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John Tatschl

NOTES IN TRANSIT

TOKYO. Today I went once more to look at Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel. I never in my life laughed aloud at a building—but here I did. It was so funny. So bad, so ugly, so pathetic. It is the size of a small motor court and with its shabbiness would fit perfectly into some dilapidated outskirt of some provincial dump. This can never have been any good—not even when it was new.

A friendly woman shoeshine motioned me with the most graceful movement of her hand to take a seat in front of her and have my shoes shined—who can resist such a smile and such a gesture. She was not saying one word. When I had taken my low-low seat, she offered me a little candy from a little paper sack.

There is absolutely nothing the Japanese have not copied from someone. I find the German pencil protector of my schoolboy days in use here. I can remember in 1920-30 the great number of Japanese in European libraries for example. Photographing from books, from magazines, from showcases. With their cameras, their notebooks, their collapsible tripods on tables where we read and wondered what they were about.

Strange sight: An American cowboy (or what looks like one) speaking Japanese on Tokyo TV.

Nobody stares at me—civilized, considerate people—even the peasants have tact. On a subway train, bursting with curiosity, they will not look at me when I am with my nose out of a book or paper, but when I start reading they all look at me and blush when I quickly look up. I laugh and the whole car starts to roar with pleasure. I seem to be the only foreigner who travels on these trains which are fast and cheap. Many people speak to me and wonder whether I am not afraid of getting lost. . . . Some have asked me what I am looking for in Japan. . . . A student asked to be permitted to visit me at the home where I live.

It is very obvious that they are a literate people. Anything printed, or a diagram or a quick drawing, when I don't know the words, is instantly clear to them. They all can read upside-down too!



Kamakura. A girl sits in the window of a petshop and feeds a little tiny fledgling with the smallest chopsticks I have ever seen. She opens the yellow bill of the little bird and stuffs food down with the sticks, somewhat like a mother bird. The whole scene has charm and a certain exotic novelty. There is a flash recognition of something strange and yet familiar and is *simpático*.

Fire! The sirens howl and finally appears a miniature Austin truck rigged with all the paraphernalia of a giant top for Christmas. The firemen's helmets are sou'wester flappy affairs covering their whole heads and their faces—except for a small slit for the eyes. The thing keeps shifting—so the men grope around like in a harmless nightmare. . . . People seem to be indifferent to the whole thing, so unlike the Americans who surprised me once (a long time ago) by always wanting to race after a fire engine . . . for the fun of it, I was told.

There are no flowers in a Japanese garden. . . .

To look at some rice fields in the country one discovers the patterns that purpose makes. The plowed lines comb around a rock much like the stone garden-patterns at Kyoto or Nara. The landscape is made of little busy lines, just like their paintings show. A seismographic line, earthquake country. Even the trees are seldom quiet or solemn. The only really straight line is the horizon over the ocean. . . .

I never knew that chrysanthemums can be smaller than a fingernail or larger than a pie plate, nor that there can be as many as two hundred blossoms on one single plant.

Followed two strange musicians around. They wore rather large baskets over their heads and played recorderlike instruments. They stopped at several stores which had their doors open. Both wore kimonos and one, I am certain, was a girl. "My family" said that could not be. . . . They call them Komuso, or strolling flute players. They can be pilgrims, but more often are simply beggars . . . the only ones I saw in Tokyo.

Ventured out of the house for the first time alone. The night before, my hosts—the Matsumotos—briefed me with directions and wrote down the characters (ideograms) which I would need for the train stations, etc. They worked fine. Had lunch after a long walk, in an upstairs restaurant from where I could overlook one of the busiest street crossings in Tokyo. Yes, there are certainly frightful numbers of people here.

Great surprise: there are no street names here nor numbers. You have to go up and down hills (within the city) narrow ways—everything scaled down to a smaller people, even the width of streets. Cars, furniture, washstands, etc. are more like large toys. But through it all a certain smell, difficult to define: spice, sewers, charcoal, cooking, fish, urine . . . give the whole city a certain definite odor—like Mexico City—or any other I have been in. One has to learn to overcome it, ignore it, but at times that is not possible when it wafts by powerfully.

I believe that life in the United States does not prepare one for travel outside it. Today it rained. The first Japanese rain. Queer how that changes everything. The drab narrow streets are suddenly drabber and narrower. There are compensations, however. I go to galleries and let the streets shift without me. I always have the fear of missing something.

When Tada-o came home from school he asked me in his funny, brusque way: "You came see mouse temple?" I knew he had practiced the sentence all the way home from school. We went of course. The temple was quite near our house, secluded in a fine garden which also had some sort of children's playground in it. Uniformed school children all over everything. . . . I soon saw that I was being shown around. Tada-o's friends had evidently demanded that the "gaijin" (foreigner) be shown to them. I acted as if I had not noticed.

We left our shoes in the first wooden step of the temple and went in in our bare feet. T. first had asked permission from the Shinto priest. We went around the inner room which was rather dark since there were no windows at all. Light entered by the front door. Beautiful wood, black with age, polished by a thousand hands; a strangely agreeable floor, shiny but unlacquered or painted. In fact,



there was not a single painted piece of wood that I saw in all of Japan. High columns, holding the roof, shone with a dark gloss up to the height of a stretched-out arm, but became dull and dusty-looking higher up where no hands ever touched them. There were a great number of religious implements and objects around, either gilded or lacquered in a dark red. On elaborately carved low benches were a number of wooden bells, which, T. told me, were being struck by a priest while another read sacred texts. He was quite free in handling the objects, turning pages in books and walking everywhere in the room. There was no image of a mouse to be seen anywhere and he could not explain to me which was the main sacred item. He seemed blissfully ignorant of such matters. In a separate room there was a drum made of wood and covered with parchment, yellow with age and cracked in a few places, but still vibrant with life when Tada-o tapped its face. Also the wooden bells had an astonishing resonance.

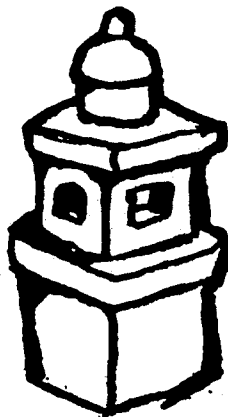
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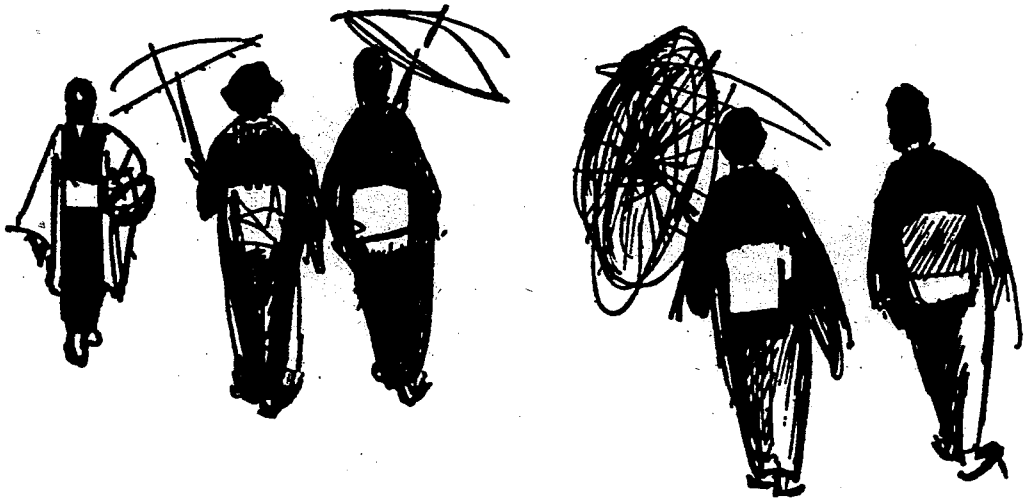
Behind the temple was a small cemetery. I heard the familiar tapping of a stonemason working on a tombstone. Found him squatting on top of the stone and working downward. Same tools I use though. We smiled at each other and I had to restrain an impulse to ask him to lend me the hammer and chisel for a moment; my hands felt the sting of being out of work.

Saw a group of pilgrim visitors at the Meiji Shrine being blessed by a young Shinto priest, who shook a sort of paper mop over their bowed heads. The paper was white and rustled as he shook the handle. The whole ceremony was short but had an aspect of sincerity.

There is a place where one washes ones hands before one enters the shrine.

Heard Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto played magnificently by someone in a beer-hall. Entered a large department store on the Ginza. It was just being drowned in an over-loudspoken recording of a tender string quartet movement, perhaps a Haydn or Mozart. Here music has to be loud to be appreciated. The Vienna Philharmonic is in town, but there are absolutely no tickets to be had.





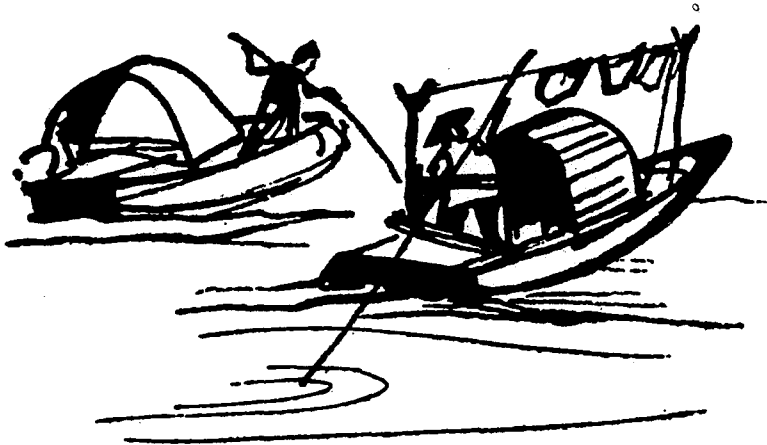
Finally I found someone who will take me to visit Kiyoshi Saito. In the spring of 1956 Saito had come to visit the University of New Mexico. He did me the honor of visiting my class in printmaking. Although there had to be an interpreter, Saito and I established instant rapport. At our leave-taking, I said that I would return his visit whenever I came to Japan.

His house and studio are difficult to find . . . at the outskirts of Tokyo. To get there you need a specialist in topography. The city has no named streets, no city guide, no book. . . . One has to find someone who was once a newspaper boy who worked himself up to milkman and finally postman. Or one has to find the district rice-bureau. They have a list of all the inhabitants of their districts. There you will find some person who thinks he speaks English and will translate for you. . . .

Finally we rang the doorbell of Saito's neat house. His wife came to open the door, looked at me and went to get her husband. Saito acted as though he had expected me. I could not believe that he would remember me at all. But he insisted that he did.

His studio is very small. I was humbled to see how little room this great artist needed in which to do his work. The floor is his work table. It was also our tea table. We had tea and it started to rain. The sliding screens of the room were closed. The air was chilly and damp. Saito listened to the rain and we all said nothing. His woodcuts were lying about on the floor.

After a while Saito got up and opened the sliding screen doors to reveal his garden. Through the slanting rain I saw dwarfed trees, wet rocks, foliage—the subjects of his work. While I contemplated this, he left the room and returned with a piece of paper that he held close to him. As he seated himself he handed it to me. It was a print I had made and given to him in New Mexico.



HONG KONG. Our ship, a freighter, is surrounded by forty or fifty wooden boats, barges, Chinese junks, which take our cargo and bring new things to load into our hold. The winches go the whole night, as we all rise and fall with the swell of the sea. Men and children work in shifts and I go about on deck and look over the sides into these junks where the laborers live with their families. The junks are beautifully built, golden wood, varnished, but the natural color of the wood gives them an elegant appearance. On the high afterdeck they have a small stove rigged where the oldest woman cooks for the whole family on the tiniest fire. Twigs and a bit of straw are being fed into the flame piece by piece. There is a lot of smoke, and an astonishing number of boxes and containers have to be opened to add to the preparation of the meal. A pot of rice is cooling. A small frying pan holds perhaps fish and vegetables, an agreeable odor comes up to my deck and as I watch, the hatch opens, the first sleepy, hungry man arrives and sits down on a packing crate and waits for his bowl. When he has finished he joins the others loading cargo—then the hatch opens and another tousled head appears . . . this went on nearly all night . . . the woman kept on cooking for the men. Children would help or make-believe and suddenly be felled by sleep and sprawl where they stood a second before. Sleep for a while and up again as good as new.

Tailors came aboard to measure customers for suits, finished within twenty-four hours; vendors, tradesmen of all sorts, money-changers looking for American dollars for the Black Market. On the decks below, the mah-jong tables rattle as the crews wait their turn of the watch.





SINGAPORE. Shop window at Christmas time. Artificial snow swirls about inside, where a landscape with castle and river had been constructed. Outside in the tropical sunheat a thick crowd of Malay coolies, Javanese, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese stand transfixed by this wonder. There is no suggestion of anything Christian, and yet somehow I, too, was touched. . . .

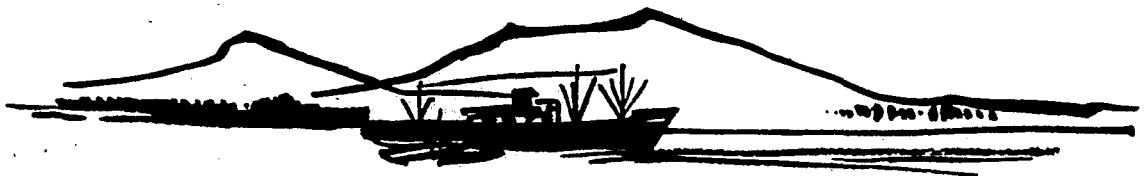
The shabbiness of the city is quite remarkable. There are beaten-up oil drums, once painted white, standing in the streets as traffic regulators. Bedsteads are parked during the day like bicycles along buildings, during the night they are placed on the sidewalks and people who have nowhere else to go, sleep there. Open sewers run past every store and every eating place. The odors of Singapore are rather overwhelming.

Before sailing time there are hundreds of people on the pier. Indians in turbans, in beards, in saris, some rather beautiful color schemes. Shinto priests in saffron garb with drums that looked like tennis rackets, but covered with skin rather than gut. They drummed goodbye to one of them who was already aboard. Amongst them was the prettiest Shinto nun. Too bad she had her hair shaved off. . . . The pier was covered with all sorts of sacks, bags, elaborately decorated footlockers made of metal, locked with medieval-looking locks made of brass. Things, belongings rolled into rugs, tied with the flimsiest strings that kept breaking, spilled pans, clothes, fruits, etc. Bamboo mats, newspapers, rags, pots and pans, coffee cans—everything is carried aboard either by the coolies, who have to do much shouting, or their clients. They all go to the decks below. These quarters are stunning. All the various castes have their own kitchens, prepare their own food according to certain rules, the refuse of peelings, vegetable rinds, onion skins, banana peels, rotten tomatoes, everything combines to give the deck a remarkably slick and dangerous cover. Yet children race about, in and out between the legs of the sweating coolies, screeching mamas and crew.



An old man takes his leave from son and daughter-in-law. The old patriarch, full of dignity, seemingly ignores the solicitations of his son and puts a folded piece of paper money into his son's pocket. The young man protests violently, the daughter looks away, the papa insists, and finally the son pockets the present in an inside pocket of his jacket.

Many younger people kiss the seam of the clothes of their elders. There is not much embracing done and certainly no kissing at all, except for a complicated hand-kissing. Several Hindus make and hold certain hand positions, some over their heads; a handsome young Hindu girl, a child in her arms, stands a bit behind them all. She wears a beautiful pink sari with a light-blue veil over it. As she stands there in the background I notice that the tears are streaming down her face. She makes no effort to wipe them off, and she and the child are facing the ship without the slightest movement.



PENANG. Sunday, and the town was pleasantly quiet. Neat, like some little Mexican port on the Pacific coast. The arcades along the streets looked cool and clean in the morning sun, but you could see that this would not last for long and that the heat would be upon us again.

Everybody walks in the same kind of sandals I wear, the Japanese rubber variety, or goes barefooted. The bicycles, too, make no noise. After noisy Singapore, this is a pleasant surprise.

I shall never forget that old woman of Singapore, she haunts me still. The story goes that her young son fell to his death from the scaffold of a high building which was under construction some thirty years ago or more. Ever since that fateful day she has stood in the middle of that busy street and cursed that building and everything about it.

She still stands there. Old and bent, her voice gone except for a low rattling bark, there are no more tears, but you can see where they eroded her cheeks and where hate has fixed a sneer and bared her few

teeth so that she resembles a living gargoyle. Traffic churns about her and you cannot hear her strange bark. Only as I went up to her, to look into that face, did I hear that sound. I can still hear it.

Penang is a charming island, the town is small, exotic, no motor cars. Taxis are tricycles with the sweating driver before you. There are more advanced lands where the driver pedals behind the customer which in the tropics is the height of consideration.

One can never know what there will be to see and to wonder about. For instance today I wound up in a Chinese temple. I had never been in one. I always am afraid to intrude on other people's gods, but an old man sitting on the temple steps answered my questioning look with an inviting motion of his arm.

The building was rather large and round; a dome-like roof had a hole in it which was the only source of light. A good deal of blue smoke filled the room. The worshipers—all of them Chinese—were all about, some starting incense to burn at a large brass charcoal burner which stood right under the hole in the roof. Incense of all types was being used. The long green taped sticks were used en masse. Great bundles of them were being set to burn at one time. It was a pleasant perfume that filled the air. Some young girls walked around the temple room swinging such bundles of incense about them in a most vigorous way so that they appeared within a real cloud of blue haze. Very attractive.

There was the atmosphere of some native restaurant about this room, which came perhaps from the counters standing about with "clerks" behind who offered food for sale—however it was food for the gods. You could buy an offering here and lay it at the feet of the many images standing along the circular wall. Some were well-carved and many of them were gilded over a red gesso ground. Some images must have been very precious since they were under glass in something resembling a very ornate shadowbox. I bought a small orange to lay at the feet of a beautiful female image who smiled from behind her glass. The girls came once more swinging past. I could see them in the reflection of the glass superimposed over the goddess. Somehow in the haze, that golden image, the swinging arms, the smoke and the noise about, seemed to fuse into a beautiful whole. There was no hush, no piety. Laughs, giggling girls, shouts. In front of another carved god stood a small man who held two painted, kidney-shaped pieces of wood up as if to draw the attention of the god to himself. He clapped them together and made motions with his arms. He waved and suddenly threw the pieces to the floor. He watched and studied their position. He

walked around them, he bent over them, he rubbed his thin knuckles as if he were expecting some favorable answer . . . murmuring reverently all the while. After some time he would pick the pieces up again and proceed from the beginning, clapping them together, motioning his arms to get attention and scrutinizing their fall. . . . No satisfactory answer seemed to be in store for him on that day. In some sooty corner of the room men were washing utensils—bowls that must have held rice for the gods. A naked man, bending over a basin of copper, was washing his brown body with a large sponge. In a small yard outside stood an incinerator that had the most remarkable flue in the shape of a windbag. It was made of baked clay. Its shape was conceived by a master. Hot air seemed to be filling that shape. It was a humorous, true shape such as one sees only rarely. In another corner of the yard stood a stick on which someone had fastened a very large hand of the Buddha. It was made of bronze and had belonged once to a monumental statue. Perhaps it served now to be carried in processions. The uplifted index finger was the size of my lower arm and was eloquently warning, or teaching or emphasising some point.

On the outside, the temple looked not much different from other Oriental Buddhist shrines: A tangle of roofs. A congregation of gods all in bright pink, some with long mustaches, black, pointing Wilhelm-like to the heavens above. Temple dogs guarding at the doors, finely carved of stone in distant days of the past. They had a fresh coat of enamel paint in stripes. Red, green and white.





INDIA. Bhuvaneshvar, Majarani Temple. So far this is the most wonderful thing I have seen in all India. Such carvings. To my great surprise the stone is red, really red, like a baked brick fresh from the kiln. But harder than our sandstone by far. The temple tower is full of other colors, gray amber tones, and greens from lichens that cover the weather side. How this enhances the design is beyond expectation. There is a richness and beauty in the carving that covers nearly every square foot of the temple, nowhere a shoddy, casual carving. Every bit of the surface is alive and attractive. The designs are repetitive, but subordinated to one all-over plan. What surprised me was to find tiny blossoms pressed into the carved filigree here and there. Obviously put there by believers, since most of the temples of Bhuvaneshvar are still in use—since the thirteenth century.

Bhuvaneshvar, Lingaraja Temple. I have already developed a preference for this temple. Perhaps because the residing holy man is disagreeable—like most Indian holy men. . . . Met five children on the road to the temple which is close to a river bank. They were going swimming as I came up to them. What luck: they all spoke English. There was absolutely no shyness there. The oldest girl, perhaps nine, offered to pacify the holy man, while I took some photographs of the sculptures.

The smallest carved figure was just about as long as my index finger—the tallest, close to four feet. . . . The children all prayed before several of the side temples. They simply bent forward and started a rapid litany that lasted about one minute and ended in a peal of laughter—especially when they discovered that one of these side temples was unoccupied by the god. . . . Afterwards we all went to the river and I gave my first Indian swimming lesson.

I am happy with my driver. He also likes art and during these few days we have become acquainted and quite friendly. He earns fifteen dollars per month as a government driver attached to the Government Rest House. He is married to a girl his parents picked out for him. She is illiterate and since he can read a bit as well as write, he is bored with her. Also she has heavy gold ornaments in her nose and he scorns this as primitive. When I left, he said not to give him money as a gift,



but to send him a dictionary of the English language and some text so he could learn English. He had never been to any city, such as Calcutta, had never been to a movie, had heard that there was such a thing as television and wanted to have an explanation of how it works. Although he saw many cameras swinging from the necks of many tourists, none had ever let him look through a viewfinder. In return for the pleasure of taking his first shots he volunteered to break himself of the habit of chewing betel nuts which made the inside of his mouth red as if he were bleeding. Although he never smiled, even when we were both happy about something, I sensed that he was as glad as I to have made a friend.

Puri. On the road we met a group of men who carried a rather large coffin-like box suspended from a pole. There were three men in front and three in back. They were chanting as they trotted along at a good pace. They were carrying a bride to her bridegroom. A sliding door was slightly ajar and I think I saw a sliver of a dark face.

Konorak. We were up early. The sun was just rising, a big red disk in a mist. The last mud village with its great number of sacred cows barring the way. There was the silliest little sign painted on a board saying "Konorak." Even this magic word had to be misspelled!

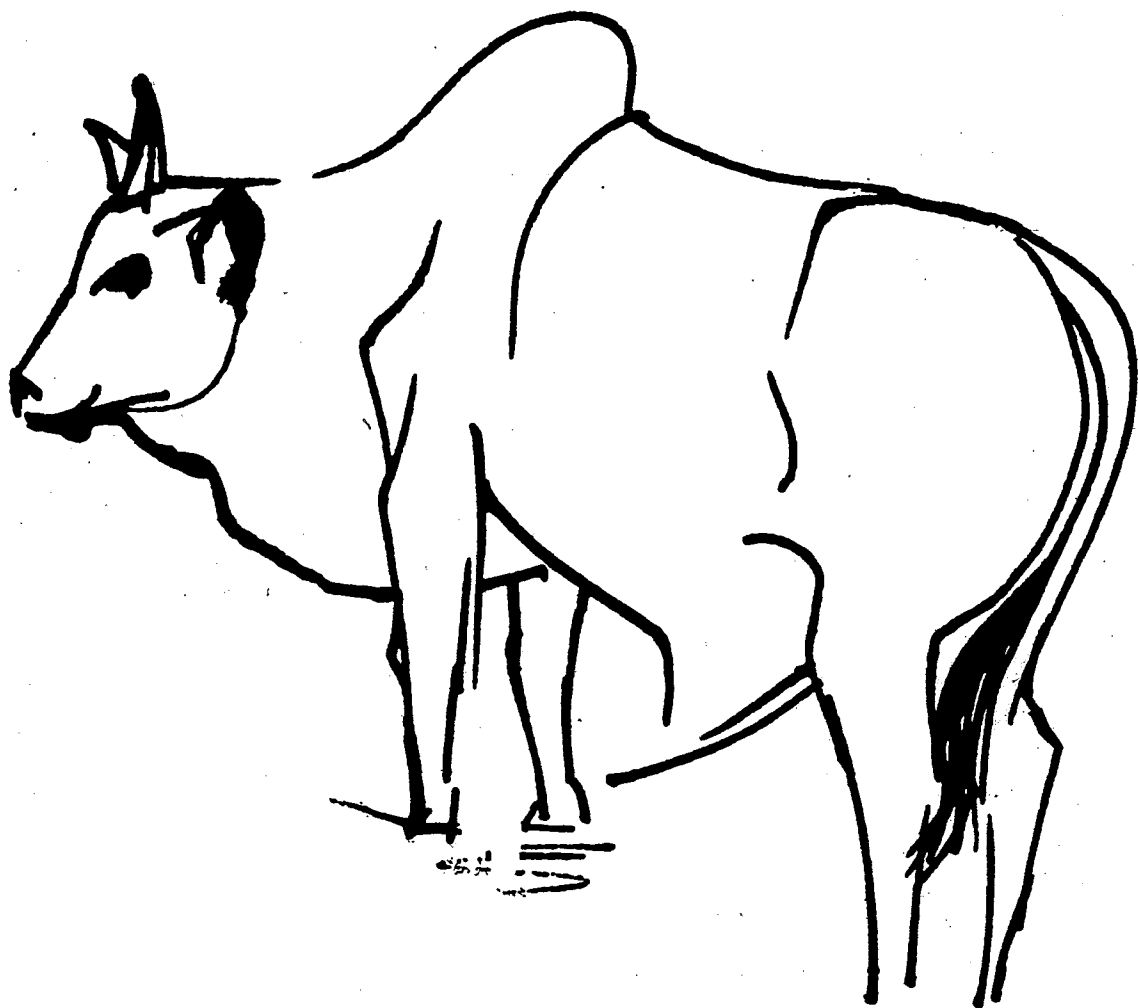
After so many years of hoping to get here—I was exhausted from the suspense. Few things are as marvelous in reality as they have become over a long period in our imagination. The Black Pagoda that I had come to see is rather more spectacular than my fantasy had led me to expect. These were some of the hours where I was really glad to be a sculptor. This made up for all the agonies suffered in front of bronze kings, in parks, near railway stations, or somewhere they should never be but always are. . . .

The whole temple compound at Konorak is remarkably clean and free from the usual huts and shacks and people and beggars, although these were there, too, but not as numerous as in other places.

The color is gray, and it is the same limestone gray to be seen at

Chartres—incidentally, this, too, was created at that same time. What intrigues me so is that here and there I can discover an unfinished piece of carving. Sometimes only an outline is carved and a few points are fixed—and somehow the hand that started this never came back to finish. . . . An then, of course, there are places where a head is broken off or a hand missing.

Little children about, in the arms of their mothers, made-up, eyes painted and outlined in an almost Egyptian fashion, elongated eyelids with mascara or black paint. Many have infected eyes that fester and run yellow ooze. Some skins are bluish black. Again I am an oddity with my yellow hair, and people follow me around everywhere I go.



CAIRO. Museum. It seems I walk about ten miles per day in this museum. After the first week I have become accustomed to the bending, the stretching for a better look, the crouching, the leaning over the edges of sarcophagi, the walking backwards, and banging my head into some Pharaoh who stares straight ahead, unseeing.

A guard, standing on a small wooden platform which keeps his feet from freezing amongst these cold ancient stones. He sings quietly to himself. Sounds like a litany. Could he be praying? I have been told that the guards are not insensitive to the spiritual aspects of the things they guard here. But nothing can match their disdain for the tourists. I wish there were a way to capture those expressions.

What one can overhear when a troupe of group-travelers is herded past a famous work of art is sometimes hilarious, sometimes shattering. One ought to have a tape recorder; there is some sort of oracle here.

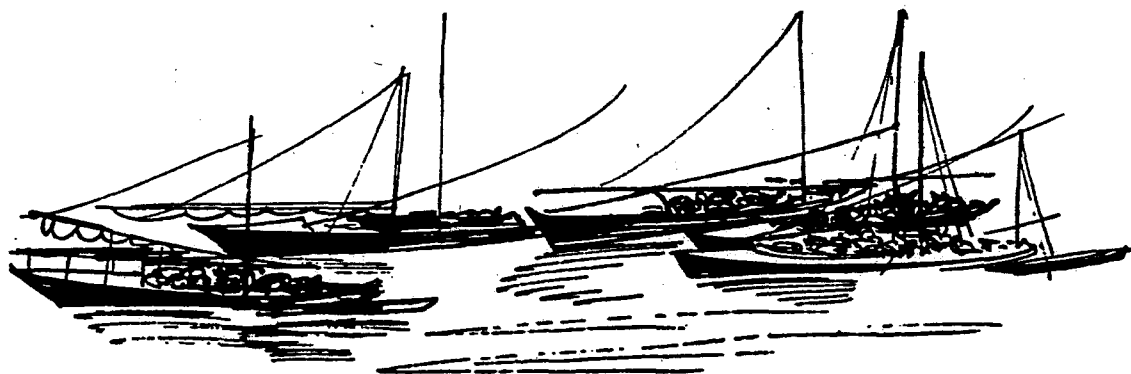
I went to see the Pyramids. Took a city bus from the Place de la Republique and for ten cents was brought to Gizeh, where I walked into a swarm of guides (dragomans). With camels, on donkeys, on foot, with their walking sticks waving, they jostled one another, pushing and yelling to be hired for the excursion. I simply stuck an index finger into one ear and flapped my lips together without making a sound—which means a deaf-mute the world over. What can a dragoman do with that? At any rate it worked fine and they let me pass through a narrow corridor they had formed. I had to hurry since I was dangerously shaking with inner laughter. I do not know whether anybody else ever greeted the Sphinx with silent guffaws. . . . She smiled a battered smile as we faced each other—alone.

Today several rooms in the museum were nearly impassable for all the cables, wires, electric paraphernalia, lights, reflectors, and what not. A photographer, with goatee and in corduroy, stalked importantly amongst all this stuff, directing lights to play on Ramses. A large plate camera stood before the Pharaoh, a black cloth hung over the plate holder and was lifted as the maestro ducked under every now and then. The shifting lights gave for short moments an uncanny lifelike mobility to that silent, stony gravity of Ramses. I enjoyed this unexpected play of make-believe life, and when the effect was particularly splendid I blurted out "Oh, hold it!" which popped the head out from under the black cloth and earned me a stare that nearly matched the Pharaoh's.

There are one hundred thousand items in the Cairo Museum. After two weeks of wandering amongst them I have gained a small general

impression of the incredible wealth that has been brought under this roof. The building looks more like a railway station built in the Gay Nineties. It is so utterly unsuitable that a flashlight (forbidden) is needed, or at least a mirror to reflect light into the darkest recesses where at times the finest works are hidden away, after they have been unearthed and put on "exhibit." I am seriously thinking of buying a flashlight and hope to get permission to use it.

After such a visit I always walk towards the Nile. The same boats are there still that are to be seen on the stone reliefs, the same air, the same sky. . . . A large fawn-colored herd of young camels is being driven across a bridge. All traffic stops until they pass. Camel drivers in dark dirty burnouses, wielding long staffs, urge the animals on with pokes and with hoarse, ugly sounds. As they pass with their soft-whispering shuffle, one feels a sense of the past.





ATHENS. A nice morning from the hotel window—right opposite the Acropolis—must wash the window to see better. This air age has its points. But the illiterate travel best, I am sure. I have to wait for my mind to catch up with my body. Only yesterday, at this hour, I could look at the Pyramids. . . . Spilled my coffee over Crete and the Minotaur's Labyrinth. Amazing how accurately the island matches its picture on the map, I had in my lap.

The sun is coming up and kisses the Parthenon first; there is that rosy shine again on the cornices and the columns. What a lucky accident to have a bit of iron oxide in the marble when you build a temple of such magnificence. Rose-colored marble blushing in the morning—underneath, green little flatnesses from where the rocks rise almost vertically to merge with the ancient walls, up to the parapet, and the rock platform on which all temples stand—walls that Pericles already venerated as ancient. Like a fortress is this temple-mountain, and yet one senses the light, the familiar, the personal, the Western countenance. The heavy Egyptian ponderousness is past now and we are getting closer to home . . . home! There is grace and spirit, there is the touchable evidence of elegant minds, and it is that elegance my mind is in awe of, not so much just the stones and the proportions and the entasis. But the minds who dreamed all this into place. . . .

I am having my breakfast on this windowsill, looking at the Acropolis, thinking this was the place where the Western human spirit made its most decisive first point and that nobody was ever again happy unless this spirit was in power. . . . Who else is as rich and as happy as I am now?

A cautious cat investigates around a chimney below my window; an early milkman tosses large noisy cans about on the cobblestones down

below in the still, dark, old street that winds itself up toward the mountain and the wall.

There are few streets in Athens from which one cannot see at least a gable or a pediment of the Parthenon. And once again in a little square, an outdoor cafe, an old Byzantine churchling right at my elbow, people walking in and out of its candlelit portal. A flower shop overflows onto its apsis and the fragrance of the many blossoms mixes happily with the mocha in the tiny cup before me. There is a bird cage hanging over a shop in this small square opposite the cafe house. The bird sings and somehow fills the square with its song. I notice that nearly all conversation has stopped.

In front of the National Museum in Athens there is a big fat man who sells sponges from the Aegean Sea. He has an old fish-net over his coat to which he has fastened a hundred sponges. A spring shower . . . like everywhere else, short in duration but rich in water. To keep his sponges dry, he sprints for cover, looking every bit like some sea monster.

There must be people traveling today who have every stop pre-arranged, predetermined, and the spots reserved. Do they flip rooms in a museum, like they flip pages in a book? It takes time, time, and lots of time to see anything at all. There is Agamemnon's mask in gold and a horde passes by as if it were a piece of gilded cardboard. I feel like apologizing to Agamemnon. The fabulous collection of ceramics on the second floor has hardly any visitors. Not sensational enough—those old pots. What an imagination the Greeks used to have, seven or six centuries before Christ! They never seemed to have been "reasonable" about anything. What tremendous sex force they must have had . . . and it seems reasonable to imagine that they tried, at least in fantasy, to mate with every living creature. There are birds, that have a man's head, lions with women's breasts, chimeras, and centaurs. In all this I seem to see a real urge to "create" a fabulous "creature." Being unsuccessful biologically, the ancient Greek was thrown back on his imagination and opened another world, the first dadaistic world. And in this world the artist has made Man smile at himself—perhaps for the first time in all the ages that have gone before. Often this is done with a dog chasing a rabbit, or a nymph being chased by a satyr. The nymph nearly always looks back as if to judge her speed—not too fast. Or so it seems to me. . . . Much nameless competence has made so many beautiful things. Uniquely beautiful, too. There is never even a scratch of identification mark upon a work of art from that time.

ROME. A blustery early spring day. On the Via Veneto are primulas in nice big flowerbeds under leafbarren platanums—fine, green hairs of grass up from seed, and red dark tulips around the base of a dreadful, huge monument. Surprised me, after Athens, where nothing like this could be seen. In Rome there is always this present that we (the non-Latins) think is bombastic and false and loud. But “this” was also in Michelangelo, in Leonardo, and came out as Art and is found to be genuine enough to have lasted us (the non-Latins) for several hundred years, and without which our, the non-Latin world, would be a naked and dreary place, I fear.

Only a liar or a fool would ever say that he knows Rome. I have never seen a street or a house or a portal that has no story.

There are so many young friars in this city. To cut a tonsure, I suddenly realize, is a simple way to prevent a quick change of mind. In other words, a certain haircut can, under circumstances, be enough to keep the weak on the narrow path. . . .

A clear-voiced young woman, obviously a Roman, asked me today where a certain street was. I felt ridiculously flattered, that I knew and she had asked me—an obvious non-Roman.

Galeria Barberini. To look only at what hangs on the walls is not enough here. The whole setting, these ancient rooms, the parquet, the ceilings with their stucco décor, the doors, everything is contributing to one’s elation. There are so many paintings where another strip of canvas had to be sewed on. The artist “ran over,” like leavened dough over a bowl. One can often notice that the smaller the idea was, the bigger was the square-footage of some Renaissance paintings.

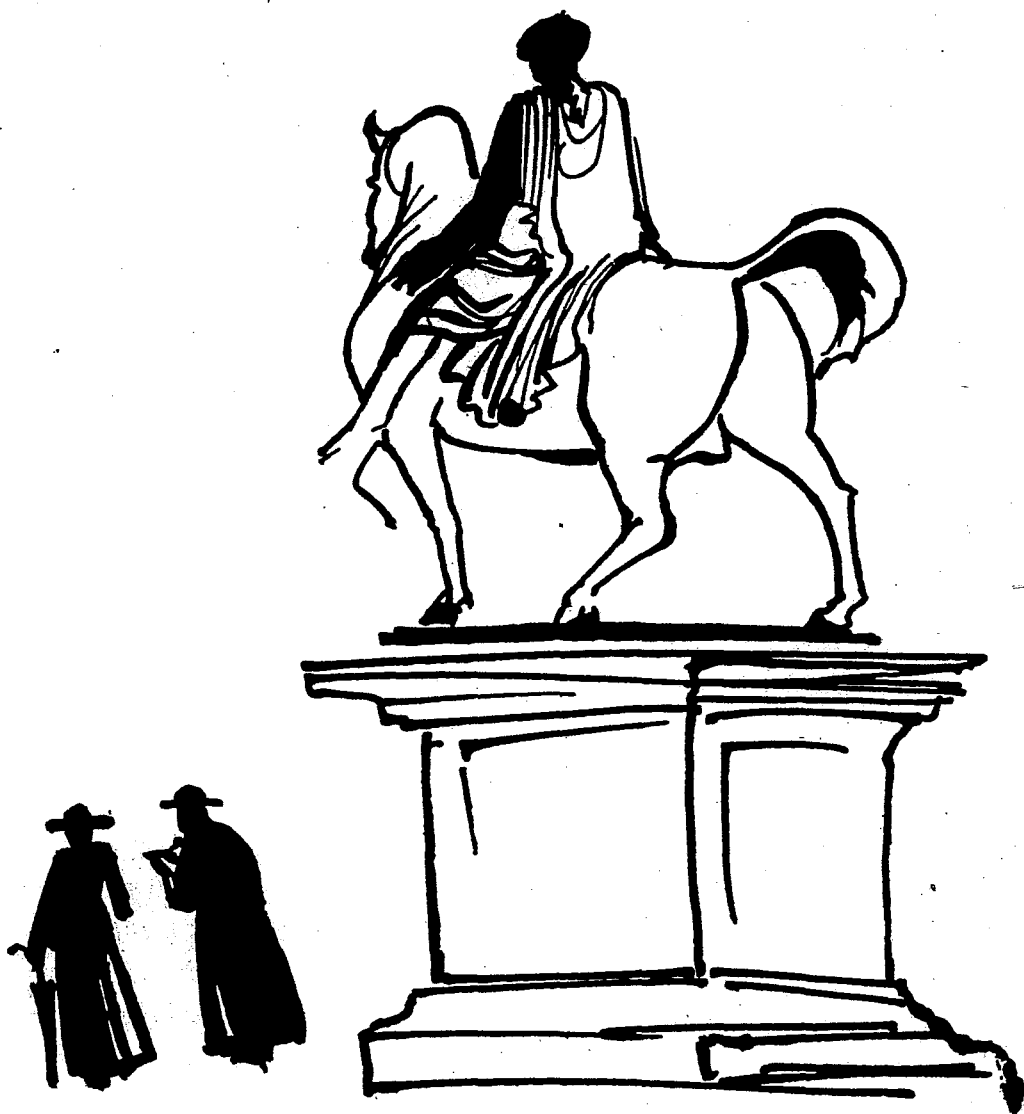
One is racially handicapped, after all. Next to the masses of Italian Masters hangs a Holbein, a Masys. . . . It is a bit like walking into a quiet woods near a carnival. Riotous pandemonium out there and here this quiet melody. And sometime there is a face in one of these paintings that reminds one of a relative.

After so many years in the desert, water even has an element of surprise for me. Fountains splash all day and night, every day and every night. One remembers water bills before one sees beauty.

Looking down on the Piazza Popolo. Evening hour and the Romans love to look at their city. Young people in belted raincoats, sipping from tiny cups with no interruption to their chatter, staccato repartee.

A silky leg drawn into a car slowly before the door slams shut. My inadvertant scrutiny, appraisal and approval—and its acceptance—all in a split second, before the car is off.

Those wonderful delicatessen stores. Even the eggs have little blue stamps on them saying *Frescissimo*. . . . There is a huge red heart for sale: 18 lire—15 cents. Perhaps a people shows its own face in its shop windows. I will never forget the row of dusty coke bottles in a shop window in a little town in Arizona, standing on faded, once-red crepe paper, they emphasized the lonely, forlorn town. . . . Looked through a huge record shop to refresh my hunger and my longing for some good music.



Everybody is there on the shelves, peacefully competing for my attention—which they have. . . . Not one record did I see in all of India. Few in Cairo, Athens, but here one feels at home again.

Listened to a street cleaner early this morning as he swung his broom down the gutter. Whistling. Beautifully in tune he was with a Puccini aria. I waited to see whether he would allow for a rubato at the end—he did.

Went for the first time in my life into the Galeria Barbarini. There is a Titian, "Venere e Adoni." Wonder if Shakespeare could have known of the painting. His poem, "Venus and Adonis," is a perfect match for it. A rather middle-aged Venus tries to hang on to a young Adonis who wants out, away. His dogs are pulling and he has the most disdainful expression on his handsome face. Titian saved us the agony of seeing hers. Her face is turned away from us, we see only her impressive much-fingered back.

Remarkable how many miles one can walk per day and still walk the next day and the one after that. During the last eight or nine months I have walked more than during the last eight or nine years in the States.

At my pension they still have the light source smack in the center of the ten-foot-high ceiling. You write on a drawer bottom from your desk, while sitting in bed. But in spite of some discomforts of a minor nature, I have been most happy in Rome. Were I not a Viennese, I would be just as happy to be a Roman. The city has washed its face and looks fine now. The shop windows tell a different tale from the newspapers. There are goods in them, fashions, that make me feel like some clodhopper from the hinterlands. Have already fallen in love twice—with a woolen shawl, dark red with little green squares, and with a suede chamois jacket with a knitted collar.

Went to the Villa Umberto to see a horse show and a jumping contest. I needed some relief from the galleries and all that art. Again was impressed with the way Romans dress. Some rode well, nearly always the ones with the lesser clothes. But there is nothing to compare with that setting. A huge field of turf ringed-in by the most wonderful trees, bushes in bloom, a few kites in the blue sky, the bleachers full of young people who cheer when their friends have ridden well or ooh when they fall. There are monocled men with grey hair around their ears and fine-looking women in furs and riding boots, but you can tell they never rode. Just for show. . . .

Also went to a bird shop in the inner city. A thousand different song birds all in different cages, singing like mad. The shop was run by several

young women who saw at once that I was a tourist and was not going to buy birds. I told them that I just wanted to hear them sing if that was all right. It was.

I know of no other city where it is more intriguing to walk in the streets with no purpose. People, cars, Lambrettas, Vespas, girls, women, boys all splashing around one—and those musical snatches of their language. Again it is good that one does not understand everything—just enough to get the flavor.

Here and there an arresting setting. A quiet square. Dark sky and a full moon so unexpected in that narrow slit between two houses that stand so closely that their eaves seem to touch. Opposite a church, Baroque, people walking in and out of it. A little further on a brightly-lit flower shop. Marvelous colors in all that dark gray night color, of street and houses. Next door a Brazilian coffee shop, where sacks of roasted coffee beans stand around on the floor. The aroma comes wafting right across the square to lure me.

Rainy morning. This is the day I was reserving for the Sistine. Someone, I have forgotten who, told me many years ago, to wait for such a gray day to see the paintings. One has to be there as soon as it opens, around nine o'clock in the morning. In those days I never could ignore everything else in the Vatican Gallery and keep my date with Michelangelo. I was nearly always held by someone else on the way. This time I was firm. I also wanted to avoid the tourists. Masses of them abound in every corner of Rome—even in springtime.

I nearly ran through the corridors, the library, the vestibules to get to the chapel in time. There was only the guard. An old man with a shawl around his neck, overcoat hands in pockets, pacing up and down the length of the chapel, never lifting his eye to the walls or the ceiling.

There are no words for what there is to see or to feel. But that short hour, before the first guided tour arrives, is always filled with awe and love and pride. Pride that I too belong to the human race, that I too can feel and be transported by works of art.

Afterwards I would stop by in the library. Middle age has given me the courage to take a magnifying glass along. Many illuminations are so tiny that one cannot say one saw them—without a glass. The lovely texture parchment has when it is a thousand years old. There was also a letter by Michelangelo. I could read these words “Qui me negligeme perd. . . .”