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WHAT IS ART?

BY MATAICHI MIYA

THE thing that looks Art to a person who thinks that it is Art, is Art. There are many ways of looking at it from different angles—those of the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the child and the grown-up. Art belongs to everybody who looks for it. There is not a human who does not admire Art. Art and you will be more friendly when you are at peace; when you have no trouble on your mind, no sickness in your family, nothing to worry over, then you can enjoy Art. Then Art will love you and you in turn will love Art.

There are a few who cannot forget Art even for a minute, but they are exceptional.

Art is very wide. Art is not only what you see with your eye, but it is within your mind also. There are many things beside art objects in art galleries. You may find Art almost anywhere, anytime, if you have the eye to see it. In your home good house-keeping is Art; so are harmonious decorations and the arrangement of flowers; so are cooking, eating, sleeping and dressing; so is talking; so are movements and manners—yes, so is love—there is Art in all. You may find a great sculptor in the barber shop, or in a tailor shop. A master hand—that is Art. No matter where we find it.

Think of some of the subjects which from olden days until now artists have painted as expressions of thought, as Degas has been moved to do after seeing the wonderful movements and the grace of dancers. Beautiful flowers, together with butterflies, as by the Sung master Li-Ti. A group of monkeys by Sosen. You may be reminded of Whistler by a bridge in the distance on a misty morning, or a peaceful sunset. You may recall a farmer returning in the dimness of evening, by Millet; or a bright sunset in an open field, by George Inness. Snow, the moon and rain, by Hiroshige. Rocky mountains and pine trees, by Shirkui.

An old beggar, by the illustrious Rembrandt. Lifelike Greek statues, spiritfui Gothic figures of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and impressive Buddhistic images of T'ang and Six Dynasties.

There is no end of subjects or of artists, from the days of old until today, giving pleasure to those who admire, and to us all giving the chance to appreciate great artists better when we look at natural things. There are many things done beyond nature or model, which is work done by the power of imagination. For example, *The Thinker*, by Rodin. I do not believe anyone knows what that thinker is thinking. There was a man, I know, who knew all about it, but he is no more in this world.

Yet, there is a still greater quality in Art, in Buddhist art and in Christian art, whether of sculptor or of painter; the artists try to put impressive and worshipable spirits into the objects produced, to help the Buddhistic or the Christian or any other religion by Art; and in doing so, they have also helped Art.

There is no standard form, no original example exists, but ideal after ideal, copy after copy, work after work. Today you have complete forms, but those forms are not original, in Buddhism. Those forms were built by the great priests and artists under the T'ang Dynasty by the order of the Buddhistic power. No one ever saw Buddha or Kuan-yin or Jesus, for portraiture, but the artists built them from imagination of what they looked like—what they should have looked like according to history and tradition and worship. So Buddhist art, or religious art, is spiritual art. Take for example Kano Hogai's *Fudo-myōwō*, a painting formerly in the Fenellosa Collection, now in Japan—what wonderful power of Fudo, how different from others, what a mighty conception, what a great spirit Hogai had for Fudo!

Art knows no twins, has no two alike; one artist cannot paint two pictures exactly the same. One is better than the other. Therefore great Art is a very precious treasure. Do not confuse "valuable" with value, "rarity" with rare, archæology or antiquity with works of art. Price has nothing to do with the value of Art, which is not quantity but quality. The spirit of Art is in simplicity. Simplicity is higher Art than is implied in the words magnificent, gorgeous or wonderful. Simplicity has charm and

delicacy and everlasting thought. Artists paint for the love of Art; many of them sacrifice their lives for the love of Art, as you may recollect; collectors fight in competition and pay for the love of Art. Yet Art has no price. An object at a thousand dollars is cheap, yet a dollar may be too much. In his philosophy of art collecting someone said: "I have regretted my economy; I am happy in my extravagance." What tremendous value Art has!

Do not forget the love of nature that the artist puts into the art object. Great Art pleases you all the time if it is around you, and the art object will remind you of its model and will tell a pleasing story and will refresh your mind; but you must have an eye to see. There are many things which you cannot see, yet Art will draw a picture of them in your mind. Music, or song by human or insect or bird, will give us the inspiration of a picture. Listening to sound, one can dream a picture in his way, and another in another way—each of different sort.

There was a song about a crow. As those who live in the country no doubt know, the crow sings the first thing in the morning, which is very annoying to some people and awakens them. One lover said:

Kill all the crows in the world, for I want to sleep enough with my love.

Another lover said:

I would like to sleep enough with my love together with all the crows in the world.

One looked for trouble and the other for peace to satisfy his love.

There is Art in literature, in prose and in poetry. The Japanese poet, Basho, produced a masterpiece: "Old pond—frog jump in—water sound." That means nothing if you are not familiar with it. But the translation of his thought into the picture: A little cottage near the old pond, where the palms grow in the garden of green moss—the stone lantern and the simple gate.

One rainy day in spring, Basho seated himself in front of his desk, looking through a round window toward the pond, and meditated. Suddenly, he heard a sound of splashing water, then he saw a frog swimming, and Basho jumped and in ecstasy he

called out, for there was inspiration and he started his poem. "Old pond—frog jump in—water sound." He composed his poem, unconsciously, dreamlike; what a wonderful inspiration that was. The poem contains seventeen "Hirakana" syllables, according to the Japanese rule of Five-Seven-Five. No artist can illumine a picture so vividly in so few words. It is spiritual art. It is most difficult in Art to inscribe a picture in so few strokes, so few words. A friend told me of a letter from a father to son, which said: "My dear son, I am very busy today so I will write you a long letter."

There are many directions in Art. One cannot appreciate all of wonderful Art. But you can understand and admire some of it, if you love Art. Art belongs to humanity and to the development of human culture. Art belongs to the whole nation, so the art museum is a wonderful gift to the nation, for the benefit of the seeing, and to be well kept for the next generation. Of collectors of Art one collects for his love, another for show, another for making money—and others collect for gifts to the nation. All have good principles, but individual art collectors should not corner the works of an individual artist, or the same kind of things. There are many others who love Art as much as you do.

Are you proud or ashamed to own fifty Rembrandts, or one hundred works of Degas, or a roomful of black hawthorn or peachbloom porcelains, or of Rodin sculptures? Yes, if you are going to give them to the nation then you can be proud; but if you are going to keep them yourself, you should change your mind. We humans cannot live long—as Art is long—but good will with works of Art may persist forever. The individual collector should collect all kinds of Art to be a real art collector.

In Japan and China art collecting is done on a broader scale, and the collection is equal in class. Also, Japan has Art showing and using Art, and also has Art in looking and admiring. A Japanese house is decorated with one painting, and one vase with flowers and few other things; and that is all, in one room. It may look bare, but if you are invited often you see different decorations, according to the season, in assortment and harmony. In a Western home everything is exposed at one time and you know what is in the home the first visit.

The Japanese way of showing Art is admirable because the Japanese select objects according to the taste of the guest and also according to the season. The decoration consists of pictures, flowers, a harmonious selection of dishes and bowls, and choice foods and drinks of tea or sake, Art with nature and nature with Art; you talk about the garden, and talk about Art all the time; Art together with nature. That is the Eastern way; they have plenty of time for admiring Art. Art is very important—next to life. Life without Art is no life. So there is not one who has no taste. They have good or bad, to start with; to cultivate your natural gift or Art is your duty, and it will make your life happier.

And you will be more happy if you are able to create or discover or appreciate a masterpiece through your own knowledge. Who discovers is a great master, also. How can anyone tell that it is a masterpiece? When you see an object and at first glance are hypnotized by the spirit of Art in its workmanship. It takes your breath away. Your expression changes. You are robbed of your soul and spirit. Then in a little while your spirit returns to normal; but you never can forget the great power, and it will stay with your spirit forever. If you have that masterpiece near you and in your sight at all times you are drawn to it more strongly with every look.

So any masterpiece is beyond your expectation, the happening of something which you do not expect in your life. An incident of joy or sorrow which may occur in your life is an accident; this accident happens in Art—that incident of discovering a masterpiece. Ten persons have ten different thoughts. One may love what he likes best; never mind the others. But try always to improve your gift of taste.

“Higher they will rise who strive for the highest.”

MATAICHI MIYA.