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From : S/Ldr Douglas Cooper

17 Grennan Court  
Sloane Avenue  
London S.W.3

Nov. 4th. 1944

10/27

Dear Alfred,

I was glad to get your letter and would have hoped to answer a long time ago, but all this war business is so exhausting that I spend my only free day each week in bed and neither read nor write letters. It has become almost impossible to stir oneself up to read books, and then one is so appallingly out of touch with everything that might be of interest. I see nothing from the Museum except sometimes a note of its activities if I am sent a cutting from Art News, or an occasional snatch of gossip from people like Francis Taylor who happen to arrive here. I am not on the mailing list and I receive none of its publications, and such art libraries as London once possessed are now all closed or bombed. So I have not seen Gallatin's book on Preque and have only by chance seen Sweeney's "Calder" because it was sent to me for review. I have not even the Dali "Autobiography". I have of course seen those products of "Glorious Britain"... Moore, Grant, Sutherland etc., but one puts them in the cupboard unopened; it matters not whether they be read now or burnt in 10 years. The new big Moore book came in for review the other day and I did spend a Sunday in bed writing that. No, I am not impressed. I am only depressed. It seems to me a fine piece of printing, full of very cleverly tricked photographs, but the work is almost meaningless. He really has nothing to say, and he is a weak draughtsman who dresses up his poor ideas in a sort of standard Molyneux setting. Once upon a time Henry ~~xxx~~ was a serious artist, it seems to me... now there is only the technical accomplishment left and all the rest is pretention. I doubt whether there will be any art of consequence for 50 years, because there are no standards, no principles which are honestly and to the end upheld by those who presume to call themselves critics. Every new whimsey is hailed as a masterpiece. But what matter? We have had a flourishing of art for the last 100 years such as there has not been, and these things come in cycles. I was sorry not to be able to go to a lecture by Charlie Sawyer this week on the subject of whether there ever will be an American art. I don't know if he found one.

If you have seen Francis Taylor since his return you will probably have heard that I am now doing monuments, fine arts etc. for the allied armies with Woolley, Webb and a number of your compatriots. I suppose that on the whole we believe that we are preserving the cultural wealth of Europe for the next generation, but whether we are not in fact doing far more harm than good? (for in the next war, which is inevitable in 15 years) it will all be destroyed for good). Before that I was out of the country for a long time, on Malte and the like.

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	AHB	I.B. 15

2

So work is at a standstill. The Gris catalogue was left in Paris in 1940 and has I expect been destroyed by some bloody Hun. I think not of it; it is so unimportant. If it is there I shall probably be quite glad to see it and remember the days when I still had an enthusiasm for the creations of the present day and of Europe in particular. Now I realise that one had probably better get oneself out to pig and peacock farming in Patagonia.....so profitable and so remote. One takes out a subscription for every book published and spends two months a year in the civilised areas of the world. Of poor Ingeborg I have heard nothing except that she was in Italy a long while ago. I wonder what has happened to her Rousseau catalogue.

From here there is no news of import to give you. The new Picassos are all pretty bad; at least, that is to say, those that I have seen. Those reproduced in colour in that folder are uninspired, those at the Salon d'Automne are equally so and one cannot much wonder at the young men who rushed in to try and take them down. It is reported that he has done a number of fine drawings. I have seen photos of one or two: they were better but not P at his best. Matisse has gone back to his pre-1910 manner; and there are those who rave about the new Bonnard's. I can't see what it is all about. I have a hunch that possible the most impressive contribution will in time be made by Miro when he is free to escape from his Balearic isle. I have had the new Masson books from NY: they seem again just awful...meaningless. What filthy taste Breton always has had in painting, and what a lot of harm he has done to the visual arts, though I think he is an almost great writer. I have been shown a new Helion: it merely goes to show how easily incompetence is covered under the guise of abstraction. They tell me that Tal Coat has become one of the leaders in Paris. My god, what a generation of nincompoops we are asked to face! But then of course since those who interest themselves in modern art never by any chance look at anything which was not made the day before yesterday it is hardly surprising that they have neither knowledge nor taste to guide them in their enthusiasms.

Wildensteins have just opened up their gallery here with a few French pictures, mostly from the Schmitz collection, otherwise there is nothing to look at. All my pictures have been in store for 5 years and will probably remain there for the next five as I see no likelihood of being allowed to escape from the Army in less than three years after the cessation of hostilities. It will be nice to get out of it all and to be able to sit down and contemplate a picture of which one is fond. You probably just don't know what that means since you will never have been without them.

My best wishes to Marga and to all my other friends. Do write again if you have time.

Sincerely