

For

P. de Leszlo

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IN DEFENCE OF MODERN ART.

Emil Cammaerts Proud of His
Generation.

THE NEW AMBITION.

Painters Going Back to the Italian Primitives.

Comparisons between the beauties of the Old Masters and the much-criticised work of the ultra-moderns have been revived by the highly successful Flemish Exhibition at Burlington House, of which one modern portrait painter, M. de Leszlo, said the other day:—

"If you want to know where we of the present time stand aesthetically, go and look at Burlington House now and then go and see what those same galleries will look like this summer."

M. Emil Cammaerts, the Belgian poet and patriot, who had himself done a great deal of work in the background of the organisation of the Flemish Exhibition, took up the challenge on behalf of the ultra-modern artist, in the course of an "Evening Standard" interview.

"I can almost find it in my heart to regret that the rule excluding the work of any living artist has prevented the inclusion of the Flemish ultra-modern school in the exhibition at Burlington House," he declared.

Progressive Art.

Let me say that I do not join in decrying the moderns. I am very proud of my generation. Even if modern work does not come up to the best of the old, which I do not for one minute admit, it is what we of this generation have to live with. The new aspirations, not the old ones, are the things with which we have to deal.

"As a matter of fact, too, there is progress in art. Just as there were many finer things done in the 17th than in the 16th centuries—so there were finer things in the 18th than the 17th, in the 19th than in the 18th, and so on."

Striving for Naïveté.

"One of the most interesting things about the modern Impressionists (I am speaking of the serious impressionist artists, not those freaks who deal in intellectual gymnastics—that are not art at all)—is the fact that they are going back to the methods of the primitives. In fact, many modern Impressionists outdo the Primitives; I mean the Italian Primitives, not the Flemish; which, as you can see at Burlington House, are really quite progressive and lacking in that striking quality of pure naïveté that marks the first artistic efforts of the Italians and others.

"That naïveté is being recaptured by the moderns. I will tell you why they are striving after it.

"So many formulas of art have been exhausted. Then you must try, as the Impressionists are trying, to find a new formula—something else to perfect. Thus many artists suddenly sacrificed drawing and perspective and began to try dividing sun rays—seeing what they could do with light. But, of course, you can't go on dividing sun-rays for ever, and so artists are still groping after a new formula—simply because all that can be done with the old ones has been done, and we must find a new outlet for the work of perfecting and polishing, or there will be stagnation.

Democratic Art.

"Another striking thing about modern art is what one might almost call its Socialistic outlook.

"In the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, when the poor people were really wretched, most artists, being dependents of the great princes, depicted the people as grotesque and ludicrous—subjects for buffoonery. All, that is, except the Flemish painter Peter Breughel who is perhaps the most typical of all Flemish artists. Back in those days, when no one else did such a thing, Breughel did what the moderns do—he presented the dignity and the tragedy of the people. Breughel was the first democratic painter. Now they—nearly all look at the peasants and workers in that spirit.

The Nations and the Arts.

"He has also had his influence on Belgian literature. But all art has had that influence in Belgium, because we Belgians are painter first and writers afterwards. Every country has its own speciality. The English are first of all poets, the French first of all prose writers, the Germans first of all musicians, and we, and to a certain extent the Dutch, too first of all painters.

"In other directions we may wait to be led. In art we are always ready to work our own progressive way ahead."