

THE ART RENASCENCE IN VIRGINIA

Evidence that another of the so-called "frills" is really fundamental in the cultural development of a proud state like Virginia.

BEFORE I enter into the résumé of the activities of the state in the past decade, I think it best to familiarize you with the art activities of the early colony of Virginia. I am going to read from an article by Miss Adele Clark on the State as an Art Collector.

"The state is not often thought of in the light of an art collector; yet, Virginia since its earliest days as a state has acquired works of art. Indeed, one of the first acts of the General Assembly after the ratification of the constitution of the United States was to order the erection of a statue of President Washington, to be placed in the State Capitol. This was in line with policies of colonial days, the House of Burgesses of Virginia having acquired the statue of Lord Botetourt that now stands on the campus of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. Shortly after the act authorizing the erection of the statue of Washington, and the awarding of the commission for the statue to the French sculptor, Houdon, another act was passed that a bust of LaFayette be placed in the Capitol of Virginia, and the same artist was commissioned to make this bust. Interesting evidence, this, not only of the warm feeling and close connection that existed between France and the United States at that time, but of the modern, almost radical, attitude toward art on the part of Virginians of that day. For tradition has it that Canova, the Italian classicist of that period, entered into a contest for the commission to make the statue, and the committee the Virginia Assembly appointed to

carry out the details of the plan debated for some time over the comparative merits of the two sculptors, and the two schools they represented. Houdon, the realist, insisted on portraying Washington as he lived and moved and dressed in those days; while Canova, true to his classic theories, would represent him translated as it were into the timeless classic era, robed in a Roman toga. In the world of art, Houdon's theories then were considered as radical as are Epstein's today. Realism triumphed in Virginia, and the superb statue—one of the great works of art in the world today—is the goodly heritage of Virginians.

"No biography of Washington can give the realization of personality, the interpretation of character, powerful, assured, serene, and dignified, that the genius of Houdon has caught. Here in truth is the leader of a new order, confident of his own mission and of the significance of his political philosophy. Canova was commissioned to make a bust of John Marshall, which occupies a niche in the rotunda of the Capitol near the bust of LaFayette. The treatment is classical and in the Roman style. These contrasting examples preserve for Virginia the scope of eighteenth century sculpture."

From that period up to the past four years in which Governor Pollard as the first executive to realize that art is an enhancement to the state as a whole, began his scheme of combining the spirit of yesterday with the practical needs of today, little in the way of art activity can be recorded. One of the first activities of the Governor was the restoration of the Old House of Delegates and the rehangng and displaying of the portraits that are now in the State Capitol. He has been extremely successful in interesting civic-minded Virginians in making contributions of sculptural busts to the state. And as a result of his efforts, the rotunda of the Capitol contains over a half dozen busts of Virginia-born Presidents by prominent American sculptors.

Excerpts from an address before the meeting of the Art Section of the State Teachers Conference, at the Richmond Academy of Arts, Friday, December 1, 1933.

When Judge John Barton Payne offered \$100,000 to the state for an Art Museum with the provision that the state give a like sum to the erection of the first unit, the state being unable to contribute this like sum at the present time, Governor Pollard personally raised the necessary amount to assure Virginia her Art Museum.

Many art organizations throughout the state are doing a splendid work in their own communities, and it is due to the work of these groups, composed in most cases of a membership consisting largely of artists, that the art renaissance in Virginia is a vital factor in the cultural life of the state. It is due to such groups as the Norfolk Art Corner, the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, the Lynchburg Art Club, and the Danville Art Club, the Art departments of the women's clubs and the schools and colleges that Virginia is keenly aware of this fact. . . . The University of Virginia, Extension Division, has been co-operating with the American Federation of Arts in conducting an experiment in rural communities of the state which has been judged by the officials of these institutions as being highly successful.

A few months will see the completion of the new Art Museum at the University of Virginia, a definite step toward the further development of the Fine Art curricula in institutions of higher learning. . . . A very gratifying response was accorded the proposal concerning a state art federation which was made at the Conference at the Academy of Arts on November 18.

The real success of the art renaissance in Virginia is dependent upon the work of the group assembled here today and other art teachers in the state. The teaching of the fine arts and their appreciation has only found its way into the elementary schools throughout the nation during the past quarter century. It has only been during the last decade that notable changes have been effected in the curricula of a number of the

colleges. The progressive educator is keenly aware that the teaching of the fine arts should be a part of his program. The arousing of interest rather than mental discipline of the student in his work, will, I believe, be accepted as one of the soundest theories of the educator. In the study of the arts the teacher has every opportunity to apply these principles. While the other courses in the schools and colleges are extremely important, American educators must learn that the teaching of the arts and their appreciation is a major part of their work in the preparation of the student for his or her life work.

It is not the purpose of your group to develop artists, but I do believe with the alliance of the future younger generation you can accomplish a great work and do much in establishing standards of good taste. There is no reason to burden our children with an inherited environment of mediocrity and insignificance. Every child within the limit of his own capabilities can acquire a discriminating taste and appreciation of the arts. Only in this way will America become an art loving nation. As William Morris said: "Art will be the part of our daily lives and the daily life of every man."

The movement is here. It is up to the teachers to see that it flourishes. The facts are a challenge. They should be encouraged by the situation and should rise to great heights. . . . You, the teachers of our future, hold the key to the success of the movement. It is through the child that the adult will and can be educated. Whereas the adult can patronize and assist financially, it remains to the future generation to carry out the scheme. The teachers must provide for the child a constructive program of art education and appreciation. Make this possible, then the museums, the galleries, and all that will enrich the lives of your citizenship will be assured.

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