

# THE VALUE, MEANING AND PLACE OF ART IN EDUCATION

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TO attempt to define the meaning of Art as an introduction to so short an article would be well nigh impossible. In the first place, whereas philosophers and writers have written innumerable books on the subject, the question *What is Art?* still remains. When we have solved that problem, life in many phases will have surrendered the solution of its mysteries and we shall be unaware that such a thing as Art exists—for these will be the days of perfection. We are concerned about Art because Art is separating itself from life, and we are forced to contemplate Art as a separate and distinct department of human affairs.

But life and Art are really inseparable—Art and Religion, Art and Philosophy, Art and Science—all branches of the same tree; all drawing sustenance from the deepest roots of our being. When we come to measure the effects of the presence or absence of Art in any community or individual, then, indeed, by faith, the fundamental attribute of life, we are aware of what Art is, just as we are aware of the goodness of God.

In the present day we are rapidly changing into a race of abstract thinkers. Metaphysical and scientific speculation has resolved our mental process into a quantitative estimation of life in terms of formulae. Organized Religion, apart from the clash of dogma, is indulging in a competitive struggle with the commercial world. Art alone is left to us, an avenue of escape into a world of reality.

But in these years of commercial expansion, when pride in business and in our industrial brittleness takes precedence over spiritual and aesthetic character, we shall have little leisure to enjoy or participate in the contemplation, or projection, of beauty, unless we care for the growth in the formative years of our children, with as earnest a desire to encourage their aesthetic development as we have to develop their spiritual and physical character.

True education is one with growth. Too often our interpretation of this is in the fitting of the easily moulded child mind into

prescribed and traditionally protected forms. The child is only partially considered in this process, and, whilst in many phases of public activity, and in many other subjects of the curriculum, progress *has* been made in the process of freeing the child mind from the oppressiveness of preconceived ideas about life, adult, and often weary, standards of existence are still enforced *upon* the child, instead of eliciting *from* him, in terms of picture, poem, movement and music, his response to environment. The youthful spirit, presenting the eternal rhythm of beauty in life, unfolds like a flower under wise and sympathetic guidance.

We are slowly emerging from a rather terrible state of affairs in public school courses of instruction in Art. Almost any individual of middle age in Canada is a living example of the lack of interest of the adult mind in Art, except in terms of sentimental regard for prettiness of presentation in pictures and a rather wholesome respect for something vaguely understood, but which might have value if applied to commercial commodities.

If we look back upon our youthful days at public or private school, we may find one of the reasons why the Art of our times and country fails to elicit from us anything in the way of response. Standardized means of instruction in Art, or the drawing lesson, was to us a formalized process of weary gazing at ugly, misshapen vases, type solids, cubes, prisms and cones, and unvaried reiteration of terms of "Perspective" and "Light and Shade".

These things were taught by people who had no creative spark in themselves, to whom the Art lesson was an intrusion on the other more important subjects, and the time given to Art wasted. It would have been better for some of us if the subject had been left untaught, for it introduced Art as a task, and form as anything but beautiful.

The subject really became a part of public instruction more by luck than good management, as a branch of disciplinary training in the education of the hand and eye. What was good enough for the edification of polite society as a necessary finishing touch to a delicate and gentle education, surely should not be denied in our democratic age of equal participation to all who seek, or are compelled to accept, education.

Therefore, the classical moulds of the beauty of perfect form were taken as standards. Children were taught to draw, because to draw was to make contact with remote and abstract perception of beauty. Form was an abstract of the system, and to draw well was a means of developing powers of inventiveness and a routine method of approach to contact with the visible world. So in times

past the subject of Art was put on all the curricula of public instruction, and a system developed by professional artists out of the funds of their great experience with the dictum that drawing "was the end and basis of all Art." This, in itself, was of such a disciplinary nature that it allowed of no straying from the formal path laid down by precept and experience of other professional artist mentors, who had pounded in the bitter and unbeautiful maxims and practice. This was a strange perversion of the classical ideal, that beauty was living in the formalized, static presentation of mechanical form.

It *is* there, but its presentation in the early days of youthful enjoyment of life was anything but an inducement to seek further, or to realize that Nature was a joyous background of beauty and that we ourselves were natural and living examples of beauty of form, full of an abundant rhythm of energy. We were conscious, if inarticulate, that outside the school window were sunlight and colour, cool shade in the woods, animals, buildings and things—things of life and movement that we loved.

If these flat copies, and poor casts of historical ornament, this routine solving of problems of mechanical perspective, these ways of holding the pencil and compass—if these things are of beauty and of the nature of Art, then there is no joy in participation and no pride in achievement, but only the proof, over and over again expressed to the child mind, that education is something we don't like to do, and in the same category as medicine, good for us, but to be taken to oblige adult parents, and not to be enjoyed.

A protective philosophy and creed was built around this method. Moral and utilitarian phraseology masqueraded as instruction to teachers. Beauty was measured and tinted, ruled and analyzed, and small children were kept transcribing, with hard pencils and quantities of india rubber, the world of professional reason into terms of beautifully clear, fine lining and delicate tints of charcoal.

What a task! What a hopeless absurdity! It is no wonder that we adult, respectable, peaceful-minded citizens of middle age cannot go into an Art Gallery with understanding, nor see beauty in the rhythm of music and verse, suffering as we are from the neglect in our youth.

The most distressing feature is that in many schools in the Dominion it is still going on.

Not so very many years ago, there came a change in affairs, which did not originate in this country. This succeeding phase attempted to destroy the old cultural idea of Art in Education postulated by professional academic artists of pseudo-classical

tendencies; replacing it with a "back-to-nature" cry of romantic realism. The flat copy and the antique cast of historic ornament were banished in "advanced" schools, and actual, living plants bloomed in a fresher air in our classrooms—plant form and design, brush work, drawing from models, action studies and designs for commodities of a supposedly industrial nature. This coincided with the beginnings of manual training in the schools, and a youth was supposed to be able to draw a T joint in perspective, make a working drawing, and construct the actual problem in wood. The girls did sewing and household science and arts. Most curricula of public instruction are founded on this method of training the hand and eye. Nature study, Perspective, Lettering, Still life, Object Drawing, Water Colour and Crayon study, Design applied in some cases to material.

This, when it is thoroughly and wisely applied, is a program worth while. It belongs more to the Art School than to Education in Art in the public and high schools, and was a decided advance on the former system, but it gave little to the mind and nothing to the creative soul.

Professional artists are usually bad educators, and organizers of twenty years ago, who should have known better, were sentimentally stampeded into the mistaken idea that the technique of the artist and the accepted routine of his form of training were good enough, if compressed into a form of public instruction, to serve as Art instruction. Thus were the mistakes and habits of the studio handed on to the children. Even to-day there are professional artists wasting the creative hours of youth in school and college, Art and Technical school, convincing the pupils, as George Bernard Shaw says of the academic teacher of Art, that "his limitations are rules, his observances dexterities, his timidities good taste, and his emptiness purities, and when he declares that Art should not be didactic, all the people who have nothing to teach, and all the people who don't want to learn, agree with him emphatically."

Unfortunately, the age of the idea that "Art is the imitation of life" has not passed, and theories were based upon the idea and formulated in good and earnest spirit, that man seeking salvation through beauty must first gain knowledge and wisdom through a realization of the beauty of himself and his environment. But the misinterpretation of this doctrine to mean that the artist must record literally and with exactness, whilst perhaps a suitable attitude for the professional artist and for studio practice, is a distortion in junior education. Perspective, Anatomy, Light and Shade—all objective clues to closer contact with an objective



world of appearance, are made the end of Art instead of only methods of leverage.

"Art is a mirror upon nature"—likeness and imitation—all the subtle arts of verisimilitude, whilst they may serve the anecdotal tendencies of the academic painter of genre, portraits, landscapes and still life, have been of doubtful value in the education of the juvenile mind.

The doctrine that has formed the theory of the adult mind of to-day is, that when a picture or object of design imitates nature, is a faithful copy of the appearance, then it is a work of Art. The more skilfully it presents the details of nature, the correctness of perspective, anatomy, and light and shade, the more certainly it is a master work of a master brush.

It followed and was glibly postulated that if such results can be achieved through a knowledge of perspective, then this was the course to follow in public education.

It resulted in the actual teaching of perspective in public schools to children of nine or ten years of age; the principles of light and shade to very slightly older children, and in some high schools a study of anatomy of the human figure as a guide to the study of figure drawing.

This procedure definitely presumes to "educate" the child to become an artist, and in the traditional mould. It makes the first great error in attempting to graft on to the rhythmic, action-loving nature of the child the relics of an age of scientific experiment.

The child in its progress is the prototype of the race. The ages of primitive man are expressed in the early drawings of children. The great deer and bison, wild horses and other animals of paleolithic man are the result of rhythmic energy before the days of the written word. The child's drawing of the rabbit or pet dog is similar and for the same purpose. They are the graphic records of contact with reality. It is mankind in childhood talking to itself.

This energy should be used, directed and led towards creation, and it constitutes for the child nearly the whole of public and high school life. Any attempt to teach children to become artists simply aims to establish a form or method to substitute what is there in great abundance—a natural and spontaneous desire to express life. But the Art instructor, whilst he may be a working creative artist, and none other is worth while, may be also an individual who understands the idea behind the education in Art, which should be the harmonious development of native faculties.

That is why the artist, as artist, exhibitor, fine technician, academic, suave or bold in style, living the accepted life of studio

and exhibition—admirable and courageous—tepid and sentimental,—superficial and popular,—whatever the type,—is of no value as educator unless he is willing, mentally and aesthetically, to step from his position as a professional man and study the nature and growth of the child mind.

Now comes in the utilitarian idea of Art as a necessary accompaniment to the successful exploitation of commercial commodities. The appeal to the manufacturer to support the cause of Art Education is answered either by indifference or by those who feel that Art has a dollar and cents value, that the artist, designer, manufacturer and distributor should get together for a concerted attack through education, business and politics to conserve and use the energy of youth and the natural resources of a nation towards the betterment of design in industrial life.

In our present day of industrialism and technical training towards a more brittle efficiency, this idea of placing Industrial Art in the schools, denies, in result at any rate, that Art is the interpretation of the beauty and rhythm of life, and that the history of Art is the life of man literally written in terms of beauty through the ages. The cultural side of Art, as has happened with almost any subject of educational usage in the schools and universities, gave place to the economic and utilitarian, the adaption of man to the machinery of production.

The great increase in the efficiency of technical education inevitably crowds out the aesthetic side of Art, for the sake of more efficient schemes for the production of, more or less, skilled craftsmen. The old days of artistic apprenticeship have passed, and in its place in Technical and Art schools are produced annually youths and girls who may take their place feeding the machinery, not of artistic production of the commodities themselves, but of the advertising of products, mostly made abroad, displayed in the huge stores and distributing centres, and pictorially presented to the eye through newspaper, magazine and trade journal.

This is one of the outward appearing effects of technical education in Art—its production of scantily educated youth in Art as an educational contribution to Industrial progress. The deeper and more lasting effect is that technical education appears as a synonym for material knowledge of things and processes, with Art as a servant to these. Its principles and history, its joyous expression, its fine art of line, form and colour are lost, and only those things that are useful to the machine are retained. Art becomes a slave weighted heavily—a butterfly in chains. Public education is in a conspiracy, unconscious and unarmed, with Industrialism, to smother the voice of art consciousness.

It is, of course, not to be denied that Art and craftsmanship are inseparable companions of beauty in production,—nor is it alleged that the art of the painter, sculptor or architect is the only form of art expression. The modern theory, indeed, tried to reconcile and unite the so-called useful and Fine Arts into a harmonious whole having the same qualities in common.

The error in most of the present day methods is that Art is diverted from a creative process, a quality of human consciousness, into servility to a quantitative element in production,—or, in the perversion of the cultural element in life, Art serves most people as a luxury, recreation or entertainment.

Among many thoughtful and cultured individuals Art has retained its academic exclusiveness. The possession of pictures and bric-a-brac of historical and romantic associations, connoisseurship of a refined yet personal order, has given to a few others of wealth and leisure the power of possession. The pleasure of enjoyment of another age and period, less pressing and more romantic than this, provides a way of escape into a more pleasing contemplation of the idea of beauty.

Gradually, yet surely, there has been built up an idea among unthinking people that Art is a picture in a golden frame, an exclusive possession of a few, to be seen only in the houses of the wealthy or in an Art Gallery, or that it is an academic possession of the intellect to know things about the history of Art—to be able to talk easily and confidently about early Italian Primitives, Renaissance engravings, and aesthetic speculation in the nature of objective and abstract beauty.

It is all these, and more, for these are but the possessive, inactive values in Art that do but deter and discourage the mind from expression.

People differ widely in their aptitude for certain activities of the hand and mind, but a simple interest in beauty is the most common aspiration characteristic of the human being. It is industrial obsessions, academic diletteism, professional indifference, and the pride of possession that has kept Art education in a narrow commercial rut, ground under the wheels of progress, shapeless and debased.

But it is easy to rail at our mode of existence, harder to point a way and to follow it.

With all the beauty in temple, picture, and sculptured form compelling the eyes and mind to the past, how difficult it is to see the real meaning of Art, to share its creative moments and its beauty of expression with others, when our own worship is reserved

for the past or whatever of classical beauty is granted to the present day.

In this present age of transition we are cutting sharply and deeply into preconceived ideas of the relative importance of Art, Science, and vocational activities—we are still in the stage officially of academic preponderance of ideas of professionalism, and of the necessity of Art as a service to industry. We regard the findings of Science as of greater value to humanity than the quality of Art, though we know that we draw more nourishment from the emotional and spiritual world than from the world of facts and ideas.

Much is due to the great contributions to Art Education on this continent alone of men like Dow, a great name in the process of unfoldment of the idea of Art in relation to life, and not to the life of the studios; to Denman Ross of Harvard, who created an orderly aesthetic language from classical elements of beauty of line and tone and colour; and to John Dewey, who realized the importance of the aesthetic view of life as a reasonable creative attitude of educationalists towards the idea that Art is the real motivating factor in education and life—the consummation of all the activities of the human soul.

The modern idea of Art in education accepts the vital truth that true education should aim at the harmonious development of native abilities, instead of using the child as an example of obedient response to professional or commercial demands. The nature of the child is studied, its spontaneous desire to make contact with life in all forms considered, and, through the expressiveness of pictures in word, music and illustration, encouraged toward expression. The natural and individual character which is the strength and beauty of the child must not be distorted into prescribed moulds, but should be encouraged into further individuality.

Neither industry nor the studio is the end of education in Art, especially in public and high schools, nor should the curriculum emphasize the importance of a final and commercial goal in deference to the standards of present-day life. It is not the weak imitation of life and of our day, nor of nature and the world of appearance that should be the aim, but rather the realization among teachers that Art is creative and correlated to all the other activities of life.

Aesthetic feeling and imagination do not constitute a special faculty of the mind. Art is not radically different from other activities, but it must be freed from ulterior, narrowly practical considerations. When it is separated from the rest of life, made a luxury and a way of escape from reality, it becomes soft, attenuated and effeminate.



Great Art is closely bound up with other vital human interests, religion, philosophy, science and practical affairs.

It is related to industry and the commercial life, and to the work of the so-called professional artist, but to these no more than to other things in the life of the child, to games and pleasure, physical activities,—to poetry and dramatic presentation, to dress, health, the home life, and the future existence of the child as citizen.

Observation and criticism has been applied to education in public and high schools in the course of this article.

What is the place of Art in the universities? In the Dominion of Canada there are courses in Art practice and critical study in the History of Art, and in aesthetic considerations of Architecture only in special Departments of Architecture and in only one or two centres of higher education. There are no courses in Art Appreciation, nothing in Aesthetics, except as a dependent study of Philosophy, nothing in the Philosophy of Art nor the History of Art. If painting, sculpture and the Fine Arts are referred to, it is merely incidental and only when a professor finds, that through his love of the Fine Arts he can illuminate history or languages, theology and literature by examples from the work of the Artist.

In the United States more than fifty universities have courses in Art, not for those alone who desire a cultural background to an education in the plastic arts, but as part of a course in the appreciation of Art in relation to Religion, Philosophy, Science and Literature.

Universities in Great Britain and other European countries recognize the claims of Art in modern Education. It is in the universities that the subject could be lifted above the narrow, encroaching demands of industrialism, into an atmosphere of study, speculation and enjoyment of Art as a pathway, a way of life. Departments of Fine Art would provide a way towards a more complete perception of life: the study of Art in relation to life placed in University training would enable our students to grasp the idea of life as a whole. For it is of the same branch of the same tree as religion, and yet there are many who look with feelings akin to dismay at the possible intrusion of such a capricious element as Art into theological, philosophical or scientific courses.

Bohemianism and temperamental behavior, Modern Art and its "isms", all such catchwords rouse the shades of our Puritanical ancestry to demand that we protect modern youth from indulging in this doubtful adventure into realms of imagination. Of course, we regard the Art School as the place for the training of artists and craftsmen. But it is not Art training in the sense of specialization

in some particular art or craft which is the province of the Art training colleges—a phase of Art education with which we are not dealing, but as Art Education in the development of beauty in life. Only a few desire to continue the actual making of works of art, while many desire to appreciate and enjoy with wider range and finer discriminations.

There should be a course where Art is considered in relation to psychology, philosophy, ethics and educational methods. The history of all Art forms and traditions should be studied, but not from an archaeological point of view, nor with emphasis on dates and periods, but from a sensitive weighing of relationship with the life and times of the Artist, or Art form. For example, classes in English Literature would study the Art form of Hogarth, Reynolds, Blake and Constable as contributory creative stimuli to 18th century life. Here is the satirical, classical, romantic, mystical and naturalistic element in Painting, respectively, manifested.

There would also be opportunity to follow in history the various racial forms of expression in the Arts. Surely Greek Sculpture has an important place in Classics, and the forms of furniture and textiles a bearing on the life and literature of the Renaissance. The beginnings of Christianity as evidenced in the pictorial projection of the gospel story in the catacombs should have attention in any theological or historical course.

Further, as a guide to the enjoyment of life, apart from moralistic and economic considerations, it is without doubt essential that the aesthetic experience, the element of choice exercised in a thousand ways in life, should receive some authoritative suggestion and direction in a university.

We see the lack of it in the cities, factory towns, hoardings and even such dreadful things as badly designed war memorials; wherever the individual in authority, without a trace of aesthetic discrimination, makes a choice and directs progress. Usually such a citizen has had a good education. To accuse such a one of bad taste is almost as insulting as to reflect upon his lack of sense of humour.

It has been the pleasant experience of the writer to undertake the direction of various groups of university students in the closer association of historical and contemporary art forms—studying these, not from the standpoint of history, nor with an idea of future credits or examinations, but to add to the immediate and lasting enjoyment of the members of such groups. ||

Composition in relation to plastic presentation received analysis and comparison, in much the same way that in a course in literature

or philosophy the significance of words and expressive phrases is analyzed and critically surveyed. To relate plastic form, the movement of colours, and lines in space, to the expressiveness of words, the significant movement of meaningful sounds in time, is an example of related study that must inevitably add to the vocabulary pictorial imagery either in form or in words.

Very young children have a natural aesthetic contemplation of life, especially in their regard to pictures. Whilst we older ones are considering the story in relation to a literary title, or contemplating its literal imitativeness and photographic resemblance, a child enters immediately into enjoyment of its Art form.

We cannot protect the modern child of nine or ten years from the enjoyment of modern Art. Comic strips in the newspapers, and cheap illustrations of all kinds have produced a reaction to the quantitative element of the reproduction of pictures. The child intuitively grasps the aesthetic stimulus of rhythm, balance, and relationship of line and colour, and understands that these things are the "story" of a picture. Experimental work in an Art Gallery has proved this over and over again.

It is this creative element, this momentum of youth, that is the real life of art, related to the energy of youth and coincident with Rhythm in nature. It is the real survival of the classical elements of proportion, measure, balance and shape that represents the divine and golden thread of order in the physical universe. The understanding of this, the search for its meaning through Art in whatever form, is the business of all educators.

The main requisite in school and university is not change in the system but change in the spirit, aims, and methods of individual teachers.

The classical theory regards life as a work of art, and each work is an epitome of the progress of the human soul through the allotted span of years. If we expand this thought in an occult sense, we contemplate the idea of many re-created existences, lives that are lived and re-lived, each life an infinitesimal rounding of excrescences and faulty compositional features that destroy unity, "until", as Plotinus says of the Sculptor, "the godlike splendor shines on you, from it."

If we look at education broadly conceived as lasting the entire lifetime, the responsibility of authority in matters of Art or any subject is to create in early youth and young manhood the idea of creation, the relation of part to part, the fitness to material and purpose, the broad sweep of lines of beauty, the courageous massing of tones, and the vigor and power of colourful statement. Of such

beginnings great works of art are formed; from the universal idea to the particularization of parts; from the Design to the details. In such a way was creation conceived, and from light and the division of spaces to the birth of man the same creative activity goes on. Always mankind in the image of God does not imitate the details, but intuitively enjoys the creative process in thought and action.

When professionalism or commercial preoccupations destroy and reverse this process, momentum and creative joy cease, and art becomes artifice. Art is not perfection, not something outside of man, but a developing force within man. Art is the process of becoming.

The Art of our times and country depends on the measure of appreciation given to it. Our Art belongs to the "Procession of life". Creation and perfection are not exclusive possessions of the Artist, they are attributes of the artist in all individuals.

When we can see education as a creative force, we shall know that the idea of Art is helping its progress along the pathway. We shall see Art not as professional skill, or a subject in a curriculum, but as a means to a richer way of life.