SPECIAL ARTICLES

WHAT IS ART?

A DEFINITION

By F. WELLINGTON RUCKSTUHL

AT present, when the inquiring Public which pays for works of art enters the gates of the world of art in search of knowledge, it becomes bewildered by the fog and nauseated by the Anarchy it finds there.

In order to know how to thread its way through this miserable Confusion, in its effort to obtain sound notions as to what constitutes Enduring Art, the only sort worthy of being paid for by public savings and taxes, the first thing the Public must know is:—That there is no more distressing impertinence in life than the criticizing of Art—above all adversely—by a man who has not a well-defined Standard by which to judge a work of art. And how few among Artists and Critics have even so much as a sane, not to speak of an invulnerable, Definition of Art? How unlike a Banker, who judges a gold dollar by a clear and fixed Standard!

Tolstoi spent, he said, twelve years writing his book: "What Is Art?" and he came near answering it correctly. He spoiled his job by assuming that a *moujik* can appreciate every great work of art as well as a master and a man of æsthetic culture. By this sort of mental bias, moral excessivism and slipshod thinking, the anarchy in the world of art has been propagated, until that field of human endeavor is no longer one of unalloyed joy.

The anarchy in the Intellectual World ceased when Bacon substituted Inductive for Deductive reasoning, common-sense for cryptic ratiocination. He insisted that we begin, in our reasoning, at the bottom of things, and reason up to God, instead of the reverse. And Kant destroyed the anarchy in the Moral World when, out of the muck of speculation, he drew his common-sense "Categorical Imperative: "Act so that your action may be made the standard of universal action!" And the world of art will never be purged of its anarchy until we use baconian common-sense: go first to the bottom, find the broadest foundation, and build up from there—to find an invulnerable Definition of art.

What do we mean by the word—Art? The word has been used to designate everything under the sun, from "The Art of Poetry" to "The Art of Goose Washing"; from "The Art of Living" to "The Art of Dying!" until every charlatan has his pet definition which he knows he cannot successfully defend.

One of the causes of the anarchy in the World of Art is: the joy some would-be thinkers seem to find in throwing out half-truths, more bewildering than deliberate falsehoods. For example: The painter Abbey nailed up in the Dome of the Harrisburg Capitol this dictum: "Art deals with things forever incapable of definition." As though anything in art is beyond human definition! Not only can we define art, but it *had been* completely defined when he nailed up his half-true *ipse dixit!* What we need to do is not to worry about finding a Definition, but select the best and broadest one capable of being made, correct its formula until it is invulnerable and then:—*agree to accept it,* as the fundamental law—if we really wish to clean out the Augean Stables in the world of art. For, as Voltaire said: "If you wish to converse with me—define your terms?" And, unless we do agree on "What is Art?" we might as well quit all talking on the subject.

Another cause of the lack of an Accepted definition of art is the innate vice of the human mind to Confound things. How many writers have confounded Art with Beauty, with Style, with technique, et cetera, when in reality Art is neither of those—though they all may enter as elements into a finished Work of Art?

The final cause is: that there is one portion of thinkers in the world of art which regards art as a *PROCESS,* or an *ACTIVITY,* while the public at large—when the word "Art" is mentioned—thinks only of art as a PRODUCT—of completed Works of Art.

For example: Dr. Johnson said: "Art is the power of doing things which is not taught by Nature."

John Stewart Mill said: "Art is but the employment of the powers of Nature for an end."

Coleridge said: "Art is not a thing; it is a way."

A certain class of Artists, taking these as a cue—and for private, selfish ends—agreed, and then R. D. W. Stevenson said: "Technique is Art, and those who are not interested in technique are not interested in Art."

As definitions of Art: as an Activity, these are all very well, but as definitions of Art: as a Product, as Works of Art, they are all absurd. Because technique is not—Art, it is only a part of art. And if you are going to use the word art to designate every activity, or process, you will have to include among the arts every handicraft in the world and call them all—Art. Take billiards, baseball-pitching, or mule-skinning. Does any one suppose that any of these are easy to do? Only a cow-boy knows the "fine art" of "skinning a mule."

Every human activity, from driving nails to driving locomotives can be raised: from a bungling—into an "art." If that is what you mean by Art, let us define it thus: Every simple human activity becomes an Art in ratio of the degree of quick perception, sound judgment, unfailing memory, rapid decision and dexterity of hand necessary to obtain a result—surprisingly above the ordinary.

But, your would-be æsthetician knows full well we do not include the art of shaving and juggling when

we speak of: Art! And he knows also that there is something far higher involved in art than the mere intellectual admiration we feel before any display of mere technical skill in the process of Producing a work of art. And it is that Something Else, which must be made the basis of our Definition of art.

The question is: What does the public *think* of—when we use the word: Art? It instinctively thinks of Finished Products—*complete* Works of Art, such as: Poems, Statues, Palaces, Oratorios, Parks, and Paintings. Therefore, to select the Process of doing art and then defining that Process as art, instead of defining art as a Product—complete works of art—is nonsense, and perhaps the most prolific cause of the present execrable confusion in the world of art.

Let us not waste any time on refuting the mass of faulty definitions of art: most of them made to justify, or condone, the peculiar art of some selfish "Individualist" bent on defending his technical process in art—in order to help him unload his novel art products on the, naturally easily gullible, public. Let us attack the problem with common-sense and try to define art: as a Product.

Poe said, in the foreword to his "Eureka": "To the few who love me and whom I love . . . I present this composition as an Art Product alone: let us say as a Romance; or, if it be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem." Let us do likewise, above all since the greatest thinkers since Aristotle have always regarded art as: a Product. And let us go to the foundation of things:

That mankind is traveling from a low, animal state toward a more and more spiritual state, evolution proves. And, without going too deep into Psychology, we may say: We are, practically, made up of a Body, a Mind, a Soul, and an Ego.

These may be likened, so to speak, to a Throne-room, the seat of the Ego in which the Ego sits in eternal expectancy, surrounded by three other rooms, in which are ever busy three Ministers, called: Physical, Intellectual and Spiritual.

When we are asleep we merely Exist. We begin to Live only when we awake into a state of consciousness, and we Live only as long as succeeding states of consciousness occur.

As soon as we awake we have the first Surprise of the day, the first Emotion, *i. e.*, the recognition that we are, that we exist. When we open our eyes we have the next Surprise, or emotion: caused by the nature of the impact upon our body, mind, or soul by our environment.

Every impact of nature on the body, mind or soul of man is a surprise, and creates an Agitation, weak or powerful. James, in his "Psychology" says: "The entire organism may be called a sounding-board, which every change in consciousness, however slight, may make reverberate."

Now, the agitations of the body we call Sensations, those of the mind we call Thoughts, and the agitations of the soul we call Emotions.

If our environment is the one we are *used* to, our surprises will not appear to us as surprises any longer, because they have become commonplace surprises, through repetition, day by day. But they are surprises, nevertheless. But, when repeated often enough, these surprises fail to Agitate us, to startle or emotion us. Hence, the daily mechanical routine of tending, let us say a spinning-machine in a cotton factory, is about as drab and deadening—because Emotionless—an existence as one can imagine. But, when a surprise is Unusual, then we are agitated, stirred, out of our lethargy and drab state of consciousness into an Emotional State; and the agitation in us is great in ratio of the unusualness and immensity of our surprise. Then we call it a surprise or astonishment. But, I repeat, every Change in our state of consciousness is a—surprise, and also every surprise is followed by an emotion, of some kind, or degree.

Now, from the moment we open our eyes on awakening, the Ego or the "Will," or whatever we choose to call the "I" or the "Me" in us, sits enthroned, I repeat, in a state of Expectancy, ready to receive Trains of Sensations from the Minister called Physical, or trains of Thought from the Minister called Intellectual or trains of Emotions from the Minister called Spiritual. These Ministers may enter singly, doubly, or all three at once. When Minister Physical brings in simple sensations, we have a simple state of consciousness, unaccompanied by thoughts or high emotions; when Minister Physical and Minister Intellectual and Minister Spiritual bring in sensations, thoughts and emotions: in quick succession, we have a Complex State of consciousness.

Now, these may be pleasant or unpleasant: depending on the nature of our environment, and on the proportion of the dominance and force in us of either Minister Physical, or Intellectual or Spiritual. But, in all cases, it is the Ego which: Passes Judgment on the desirability or undesirability of the states of consciousness, as they are offered by the three Ministers aforesaid and accepts or rejects them and acts accordingly.

Of course, we do not know where the body begins and ends, or where the mind and soul begin and end. They are so interrelated, interwoven, that, now and then, they seem as one, or two, or three, when, in reality, they are three—dominated by a fourth: the Ego. Hence, also, our sensations, thoughts and emotions overlap, so that some states of consciousness are made up of physical, intellectual and spiritual elements—fused into one whole; but our Life, apart from mere Existence, is carried on mainly in these three fields of experience—physical, intellectual and spiritual Emotions.

Our Emotions are of two kinds: Negative and Positive.

The negative emotions are such as are neither agreeable nor disagreeable. The positive emotions are such as are distinctly agreeable or disagreeable. And, since stagnation is near unto death, and movement means life, it follows that: the more emotions we experience and live through, the more varied and pleasurable they are, the richer and happier our life on this earth will be. By pleasure I do not mean merely sensuous pleasure, but also intellectual and spiritual pleasure.

Thus, we see, that the Experiencing of Emotion, is at the very base of our Life. It remains to be shown that the Expression of Emotion is at the very base of all Art.

Nature has so organized us that, as soon as we experience an emotion, we feel a sudden impulse to Express it. And this impulse is powerful—in ratio of the Intensity of the emotion. "No impression without expression," says James. Because

every surprise and every motion also exert a pressure: strong in ratio of the native impressionability and emotionability of a man, which, unless relieved, becomes a Burden. That is why so few people can keep a secret. The hearing of a secret causes a surprise, an emotion, and the first impulse, in the vast majority of normal people, is to Unload this secret on some one else, to pass it on. If we are bound by a promise not to reveal a secret, it becomes a burden which only the strongest can support, the average person being devoid of enough self-control to hold back the Pressure the secret exerts. When we give away the secret we feel a real relief—Oof! of a burden! This is what Aristotle called the "katharsis of the emotions"—an explosive expression of our emotion.

Now, this act: of the mere expression of an emotion—if it ends in some kind of Form, in a definite PRODUCT, in the shape of a finished Poem, or Statue, or Picture, or Building, or Garden, or a Story or even a Dog Collar, or a Joke, is already—a Work of Art.

It makes no difference how trivial or sublime, how beautiful or ugly, how moral or immoral: every Expression of human Emotion, in whatever Form it may be made—is a Work of Art; and it makes no difference whether it stirs the emotions of one man, or of all mankind.

Because, in your effort to express your own emotions you must use some sort of vehicle, or Form, or shape, which has no other use on earth, primarily, than to express your emotions.

Now, if anything that you create is made only for a Use—other than to serve as a Vehicle for the expression of your emotions, it is not a work of art, but merely an article of Use. Material Usefulness is the factor which places one human object, or work, into the category of: Industry; Spiritual Usefulness is the factor which places any human production into the category of: Art.

Moreover, if an article of mere use: is used as a vehicle for the expression of your emotions, by applying to it expressive ornaments: for the sake of Beautifying it, or for the expression of an idea, or of a mere emotion of delight, or of sadness, it is by that act taken out of the category of merely useful articles and, at once, becomes a work of art: rudimentary art, perhaps, but still—a work of art!

Therefore, every man is a rudimentary artist: as soon as he merely Attempts to Express his Emotion, even in rudimentary form.

Moreover, the strongest hunger of the soul is for self-expression. Our whole life, from waking to going to sleep, is but one process of self-expression. Hence, there is no greater punishment than enforced, perpetual silence.

In fact, every animal, insect, tree, flower and rock, also answers to the Cosmic Urge and craves to express itself in some Form—and nearly always in some form of Beauty.

This deep truth found again an adequate expression in Emerson's profound remark: "ALL NATURE IS BENT UPON EXPRESSION." Because self-expression is the greatest relief and greatest joy vouchsafed by the universe, and reflection will convince the reader that this must be so.

Therefore, Tolstoi is correct when he says: "The activity of art is based on the fact that a man, receiving through his senses of hearing and sight another man's expression of feeling (emotion), is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it." So that we may define art—in the abstract—as follows: ART IS AN EXPRESSION OF HUMAN EMOTION. But that is not sufficient.

There are all sorts of normal and abnormal men. There are men so self-centered that they do not care to express their emotions, even to their most intimate acquaintances. These are the silent men. These never become artists,—because they never have anything to communicate.

Then there are other men whose greatest joy consists in expressing their emotions, but who are so utterly indifferent to the happiness of others that, to relieve themselves of their own emotional pressure, they will sing, or rhyme, or dance a jig, draw or paint: only to please themselves—just to relieve their own emotions.

Some go further; and, full of contempt for mankind, they express their emotions and throw the product on the junk-pile, and they are usually not worth much more than that. These are all more or less abnormal men.

But, then, there is the Normal Majority of men, whose greatest joy consists, not in merely expressing their emotions, glad or sad, but in Communicating them to others: in order to Share them.

Others go still further; and, not content with merely sharing their emotions, yearn to Stir the emotions of their fellows, and mankind: to stimulate them to action. These are the highly developed, emotional men who usually become professional Artists —in one of the eight arts.

These Artists very rarely choose a subject for an art-work that is disagreeable; because, for *stirring* the emotions of mankind profoundly, a work of art must not be disagreeable or ugly. To be, for a long *time*, worth while, it must be as Agreeable and Beautiful as possible, and express, not a low, but a high state of emotion.

To the highly developed man an emotional state is high and agreeable, or low and disagreeable, in ratio of the distance to which it Lifts him: above merely animal existence, away from the muck and misery of the commonplace things of the earth, earthy.

There are three Categories of these lifting, pleasurable emotions: the various kinds of MIRTH, DELIGHT and AWE. These we experience in various degrees of intensity. And however much an acquired wisdom may, for the sake of variety in life, dictate an occasional passing through a disciplinary unpleasant state of emotional experience, the Ego usually prefers to experience and express—Pleasant emotions. As that great Artist, Emerson, said:

> "We mount to Paradise
> On the stairway of Surprise!"

What he meant is that we mount on the stairway of pleasant—Emotions.

Now, suppose a man hears a funny story, laughs like a lord, and rushes off to tell it to you and says: "Jack, I've got a new one, a corker!" and then tells a story with every trick he can muster—to make you laugh. He does this because he finds a real happiness and relief in Forcing you to Share his happiness. If you do not laugh, he will look at you, quizzically, and say to himself: Well, that story seemed awfully

funny to me. Am I thick or is he?" And he is really unhappy—because he failed to make a "hit" with you. If you then say: "Well, old top, the story's a good one, but a 'chestnut!' I laughed over that two years ago," he will feel relieved that he is not so queer as he seemed to himself, but he will resent your non-display of social hypocrisy: in not laughing, any way, just to give him a chance to Share his happiness with you—because you refused his "treat!"

Therefore, a mere Funny Story, even a Joke, is already a work of art—because it is an effort at: the Expression of Emotion.

Hence, the primordial spiritual push in every normal man—and abnormal men do not count in a discussion of Art—is not only to stimulate him to Express his emotions, but to: Stir the emotions of his nearest Neighbor. If he succeeds, his reward for the effort is a certain satisfaction, at having successfully relieved himself of his emotional burden, or pressure.

But there is a higher reason. Carlyle said: "The deepest hunger of the human soul is for human recognition." Why? Because as James says in his "Psychology": "No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof." That is to say: men cannot live without the recognition of their fellow-men. And three years of solitary confinement in the prisons of Italy suffices to drag a man to insanity and the grave.

Moreover, man knows by instinct that if he can share the happiness of his own glad emotions with his neighbors, by arousing in them the same emotions and joy—by adequately expressing them—he will obtain for himself not only the joy of recognition, but the Love of his Neighbors and, so, Bind them to himself, and thus, gradually, more or less—according to his power of expression—conquer the world and carve out a place—immortality—in the hearts of mankind. Thus he satisfies that feeling which, when healthy, we call Self-love or Egotism, which is rooted in the elemental hunger for self-preservation: Nature's first command.

Says Darwin, in his "Autobiography"—in order to explain why he succeeded in life: "What is far more important, my love of natural science has been steady and ardent. This pure love has, however, been much aided by the ambition *to be esteemed* by my fellow naturalists." Thus we see that the hunger for human recognition, with the vast majority of men, even the greatest, is the strongest driving-power in the world, the very cosmic urge which is pushing man from high to higher toward an ever-more perfect state of civilization: through the more and more perfect Expression of those of his emotions which lift his fellows up to himself, and beyond.

Hence, those men who have the largest and deepest hunger for the love of their fellow-men—for "human recognition"—are *impelled* to serve them most and so enter the ranks, not only of the great artists, but of great heroes and the saviors of the race. And the more gifted the artist—the more of this "hunger for human recognition" will he possess.

He may not care for a "blatant beating of the big bazoo," or for a vulgar notoriety, but, deep down, he will have enough of that "decent respect for the opinion of mankind," as Jefferson said, to make his work so perfect that he will run the chance at least, of escaping the critical condemnation or ridicule of his contemporaries, which is a desire for at least a negative human recognition, and equally rooted in the primal desire for self-preservation. Hence, feebleness of desire for human recognition always accompanies Creative Mediocrity.

If this hunger for human recognition is so strong that it will make a man, with a beneficent purpose, Work for it: by clean, rational methods, it may be called and welcomed as—Beneficent Egotism. A man so possessed will never be content merely to express his own emotions, and "let it go at that!" He will be doubly urged on, first by a natural impulse, and second, by an acquired desire: to Communicate his emotions to his fellow-men, to Stir the emotions of mankind,—in some language or medium of expression. And the greater this urge in a man, and the greater the skill and power he manifests in stirring the emotions of mankind, and the more lofty and sublime the emotions with which he fills the majority of men, and for the longest period of time, the greater artist he will prove to be!

Per contra, should a man's self-love and desire for human recognition take on a diseased form, and urge him to seek a quick Notoriety: simply to have himself talked about, like Beaudelaire, Oscar Wilde or Cagliostro, by methods at once charlatanistic and unclean, then it becomes: Egomania, a destructive force, not only in Life but in Art.

Thus, we have gradually dug down to the fundamental truths of life:—that a Surprise is an Emotion; that Agreeable emotions give us Happiness; that to Share this happiness with our Neighbors is a desire implanted in us by Nature; that to do this we Express our emotions in the most adequate and forceful Form we can command: by Poetry, Oratory, Painting, Sculpture, Music, Architecture, etc., all of which we call—Art.

In short, the Joy of Experiencing and *Expressing* human *Emotion* is at the basis of both Life and Art.

Now, these facts are the deepest and broadest basis for an invulnerable definition of art. Hence, I repeat, the simplest, solid definition of art, in the abstract, is this: Art is an Expression of Human Emotion. But, as I said before, this is not sufficient. Therefore, philosophers have striven for a more comprehensive and detailed definition.

The best of these is by Eugène Véron in his "Æsthetics," 1873:—"We may, therefore, as a general definition say, that art is the manifestation of an emotion, translating itself, exteriorily, either by a combination of lines, of forms or of colors, or by a series of gestures, of sounds or of words, subjected to certain rhythms." A perfect definition of art—in the abstract.

But this is not enough: because it only defines Art in the abstract, fails to be explicit: as to whether art means a Process or a Product, and fails to imply that there are Two Kinds of artists: Those who are merely content to Express their own emotions, and, so, nearly always remain trivial artists, and those who aim to Stir the emotions of their fellow-men, and, so, sometimes become truly great.

The next important definition is by Tolstoi in his: "What Is Art?" 1898:—"Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others the feelings (emotions) he has lived through, and

that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them."

This is faulty: because it Excludes Works of Art which were made without: "One man Consciously handing over to others the feelings (emotions) he has lived through." Because a man may express his own emotions and produce a work of art, without ever dreaming of "infecting others" with his own emotions, and, sometimes, produce a great work of art; besides, a Sound definition must not exclude any work of art. Also, it defines art only as an Activity, which is unphilosophic. We know Tolstoi framed his one-sided definition to serve his own purpose: social reform, in which labor he went to extremes, forgetting the Greek injunction: "Nothing to Excess."

Taine, an important French writer, made a definition which is not a definition at all, but a direction: how to *produce* a Work of Art.

Bacon's definition: "Art is man added to Nature!" is also not a definition of Art, but it is a definition of *Style* because that is what style is —an addition of a man's personality to a work of nature.

Delsarte's definition: "Art is an emotion passed through thought and fixed in form," is an excellent definition of art in the abstract, much like Véron's, but also insufficient: because merely defining art in the abstract, and giving no hint that there are men who care only to express their own emotions and others who long to arouse the emotions of others, and that there are various degrees of excellence in art, from the Trivial to the Great.

Now, lest the laymen may think that the defining of Art is not an important national matter, I will quote a part of an address delivered at the National Arts Club about a year ago, in which I said:

"Previous to the fall of 1898 I was frequently called by the United States Government, as an expert, to testify as to whether certain statues, held for duty at the Custom House here, were works of art. One day in 1898, while at work as general manager of the building of the Dewey Arch on Twenty-third Street and Fifth Avenue, one of the architects engaged in the work appeared to me looking somewhat gloomy. 'What's the matter, old man?' I queried. 'Oh,' he replied, 'I have just come from the Custom House, where I lost a case. I had one of my Church Altars cut in Caen stone, in Caen, France; and, when it got here, I was forced to pay duty, on the plea that it was not a work of art. I protested. But a number of sculptors said it was not a work of art. And so I lose.'

"'What!' I said. 'They testified your *altar* is not a work of art?'

"'Yes,' he replied.

"'Why, they are dreaming!' I said, and I told him my idea of what constitutes a work of art, and why his altar is, inevitably, a work of art.

"'Will you testify to that before the Collector?' he asked.

"'Surely!' I replied. And we proceeded with work on the Arch.

"Later, I was subpœnaed before the Collector and, as near as I can recollect, this took place: Arrived at the Custom House I took my seat, and, while the stenographer and the Collector listened, his attorney established my status as an expert. Then he placed before me a blueprint of an altar. After examining it I said: 'Well, sir?'

"'Do you consider that a work of art?' he asked.

"'I certainly do.'

"'You do?'

"'I do.'

"'Well,' with a solemn pause, 'do you know that St. Gaudens, Ward, Hartley, MacDonald, Rhind and others have testified that it is not a work of art?'

"'That does not worry me. A man may be a great success as a synthetic sculptor and a great failure as an analytical thinker. All the men you mention have simply never gone to the bottom of things in their thinking on the theory of art and æsthetics.'

"'Well,' he said, with a sardonic air, 'can you define art?'

"'Yes, I can,' I replied.

"'Will you kindly do so?'

"I then gave him this definition of art:

"EVERY HUMAN WORK, MADE IN ANY LANGUAGE, WITH THE PURPOSE OF EXPRESSING, OR STIRRING, HUMAN EMOTION, IS A WORK OF ART; AND A WORK OF ART IS GREAT IN RATIO OF ITS POWER OF STIRRING THE HIGHEST EMOTIONS OF THE LARGEST NUMBER OF CULTURED PEOPLE FOR THE LONGEST PERIOD OF TIME.

"'Well,' he said, 'isn't that rather broad?'

"'Of course it is broad. A definition, in order to define, must be both inclusive and exclusive, and I think you will find mine conclusive.'

"He looked stalemated. And I continued: 'All thinkers on art, however they may differ on detail, agree on this: That the function of all artists is: First, to *express* their own emotions, and second, to *stir* the emotions of their fellowmen, be those emotions trivial or great, high or low. Now, a Cathedral is the greatest instrument on earth for stirring the highest human emotion, and the altar is the most important part of that instrument. If the altar is a mere rock, it is not a work of *art;* it is a mere article of *use.* But, if the altar shows some kind of *design,* and an effort to make the altar *beautiful,* in order to arouse the emotions and lift the soul of the worshipers, it is a work of art, no matter what its design. You have not asked me if this altar is a *Great* Work of Art. And that is none of the government's business. The question the government alone should ask is this: "Is this altar a work of art?" I reply that, if it were the most grotesque design in the world, so long as the deliberate *purpose* of the artist was to *express* his emotions and to *arouse* the emotions of his fellowmen, however simple or complex, skilful or crude, his design may be, it is a work of art, no matter how it may grate upon the feelings of other men whose tastes differ from that of the artist. The sculptors who testified that the altar is not a work of art meant to imply that it is not a *Great* Work of Art. But, for the purpose of the infliction of a tariff, the government should not ask, is a work of art Great or Trivial. It should allow every *original* work of art, however good or bad, to come in free, for an American, and strike with fifteen per cent. duty every such work of art of an alien. The only question the government should ask is this: 'Is it morally clean and an original work of art; that is, not a duplicate, not a copy?" Many critics call many of the works of Rodin fine; many others call them crimes in marble. Who is going to decide? Hence, the question of the excellence or greatness of a work of art, imported, is beyond the province of the government, so long as the work is morally clean.'

"'That is all,' he said.

"The case went to Washington and the architect won. The government accepted my definition of art; and, reversing the Collector's decision, even though bolstered up by the testimony of the leading sculptors named above, returned him his money.

"This incident shows the supreme importance of a final and correct definition of art, from which no one can escape. And I think that my definition, as above given, is such a final one.

"The importance of my definition of art is derived not from my defining art in the abstract, not because the United States Government accepted my definition, but because it is the first definition in the history of æsthetics which, besides defining art in the abstract, also defines Great Art, and asserts that the *greatness* of a work of art *depends* upon its power of *stirring* our *highest emotions* and for the longest period of time. Thus it furnishes a beacon light for all those artists who wish to create truly great and *enduring* art, instead of wasting their lives producing ephemeral artistic stunts, destined for the morgue of oblivion.

"Another important point. Every æsthetician, from Baumgarten to Tolstoi, agrees that Art is a *Language,* for communicating with our fellowmen. This has, lately, been questioned by a few aberrated writers on art. My definition reaffirms that art *is a language.*

"Finally, my definition divides art into two great categories: Trivial and Great Art. That is, merely Decorative and Playful Art, and Expressive and Stimulative Art. What divides the two like a wall? *The spirit of Social Service.*

"A merely *decorative* work of art is addressed only to the senses, having no meaning beyond satisfying our sensuous

love of agreeable lines, colors, sounds and movements. And this is a trivial function by the side of the great spiritual function of arousing the highest emotions of the soul of mankind. An *expressive* work of art of any kind, in which the artist clearly aimed to produce a thing so beautiful, by *poetizing* his subject, as to arouse, universally, the emotions of mankind, belongs to the category of Great Art, even if it lacks mere technical *cleverness*. Why? Because, when we produce a thing which gives joy and ecstasy to the majority of mankind, or at least of our own race, we create an active, *unifying* social force, a thing that brings all men of our race, high or low, prince or peasant, into a *sympathetic relation*. It tends to increase the love between man and man. And that is the highest thing possible on this earth. And, when we engage in such an activity, we ally ourselves with the loftiest forces of nature, or with our Heavenly Father, 'Who so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son' to lift mankind into a greater and grander *unity*. Therefore, those expressive works of art, which show that the artists struggled hard to stir our loftiest emotions, they belong to the *category* of great art. It makes no difference if they are technically as defective and awkward as are the works of Fra Angelico at Florence, or of Orcagna at Pisa, when compared with such perfect works as Titian's 'Assumption,' or Leonardo's 'Last Supper.' Just as the hunchback slave Aesop is in the category of great men, because he solaced and buttressed the courage of mankind and spiritualized its aspirations, so, even the awkward works of Angelico and Orcagna are great because they radiate a *social* spirit which has lifted the souls of millions of men above the commonplace to the sublime, above the material to the spiritual. Thus they became a social power, working for higher social ends. They become unifying, *binding* forces which still work in the direction of concentrating the energies of men—for the perfection of the race and its environment. That is what entitles them to be placed in the temple of truly Great Art. Therefore, when the facts of life and of nature lift an artist into a state of sublime creative emotion and he translates that emotion into a work of supreme beauty that arouses sublime emotions in his fellowmen, high or humble, he becomes a conqueror of the world. While the artist who spends a long life in merely expressing himself in smart or clever works, which show clearly that he thought nothing of lifting his fellowmen to noble, spiritual enterprises but, rather, of calling the attention of the world to his clever, technical, stylistic stunts, he is destined to be forgotten. For, as Emerson said: 'The true artist has the planet for his pedestal; the adventurer, after years of strife, has nothing broader than his own shoes.' That is to say, the difference between Trivial and Great Art is one of Morals—of a spiritual and a social *purpose.*"

The main cause of so much confusion in æsthetics is the fact that every Æsthetician, heretofore, has tried to define—in *one definition,* more than is possible to define in any one definition in any human language and, in addition, has done it in slipshod language, like Plato, when he defined Beauty as: "Variety in Unity," which is childish, seeing that Variety and Unity will also produce—the Ugly! You cannot define two diametrically opposed things by one definition! A definition of Day will not define Night. And it is amazing that, during two thousand years, hundreds of writers have, like stupid parrots, repeated this error. Variety in Unity is one element of beauty, but those three words do not define: Beauty.

It is impossible to include in a definition of Art every element that enters into a Work of Art. Hence, all we can do is: to find the Fundamental thing that separates a Work of Art from everything else, and that is: The Expression of Human Emotion. After that, the most we can do is to suggest what makes a Work of Art greater and greater, from the most Trivial to the most Great.

Hence it is astonishing that no æsthetician has, heretofore, been able to see that, to avoid destructive confusion in the World of Art, we must divide all Art into at least three distinct categories: Trivial Art, Clever Art and Great Art.

And what is it that divides these three categories? It is: their relative power of Stirring either only the Sensuous, or merely the Intellectual, or the Spiritual emotions of mankind. In each of these three categories of Art we see a display of a greater and greater anxiety, energy and power on the part of the Artist, first: to Express adequately his own emotions or, second, his trying to Stir the emotions of his fellow-men.

For example, a crude Japanese fan, involving only a few grotesquely drawn rocks and some water, manifestly made in a careless mood, showing no great energy or labor of love, and made to appeal only to our love of Sensuous color, and arousing in us only a gentle emotion of such Mirth as forces us to say: "Hello! isn't that cute?" is a Trivial Work of Art: but it is, nevertheless, a Work of Art. Why? because the man who made it found some degree of joy in merely expressing his simple, sensuous, even grotesque emotion.

An example of *Clever* Art is: A Louis XVI screen with Fragonard decorations. The function of the screen is a trivial one and the subjects of the decorations are trivial also. But the whole thing is lifted out of the category of purely trivial art into the category of Clever Art, by the extraordinary display of Intellectual Skill, plus manual skill, plus loving dexterity of hand, and anxiety in the composition and execution of so perfect a thing, of its kind—an exponent of the cleverness of a clever age—so that we can imagine the joy both the cabinet-maker and the painter found in the mere making of the screen. Hence, it appeals to our Intellect as well as our senses, and arouses in us an emotion of—Delight, a higher emotion than the emotion of Mirth.

An example of a Great Work of Art is: Leonardo's "Last Supper." We know of "Last Suppers" by five of the great Renaissance artists, by Tintoretto, Raphael, Ghirlandajo, Del Sarto and Leonardo. Tintoretto was so little Emotioned by the subject that he handled it in a nonchalant way, and the result is trivial and makes us smile rather than worship. Raphael's decoration is dignified, but also nearly as trivial as Tintoretto's, because it has neither the cleverness of composition of that of Ghirlandajo, nor the dramatic expression of that of Del Sarto. It lacks character. The one by Ghirlandajo is truly *Clever,* because of the clever and charming composition and color scheme, and a certain serenity that pervades it. But it is only clever, because it lacks the profoundly dramatic expression—possible in the subject. The one by Del Sarto is less charming in color and composition than Ghirlandajo's, but greater—because more Dramatic, and showing more profoundly expressed human emotion on the faces of the actors in the drama. Hence, it stirs in us *loftier* emotions.

But the greatest of the five, and one of the six greatest works of the painter's art of all times, is that by Leonardo. Why? Because he alone of the five was himself Emotioned by the subject to the highest pitch, and then made the finest composition —and with infinite love and labor, succeeded in imagining and then expressing, the emotioning Dramatic disturbance, which must have followed, when Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray me this very night!" The more we contem-

plate the large copy in Milan, the more we gradually feel an emotion of *Awe*—the highest emotion the soul can experience. And this emotion becomes stronger as we note the perfect science of composition, drawing and expression of the picture, and then the loving anxiety with which he aimed to so perfect his work so that it should Stir the emotions of his fellow-men and, so, make them Share in his own emotional exaltation!

In Leonardo's own day the world already acclaimed this picture as the greatest of all "Last Suppers." And to-day the world is more than ever united in the opinion that it is not only the greatest "Last Supper" ever painted, but that it is one of the six greatest painted Pictures ever produced.

Before some trivial work you will hear people say: "What, that? that isn't a work of Art!" They do not mean it is not "a work of art"—they do mean is that it is not a *Clever* or a *Great* work of art; and, unable to express themselves in correct or clear language, they use general terms, ending in a slipshod remark.

In fact, slipshod thinking, talking, and writing are responsible for most of the anarchy in æsthetics in the world of art.

You cannot say a man is not a man: because he is a stupid and not a clever or a great man, can you? Even an African Pigmy is a man. You cannot say an Expression of Human Emotion, made in any language whatsoever, is not a work of art: because it is trivial and not clever or great. No matter how trivial or bad a man is, he is still a man; no matter how trivial and weak a work of art is, it is still a work of art.

People often say: "Isn't that—Artistic?" What they really mean, and should say, is: "Isn't that—Clever?" That is what they really do mean. Every art work is "artistic," but even the greatest works of art lack—*cleverness*.

But, to go deeply into the differences which divide the trivial from the clever and the clever from the great would take a volume. All we can consider is one sample of each.

What is true of Painting is true of Poetry. A trivial poem is the following:

"Yankee Doodle came to town
A-riding of a pony,
Stuck a feather in his hat
And called him Maccaroni."

It is a grotesque poem, merely arouses our Mirth, and, then, ridicule, but it is a Poem nevertheless.

A clever poem is Poe's:

"I dwelt alone
In a world of moan
And my soul was a stagnant tide,
Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became my blushing bride,
Till the yellow-haired, smiling Eulalie became my smiling bride."

It is of no special significance, but its varied and melodious lines, skilful composition and dextrous rhyming, arouse, to a certain extent, our intellectual admiration and, to a certain degree, an emotion of Delight, though falling short of arousing in us an emotion of Awe, and, therefore, lifts it from the category of Trivial and puts it into the category of Clever Art.

A great poem is Bryant's "Thanatopsis," the closing lines of which are:

"So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To the pale realms of shade, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon; but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

As we gradually read and grasp the meaning of this poem, one of the four greatest short poems in the language, we are slowly filled with an emotion of Awe by the grandeur and cadence of the lines, and by the nobility of the thought. But, far more than that. As we feel, gradually, with the passing years, steal over us the increasing consolation that this poem makes us feel, as we become impressed with the thought that all men must share our fate and that "death levels all ranks and lays the shepherd's crook beside the scepter of a king," we gradually find ourselves sustained and calmed in the face of death on our sick-bed; and, as we gradually learn to feel that the Poet aimed to console us, aimed to lift us to a lofty plane of thought and emotion, we feel an ever-increasing love for him and, finally, thank destiny for having lent the world so fine a soul long enough to enable it to evolve so sublime a masterpiece and to endow mankind with it, to serve for all time: as a stimulus to noble action, and as a fortifying consolation to afflicted humanity, helping it to a serene resignation as it sees itself gradually forced to depart from this world, so adorably beautiful to the soul, in spite of the miseries the mind and body may, now and then, pass through during our span of life. And then the universal veneration we feel for the Poet apotheosizes him into a sure immortality.

What is true of Poetry and Painting is true of Sculpture, Architecture, Music and all the Arts, all of which are governed by the same fundamental Laws.

Now, beginning with the most rudimentary and trivial works of art, there are less and less trivial works: up to the line where the higher category: the clever works of art, begins; then there are more and more clever works: until we reach the line where the category of great works of art begin—the three categories overlapping each other; then we reach greater and greater works of art: until we arrive at the greatest work, in each of the eight arts of the world. And that work is: the one which the largest number of cultured people have voted—after the longest period of time since its creation—to be the greatest work of art of its kind.

Why do I say cultured people? Because Tolstoi made the mistake of supposing that a crowd of uncultured moujiks, with rudimentary brains, are able to judge a work of art. They are not! Why? Because into the creation of a great work of art enter many complex elements, capable of stirring many different emotions of different people to different degrees, many of which are technical, intellectual elements, of which an uncultured man can know nothing, elements which can make an appeal only to the intellectual emotions of cultured men.

For instance, a Spanish peasant will enter the cathedral at Seville and look at a fine Madonna by

Murillo and be scarcely moved, then turn to a shrine and see a waxwork Madonna bedizened with crude red, blue and green silk, brass spangles and tin tinsel and be emotioned to delight, even to rapture! Both the wax-doll and the Murillo are—works of art, but one is utterly trivial, the other is great; the difference being one of intellectual science and craftsmanship and a spiritual suggestiveness: totally beyond the grasp of the peasant, and within the comprehension and appreciation of only cultured and spiritually awake people.

It is astonishing that so great an artist as Tolstoi should have so ignored the social value of the merely intellectual elements in a work of art, in view of his crusade for social uplift! This is another proof of his excessiveism and of his being not a deep analytical thinker, but rather a synthetic and sympathetic artist.

Finally, time is a great factor in determining the greatness of a work of art. Time has a contempt for all things made without its aid. The artist who ignores time, both in the making of his art work and in entrusting it to its care, is doomed to oblivion, and all his æsthetic tergiversations and "artistic jumping-jacking" will be but—pitiable waste of energy.

It is safe to say that those among the works of Greek art which have come down to us and have, uniformly, during two thousand years of time, been voted, by all sorts of minds, as the best and still the best, that they really are—the best.

Thus, it is certain that the "Jupiter Otricoli" in the Vatican is the greatest representation of the Godhead ever made by man, as far as we know; because it has been successively decided to be so by the majority of the wisest and most profoundly cultured men of the world. Against such a verdict the *ipse-dixit* of any individual merely raises a laugh.

And what is a "cultured" man? He is a man who, first of all, is able to reason logically; who has learned the meaning of life, *i. e.*, to get away from the animal toward the spiritual; who will not do an unjust thing; who has learned the value of things; who has enough self-control to prevent his judgment from being too much warped by his own taste and temperament; who is dominated by common-sense; and who, finally, is filled with enough love for his fellow-men to enable him to feel what is good or bad, in its effect, on the highest interests of the race, and who has a fixed desire to contribute his share toward the elevation of mankind as far as in him lies.

He alone knows the real value of any spoken word, whether in type, paint, sound or stone. He alone is able to look back in imagination over the past, and, reasoning by analogy, say what work of art will likely endure in the future. Are there many such men among artists? No! Many among peasants? No! And very few of these are found among the so-called upper and rich classes. It is in the great middle class that most men of culture are found. Some are poor and some are rich.

This cultured class embraces, of course, artists of all kinds. But it also includes philosophers, statesmen, metaphysicians, lawyers, critics, savants, educators and men of high intellectual activity generally. And it is this great cultured class which finally gives to every work of art its place and rank.

Thus, to sum up, we see: that we exist only so long as we are asleep; we begin to live only when we are awake, because we then literally enjoy various states of consciousness in which we, our ego, experience different kinds of agitations or emotions—some physical, some intellectual, some spiritual. By a fiat of nature we are impelled to express those emotions all the more certainly, the stronger the emotions; to do this we must use certain kinds of language or form; and, as soon as our emotion is expressed, in some form, merely with the purpose of expressing that emotion—no matter how trivial the emotion or how trivial the form of expression—it is already —a work of art—rudimentary in ratio of the triviality of the emotion and of the form. When, however, the emotion is a powerful one, and of a lofty kind, and expressed with an extraordinary power of stirring the emotions, not only of an individual, but of mankind: then we have a great work of art.

So, I repeat: EVERY HUMAN WORK MADE, IN ANY LANGUAGE, WITH THE PURPOSE OF EXPRESSING, OR STIRRING, HUMAN EMOTION IS A WORK OF ART; AND A WORK OF ART IS GREAT IN RATIO OF ITS POWER OF STIRRING THE HIGHEST EMOTIONS OF THE LARGEST NUMBER OF CULTURED PEOPLE FOR THE LONGEST PERIOD OF TIME.

F. W. Ruckstuhl