

ART IN EDUCATION - EDUCATION IN ART

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In a recent review of an inspiring book [this volume, p. 221], Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*, limitations of space compelled me to omit reference to many of its significant considerations. One of these was a plea for the inclusion of aesthetic appreciation in the scheme of life and of education. The plea is the more significant because based on a fundamental philosophical principle, not just upon miscellaneous eulogies assembled ad hoc. To quote some of his own words: There is something between the gross specialised values of the practical man, and the thin specialised values of the mere scholar. Both types have missed something; and if you add together the two sets of values, you do not obtain the missing elements. What is wanted is an appreciation of the infinite variety of vivid values achieved by an organism in its proper environment. When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset. There is no substitute for the direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality. We want concrete fact with a high light thrown on what is relevant to its preciousness.

Art and aesthetic appreciation is what is missing, "art" denoting any selective activity by which concrete things are so arranged as to elicit attention to the distinctive values realizable by them. Aesthetic appreciation and art so conceived are not additions to the real world, much less luxuries. They represent the only ways in which the individualized elements in the world of nature and man are grasped. Science assumes *that* there are such individual realizations in which something exists immediately for its — 112 — own sake, but it passes over *what* they are: it does so because its business is elsewhere, namely in the relations which they have to other things. Without aesthetic appreciation we miss the most characteristic as well as the most precious thing in the real world. The same is true of "practical" matters, that is, of activity limited to effecting technical changes, changes which do not affect our enjoyable realizations of things in their individualities.

¹ Reseña que escribe en 1926 sobre el libro de Albert C. Barnes (1925) *The Art in Painting*, titulada "Art in Education – Education in Art".

Modern preoccupation with science and with industry based on science has been disastrous; our education has followed the model which they have set. It has been concerned with intellectual analysis and formularized information, and with technical training for this or that field of professionalized activity, a statement as true, upon the whole, of the scholar in the classics or in literature or in the fine arts themselves as of specialists in other branches.

The result is disastrous because it strengthens the tendency to professionalism, or the setting of minds in grooves. “The fixed person for the fixed duties, who in older societies was such a godsend, in the future will be a public danger.” The physical celibacy of the learned class of the Middle Ages is now repeated in a “celibacy of the intellect divorced from the concrete contemplation of the complete facts.” Again, the outcome is disastrous because it leads men to take abstractions as if they were realities.

The social effects are seen in traditional political economy with its abstractions from concrete individual human lives, the theory only reflecting, however, the actual abstractions which reign practically in industry. It is disastrous because it has fixed attention upon competition for control and possession of a fixed environment rather than upon what art can do to create an environment; and because it has led to the middle-class complacent regard for comfort and security in a moving world, while “in the immediate future there will be less security than in the immediate past, less stability.” It is disastrous because civilization built upon these principles cannot supply the demand of the soul for joy, or freshness of experience; only attention through art to the vivid but transient values of things can effect such refreshment.

Such refreshments, themselves transient, yet discipline the inmost being of man, a discipline “not distinct from enjoyment, but by reason of it,” since they shape the soul to a permanent appreciation of values beyond its former self. — 113 —

Such an indictment of existing culture upon both its scientific and industrial sides with the claim that aesthetic appreciation inspired by **art** is the missing element, raises the question of the intrinsic connection between **education** and the arts. In a recent review, Mr. Leo Stein made an adverse criticism of the book on *The Art in Painting* written by Mr. A. C. Barnes, on the ground that the book was unfavorably affected by Mr. Barnes’s interest in education as exemplified in his creation of the Barnes Foundation as an education-

al institution.²¹ The assertion raises in its^o implications the question of what painting as an **art** is in relation to **education**. Is **art** in painting so foreign to **education** and^o **education** so foreign to **art** that they must be kept apart, or is art^o intrinsically educative, intrinsically, by its very existence, and not by virtue of any didactic purpose to which it is subordinated?

The answer to the question is clear enough from the standpoint of such a philosophy as that of Mr. Whitehead. The book and the Foundation which it represents propound the question in a definite form which properly affords the point of departure for a more specific consideration of the general theme.

The book is written from the conviction that art as displayed in painting is inherently educative. But paintings do not educate at present till we are educated to enjoy, to realize, their educative potentialities. The need of prior education flows from many sources. Part of the reasons are stated in what has been drawn from Mr. Whitehead: the submergence of aesthetic appreciation by the ruling tendencies of our present culture. We are^o unconsciously educated away from art in painting in advance. But they are also more specific. They spring from the disposition of^o artists, or at least “connoisseurs,” to set art on a pedestal, to make of it something esoteric, something apart from values inherent in all experiences of things in their full integrity, and something apart from the constant needs of the everyday man.

This attitude is fostered in turn by the customs of institutionalized museums and the habits of professional critics. The celibacy of the intellect has found its way into galleries and histories of art, into books about painters and paintings. The strong social current setting against aesthetic realization is reinforced by influences which not only give the would-be enjoyer of paintings no directive^o 114 — assistance, but which actually confuse and mislead. For they fix observation upon everything except what is vital—the eliciting of attention to the distinctive values realizable in all things, when these values are selected and heightened by the painter’s eye and hand. The book in question attempts, as does the educational Foundation, a reversal of this process.

Since Mr. Stein omitted in his review to state the principles by which Mr. Barnes achieves the reversal, I may be excused for stating them. One of them is that the painter realizes the^o heightened appreciative enjoyment of the scenes of nature and human life by thorough-going integration of the elements proper to painting, namely, color, including light, line, spatial^o ar-

rangement, the latter including surface pattern, solidity and depth. Plastic form or design is the result of the merging, the interpenetration of these elements, and is not to be identified with the effect of any one of them taken by itself—which, in fact, only leads to an overaccentuation of some one feature detracting from the aesthetic effect of the whole. This interpenetration or integration is then the vital thing, comparable to what, in Mr. Whitehead's terminology, is the interplay of individual values such that every part of the whole reflects the aspects of every other part, as the whole reflects aspects of nature extending far beyond the scene specifically displayed. To be educated for the educative function of paintings is thus to learn to see this integration in the whole and in its every part. The other element in education is recognition of a continuing tradition which works in the individual artist, but not by way of enslavement—which defines academic art. Every significant painter in respecting and using the tradition adds something to it from his own personal vision and emotion, and his addition is qualitative, transforming.

Such a statement as has just been made is, of course, merely preliminary; by itself it is nothing. It becomes something by being applied in detail to the definite analysis of a large number of paintings from the time of Giotto to the present day. We come back to the two questions already asked. In the first place, is art intrinsically an education and an imperatively needed education of the human being? In the second place, is education needed to help human beings to see paintings so that their educative function may be realized? I am loath to believe that Mr. Stein would answer either of these questions in the negative; I do not suppose he belongs to the esoteric who would treat art in paintings or elsewhere as a mystery for the few. In this case, difference in appraisal of particular artists or paintings means little or nothing in itself. For the essence of what Mr. Barnes offers is method and a criterion based on that method. If the method is right then errors in specific appraisals must be corrected by the use of the method.

Method means or is intelligence at work; denial of the existence of any attainable method signifies, therefore, continuation of the present chaos and impotency of aesthetic appreciation: that is, continued non-performance of that educative function from absence of which our civilization is suffering so disastrously. I shall not obtrude my own opinion as to the worth of the method. But the existence of the Foundation and the book which presents its leading ideas of method are a challenge. They assert that aesthetic apprecia-

tion inspired and directed by art is a rightful and imperatively urgent demand of the common man; they assert that method, intelligence, may be employed not just by a few critics for the delectation or information of a small circle, but so that everyone may be educated to obtain what art in paintings has to give. They make the latter assertion by proffering in general and in detail a method, showing it in operation. They raise therefore a problem of immense importance in education, a problem intimately and vitally connected with the greatest weakness in existing education, a weakness disastrously affecting every phase of contemporary life. It is this fact which gives the book a quality incommensurate with that of other "treatises" on painting and art and which calls for criticism which is correspondingly out of the usual sort.