . artists who could not survive without support, approval and companionship turned their backs on the difficult path of abstractionism . . ." Not all conversion to representation need be venal and cowardly. Heroic was the attitude of the cubist Rivera, leaving behind him in 1921 the economic security guaranteed by a Paris dealer for what seemed then aesthetic exile and meagre rewards—Mexican walls and a laborer's weekly pay. Hélicon, justly recognized as a successful master of abstract art, links his recent turn towards nature to what he experienced as a soldier in this war. And Dali was yielding to another spur than weakness when he changed from early abstractions to what he calls "hand-done color photography."

I agree with Janis that non-objective art deserves the name of "20th Century art," but feel that it would be safer to term it "early 20th Century art." Aesthetic quakes write complex graphs in a hundred years, as in the last century that opens with the pomp of David's "Coronation of Napoleon" and outlasts Van Gogh. Starting with fauvism where Van Gogh left off, our own century has ample time left to breed in its turn a David.

JEAN CHARLOT

A Doctrinal Baudelaire

BAUDELAIRE, A CRITICISM. By *Joseph D. Bennett*. Princeton. \$2.00

THIS book contains a general theory about Baudelaire's life and the development of his poetry. The larger part of it, and the more valuable part, is devoted to the critical exegesis of some twenty-odd poems of which both the French originals and English versions by the author are included.

The general theory is one which is familiar and stale. It might be termed, perhaps unjustly, the "Catholic" theory. It is at least as old as the last section of Albert Thibaudet's essay in *Intérieurs*, its most imposing monument is Stanislas Fumet's *Notre Baudelaire*, and its chief expression in English has been T. S. Eliot's essay in *Collected Essays*, surely the silliest thing Mr. Eliot ever committed to print. Although I

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