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Herbert J. Seligmann, "A Woman in Flower"

Herbert J. Seligmann

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A Woman in Flower

Let us concede that what Georgia O'Keeffe commits to canvas is not "painting". Suppose it is called woman in flower. Or let us say she has found new terms for the bright edge of pain, the suffusing mystery of sensation stated in visual terms, the experiences of mortal flesh that range the depths of spiritual exaltation. People have words for many things, love, death, ecstasy, agony. At the height or depth of experience these and all words seem inadequate. For some of these heights of intense being Georgia O'Keeffe has found new realization incapable of translation into words as music is untranslatable. As it is not the ear alone which listens, so it is not the eye alone which sees. That was demonstrated at the 1925 Exhibition of Seven Americans in the Equivalents by which name Alfred Stieglitz denoted the spiritual dramas he unfolded through his photographic vision of cloud shapes, tree tops... He made clear with a new clarity that the symbols employed in the arts, if they convey anything at all, communicate the profoundest and most exquisite intensities of which highly gifted, sensitive men and women are capable. In this sense O'Keeffe paintings too are Equivalents - Equivalents for experience such as few women in the world have dared and none found means of stating. That is why, no doubt, women in multitudes and men too have been moved in their central being by these statements, finding liberation in the clear perception and exposure of what had been dimly or turbidly apprehended. The intense innocence and incandescent purity of these utterances, made possible and real by immaculate craftsmanship, have found response in truly religious people.

Herbert J. Seligmann

1 January 1933