

EXHIBITION OF MODERN
PAINTINGS BY ALBERT
BLOCH OF MUNICH. THE
ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO.
JULY, 1915.

Catalogue
of an
Exhibition of Modern Paintings
by
Albert Bloch of Munich

The Art Institute of Chicago
July and August, 1915

MANY of the paintings have been exhibited in various cities on the Continent, notably in the Autumn Salon, Berlin, 1913, and in a special exhibition given Bloch in Berlin the same year.

Prices of paintings which are for sale may be obtained of Guard, or at desk in corridor, or at desk on first floor at the main entrance.



Portrait of F. F. L. BIRRELL.

ALBERT BLOCH is an American, about thirty, who has lived in Munich six years for two good reasons: it is a cheap place to live, and it is a good place to work. It has that indefinable incentive, called atmosphere, created by five thousand students and artists arguing, disputing, theorizing, exhibiting, as only a big colony of students and artists can, in a place so given over to art that arguments and theories command attention and are taken seriously. That is what is meant by the "art atmosphere" of certain European cities. American cities are so busy with other problems that they will not "stop, look, and listen" when the artist tries to make himself heard.

Speaking of Bloch's personality William Marion Reedy, editor of "The Mirror," said:

"He is a man of much force, which you might almost call stubbornness, and nobody can tell him anything, but I happen to know that he is willing to endure privations and obloquy for the idea that possesses him, and so he has my unlimited respect."

Bloch is one of a small group called the Blue Knights, headed by the Russian Kandinsky, whose work is the last word in abstract painting and whose profound, almost mystical, theories are eloquently set forth in his writings.

These men must not be confounded with the Munich Secessionists, who created their sensation years ago and are now quite academic. The fundamental aim of the Blue Knights as a group is liberty of the individual to express himself in his own way, unhampered by juries, or other official or artificial restrictions. No two of the group paint at all alike; it would be hard to say that one is influenced by another. It would be difficult to conceive pictures more unlike than Bloch's and Kandinsky's, while those of Franz Marc, a brilliant member of the group, are still different. But all are alike in this one fundamental quality: the works of each are the unrestrained expression of the individuality of each; they are not copies of the pictures of any other man or period. They are attempts to do new things only in the sense that each man tries his best to express himself, without consciously or unconsciously imitating others. One natural result is that as they paint from year to year their works show surprising changes. What is painted this year may be widely different from what was painted last year. This is not true to the same extent of most painters, who consciously try to follow great masters or who adhere to great schools or periods.

The twenty-five paintings on exhibition cover about six years and yet show most astonishing developments, always in the direction of greater freedom and finer abstraction. The "Factory Chimneys," (No. 4) is so realistic that it might hang in any exhibition and attract no attention, save for a certain simplicity and strength. At the other extreme, "Night I" (No. 23) is almost a pure creation of the imagination as well as a beautiful composition of line and color. It is, as a

matter of fact, a synthesis of Bloch's impressions of Munich by night, a summary of things he saw and felt during his wanderings about the city; it is vision on vision, dream on dream, a composite of a hundred glimpses, the fusion of a hundred impressions; it represents no part of the city, but is the city by night. Of this particular canvas a distinguished Japanese art-lover said, "I would rather have it than any modern painting I have seen for many a year." "Summer Night," (No. 14) is a purely poetic composition. Do not look at it as a picture; look at it as if it were, say, the drop curtain of a theatre, for then it would not seem at all strange, but on the contrary a very unusual and very beautiful curtain. "Lamentation," (No. 5) is founded on a poem by the late Max Bierbauer. It is the spirit of the poem on canvas. The figures convey the feeling of lamentation far more powerfully than if they more literally resembled human beings; they are sorrowing masses, as distinguished from mere weeping men and women. Then, too, they are fine harmonies of line and color; they are decorative as well as significant.

"Harlequin," (No. 12) is in an entirely different vein, a lighter and more joyous mood. It is as graceful and charming as a fairy tale. Look at it as you would at an illustration to an Arabian Nights tale and all your opposition will disappear. You will like the painting, and the more you look at it and search it the more you will like it. From a purely technical point of view it is very well painted. "Clowns II," (No.8) Bloch himself describes as a humoresque, like unto any similar humorous or fantastic composition in music. As he says, "Why may not the painter have his

moments of relaxation?" "Pantomime," (No. 6) is a pure fancy, a composition that reveals itself slowly, but its rich coloring and intricate design are apparent on first impression. The large canvas, "Three Pierrots and Harlequin," (No 24) is one of his latest. It is looser in construction and freer in technic and probably marks a new development. It is essentially decorative, with a fine sweep of action.

Bloch possesses a sense of humor that is almost biting. In "Clowns II" it is good-natured humor. In "Prize Fight," (No. 7) and "The Green Domino," (No. 20) his attitude toward life is almost cynical. "The Prize Fight" is less significant as a presentation of a fight than for its presentation of the mental attitude of the crowd. The underlying human problem interested the artist quite as much as the creation of a composition of light and shade and color. In passing, it should be noted that while Bloch is in no sense a cubist and has no sympathy with cubism, this particular picture in its use of planes and its treatment of objects as almost transparent exemplifies some of the theories of cubism at their best.

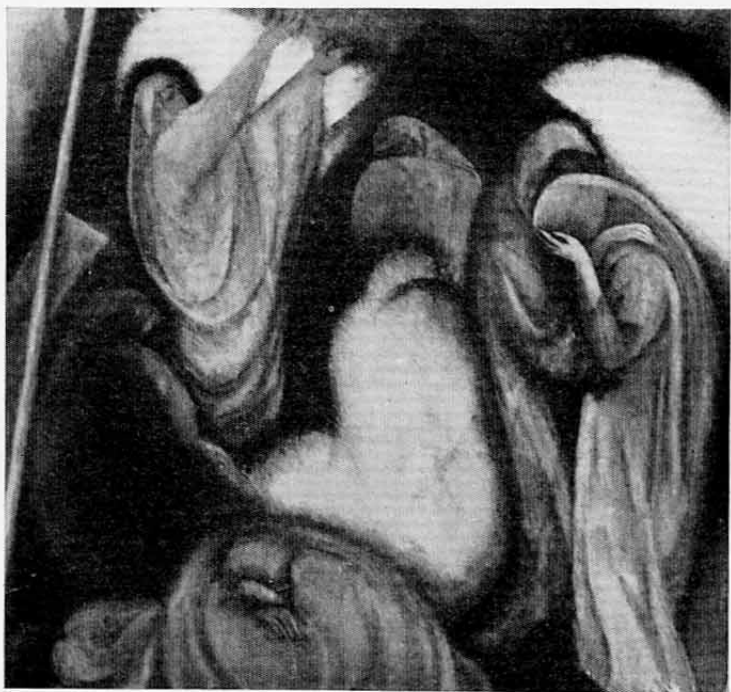
But these paintings are in no sense cubist. Neither are they futurist. What are they then? Compositional painting is the best term for them. That is what Kandinsky calls his work: compositional painting in precisely the same sense that music is compositional sound. They are not pictures of something or somebody, mere canvas mediums serving to carry our thoughts outside and beyond to the something or somebody. They challenge our attention to themselves, and it is the verdict of everyone who happens to

own some of these new paintings that they are most companionable, because they always reveal a little more and more, but never quite all of themselves. The best of them inwardly challenge our very best thought, while outwardly gratifying the eye with a brilliant harmony of line and color.

There is a great deal of poetry which is so baldly descriptive that it does little more than call to mind the scenes and events described. That is all very interesting if one cares for purely descriptive and narrative poems. But there is a finer and more abstract poetry which absorbs our entire attention on itself, which is complete in itself. There is music that is cheaply realistic, and there is music so pure and abstract that one loses all sense of realities. The new men are attempting to do with line and color what great composers have done for centuries with sound—to make composition of line and color beautiful in themselves, that do not depend for success upon suggesting or recalling some familiar object, some great personage, some historic event. And why not? Why may not painters attempt what musicians and poets have done so successfully? And if they do attempt it, why should we not try to help and encourage them? These new experiments are in no sense antagonistic to the great work that is being done along more familiar lines; on the contrary, they supplement and strengthen. The really great painter, the man who is always growing in his art, looks with keenest interest on these new paintings. He may never care to paint like them, but that is all the more reason why he likes to see others making experiments which he has no time to make.

Of all the public art galleries of the country the Chicago Art Institute has been the broadest in its views of what it owes the public; it has been the most alert to give the public an opportunity to see the latest developments in art in Europe; so far as art is concerned, it has saved the people of Chicago many a trip abroad. That is what an art museum should do. It is like a public library. It should have on hand the latest books and the books the public wants to see, even though the trustees of the library may consider some of the books not worth reading. The trouble with nearly all the other art museums of this country is that those in charge assert the right to say what the public shall and shall not be permitted to see. Public libraries do not do this; public museums should not. In opening its doors to exhibitions such as the International and such as the present one of Bloch's, the Trustees of the Art Institute do so on the theory that its members and the public have the right to see and judge for themselves everything that is new and interesting in art, or— to put it in more practical language—the people of Chicago should not be compelled to go abroad to see the new pictures if it is within the power of the Institute to bring the pictures here.

ARTHUR J. EDDY.



LAMENTATION

CATALOGUE

- 1 Still-life
- 2 The wrestlers
- 3 Boy with orange
- 4 Factories
- 5 Lamentation
From Berlin autumn Salon, 1913
Lent by Arthur J. Eddy
- 6 Pantomime
Lent
- 7 Prize fight
From Berlin autumn Salon, 1913
Lent
- 8 Clowns II
Lent

- 9 Kneeling figures
- 10 Portrait: F. F. L. Birrell, son of
Hon. Augustin Birrell
Lent
- 11 Scherzo
From Berlin autumn Salon, 1913
- 12 Harlequin
Lent by Mrs. Arthur T. Aldis
- 13 Portrait: Fraulein von B.
From Berlin autumn Salon, 1914
- 14 Summer night
From Berlin autumn Salon, 1913
Lent by Arthur J. Eddy
- 15 The dancer Sacheroff
Lent
- 16 Landscape
- 17 Reclining figure
- 18 Night II

- 19 Rocks: Song I
- 20 The green domino
- 21 Spring: Song II
- 22 Portrait: Robert Minor, American illustrator
- 23 Night I
Lent by Arthur J. Eddy
- 24 Three Pierrots and harlequin
- 25 Peaks
Lent