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PROVINCIAL EXHIBITION.

CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECTS IN FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT.

A short time since we addressed communications to several of our principal oil and water-colour painters, to somewhat the following effect:—

“At each recurring Annual Provincial Exhibition, difficulties arise as to who are amateur and who professional exhibitors, in the Fine Arts department. The trouble increases year by year, which renders it highly desirable that a re-classification of the prize list should at once be made, and the appellation ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ be given their distinct meanings—if these terms are to be retained. One person defines the application of the word ‘professional’ to the artist who lives entirely by the pencil and brush; another to the artist also who may occasionally sell the work produced, or who to any extent teaches the art to others. These definitions may all be held as unsatisfactory, and some therefore contend that these terms should be done away, and the classification of ‘originals’ and ‘copies’ be substituted. This might be an improvement, if in addition there should be a class for pupils not over a certain age. Will you have the goodness to furnish me such suggestions as may occur to you, at your earliest convenience?”

In answer to the above we have received several communications, from both professional and amateur artists, who agree in several of the points under consideration.

For the purpose of giving the general import of these communications, and also for the purpose of affording publicity to some useful suggestions, which may be of benefit to amateur artists, we take the liberty of making some lengthy extracts, and shall therefore designate the writers by consecutive numbers.

No. 1 says:—“The questions for consideration appear to be, 1st.—Whether, for the future, originals shall be distinguished from copies, and the superiority of the former marked by a higher scale of prizes; and 2nd.—How the competition shall be classed under these two heads.

1st.—It would seem that there can be no doubt whatever that both propositions should be answered

in the affirmative. With permission, I will proceed to point out how great is the superiority of originals over copies, which might not otherwise be wholly apparent.

In the first place an original picture sets the mind thinking upon choice of subject and general treatment, which may be heroic, historical, moral, poetical, humorous, or pathetic; or it may be—as it must be admitted it very often is—only imitation of natural objects. Then comes design, composition, drawing, light and shadow, color, and general effect.

These are the *component parts* of every original work of any merit, and, so far as I am aware, *there are no others*. They are all subjects of mental study and reflection, more or less assisted by natural genius. A copyist *can dispense* with every one of them—they are all *made ready* to hand.

All that a copy requires is imitative power and executive skill; and both of these are indispensable, in at least an equal degree, to the original artist.”

The writer goes on to show that “copies can bear no sort of comparison with originals,” and “never possess more than a small relative value. The artists who produce them, however meritorious in their own way, have scarcely any rank as artists.” He does not wish to be understood “that a good copy of a superior work by a great artist may not be better than an average original, and may be very advantageous, whether as practice or example.”

This writer also points out how “manifestly unjust and discouraging it is that copies should be allowed to compete with originals,” for the same prizes; and instances a peculiar case of hardship where the first prize was given to a copy of a print after Sir Edward Landseer, in which the engraver’s work was well imitated, while the second prize was awarded to an original drawing.

2nd.—With regard to classification, it is suggested that there might be four classes—“originals and copies for professional artists, and the same for amateurs;” but thinks that to simplify the matter the mere distinction of originals and copies would be best, without reference to whether by professional or amateur artists. A separate class for pupils he does not approve of.

On the question, what constitutes a professional artist, as distinguished from an amateur, he says: “A professional artist, as I have always understood the term, is surely one who lives by art as a profession;” and arguing on the presumption that an artist does not cease to be an amateur because he sometimes offers his work for sale, he remarks