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ART EXHIBITION AT LIVERPOOL.

OVER 2,000 EXHIBITS.

Whatever may be said of the annual autumn exhibition in the Walker Art Gallery, there can be no doubt that, with over two thousand exhibits, it is the largest in the whole country, considerably larger than the Burlington House shows, which have never approached such dimensions, and have of late years become much more restricted. Here the walls of many galleries are crowded with works of all kinds, from the best productions of the year down to amateurish rubbish quite unfit for exhibition in anything more extended than the family circle.

Happily it always has a feature which redeems it from the charge of incoherence, in the rooms set apart for the works of some selected artists. This year it is Orpen who has a goodly room filled exclusively by his work, chiefly of course portraiture. Another is given up to that accomplished landscape artist, Lamorna Birch, and in a third room is to be found a series of water-colour drawings by an Armenian, Sarkis Katchadourian.

Sir William Orpen.

Of the first named artist, a brilliant executant, an accomplished draughtsman, a moderate colourist, gifted, or cursed, if you prefer it, with a curiously freakish temperament, one has a better opportunity of gauging the quality than ever before. A long series of his Peace Conference portrait studies shows his keen, remorseless power of intense characterisation. Such searching portraits as those of F.M. Sir Henry Wilson, or the inscrutable Japanese Minister, could not be surpassed, but that he can, on occasion, exercise the "suaviter in modo" is seen in Lady Bonham Carter's portrait. Perhaps his masterpiece is the "Homage to Manet," from the Manchester Gallery.

The most charming is "A Melody," which is delightfully modest and sincere. In "The Knackers Yard" he reminds us of Piranesi, there is the same element of terror; for virtuosity one may cite "The Model," with the strong sunlight filtering through the blind. There are some of his freakish war pictures, with figures in green tones, apparently for some obscure symbolical reason, and the revolting "Man v. Beast," so that all sides of the artist's very remarkable genius can be studied.

The 39 landscapes by Lamorna Birch belong to a very different order. He is a keen student of nature, who does not neglect its material aspect, yet manages to impose upon his work his own refined and subtle personality. He never neglects the quality of fine design, but there are occasions when it seems to have given way to the literal interpretation of the scene, and he has not gone far beyond pure realism. But his power is such that a picture like "Westerly Shore," with its great boulders, or the glittering, moving water of "The Ettrick" delight one by their sheer keenness of observation. In two pictures of "The Opal Pool," the simple quality of the delicate colour and texture are delightful, and in a water-colour of "Lake Elsie" there is a sense of fine design which reminds one of D. Y.

Cameron. Altogether, this room is a pleasing impression of refinement and distinction.

As for the Armenian artist's drawings, they are vigorous essays in a thick, opaque medium, blunt, often clumsy, in statement, but full of a primitive vigour, and characterised by a love of violent colour. The effect of sunlight filtering through trees, and speckling the figures, in "Midday" and "After a Good Day's Work," applies the theme of some of his happiest work, and though one feels that subtlety and refinement are wanting, their presence would be quite inconsistent with the painter's artistic individuality.

Millais and Victorianism.

Among the very varied work on the walls are a few pictures belonging to an earlier generation. The most interesting are two early works by Millais. One is entitled "Preaching to the Roundheads" (301), which is the picture executed in 1841 when he was only 12, and is better known as a "Scene from Peveril of the Peak." It is in water colour, apparently varnished in parts, childish in execution, but most carefully and elaborately composed, a wonderful essay for a child. The other is the highly elaborated "Apple Blossoms" (296), dated 1859, which took some four years to paint, and bears the traces of labour. Unfortunately it does not seem to have escaped the artist's most unfortunate habit of touching up his work in later years, when his method had entirely changed, and the face of the central figure (the model for which was afterwards Lady Hudley) is different from all the others in its handling, and has a facile prettiness far removed from the intensity of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Victorian art at its worst is seen in a piece of prettiness by Marcus Stone; Pettie's "Terms to the Beseiged" is better: it has some vigour, and echoes a great Scottish tradition in painting, but it degenerates into mere melodrama. To the highest rank of the Victorians belongs Richardson, one of the greatest masters of the 19th century, who could tell a story with the best of the narrators, but made consistent with purely pictorial qualities. "Her First Dance" is a fine example; it is planned with consummate art, yet it preserves perfect spontaneity, and those who can go behind the anecdote to the essentials of a work of art will realise its power and charm.

Superb Portrait Painter.

Among the living artists Sir James Guthrie is supreme, the greatest of our portrait painters, who unites in himself all the qualifications of masterhood. His work is so seldom seen in English galleries that it is a privilege to be able to study a good example of his art in the gracious full length of Lady Findlay of Aberfour (942), which has character without caricature, grace without weakness, and a feeling for the refinements of colour such as none other of our portrait artists can claim.

There are some examples of the extraordinary smartness of de Laszlo, the veiled impressive style of McEvoy, the forcefulness of Greiffenhagen (these last two deserving to be classed as colourists), the unfailing matter-of-fact of that sure-handed artist, Connall, the irritating wooden textures of Shannery, the ultra-refinements of Sims; none of them unites in himself so many qualifications of a master of portraiture. Shannery's power to seize essentials, as if by snap-shot, is seen in his remarkable paintings of the Houses of Lords and Commons, which are quite remarkable records of striking episodes. Miss Neilson-Terry is a portrait painter who has an individual style and exceptional distinction. It is feminine in its grace, yet by no means effeminate, and the group of Mrs. Douglas Barr and her sons (106) is a charming picture.