

PAINTINGS AT O. S. A.

ART flourishes in spite of everything and the general verdict of visitors at the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition is that the average is quite as high as usual, though there are, this year, few pictures of outstanding merit. The cub reporters sent to the exhibition by some of the Toronto papers went away disappointed. There were no spectacular nudes which they could attack on ostentatiously moral grounds, and no melodramatic story-pictures to praise or blame. Some of these critics cannot tell a pastel from a water-colour, an etching from a pen-drawing. They are blind to the play of harmonious colours and happy arrangement of spaces, and it is as ridiculous to send them to write up an art show as it would be to send a deaf man to review a concert. They think that pictures should be visualized thought and criticize them from the standpoint of the journalist, to whom the subject is all-important. This exhibition is condemned because of its lack of war pictures. One journalist discovers a few exceptions: Seven out of the seventy exhibitors, he says, reflect the nation's thought in some degree, and he mentions various pictures where women are knitting or sewing. But women sewed and knitted long before the war! The fact that there are more representations of knitting girls than ballet girls does not reveal a desire to reflect a war-like spirit. The true artist paints whatever impresses his peculiar sense of beauty, and only in a very remote degree does he reflect the activities of a nation.

Pictorial representation of thought lies within the realm of the cartoonist. Our papers are full of war drawings, our magazines are swollen with war stories by people who have never heard the sound of a gun, illustrated by others who have never seen a trench. By all means let us keep these insincere productions from our exhibitions! It is true that war exists to some extent in our own country, and that a variety of subjects may be found in the hospitals, at the stations, in camps, but there are, in Ontario, few figure painters who are capable of anything outside the line of straight portraiture, and if these prefer gayer, brighter subjects, who can blame them?

SOME of our artists now overseas may return with war inspirations, and we are glad to see examples of their work in this exhibition, though it was evidently executed before their departure. There are two fine landscapes by Mr. A. Y. Jackson, now in France, and an excellent portrait bust by Mr. Frederick Coates, who is training in England. Mr. Lawren Harris is so busy with his military duties that this year we have only one of his decorative landscapes.

If it is true that the Canadian public are longing for war pictures, our Government should follow the example of France and England, where the best artists are exempt from military service, but granted permission to wear uniforms and circulate at will in the war zone, making sketches for pictures which will be of inestimable value in later years. But the idea of a Canadian public longing for art in any form seems absurd.

WAR subjects do exist in this exhibition, though the place they hold is very small. Miss Marion Long has three small drawings, "Missing," "A Soldier's Widow," and "No News." They are very charming, as sketches, but we are glad that in her large paintings she contented herself with simple figure arrangements where "the story" could not interfere with the effects of colour and light. There is no reason why Mr. Bell-Smith should be praised for his "Tattoo at Camp Borden," for of the five excellent pictures he is showing, this is the least artistic and surely this is the only standard by which pictures in an exhibition like this should be judged.

We sympathize with the young reporter in search

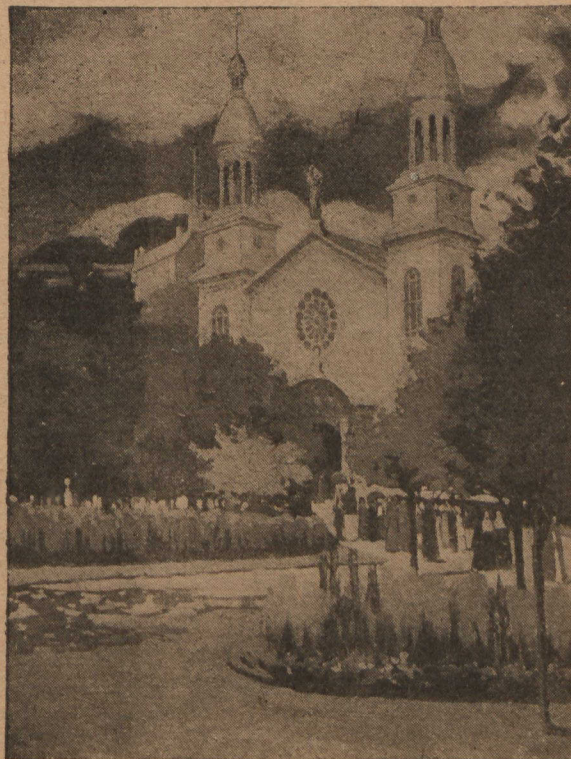
of something to say, for in discussing art it is almost as great a handicap to know too much as too little. Perhaps a stranger could write a more just criticism. We, who know the work of each artist so well, judge them by the standards they have made for themselves. If it falls below this standard we condemn; if it is much the same as usual, we pass it by without notice, though it may be far superior to that shown by new exhibitors who attract our attention by a fresh note which gives promise of better things to come.

THIS year Mr. George A. Reid surprises us. We have grown accustomed to his restful landscapes and mural decorations, low in key, quiet in colour. We remember his former successes in genre painting, which would look very sombre amongst this year's canvases, and it is a pleasure to be confronted with an elaborate figure composition, such as he used to excel in years ago, but full of radiant light and colour. The subject, too, is one that pleases even the young reporter, for "1917," as the picture is called, shows a room full of women sewing for the Red Cross.

The work of the president, Mr. C. W. Jefferys, this year, consists of excellent book illustrations, both in colour and black and white, dealing with Canadian historical subjects. Mr. Gagen still leads in marine painting. Mrs. Reid is unrivalled as a painter of still-life, and Mr. E. Wyly Grier remains



"1917," by G. A. Reid.



La Bonne Ste. Anne, by Mary E. Wrinch.



The Gold-Fish Bowl, by Marion Long.

supreme in portraiture. Two well-known landscape painters are, this year, exhibiting portraits, Mr. J. W. Beatty and Mr. Harry Britton. The figure paintings of the latter, though awkward in arrangement, are redeemed by the fine colour and masterly brush work which make his landscapes attractive. Mr. Challener's work would charm us greatly, but we know him to be capable of far greater things. Mr. J. E. H. Macdonald has a fine dramatic landscape entitled "Wild Ducks." Mr. Arthur Lismer is particularly successful in "A Nova Scotia River." Mr. F. Horsman Varley has caught the spirit of the north country in his paintings of Georgian Bay. Franklin Brownell's "The Burnt Ridge, Gatineau," is one of the most pleasing landscapes in the exhibition. Mr. Manly MacDonald has a brilliant study of snow in sunlight, and his work shows steady improvement, and—Mr. Thomas W. Mitchell, in "Fraser Lake," has an excellent rendering of sunlight.

The most interesting figure painting is Miss Florence Carlyle's "Portrait Group," the study of a woman and young girl in silvery greys. "The Club," by J. Ernest Sampson, attracted much attention for its clever delineation of portraiture in the group of twelve or more men, all prominent in art or letters, enjoying their noon hour. Miss Mary E. Wrinch contributes landscapes painted with her usual dexterity, very happy in their colour schemes, too, though they never suggest the prismatic radiance of sunlight. Mr. Andre Lapine has some capital pictures of horses; Mr. Herbert Palmer is doing excellent studies of animal life, and Miss Alice Des Clayes is also doing good work, as shown by her "Marshlands," a pleasing composition, though in handling the landscape she shows less skill than in the more difficult painting of the horses.

It seems a pity that Miss Kathleen Munn should have chosen cows and a nude woman for her two pictures, which are primarily studies of colour and light which might have been better rendered by means of simpler objects, but we remember with pleasure her work of former years, and hope that through this new departure she may evolve something very fine. Miss Maida Parlow is one of the newer exhibitors whose work shows great promise.

PERHAPS the most novel and distinctive feature of the exhibition is the work of Francis H. Johnston, who has developed a decorative sense truly remarkable. His work shows great imagination and a fine colour sense that should make him pre-eminently successful in mural decorations. "A Northern Light" is particularly fine. Some of our cleverest painters are conspicuously absent this

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