

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS.

The thesis has been divided into various chapters. These come under the leadings of : —

- (1) INTRODUCTION.
- (2) MISLEADING (OR MISJUDGED) ART OF THE PAST.
- (3) ART CRITICISM. (PARTS A AND B)
- (4) SPECIALIZATION.
- (5) ART TODAY.
- (6) ART EDUCATION.
- (7) BIBLIOGRAPHY.
- (8) ILLUSTRATIONS.

DANIEL A. COURTNEY

3rd YR. FINE ARTS. '76.

INTRODUCTION

My initial subject which I chose was entitled —
"The over-emphasis of verbal and literary comments on the visual arts, what effects it can have on the arts and the artists involved." The more I thought about this subject the more I became convinced it could not be treated as an individual comment but should be part of something much more.

My initial idea was a comment on an institution which was forcing me to verbalise on a visual subject. I needed to expand and not only question such an institution but to question the whole structure of society today and the art it produces.

Right through my thesis I make various comments and ask many questions, some I attempt to answer and others I could find no answer. I hope the reader will bear with me and forgive my ignorance in these cases.

In much of the thesis I quote various sources, this I have done because I find they can get the point across much stronger than I could ever hope to. After gathering enough thoughts and reading matter I have come up with enough information to write a thesis of four thousand words. I realize that I am only scratching the surface of what could be done. The amount of subject matter I have left out is only huge, and I apologise for this fact. I can only hope that what I have done is worthwhile.

Daniel A. Bountney

TEXT

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MISLEADING (OR MISJUDGED) ART OF THE PAST.

Many many books etc have been written on the past history of Art but few have been written on the following areas which Art Historians (with few exceptions) prefer to remain dormant.

1 Originally, paintings were an integral part of the building for which they were designed. Paintings which now hang in many galleries throughout the world were removed from their original place thus losing the atmosphere they once attained. Art objects which were once functional now became the other extreme. The importance of works of art was their uniqueness. The invention of the camera had a major effect on art, one being that works of art could be reproduced — did this destroy the ~~the~~ uniqueness of their image?

2 One of the major issues throughout the world today is the role of women in society. Throughout history, women played a minor part and were continually being treated as second class citizens. Even today, women are born into a well established role. They must be constantly wary of their appearance, follow the latest in fashion, love, honour and obey etc. Looking back through art history (European) we find women depicted as sexual objects, there to be gazed at by the male onlooker. The theme has been carried through into photography by the use of the pin-up magazines, many have used classical erotic poses. Also in film, blue movies or even the early Hollywood "classics" which glorified beautiful women and caused such ~~and~~ falsification as to have a shattering

effect on those who watched blindly.

Many painters used the respectable guise of mythological or religious Goddesses to portray pornography. It was quite common for art collectors of the past to have their wives or mistresses painted as Goddesses in appealing poses to enhance their egos and create admiration or jealousy around them.

PLATE: I

The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of women. Venus was most often used as she created a great opportunity to portray the ideal woman which every man wanted. When males were introduced they were fully clothed, no real sexual act was apparent as the female was usually positioned to be more interested in the viewer than her companion.

The eighteenth century proved to be a goldmine for the private pornographic painter and many art collectors adored their secret "nude" collections. Manet was the first to question the role of woman in painting, he portrayed a questioning woman who refused to take up any of the standard erotic poses. Many artists have followed his example.

In no other civilization was the role of the women so downtrodden. If the theme of a work was sexual attraction then it was likely to show active sexual love as between two people, one as active as the other. There is no doubt in my mind as to the effects art helped to play in the secondary role of women of which we still suffer today.

3 Another interesting topic not generally touched upon is the fact that many famous artists suffered from poor eyesight. A number of painters including our own Paul Henry suffered from colour blindness, which prompted them to use unusual colour combinations. In many cases this won them their fame.

(SEE PLATE: II) Albrecht Dürer suffered from a severe squint. He had to cover one eye when drawing or painting which limited his vision greatly.

(SEE PLATE: III) It is said that El Greco had a form of visionary defect which elongated everything he saw, thus producing the long elegant figures he became so famous for. Through the use of photographic equipment which tended to squash the paintings it was shown that not only the figures but also the background took on normal dimensions. Many of the famous Impressionists had bad eyesight which undoubtedly help them attain the effects they achieved on canvas. It is interesting to ask the question, that if these same artists had 'normal' eyesight, would their works have attained the fame they now hold?

4 In his book "Ways of Seeing", John Berger points to an important psychological point which can produce distorted effects by the viewer on art objects. E.G. He mentions a painting by Van Gogh "Crows in a Cornfield" then adds the words "This is the last painting Van Gogh produced before he died." Immediately the sentence takes on new dimensions, anybody who knows about the life of that artist will become aware of the tragedy and violence which must be contained in the painting.

When an American offered two and a half million ^{pounds} to the National Gallery in England for the Da Vinci cartoon "Virgin and child with John the Baptist," it had an immediate effect on the public and quickly became the best selling reproduction of all the paintings in the gallery. It was even changed to a more prominent position by the gallery authorities.

Do people really see the originality and uniqueness of a well known painting or does the huge price behind it have a direct psychological bearing on it?

It is important at this stage to examine the role of the art historian. I believe his task is mainly a negative one. However brilliant his perceptions are, he can only provide us with a basis of judgment. He must set out exactly as possible the conditions under which the work was produced, who commissioned it and what functional or aesthetic ideas he had in ~~his~~ mind before commencing. "He cannot set limits but only open horizons".

ART CRITICISM (DEALERS, EXPERTS ETC.)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

From the seventeenth century onwards, the prosperous bourgeoisie began to play a dominant role as patrons of the arts. First in Holland, then in France and England. Paintings began to be judged by new criteria — the contribution they made to the bourgeois interior. Art now became a commodity and was dealt with in the same way as other trade articles. As art works became valued as private possessions, so the art dealer was born, closely followed by our friend the art critic. The art collector now became a man no longer indulging in his own free choice, he became a client who bought works of art as he would stocks and shares.

The Dealer and Critic now became men with reputations, making fortunes from buying works of art and reselling — when the time was right, by praising eloquently the works of the great masters etc. Judgment and criticism from the experts was generally regarded as gospel. Galleries and auction rooms became well established. Culture columns became part of newspapers and magazines. The demand for art became greater and the time was ripe for large scale forgery.

TWO FORGERS: (OF MANY)

Throughout history, forgeries presented themselves in ~~one~~ form or another, but were usually detected by the expert eyes of the day. Inferior quality was spotted either through close scrutiny, chemical analysis or the more recent discovery of X-Ray. Some of the great

(SEE

ILLUS. NOS. 8, 9)

artists had tried their hand at it. Andrea Del Sarto copied a Raphael (Leo X) so well that for years no one knew who painted which, even the great Michelangelo dashed slightly.

After the first world war a large number of art treasures flooded the market. Ancient works emerged which were never seen before. Among these were pre Christian and fourteenth and fifteenth century masterpieces, all the work of a twentieth century unknown Italian named Uccio Dossena. By the time Dossena claimed responsibility, his works held prominent places in many art galleries of Europe and America. His work in America alone had sold for more than half a million dollars. His admission shocked the art world and shattered many an expert's morale. A cover-up operation was put into effect but Dossena reigned supreme and proved beyond doubt that he in fact was the sole artist. In a desperate effort to save themselves, the experts (who had previously immortalised the art pieces) turned round and blatantly attacked them as obvious forgeries. It was clear that they were not copies as no actual similar pieces existed. They were carried out expertly in the style ^{and age} ~~and age~~ they were thought to have come from. How could one man perform with facility and conviction masterpieces which stretched over two thousand years in style? The man was obviously a genius yet both he and his work were condemned by the experts.

(SEE ILLUS. NO VI) Another such case was the work of Han Van Meegeren, who produced a number of 17th century Vermeers. His first forgery was a work named "The Disciples of Emmaus". It was examined by a Dr. Abraham Bredius, a leading authority on Dutch masters. He pronounced it "genuine" and described it as "a masterpiece, his (Vermeer's) crowning achievement". At an exhibition of Dutch Masters, a leading art magazine proclaimed that "the ~~special~~ spiritual focus of the exhibition, despite the distinguished works of Rembrandt, Hals and G. Kneller, is Vermeer's Emmaus picture" yet another described it as a "miracle painting".

(ILLUS. NO. VII) When the forgeries came to light the fun started. While some experts insisted the paintings were still genuine, others opined that the paintings were "naive hack works, their figures maladroit, lacking in dept, plasticity and perspective".

A number of interesting points emerge from the above:

- (A) Should the judgment of the experts be any worthier of credence after the discovery than before?
- (B) Could artists like Dossena and Van Meegeren be considered "masters".
- (C) It is interesting to compare the prices of these forgeries to the prices received for their own work (vastly different) yet both coming from the same hand!
- (D) How many works of art hanging in galleries throughout the world are actual forgeries?
- (E) Works of art which adorned gallery walls now find themselves hidden in basements and cellars when proved fake — why?

PAGE IV

INTERESTING QUOTE.

In his book 3,000 yrs of deception in art, Frank
Crenau writes "According to the enlarged
oeuvre catalogue, Corot painted over 2,000
pictures. Of these, more than 5,000 are in the
United States".

PAC

ART CRITICISM

How important a part do critics actually play in the visual arts? Should they play a part? Does their personal critiques influence the reader? Are they there to "decipher" modern or abstract art which may have lost all meaning in the eyes of the general public?

Because of the rise in critic esteem it resulted that many artists became dependant on the whims of the critic. Taking one example, during the American Abstract Expressionist period artists searched for a favourable critic, because the American public would not buy until the artist received a favourable review. After all, art was big business!

The commercial gallery owner has amazing control also. Since he exists basically to make a profit, he chooses art work which he considers will sell. In doing so he chooses artists with a reputation or gambles with an unknown — who may go down well. He is not only deciding what the public buy but dictating what the public should see. Surely all art, whether good or bad should be seen and let the public decide for themselves.

Artists and critics alike tapped on to trends, and for a while a certain artist, or even a certain school of artists, could do nothing wrong. New fashions were (and are) being constantly hailed, then after a while if not ~~dis~~ discarded they sink to a secondary plane of interest. Yet the critic can suffer from a corruption of judgment, a fear to speak out against fashion. It goes without saying that the critic who tells lies to himself will

finish by telling them to others" - E. Lucie Smith.
 Most newspapers and magazines feel it is their duty to "educate" their readers ~~and~~ and supply detailed accounts of the current artistic productions. On such an issue E. Lucie Smith wrote: "Not only is there the fact that much art criticism is of very poor quality and is written in English so turgid that art critics prose has become a by-word". In the early part of this century Tolstoy was moved to write "Criticism", in which the levers of art used to find support for their opinions, has literally become so self-contradictory that if we exclude from the domain of art all to which the critics of various schools themselves deny the title - there is scarcely any art left".

One has only to spend a short ^{time} at Art College to discover the critics and "experts" who are only too willing to verbalize on student work. The variation of comments are so unbelievable that if any art student took them seriously, he would be most ~~likely~~ likely to stop work and flee - Many dismiss the critic as a non-person, not worthy of comment, but they do overlook the fact that critics, dealers, gallery owners etc have had a direct bearing on art in the past and no doubt will have in the future. They should not have the power which they held in the past as it can only have disastrous consequences.

Since the art critic is very real and cannot be ignored outright, we should ~~we~~ be aware of what role he could play. The judgment performed by him is one of isolation, and he must

be aware of this. He cannot take the art object in isolation, he can only work from the experience he has built up of his visual understanding of other works of art. He should have personal contact with the artist and explore the ideas and events which led up to the finished piece. He must have a genuine feeling for the object, not a pretence and be affected by every new artwork he sees. He cannot assume that his judgment is in any way final and should not be questioned.

OSKAR KOKOSHKA :- "If I lent an ear to my critics I would be long dead". — If only all artists could say the same.

SPECIALIZATION:

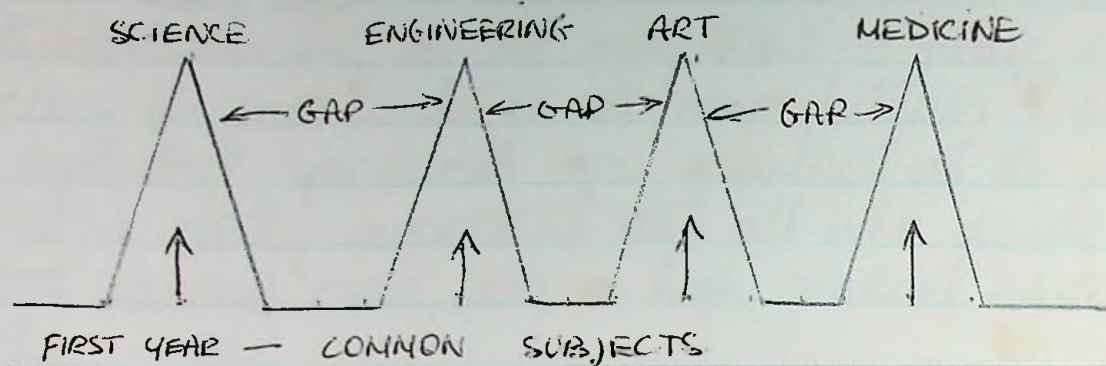
As our Civilization advances from day to day, more Specialists are required in the various fields of Technology. Highly specialised kind level educational courses are being required more and more. Could the results of this prove unfortunate in the future?

We have already come in contact with films, books, etc., who portray the mad scientist about to destroy the world, as he has the sole knowledge of his powerful invention, etc... Much of these futuristic films and publications are so far fetched that they do not pose any serious threat. However we should look closely at our system of education as it seems to me that large gaps in communication could arise in the future if not happening already.

If we look at the structure of any academic third level Institute or University, we find that during the first year a number of subjects are studied by the student. Then the specialized procedure is narrowed into the particular subject the student decides on. Over the years each become regarded as a specialist in his own field and thus becoming proud of the respect and knowledge that are associated with it. This can have the effect of creating a gap in communication between a doctor or engineer, a scientist or an artist!

Pyramids are formed (see diagram) where a person becomes deeply immersed in his own field. The same happens on a factory floor where a worker is trained to operate a specific piece of machinery, thereby unable to operate any of the other machines that occupy our factories. This often causes boredom

and alienation, The worker demands more money which leads to conflicts and strikes.



The same can apply to today's Colleges of Art, where at the end of the course, Designers, Painters, Sculptors are emerging, sometimes with little knowledge of how the other schools operate. Every art student should have (at the end of the course) a first hand knowledge of - welding, woodwork, pigment making etc, all the tools of his trade, plus a number of complementary subjects like architecture, philosophy, natural science etc. In other words a good general education which will be of value when he seeks employment. It is a well known fact that rarely has a fine art student the chance of taking up employment which is suitable to his specialisation. Very few students are able to make a living from their art when they leave college and at that only a few do in the end.

In trying to combat this problem, Josef Buyes is in the process of creating his "Free Universities," where students cover a wide range of subjects to a fairly high degree. The gap between student/teacher is eliminated when everybody concerned participates in the educational program.

Sooner or later this type of idea will have to be adopted by Governments. Though what I have written may seem extreme to some, it is obviously worth considering as we may have a very real problem on our hands in the near future. I accept the fact that specialists are required at the moment but it is vitally important that all who decide to go that narrow road, have a high general education first.

TOLSTOY: "Often kind, clever people, capable of useful labour grow savage over their specialized and stupefying occupations — become ~~so~~ self-complacent specialists and dull to all the serious phenomena of life."



ART TODAY.

- A. Never in the history of art have there been so many practising artists ~~as~~ there is today, yet art production is so scattered that a certain amount of confusion prevails. Art colleges (from various reports I have heard) seem to have become an area of stagnancy rather than creativity. Two reasons which come to mind for this confusion seem to be: (1) Students are finding that whatever road they turn to in search of something new, seems to have been travelled well already and (2) a more important reason, the effects of various political beliefs which were introduced around the turn of the century. With the advance of communism and socialism, artists began to examine their own role in society which had up to this been very bourgeois. As a social change came about, so too did art, the Bauhaus came into existence with its revolutionary ideas about art. Walter Gropius who founded the Staatliches Bauhaus stated "Our object was to liberate the creative artist from his other-worldliness and reintegrate him into the workaday world of realities; and at the same time to broaden and humanize the rigid, almost exclusively material mind of the business man." Artists like Picasso and George Gress began to introduce social awareness into their work. So art came into a new era. Today many artists feel they must integrate much more into society to justify themselves, others have ceased production because they see no way their art could change the situations they see wrong in society today.

(5)

Richard Demarco, the Scottish Gallery owner feels the confusion today can be solved by returning to the past. He feels the answer lies in the ancient Celtic mysteries which have been lost or destroyed during the past centuries. Art today does seem to lack the power and force of structures like Newgrange or a gothic cathedral. Though, comparison between the past and present is almost impossible as we now live in a totally different environment. It is interesting though to examine one marked difference which has come about.

We exist in large modern cities and accept the increasing amount of mechanisation in our lives readily. Our food has become something which comes in packages from the supermarkets rather than the soil. The people of the past lived out of doors for most of their lives, we spend the majority of ours indoors. Rarely can we enjoy the simple pleasures of enjoying a walk in the country, we take the car for a spin instead. Though we may spend two weeks in the country and find it refreshing, we still rely on modern comforts of life while there. It has become an established fact that there is a marked difference between animals living in a captive state and living in the wild. Have we become like captive animals?

(c.)

Since the Industrial Revolution, the pace of life has changed and began to speed. We have never looked back so that today life has become so complicated that many have difficulty in coping with it. So too, the art world has stepped on its accelerator and landed itself into similar confusion. An art movement which would have lasted twenty

or thirty years a century ago can last as little as six months today. So many movements that have been born recently have found themselves buried by the following movement. Art works five years old seem very outdated today. Art has joined the rat-race!

(D) Due to the large influence of social awareness on art this century, art has divided itself into two main areas i.e. Aesthetic and Functional art. While I agree with functional art, by that I mean art which has a direct bearing on society (Environmental art etc) I cannot disagree with aesthetic art, though in the future I can see the emphasis much more on functional art.

MARX: "If, even in certain social conditions, everybody was an excellent painter, that would not at all exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here, the difference between "human" and "unique" labour amounts to sheer nonsense."

MARX: "In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities."

(E)

The invention of the camera and cine-camera caused revolutions in the art world. Landscapes and still life's (representational) came under question as the camera could reproduce instantly what many painters had been trying to do for centuries.

Tolstoy "In our life there are many insignificant or even harmful activities which enjoy a respect they do not deserve, or are tolerated merely because they are considered to be of importance. The copying of flowers, horses and landscapes, such clumsy learning of musical pieces as is carried on in most of our ~~old~~ so called educated families, the painting of indecent, pornographic pictures stimulating sensuality, the composition of songs and stories of that nature are not worthy activities deserving of respect."

Cinema was hailed as the "new art" and the new media which could communicate on a world wide basis but the speculators were quick to visualize the possibilities of huge scale profits, so what was produced was the million dollar Hollywood all star movie ~~special~~ spectacles which produced nothing but man's ability to try and fool himself. Super stars were born overnight, but few were able to keep up to the inhuman pace which these films set. Many ended in disaster. This whole era of film making set ~~false~~ false standards throughout the world, and many who watched blindly were misled in dealing with life around them.

Film making is now only settling down and could be a major contributor to art in the future.



QUOTE:

Hundreds of thousands of people devote their lives from childhood to learning to twirl their legs rapidly (dancers) or to touch notes and strings very rapidly (musicians) or to sketch with paint and represent what they see (artists) or to turn every phrase inside out and find a rhyme to every word — In every large town enormous buildings are erected for museums, academies, conservatories, drama schools, and for performances and concerts. Hundreds of thousands of workmen — carpenters, masons, painters, joiners, paper-hangers, tailors, laundresses, jewellers, moulders, typesetters — spend their whole lives in hard labour to satisfy the demands of art.

— Leo Tolstoy, what is art?

(6)
PAGE I

ART EDUCATION

We are still accustomed to understanding art to be only what we hear and see in theatres, concerts and exhibitions, also buildings, statues, poems and novels. Surely this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with one another in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind. e.g. furniture, dress, song, utensils, games etc. Art education can and must play a much more important role in the lives of people in the future.

School leavers in Ireland today have not received a proper visual education. The art class still remains the Friday afternoon excuse, totally unrelated to any other subject. Only a tiny percentage of the public visit the art galleries. How can art be expected to play a part in people's lives when the vast majority of people have not received any sort of visual education. Though England is not that far ahead of us, it is however much more aware of the visual arts. I have seen many long queues waiting patiently outside any major exhibition hall, but then when was the last time we had a major exhibition in this country.

I have already mentioned how art colleges should function in the chapter on Specialization. I would like to mention now ~~on~~ the importance of art teacher training. For too long now have we relied on religious orders and hobbyist teachers to instruct our youth on art. We need a totally different approach which can only be given by properly trained teachers and people knowledgeable enough in the subject. As far back as the 1920's Marion Richardson and Robin Tanner were

PAGE II

experimenting with children new visual ideas in England. We have only begun.

Child art has emerged as highly expressive and original and helps so much in the development of a child's personality. But then the government sees differently and only regards the art class as a necessary evil which they have to put up with. This is evident when one looks ~~at~~ at the huge no. of unequipped art classrooms throughout the country.

Not until there is a large enough number of aware art teachers who start shouting, will anything be done about it.

In an ideal situation, where people respect and understand what has happened in the art of the past, and look forward ^{to} seeing new ideas. People who not only appreciate but actively partake in creating their own art thereby eliminating the specialized artist ~~altogether~~ altogether. Surely life would become richer and more meaningful to all concerned.

We can only strive for the ideal.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THE THOUGHT OF KARL MARX —

DAVID McLELLAN.

WAYS OF SEEING

— JOHN BERGER.

WHAT IS ART?

— LEO TOLSTOY

THE WORLD THROUGH BLUNTED VISION —

PATRICK TREVOR-ROPER.

VAN MEEGEREN —

LORD KILBRACKEN

ADVENTURES IN EDUCATION —

WILLEM VAN DER EYKEN / BARRY TURNER

ILLUSTRATIONS

57 Tintoretto, *Susanna and the Elders*. The classical voyeurs inviting retribution.



TYPICAL PORNOGRAPHIC PAINTING IN DISGUISE.

Die Zeit der Jugend ist die
die ich am liebsten
den ich am liebsten
den ich am liebsten



44 Albrecht Dürer, self-portrait aged 13 (1484). The eyes are still straight (Left).

45 Dürer, self-portrait aged 22 (1493). The finger may have been held up in order to steady the right eye, which is tending to diverge (Below left).

46 Dürer self-portrait aged 21 (c. 1492). The right hand would seem to be warding off the confusing false image from his divergent right eye (Below right).

AD

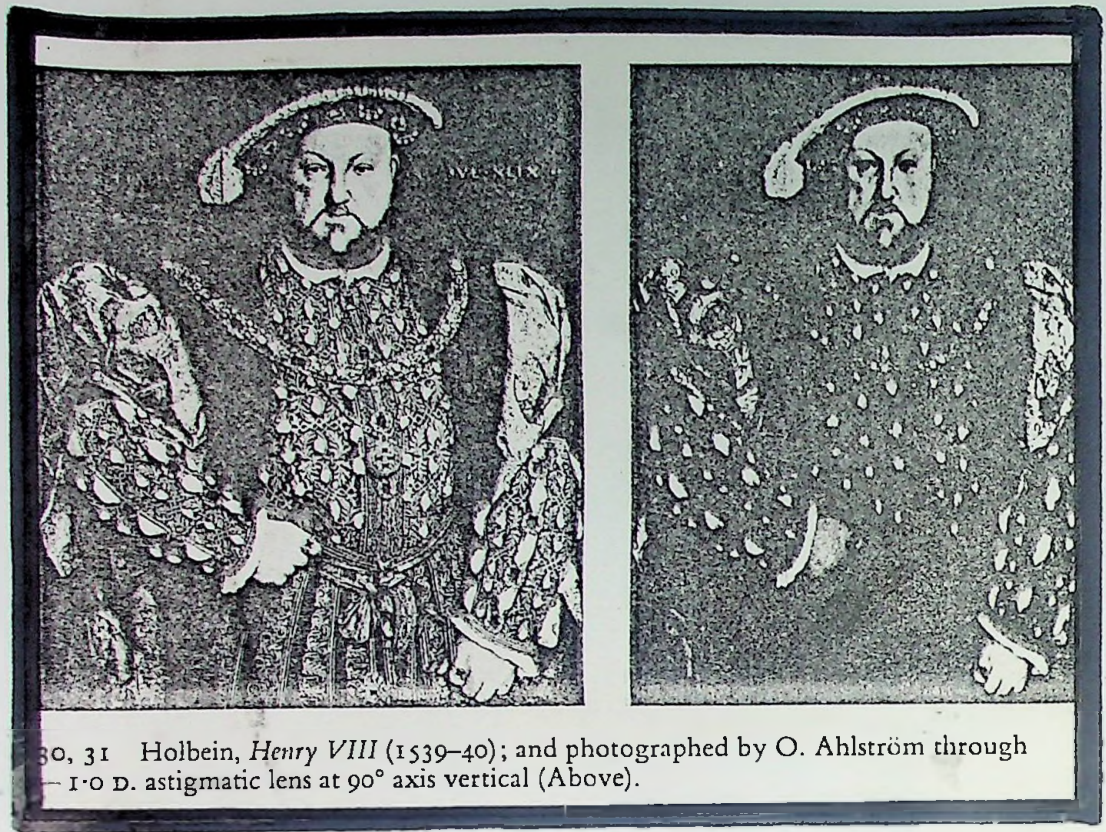




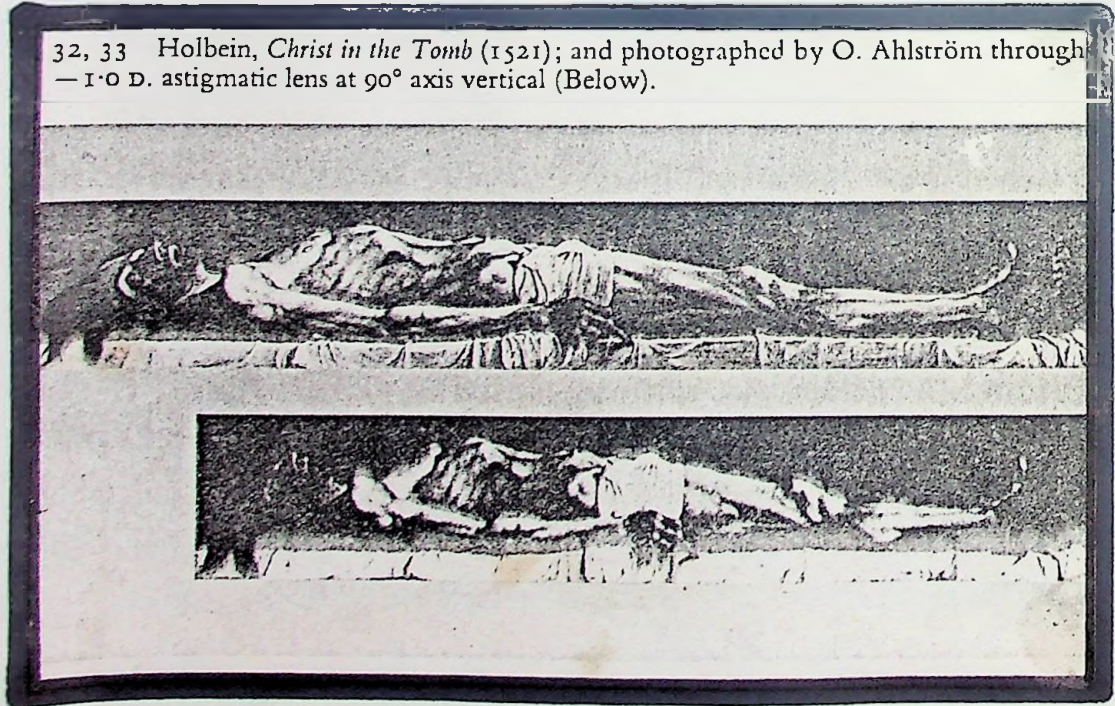
26-29 (Left) El Greco, *Portrait of Cardinal Nino de Guevara* (1600) and *St Peter and St Paul* (c. 1592); and (above and below) photographed by O. Ahlström through -1.0 D. astigmatic lens at 15 axis.



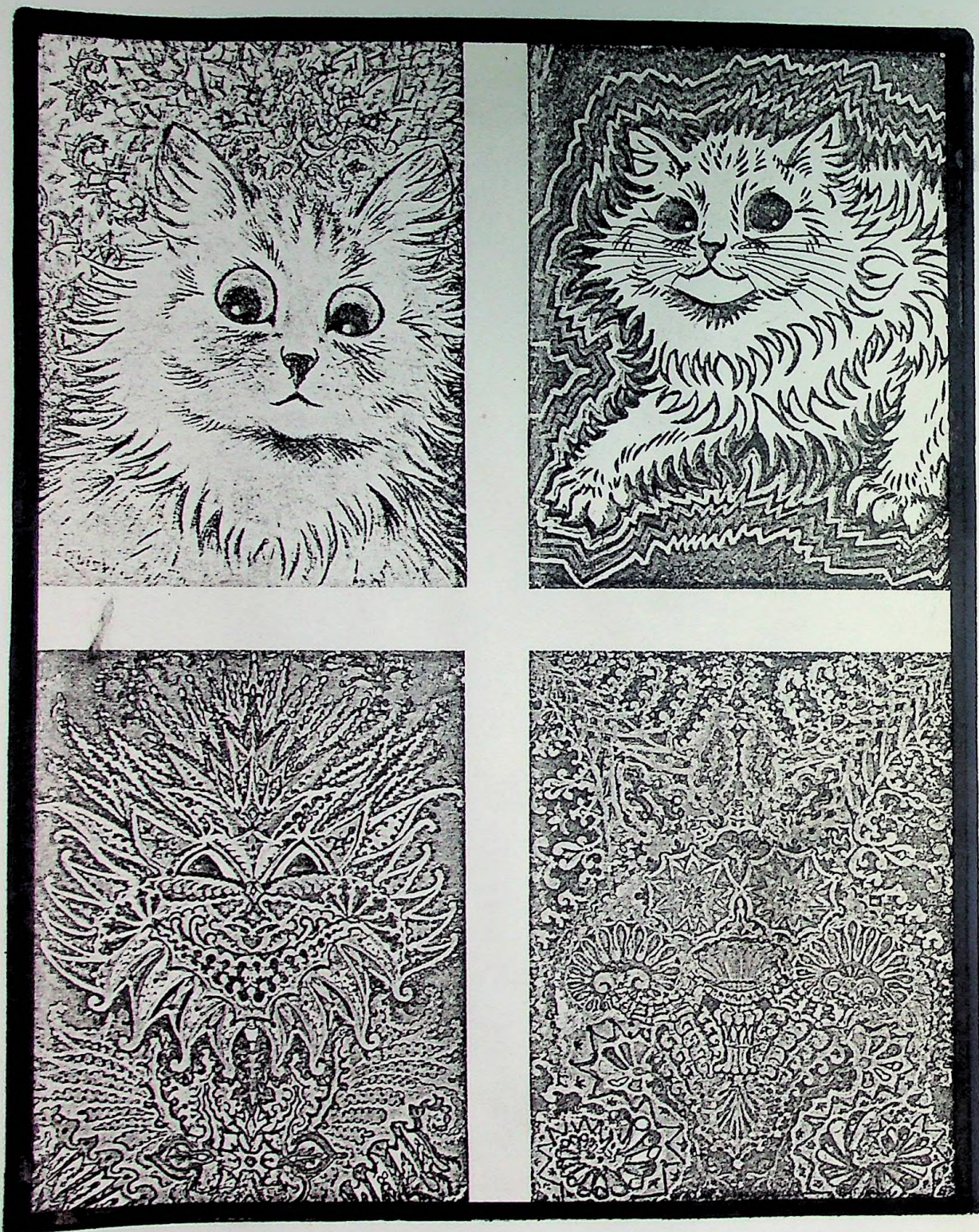
2 PAINTINGS BY EL GRECO WHICH HAVE BEEN SHORTENED THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY. THE FIGURES NOW TAKE ON NORMAL DIMENSIONS.



30, 31 Holbein, *Henry VIII* (1539-40); and photographed by O. Ahlström through
 - 1.0 D. astigmatic lens at 90° axis vertical (Above).



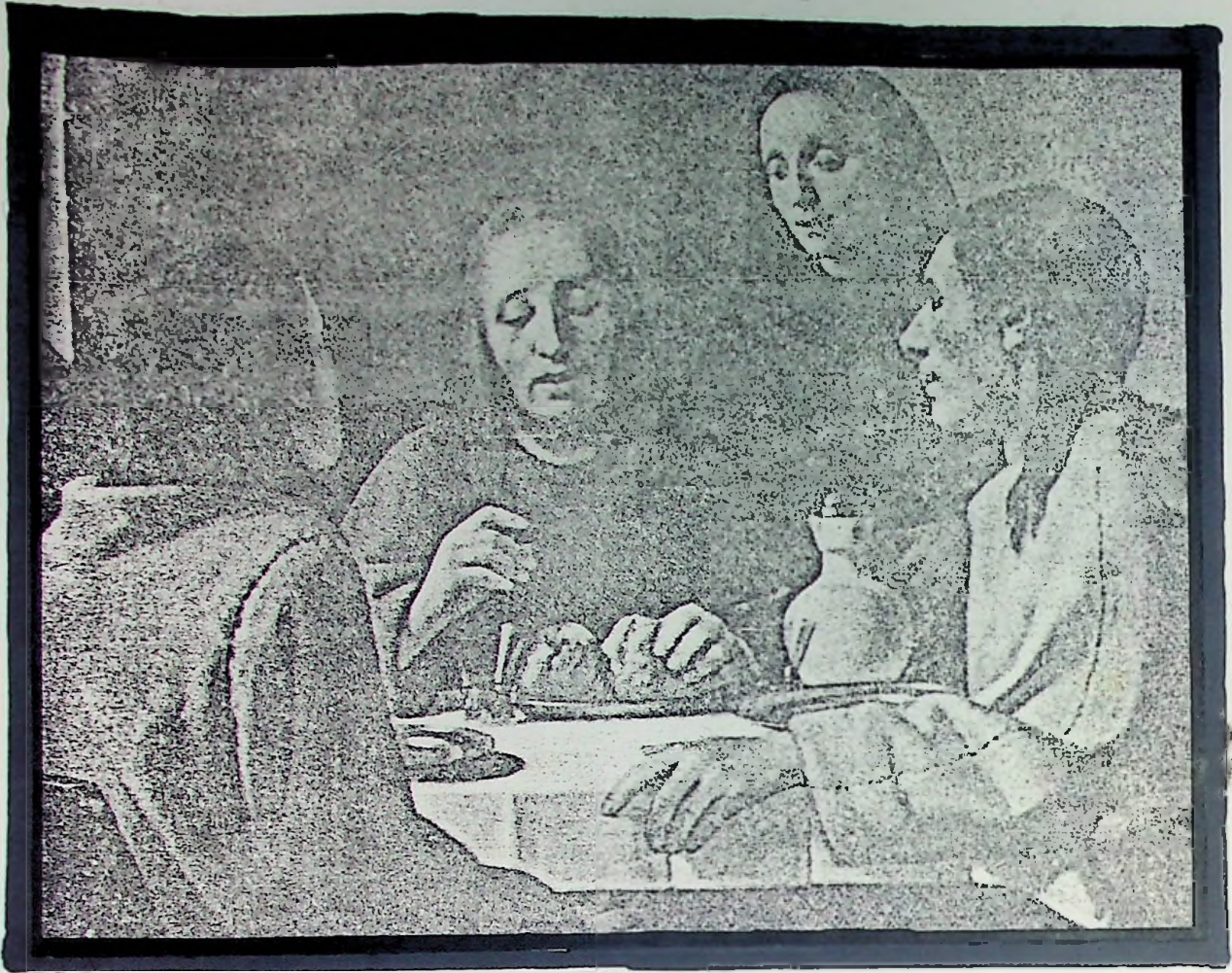
32, 33 Holbein, *Christ in the Tomb* (1521); and photographed by O. Ahlström through
 - 1.0 D. astigmatic lens at 90° axis vertical (Below).



LOUIS WAIN - SERIES OF CAT PAINTINGS.
THESE PAINTINGS WERE EXECUTED DURING DIFFERENT
STAGES DURING A SCHIZOPHRENIC ILLNESS.
THE DESIGN PATTERN BECOMES MORE INTENSE AS THE
EMOTIONS BUILD UP.



HAN VAN MEEGEREN.



VAN MEEGEREN: THE FIRST "VERMEER" HE SOLD.
THE DISCIPLES OF EMMAUS.



VAN MEEGEREN: THE LAST SUPPER.



LEO X RAPHAEL.



COPY BY ANDREA DEL SARTO.

FIERCE CONTROVERSY RAGED IN ITALY IN THE
LAST CENTURY AS TO WHICH WAS THE ORIGINAL
PAINTING.



SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: THE MISSES PAYNE.



THE SAME PICTURE AFTER CLEANING.
A RESTORER HAD DECIDED THE FIGURE OF THE
MOTHER UPSET THE BALANCE AND HARMONY OF
THE PAINTING AND — ELIMINATED IT.



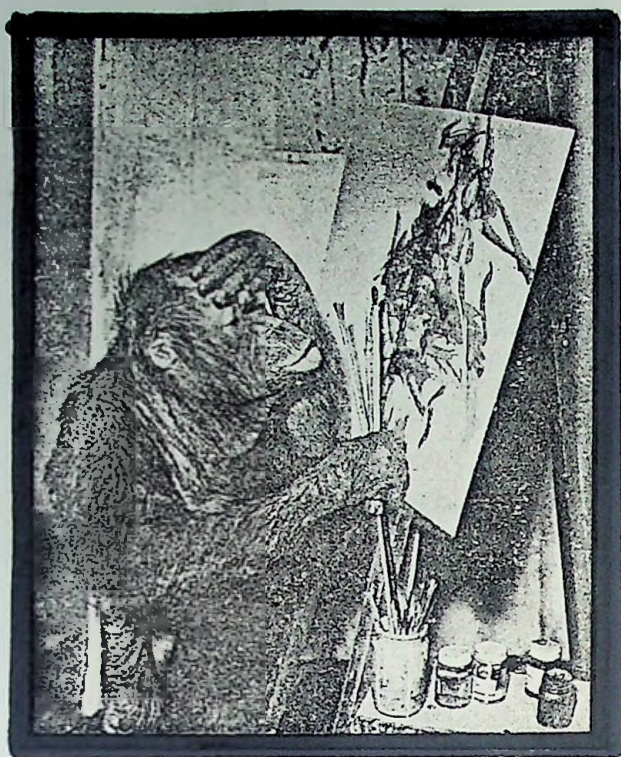
BISHOP WITH BUNCH
OF GRAPES
JOSEPH RIFESSER

BELOW:
MADONNA
AND CHILD
JOSEPH RIFESSER

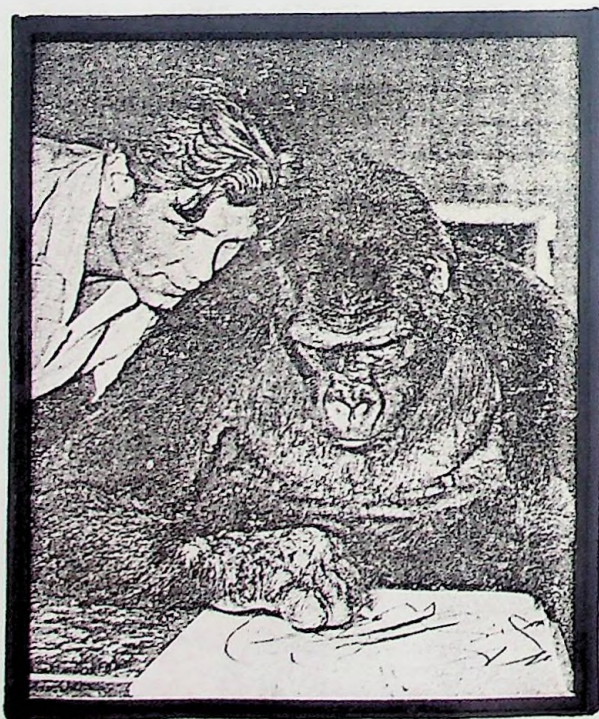
RIFESSER SOLD HIS
MADONNA AND CHILD FOR
ABOUT £30 TO A GERMAN ART
COLLECTOR IN 1959. SOON
AFTERWARDS IT WAS OFFERED
FOR SALE AS A "GOTHIC MADONNA"
AT DOROTHEUM, AUSTRIA'S LEADING
SALE-ROOM.

ANOTHER PIECE (ABOVE) WAS
DATED BY THE EXPERTS AS
CIRCA 1380. THEY PERSISTED
IN THEIR BELIEFS UNTIL
RIFESSER PROVED HE WAS
THE CARVER.





ALEXANDER THE ORANG-UTAN
CONTEMPLATING HIS PAINTING



SOPHIE THE GORILLA PERFORMS
SOME "ACTION" DRAWING.

