

Oscar B. Jacobson, director of the school of art, is a personality which stamped its impress first on the university, then on the southwest and finally on the nation. He is a painter and a critic; he is a discoverer, for he it was who first pointed out the beauties of the southwest for the painter; the work he did with the Kiowa Indians has attracted international attention. A rapier wit, a constant kindness, a deep philosophic interest in life, make Professor Jacobson a significant figure in the national art world. «The character of art» is the second university lecture, delivered April 12



## The character of art

BY OSCAR BROUSSE JACOBSON

I HOPE that no one expects me to tell him what art is. Once I thought that I knew, but I am approaching fifty, at which age one no longer presumes to be a judge of art, if of anything.

In presenting this subject permit me to call attention to my trousers. Believe it or not, the first French Revolution gave me these trousers. The French gentlemen wore knee breeches of silk. The mob who came to Versailles to ask for bread wore overalls. The mob won, and ever since we men of the Western World have been flagging about, with these emblems of democracy sometimes at half-mast. If Louis XIV had not built Versailles and had not made his court the grandest in the world, it is not improbable that I should appear wearing knee breeches. There are causes and effects. On the heels of the marching armies of the World war women's pedal extremities came into their own. Hair and skirts proving bothersome, feminine heads became bobbed like the Egyptian sphinx and skirts evolved into Scotch kilts presumably as emblems of liberty, equality and fraternity. Then the depression arrived and jobs departed, the young ladies no longer cared so much for this new freedom, but proceeded for purposes of their own to make themselves again as feminine and alluring as possible.

History seems to be a series of magnificent chances. Do you realize that if the English at the time of old Queen Elizabeth, aided and abetted by the gods who controlled the weather, had not destroyed the Spanish Armada in the Lowlands Sea, I would probably be speaking a modified form of Spanish here today.

If Napoleon had not been short of ready cash Oklahoma would perhaps today have as president Monsieur Doumer. If Henry VIII had not been quite so fond of the ladies, or so hard to please, what do you suppose our administration building would be like?

If an attractive, elegant young blade living in a little hill town of Northern Italy in 1300 had not been taken with severe illness, the Santa Fe Railway Company would probably not build its stations in the Spanish Mission style but in something else. For the man who afterwards came to be known as Saint Francis of Assisi founded the order of monks who were to establish their missions along the King's Highway of California, and this created an architecture for our whole Southwest.

Most of you probably care nothing about Mohamed, yet the followers of this prophet in Afghanistan, Turkey and Persia have had an influence on your family life by beautifying the floors of

every home in this land with their rugs—or imitations thereof.

While Caesar was walking in his marble palace in Rome in the year 4 B. C. a child was born in a caravansery in one of his unimportant provinces, who was to become a god to half the earth and in whose glorification a new and wonderful art was to arise, a thousand years later—Gothic architecture.

For the personality of one individual often determines the character of coming ages. Some would maintain that history is but the biography of great men and that the character of a people and likewise the character of its art are but accidents. Great men, good men, saints and rascals have molded epochs. They undoubtedly have helped in creating the style of a period in history, but nevertheless Art is something deeper, more elusive, more profound, more sacred.

We have then arrived at the question, first, what is art? which is almost impossible to answer, unless the definition may be "Joy of beauty in work." What determines its character? What makes art such as it is today, such as it was among the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Senegalese? Great men determine it, religion determines it, the climate and soil determine it, the race determines it, the climate and soil determine it, the epoch determines it, occu-

pations determine it, and the individual artist determines it.

Civilization is a comparative recent and fragile thing. So far as we know its first blossom appeared only six or eight thousand years ago, not long considering that behind the dawn of civilization lies the long night of bestiality and savagery estimated at one-half to one million years. It is not long since man emerged out of the primeval gloom and raised his eyes heavenward. Man's advance has not been steady, rather slow and hesitant, occasionally reaching high altitudes, often plunging into the depths, sometimes to destruction, now and then finding a way out, and every step of the journey can be traced through art.

Out of the central highlands of Asia, two streams of the Aryan race emerged. The first, moving southwesterly became the Ionians, the Greeks, the Persians and the Brahman Hindus. The second, traveling in a northwesterly direction was to become the Scandinavians, the Celts, Goths, Franks, etc. These streams sometimes joining, later separating, or forming new combinations, met on the fields of France to form an interesting nation. Other migrations formed other combinations, Celts with Anglo-Saxons and Normans became English. Iberian, Roman, Goth, Berber and Arab became Spanish. In their travels these people encountered different kinds of soil and climate which were to mold them into different patterns. The gloomy, dark steppes of Northern Europe have made the Russian what he is and have created Russian art and music; have produced a Tschaikevsky and a Roerich. The black forests of Germany have contributed to making the German people what they are—heavy, strong and sentimental; have produced a Goethe, a Wagner and a Franz Von Stuck.

In Spain, alternating hot days and cold nights, burnt umber mountains and lovely fertile valleys have made the haughty Castilian and have produced a Zuloaga or a Carmencita. To the Gulf Stream the Hollander owes his prosiness and dependability; to the bleak, stony moors, the Scotchman owes his inescapable predestination and his flinty conscience. The lakes among the pines and birch woods in the white nights have made the Swede, his folk music, a largerlof, a Prinz Eugen. The sun changing the Mediterranean into a symphony of blue and silver has produced the Italian ready to laughter and song, and with a voice like that of no other race. The eternal rise and fall of the Nile created the civilization of Egypt based upon immortality. Arabia's semi-desert topography and her position on the transcontinental highways made Islam a fighting religion. Can you doubt it?

Nations and races, like individuals, have character, a character molded by

influences before birth as well as through childhood. By the character of a nation I mean its composite mind, its temperament created by the experiences of its people through countless ages. Such as the soil and the weather are, such are the people, and such is their art. If the land happens to be moving sands, formless and waterless wastes under starry skies, we are apt to find the mystic, the aesthete, the dreamer. If people are unhappy because of misery and want they invent a heaven paved with gold bricks. In a land of plenty the vision of Paradise becomes fainter.

These things constitute the essence of art, the wild flower art, the folk art which is more fundamental than the fashion or the period. It is an expression of a peoples emotional life. The ideals of any people and the quality of any civilization can best be judged by the languages used to express emotions. By languages I mean the artistic languages of music, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture and architecture—the fine arts. As a cultivated plant the arts are often universal in their character completely obliterating national frontiers. This is especially so in music and painting.

Religion, work and play have been the sources of inspiration for all artists, especially the unknown folk artists. All art has been more or less influenced by religious beliefs. Faith has created a vast assortment of artistic symbols, often a whole art.

Religion is the fountain head of Chinese landscape painting, Egyptian architecture, Greek sculpture, Indian dances, Hindu literature, etc.

Civilization, if there is such a thing, tends to dominate and to develop natural resources by means of labor and science. The relentless struggle to master nature as well as the conflict between man and man to possess the earth give rise to many emotions. These emotions have always been expressed through the medium of the fine arts. If you doubt this statement consider the quality of the spirituals of American negroes, the epics of the Vikings, the poetry of the Arabs, and the skyscrapers of the Americans. The cowboy songs of the American west were often based upon heartache and homesickness in the long nightwatches. Their simple rhythm is that of the single-foot of the pony, the creak of the saddle, and the tinkle of the spurs, as the Italian peasant's song is built on the cadence of the swing of the scythe, or the cadence of the farmer's donkey. The sailors' ditties have the quality of wind and waves as well as an impatient longing for the companionship of girls. The origin of the rhythms of the Arabian dance, voluptuous thought it may be, is found in the camel's walk. The heavy stress of the chant of the Volga Boatman and the sweet melancholy songs of the shepherd

girls of Scandinavia, the rhythm of sound and movement in the sacred ceremony of the Hopi Snake Dance, the discreet, pretty, sensualism of the minuet of the court of Louis XV, all can be traced to their original sources. Even American jazz has a reason for existence. Musicians will tell you that we got this strange musical phenomenon from the negroes. Don't believe a word of it. Henry Ford invented jazz. Henry Ford and McCormick, the harvester man, Alexander Bell, Nobel, Atwater Kent, the Wright Brothers, Thomas Edison, all the other scientists who are responsible for this devilry that makes life so complicated and so comfortable. How can you expect people to sing harvest songs to the rhythm of a lazy sickle when they live in a world where everything below, around and above the ground is whirring in a rhythm, the speed of which is wearing out the axle of the world. On the other hand, the quiet American landscape painting is an attempt to escape from the rush and speed of our modern life.

Art has grown as a wild flower among all races at some time in their evolution. This stage of development which I prefer to call the people's flowering time does not usually coincide with the period of their highest economic or political development. Later comes the sophisticated phase. As a cultivated hot-house plant some of the arts thrive better among some people than among others. For instance, the Englishman has expressed himself rather better in literature than in either painting, sculpture or music. Perhaps the rains, fogs and soups of England have something to do with this.

As national or racial art is shaped by the soil, the sunshine, the rainfall, so in the same way is every true artist in some measure always the mirror of the "zeitgeist," the spirit of the time that colors his way of thinking and tends to express itself in every aspect of his art. And this spirit of the epoch is a complex combination of many forces. In spite of occasional explosions, history is a gradual evolution, often without any sharp demarcation between periods. The Renaissance of Italy did not begin promptly at midnight on January 1, 1400. Certain forces smoldering under the surface far back in the Middle Ages—as there are forces working in the cellars of our own civilization. The future is always pushing. Today is always loath to let go. There are movements of incubation and growth, decline and decay. Art is born, it grows to maturity and dies out with the people or is transmuted into the next epoch. Now and then it is jarred by outside influences. We need only remember how the Puritan revolution destroyed art in England for a while. And how the French Revolution affected not only that nation's art but all western art—

everything, even to my trousers. Consider how Greece influenced Italy; Italy England in the Elizabethan age. No true artist ever escapes the impulsion of his time, even though he sometimes rebels against it. With these considerations it is less difficult to understand Dante of the Middle Ages, Shakespeare of the Renaissance and Goethe of the Post-Reformation.

Great art is possible only when the people have the time, opportunity and encouragement to express themselves. If the artist is subjected to a power, political, social or ecclesiastical, it means simply that he has voluntarily or otherwise submerged his craving for self-expression to supply a demand. For proof of this we have only to turn to the endless procession of Madonnas painted during the early Renaissance in Italy and to the endless parade of strutting kings during the royal days of France.

There have been great periods of art expression, periods when whole nations, it would seem, were permeated by a sense of beauty. One of the greatest art periods occurred between 500 and 300 B. C. in Greece. The Greeks of the Golden Age had a whole cabinet of Deities, but Beauty was the real Greek God. Children from infancy were trained to respect and enjoy beauty, physical and spiritual. Physical, intellectual and spiritual harmony was the ideal. Architecture, sculpture, drama, literature, all were conceived and executed towards that end. They tried to create everything as near perfect as possible and this perfection was arrived at through an intelligently developed sense of moderation.

The Greeks were intellectually as superior to, say, our modern parliaments as these distinguished bodies are superior to the African pigmies. By concentrating on beauty as an ideal for six or seven hundred years, it is after all not so strange that old Greece produced the Parthenon, a Hermes or a Milo. As stated, the great Greek impulse developed around an intellectual conception—there was no conflict between the spiritual and the physical.

Our ancestors preferred to look at matters from a different point of view, the Christians accepting the Hebraic theory of monotheism separated the spiritual from the physical. The development of the spirit became their reason for life and they refused to admit the physical claims of nature and the intellectual needs and desires of the individual. Faith was substituted for reason, the disgust of the body for the Greek veneration and admiration of the body. They attempted to attain a high spiritual state by mortifying the flesh and discouraging the individual's intellectual development. The result is, the simple, charming, child-like art of the early Christian and the Romanesque periods in which every

line, form and color that could possibly be considered as stimulating to the senses was forbidden or lost. The ideal was to eliminate the human quality altogether. The Greeks loved the human figure and decorated it with simple, beautiful garments, the Christians hated the body and designed clothing to disguise it.

As the Dark Age eliminated the masses from intellectual participation, the church continued in this policy of suppression for the good of souls until the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries brought forth Gothic art which is the most complete, the most spiritual, the most aesthetic of all religious expressions. It is an artistic emotion in full play in an almost fanatical attempt to express in stone, glass, wood, cloth, the spiritual rapture into which the mind was constantly thrust. Knowing this we do not wonder that the huge Gothic cathedrals rise in lacy stone as if by magic—that their thousands of sculptured images are without a trace of physical voluptuousness, that they make no bid to the senses but are quivering with spiritual ecstasy. Even the color of the stained glass windows is symbolic of a mind almost celestial. This being so, it is obvious that modern Gothic architecture even though it is a perfect imitation becomes a grim joke and a falsehood in this materialistic age.

The third great period of European art history centers around the prince, the king, the pope and the artist as an individual. During this period the creations of the artistic dreamer were influenced by the demands of royalty or aristocracy but it was also an attempt to combine the intellectualism of the Greeks with the emotionalism of the middle ages and was characterized by freedom and individualism even into license. Time entirely forbids any closer inspection of the art of other periods and other peoples. It is enough to say that it is possible to define the art of each epoch by one word: Egypt, eternity; Greece, beauty; Rome, strength; early Christian, piety; Romanesque, fear; Gothic, exultation; the Renaissance, aristocratic refinement and elegance; our own age,—?

Finally we come to the individual creative artist and his way of working. In this modern age when the scientists are considered our high priests and the laboratory has become our place of worship; when everybody studies anatomy, botany, biology, geometry, zoology, etc., what is the artist's status? By many he is probably considered a nuisance or a superfluous luxury. Let us investigate him. Certainly, the scientists' accomplishments are magnificent, but even so, it is our belief that love is something more than biology, that a mountain is something more than granite, a bird in flight something more than cells, and

God something more than electrons. Recently I heard a very eminent preacher speculating on the problem of how he could "turn on God" like the man at the radio. The artist knows that when, and if, that is accomplished God will retire behind the golden clouds of the sunset. And Barrie told the truth when he said there are fairies in the world so long as there is anyone living who believes in fairies.

Of course, we cheerfully acknowledge with thanks all the fine achievements of modern scientists. We grant every claim made by him, but even so is it not equally true that there are oceans of human thought and experience which the test tube of science has never sounded and probably never will.

Come with me to the mountains, let's climb yonder peak. A practical man and a learned man in our party will immediately tell you all about the composition of the rocks, the minerals they contain, the geological area to which they belong. He will tell you about the fossils below the ground and the fauna and the flora above—tremendously fascinating subjects—but when you stand on a lofty height in the evening twilight and look down on the mysterious shrouds of night approaching, when you turn your gaze to the infinite riches of the heavens and see the stars like lamps of God hanging in the firmament or when you see the first flush of day illuminate the East and when Aurora announces the approach of Apollo leading back another day for man, when all the earth and air and sky thrill with exhilaration in harmony with the wonders of creation then you do not turn to the man of science for an interpretation of the marvelous beauty of the mountains and the sky but to the artist, the poet and the musician, who penetrate beyond the external into the realm of the spirit. Or go down to the shore of the old ocean. Again here is your man of science, learned and pleasant and accommodating. He can show you how much salt there is in the waves, he is a magician who can determine how many trillions of atoms are contained in each drop, or weigh the whole ocean. The artist perhaps understands or cares but little for all this useful knowledge. But he has the power to recreate in you the restless, everchanging sea, calm, angry, seductive, repellent, awesome. He can give you this thrill any time, through his pictures or his music. And none can weigh or measure the value of this artistic emotional experience in the happiness of mankind.

I mentioned the Gothic cathedrals a little while ago. The men who built these cathedrals were great engineers or the structures would not be standing now, but if they had had only scientific knowledge no one would care to visit these monuments. The builders of these

churches were first and foremost artists. As we approach Notre Dame of Paris, or Amiens let us examine these piles of stone, see what they mean. All the towers reach upward like giant fingers pointing their way to heaven. The three entrances are symbolic of the trinity of their faith and the ground plan of the church is in the form of a Christian cross. Their thousands of sculptured figures form a pictorial encyclopaedia of all the then available knowledge. They give you a tremendous amount of information and misinformation about saints and devils and kings and knaves, about agriculture and medicine, literature and philosophy, but they can also give you something else. Let us enter. The nave with its fluted piers is like an avenue in a mighty forest; the vaulted ceilings are like branches interlaced. The chant of the priest drifts through the quiet space, the great organ sends its waves of harmony vibrating through the forest of arches, the sounds fly heavenward on graceful and strong wings of beautiful harmony. The whole house seems one vast world filled with the glory of the Almighty. You know and you feel that in these great cathedrals the artist builders have enshrined the holiest aspirations of the Christian ages. The artist, poet, or musician feels these things perhaps more keenly than the average man and is able to make a record of his emotions and he interprets them in his own particular style.

Another valuable role which the artist plays, often unconsciously is that of historian. Did you ever stop to think that the Cro-Magnon, the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Moors, Mayas, and all other vanished people of the East and the South and the North are resurrected and measured by their art, by that which the artist impressed upon the structures in which they lived, worshipped and were buried; in the garments and jewelry they wore and the things they made and used. Let me cite you a concrete example. When Carter opened the Tomb of Tutankhamen what did he find—an old king looking like a smoked herring, surrounded by a horde of the finest examples of the artists' crafts, and Egypt lives again in all her splendor.

Viewed in this light the artist assumes a larger role than the position generally conceded to him in modern times. The artist has always truly and accurately expressed the soul of his people at his particular period or epoch. It is by the fine arts that we always judge the civilization of a nation or a race, by its monuments in architecture, painting and crafts, rather than by those useful activities which minister to the needs of existence.

Art is a record not only of material things, but of the spiritual aspirations of humanity. The spirit of Greece lives

not by the battle of Salamis but by the songs of Sappho, the sculpture of Phidias, and the Parthenon of Icatinus. England may grow old but she will never die while the plays of Shakespeare live. France may decline but her spirit will go on as long as the work of her thou-

sands of artists exists. Italy will not die as long as the paintings of Michelangelo or the Comedy of Dante remain.

Such is the character of art. Delight is the soul of art, and its function is to express and interpret the beauty of life, and man's search for the divine.

## Sooner roll call

### DIRECTORY CHANGES

C. D. Alworth, '28 eng., care Humble Oil Refining Company, Thompson, Texas.  
 Irwin E. Anderson, ex '18, care The Coca Cola Bottling Company, San Antonio, Texas.  
 Jessie May Anderson, '31 home ec., Dameron hospital, Stockton, California.  
 Floyd M. Ayers, '29 geol., Sabetha, Kansas.  
 Charles M. Barrett, '28 bus., 806 South Citrus, Los Angeles, California.  
 R. Clifford Bowles, '24 geol., 2617 Main avenue, San Antonio, Texas.  
 H. L. Camp, '28 arts-sc., '29 M. A., Box 166 F. E., College Station, Texas.  
 Mrs Stella Cash Bell, '25 ed., 104 Highland, Seminole.  
 Mrs Dorothy Bettes Collins, '24 arts-sc., 624 Oxford avenue, Akron, Ohio.  
 C. Philip Collins, '24 geol., 624 Oxford avenue, Akron, Ohio.  
 J. R. Cotteral, '29 med., Henryetta Hospital, Henryetta.  
 G. A. Foster, '29 geol., 614 Delaware avenue, Bartlesville.  
 Mrs Sara Harris Reynolds, '29 ed., 2418 Dodson avenue, Fort Smith, Arkansas.  
 Lorenz Dittmar Huff, '27 arts-sc., Box 58, Clemson College, South Carolina.  
 Mrs Audra Griffith Key, '28 ed., Box 22, Hollis.  
 Oscar Hatcher, '20 arts-sc., 1220 Perrine building, Oklahoma City.  
 Earnest C. Hicks, '22 arts-sc., Carnegie.  
 Theodore R. Hofer, '24 arts-sc., Newkirk.  
 Mrs Janie Jenkins Smith, '25 arts-sc., 2 Cervantes building, San Francisco, California.  
 Mrs Leona Jones Everett, ex '24, 708 Jennings avenue, Bartlesville.  
 Howard Kapp, '31 bus., Box 1311, Amarillo, Texas.  
 Edward J. Klopfenstein, '30 eng., 828 East Drive, Oklahoma City.  
 Robert B. McNeely, '24 geol., '27 geog., 709 Ellis Sengleton building, Wichita, Kansas.  
 Mrs Iola Morrow Hoskins, '28 ed., Dimuba, California.  
 Bruno P. Mayer, '29 law., 721 Perrine building, Oklahoma City.  
 Richard O. Meents, '30 Ph. D., 400 South Rennie avenue, Ada.  
 Mrs Maud Montgomery Dyche, '20 arts-sc., 941 East drive, Oklahoma City.  
 Mrs Gladys Moore Pearson, '29 fine arts., 1405 West Oklahoma, Enid.  
 Mrs Zylpha Myers, '26 ed., Box 397, Tecumseh.  
 B. H. Perkinson, '22 B. S., Box 825, Tyler, Tex.  
 Mrs Katherine Robinson Cox, '26 arts-sc., Arcola, Illinois.  
 Mrs Thelma Rose Hodges, '28 home ec., Wilson.  
 Carl S. Shoults, '22 arts-sc., Box 82, Brady, Texas.  
 Claude C. Smith, '24 M. A., University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada.  
 Roy V. Sturgeon, Ph G., '20, Hennessey.  
 Lyle K. Swartz, '30 pharm., care A. & C. Drug Company, Anadarko.

Homer T. Terrell, Ph. G., Pritchett, Colorado.  
 Winburn T. Thomas, '29 arts-sc., 2330 North Halstead street, Chicago, med.  
 Dr Roy Chester Warren, '28 med., Clifton, Arizona.  
 Harold Van Turner, '26 bus., Box 1686, Pampa, Texas.  
 Owen A. Winsor, '22 arts-sc., care State Bridge, Wolcott, Colorado.

### MARRIAGES

SCHROYER-NICHOLS: Miss Nada Versie Schroyer, ex '26 and Dr Ray E. Nichols, '30 med., January 2, 1932. Home, 610 Fourth street, Woodland, California.

NOYES-COOK: Mrs Lelia Hahn Noyes, '25 arts-sc., and Vernon E. Cook, '26 law, April 16, 1932. Delta Delta Delta Theta Pi. Home, Hahnhaven, Oklahoma City.

PARSONS-HODGES: Miss Ora Lucile Parsons, and James H. Hodges, '29 M. S., '31 doctor of education, April 16, 1932. Home, 2508 South Hudson, Oklahoma City.

BOSLEY-COCKE: Miss Clara Bosley of Baltimore, and William M. Cocke, '23 arts-sc., October 17, 1931. Home, 307 East Lake avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

SEWARD-McGLOTHLIN: Miss Margaret Louise Seward, and Harold D. McGlothlin, ex '30, April 23. Home, 1138 North Brauer avenue, Oklahoma City.

GEIS-FLOOD: Miss Marguerite M. Geis, ex '31, and Lloyd B. Flood, '31 eng., April 9 in Norman. Home, Tulsa.

BOLAND-McCLOSKEY: Miss Mary Elizabeth Boland, ex '29, and Lawrence Holmes McCloskey, April 30. Alpha Phi. Home, Oklahoma City.

### BIRTHS

Freeman Galt, ex '17, and Mrs Galt, a son, Freeman Galt, jr., April 22, 1932. Home, Ardmore.

Mrs Edna Stuerke Fraker, ex '22, and Elmer Fraker, '20 arts-sc., a son, Robert Vincent, March 2, 1932. Home, Chickasha.

### DEATHS

MRS FRANK LEE

Mrs Frank Lee, nee Nancy Jo Seay, '34 journ., died April 25 in Oklahoma City. Burial was made in Bonham, Texas. Parents' home is in Wichita Falls, Texas.

MISS VIRGINIA LEE WYCKOFF

Miss Virginia Lee Wyckoff, fine arts freshman, daughter of Mrs Kate Wyckoff, Norman, died