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UNIQUE DUNDEE ART EXHIBITION

PICTURES BY FAMOUS PAINTERS.

Dundee makes a mark in Scottish artistic annals by the notable exhibition which opens to-day in the Victoria Art Galleries in aid of the Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops. That the private collections of the city and its environs should muster a distinguished show of pictures is not surprising. The prosperity of Dundee has been reflected in the patronage of art for many decades.

A dramatic stroke has been achieved for this exhibition in that one gallery out of four has been devoted to modernistic ideas in colour and design. With a further happy inspiration, the expression of these by leading artists of France and Scotland is exemplified in the association of their pictures on the same wall.

Such an experiment, with such famous contributors, is an event in Scotland. Art coteries will ring with the discussion it arouses. Dundee is to be congratulated on the unique nature of the exhibition, and the congratulations go alike to the organising spirits, to the lenders of pictures, and to the public, whose good fortune it is to have this aesthetic feast put before it.

Entering the galleries (in which the Hanging Committee has done its work admirably), one is welcomed first by the quiet environment of water colours and etchings. This, too, is pleasant, for one encounters them often in an odd corner, after the larger works have dazzled and dulled the senses.

Here are prints by Walcot, M'Beay, Zorn, and D. Y. Cameron, including the very highly valued "Ben Ledi." The water colours have widely contrasting interests; Brangwyn's lyrical and decorative inspiration from Venice, Russell Flint's fresh West Highland mountains, the excellent Scots types of Mr Kerr, a brilliantly decisive E. A. Walton showing the Solway; and others by Ter Meulen and Willy Sluiter, of the Dutch School.

In the larger gallery attention is demanded by every picture. The range of artistic expression here shows that the selective taste of the Committee has been catholic and intelligent. Masters of the past are represented by a Velasquez (not perhaps one of his most finely inspired canvases, but containing skilful passages), by Raeburn's gracious feminine portrait, "Mrs Tindall Bruce," and a dramatic winter scene by George Morland, arresting as an example of that wayward genius's art.

The popular, if rather over-sentimental, Dutch School has representatives of good calibre in Mastenbroeck, de Hoog, and Isaac Israels. The horses of Munnings are in his best vein. There is a brilliant de Laszlo portrait. Famous Scots are notably in evidence in Lavery's bright Tangier scene, George Harvey's charming woodland glimpses, Lawton Wingate's landscapes, George Pirie's low-toned interior, and Robt. Alexander's delightful painting of goats.

Also to be seen in the exhibition are works by M'Taggart and Jas. Docharty.

The third, and, from many points of view, the most notable gallery has been assembled from the collections of four or five local gentlemen, whose generosity in thus disclosing their artistic treasures is public spirited. One comes into an atmosphere here of light and brilliancy that exhilarates. And if the first impression puzzles the uninitiated, a closer study will introduce Dundee visitors into some of the most interesting and delightful artistic productions of our time.

The Frenchmen, now accepted, be it recalled, in the art centres of Europe as masters, have not been given adequate exhibition of this kind in our country before. We see here the work of Van Gogh (a classic now), Matisse, de Segonzac, Vuillard, Monet, and Sisley. These are great artists. With them we can compare our own innovators, Peploe, Leslie Hunter, Cadell, and, very stirringly, those strong Dundee men, David Foggie and M'Lauchlan Milne.

We see the development from Sisley and Monet (the impressionists) through the new ideas of line and design in Van Gogh's "La Charrue," to the simplification of Matisse, with his maintenance of light, and the unifying of interest over the whole canvas in free, vital use of paint.

How does the Scots movement compare with the French? It is a difference of national temperament. The Frenchman contradicts your established notions with subtlety, despite his unconventionality. His tones (as in Vuillard) are infinitely delicate. He contradicts you with deftness, suavity, an urbanity of style.

The Scot asserts his contradiction forcibly, downrightly, with hearty colours, with a gesture almost harsh. But how sane and healthy are the high-spirited colours of Peploe and Hunter; how they detach us from a dull environment!

This art is alive and pulsing with new ideas. Who so exquisite as Vuillard in catching fresh harmonies and tender tones? Savour the freshness of Bonnard's design, the Corot-like quietude of Segonzac, the virility of Lucien Simon's "Fair," the suffused light of Marchand's trees and hills, or the swell of the waves in "Le Havre," by Othon Friesz. This is indeed a remarkable experience.

Need one say to Dundee art patrons that a picture that has taken an artist weeks to think out need not necessarily yield its content in a passing glance? Or that a picture is not enjoyed by sniffing at the glass! Standing back from these modern pictures till their tones merge, and their message comes to us, we gain from them a new idea, a true beauty; they cast a spell as strong as any; they have the eloquence of music. And, further, our patriotism finds pride that our Scots can so admirably vie with their comrades of France in carrying the standard of art over new fields.

RORNS MILLAR.