

Dr. KURT BIEBRACH

INSCRIPTIONS ON MEDALLIONS

THE main difficulty which confronts the artist about to design a medal to be presented to an individual recipient is the necessity of formalizing the text of the dedication in harmony with the design. Strictly speaking, script is outside the scope of plastic art, for it is at the same time the medium proper to another sphere of art. It makes a document of the plastic picture and the script at once becomes an inscription. On the one hand this is bound up with the laws of plastic form, on the other hand, in order to fulfil the task appointed, it must obey certain stylistic laws of form. The language of bronze is other than that of the written or printed document, the hardness of the material necessitates brevity and pregnancy of expression. This again means that the artist is fettered in his plastic invention by the content and significance of the text; he cannot use the letters as if they were merely an ornamental device, for the setting of the letters and the words must either accentuate or weaken their significance, must either comprehend the whole meaning or fail to express anything of it.

We reproduce as examples a number of inscriptions graven on the back of the so-called "Eagle shields" presented of late years by the President of Germany to persons prominent in public life, either on important birthdays or on some other jubilee occasion. (The front side of the medallion shows only the state Eagle designed by Professor Wackerle.) They were nearly all designed by Professor E. R. Weiss or by Tobias Schwab, at the instance of the National Curator of Art. In spite of a considerable degree of uniformity in the work of two different hands, the character of the work is varied enough. In spite of inward relationship and the inevitable severity dictated by the nature of the task, the feeling of the unique and the expression of personality has been achieved in every instance. In some examples the monogram has greatly aided the decorative effect, for the rune-like character of such signs lends them an especial dignity.

In addition to the "Eagle shields" we show reproductions of two medallions also commissioned by the National Curator of Art, which are particularly interesting as contrasting solutions of the problem. The "Governmental Prize of Honor" which is presented on the occasion of especially important athletic contests, is the work of Professor Hans Schwegerle of Munich, and is absolutely official in character. It can bear frequent repetition and remains always official and solemn, in contrast to the front of the medal, with which, to be sure, no perfect unity has been achieved. On the other hand the text face of the iron medallion designed by Professor Ludwig Giess in memory of the Passive Resistance on the Ruhr in 1923, is a solution full of refinement, beauty and discipline. The script is absolutely subordinated to the circular form and at the same time it forces its way, vital and aggressive, out of its narrow confines, the whole a singularly interesting piece of ripe artistry, apparently the last the artist was destined to give us.

Translated by E. T. Scheffauer



E. R. WEISS



T. SCHWAB



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L. GIESS