

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## AN OPEN LETTER TO "REALITY" MAGAZINE

The 44 artists, whose publication "Reality" has been widely circulated, view with alarm a "fast-spreading doctrine that non-objectivism has achieved some sort of esthetic finality that precludes all other forms of artistic expression" and that "this particular dogma stems very largely from the Museum of Modern Art" by means of "imbalance and emphasis."

"Non-objectivism" is a word very rarely used in the Museum of Modern Art but it is true that the Museum has responded to the very widespread and ebullient movement which has so greatly enriched the tradition of abstract art here and abroad during the past ten years - just as in the previous decade it paid heed to the various realistic and romantic tendencies which thrived in that period under the names of "regionalism," "social consciousness," "neo-romanticism," "surrealism," "American Scene," etcetera. Time moves on and art changes but neither then nor now, as a matter of policy, has the Museum tried to guide or influence artists or favor one direction more than another.

Let us look at the record.

Of the 44 champions of "humanism" and "reality" who charge the Museum with "imbalance," 18 are already represented in the Museum's Collection and well over half have been shown in its exhibitions - in many cases repeatedly, for the list includes a number of the most talented American painters.

Two years ago the Museum presented "Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America" but this was a long overdue chapter in a series of historical exhibitions which had previously included "Realists and Magic Realists" and "Romantic Painting in America" (the latter largely involved with realism, at least in style).

Last summer, in "Fifteen Americans," there were more abstract painters than realists or expressionists but the Museum's New Talent series over the past four years has included 16 young American artists, only four of whom were abstract, and of the one-man shows given during the past five years - Matisse, Soutine, Demuth, Munch, Ensor, Watkins and Braque - not one was abstract though the last, of course, was cubist.

All this is history. Now let us focus on the Museum's activities at the present moment. On the second floor are 160 paintings selected from the Museum's Collection; among these only about thirty are abstract or non-objective. Of the American canvases painted within the past decade and now on view, six are abstract, five are realist, two are in between. It should also be noted that the American artists most strongly represented in the collection - Burchfield, Demuth, Weber, Graves, Shahn, Hopper, Blume - are none of them abstract.

On the third floor of the Museum there is the one-man show of the great humanist, Georges Rouault, and in the garden and ground floor an extensive review of all schools of non-academic sculpture from Rodin to the present.

Turning to our current catalog of Circulating Exhibitions, we find listed a dozen painting shows. Three illustrate the history of early 20th-century painting; others concern watercolor technique, the relation of the painter to decorative design, a survey of young European painters. Among the "theme" shows are THE CITY (with Sloan, Hopper, Shahn, Guglielmi, etc.) and THE ARTIST'S FAMILY which include Raphael Soyer, Sloan, etc. The Whitney Museum has lent for a touring show 34 of its paintings: among the artists are Bishop, Burchfield, Evergood, Marsh and du Bois. Only one of these 13 traveling exhibitions is devoted to abstract art.

Finally, opening Friday, the 24th of April, at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, may be seen the Museum's exhibition "Twelve Americans." The painters comprise three more or less abstract artists, Stuart Davis, Gorky and Pollock; two expressionists, Marin and Graves; and four who are primarily realists, Hopper, Albright, Kane and Shahn. Another exhibition, "Seven American Watercolorists," is now on the way to Japan for a year's tour. No "non-objective" painters are included unless Mark Tobey counts as such.

May we repeat the Museum of Modern Art's declared policy: "the field of contemporary art is immeasurably wide and varied.... We believe that diversity is a sign of vitality and of the freedom of expression inherent in any democratic society. We oppose any attempt to make art, or any opinion about art, conform to a single point of view." This might well apply not only to "non-objectivism" but also to "humanism." And, in a friendly spirit, may we remind the publishers of "Reality" that even as noble a word as "humanism" has recently been converted into a mask for several varieties of dogmatic intolerance. Many artists of the "Reality" group are doubtless unaware of this.

As for the Museum, umpires are not infallible but we try to call them as we see them.

The Museum of Modern Art

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