

THE LIMITS OF THE PICTURESQUE

APHORISMS AND MAXIMS ON THE PROGRESS OF ART

BY

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"Originality! Is it not often nothing more than the despair of those who have no roots in any soil? The less roots an art has, the more it is filled with the wild aspiration to be something never seen before."

Franz Werfel, "Verdi"

Not everything that is painted and exhibited, is art or full of meaning. It therefore shows more understanding of art, when the observer laughs at a painting which he does not understand than when he makes a pretence of enthusiasm and understanding.

The reputation of being modern is a doubtful merit in the artist, like every subjective limitation. "A modern painter"—does it not imply in the end that in the fever of his ambition he has given up the ghost—that is the spirit that should inform all art?

THE ESCAPE TO THE ABSTRACT

The style of civilization appropriate to the age can no more be found by way of escape to the abstract than in the imitation or revival of previous symbols of expression.

Abstractions are inartistic and a sure sign of degeneration in the artist's work. Even the representation of the Most Holy Mysteries in art can only be by means of actual objects.

Coquetry with the abstract mirrors the vanity of half-educated artists, whose powers of observation are too feeble to enable them to be merely painter or sculptor.

Painting and the mathematics of the fourth dimension, the most utterly visible and the most entirely abstract—how can these ever be united? Yet there are simpletons who pretend to have achieved a pictorial unity of these opposites. There are even still greater fools who accept these experiments seriously.

A painter who attempts to include time in the space of his picture and attempts to convert the successive into the simultaneous, proves that he understands just as little of the physical problems of space and time as of his own art and that he is moreover a snob, at whose foolish assumptions one can only laugh.

Of course, physics can be painted, but not the theoretical, only the practical physics, which is part and parcel of the corporeal being.

PAINTER OR PHILOSOPHER?

Painters who attempt to be philosophers in paint are bunglers. Their painted philosophy is not worth the rag of cardboard or canvas on which they wipe off their surplus colour.

To form or to philosophize? He who would apply himself to the one, must at the same time resign the other. When Wagner turned to philosophy, he spoilt his music.

The difference between creation and construction is in the main the difference between feeling and thought, revelation and perception, art and science.