

## THE MIDDLE WAY IN ART

by

HLA SHAIN

It is a characteristic of society at all times that in every sphere of human activity there is perpetual revolt of youth against age. Impatient, temp'etuous and eager to break away from conventions youth accuses age of being dull, obstinate, hidebound and unreceptive. Age pins its faith on tradition and experience and has no sympathy for speed, dash, exaggeration, over-emphasis or over-confidence which it regards as sure signs of conceit born of immaturity.

So in the sphere of art, the seeds of unrest and revolt had been sown a long time ago—since perhaps, the days

had at no time been any repercussions in the East of aesthetic schisms in the West so that when at last it suddenly wakes on to a sort of Renaissance, the East is puzzled by a bewildering number of schools of

The author, a retired ICS, is a lover of art and an artist; he spent most of his time in England wandering in art galleries and attending art schools and managed to get through his probationer's exams, only by intensive work at the eleventh hour. Here, the arrival in Rangoon of Miss Anna Walinska, a well-known exponent of modern art of the western version, sets the author on an argument for the "middle way".

tiresome and insipid and that age forever wedded to tradition will never have the courage or imagination to find new and more interesting venues of self expression. Age scorns modern art which is more a means for the expression of the ego than for the representation of nature; whilst it is prepared to admit that certain forms of new ideas such as distortion, exaggeration, false perspective etc are permissible, legitimate and even desirable additions to existing techniques, age cannot tolerate attempts to



*Artists, art-lovers and guests... \**

of pre-Raphaelitism. Impressionism, post-Impressionism, surrealism, cubism etc, all signify breaks from tradition and conservatism and this tendency of the rift to go on widening is accelerated by the exponents of abstractionism—who think it a banality for a picture to represent merely what one sees; for them a picture is out of the common and in good taste only if it represents what one feels and thinks about the object. Circles, angles, lines etc. replace the objects one naturally associates with pictures and the result is recognised as art, which however is too recondite to have any appeal to the common man.

With all these cataclysmic changes taking place in the West, the East has lain quiet, until very recently, in a state of somnolence. There

thought each supported by its adherents with all the zeal of fanatics. We in this country are going through such an ordeal now. We really love conventional realism; we can appreciate impressionism; we can tolerate surrealism; but we are puzzled by cubism and are confounded by abstractionism. Here again, youth, keen as he is everywhere to break away from tradition, will snap at the chance to stigmatise age and claiming receptivity as its monopoly will probably accept with greater readiness those advanced theories of art.

### YOUTH VERSUS AGE

The rift between youth and age on this issue is pretty violent in the West. Little tolerance is shown on either side. Youth claims that art bound by convention is static, dull,

divorce art entirely from nature and it never fails to brand such attempts as cloaks designed to cover up incompetence.

### MISS WALINSKA IN BURMA

We in Burma are fortunate to have amongst us to day, a distinguished American artist—Miss Anna Walinska. Although she herself is an avowed exponent of abstractionism Miss Walinska is full of sympathy for those of us who cannot bring themselves to break

\* from left to right: standing—Mg Lin Maung; Harry; U Nyo Mya; Dr. Tha Hla; U Htin Fatt; U San Win; U Ohn Lwin; U Lwin; U Myat Kyaw; M. Tin Aye. sitting: Mrs. L. Walinsky; Mrs. Beta Welsing; U Ngwe Gaing; Miss Anna Walinska; U Hla Shain; U Ba Kyi; Mrs. Tun We.

away from the conventional realistic approach. Her judgement that contemporary art in Burma is mostly influenced by the English School of Constable with a rather impressionistic approach is perfectly correct. She acknowledges that the samples of work she inspected at the recent cultural exhibition show considerable merit. As a modernist, however, she could not help wishing to see evidence of search and experimentation without which no new direction could be anticipated. A very novel trait of her make-up is that she does not scorn the older school of conventional painters. She says, "These artists (modern) of the newer generation have such a respect for their elders that they have no longer any insuperable temptation to imitate them. They admire their elders to such a degree for what they have done that they do not feel they can do better in the same direction. They realise that there are dozens of other corners to be explored and it would seem that the younger artists have begun to push out in these other directions." If these sentiments are accepted by all modernists as their motive for searching out new directions, their efforts deserve the respect that is certainly due.

The vast majority of artists in Burma follows the realistic

approach. They have now for the first time seen and heard a modernist, who appears entirely different from the only brand they had known, the type who has nothing but scorn for every thing which is not his own work or which is not in his direction. They have also had an opportunity to see her recent work and were agreeably surprised to realise that abstraction can excite emotions in the same way as realism. The abstract drawing of the Prime Minister at prayer was unanimously regarded as a very satisfying study interpreting devotion by a few very graceful lines. Those artists who were fortunate enough to have met her could not quarrel with her view that exploration and adventure are the spice of art and that the urge to create should be fostered. We thoroughly agree with her although



artists interpret nature on canvas, or try...

efforts in that direction must necessarily be limited by the conditions prevailing in this part of the world.

#### COMPROMISE ART

Let us not join in this bitter quarrel. Let us not take sides. Let us go the middle way. It does not profit us to attack those whose views differ from us. There is plenty of room for each shade of opinion of art to grow and it is wisdom to leave it to time and history to prove which has the most permanent appeal for it is natural that only those ideas will survive the test of time which command universal approval. In the meantime let us recognise that youth and age both have their faults as both have their good points and once we do that, the possibility of a compromise becomes apparent at once. Mere representation says Lintott, even with the most exquisite finish will never satisfy whilst abstractions which have no reference to Nature or its symbols can never take the place of Nature in appealing to the universal mind. Let us therefore concentrate on a compromise and strike out a new direction in which youth and age can march forward in a spirit of friendship and co-operation.

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discussions over drawings...lets speak out.