

ONCE MORE MATISSE

(WRITTEN AFTER HAVING SEEN THE LAST EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY MATISSE IN THE PHOTO-SECESSION GALLERY)

WHAT will Matisse mean to the coming generation? Rather a strange question to ask when an artist is still exposed to the critical analysis and jeering doubt of his own generation. Yet in this instance it is tangible. Esthetically, stripped as it were of all notes of novelty, momentary influences and contentions, the essence of his work—not unlike his “Serf”—stands forth, stridulously and strenuously, as an embodiment of Strength. This is the one impression left on the mind. It is the intrinsic note that supersedes the fascination of all his other manifold gifts. This influence will remain.

As an innovator of form he is apt to be of less importance. Whenever a method of treatment becomes familiar, and easy to ply even by a beginner, the time of a new birth of imagination is inevitable. The result is a reaction. The art of our days is as vacillating in its aim and effect as the annual spring sales of millinery. There is no steadiness and solidity in the present trend of art thought. One ideal follows closely upon another. There are a dozen schools running parallel as in a race of thoroughbreds. Besides there are other men engaged in the very same problems. Every artist with original aspirations has forerunners, disciples and soulless imitators. Matisse has actual competitors. He may be made the patriarch of the movement; or this doubtful distinction will be eventually thrust upon somebody else. The centrifugal force of this movement is still elusive and shifting. The process of corrosion to which all intellectual products are subject has not yet set in.

Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso endeavor to give a new understructure to color. Their contribution to color is progressive, evolutionary. It is an expansion of impressionism. Their revolt against academic form and surface records (no matter whether of the classic or realistic school, it is idealization anyhow) is bolder, more far reaching, but it would take an augural mind indeed to prognosticate whether they have found the point of Archimedes in this respect or not. It is very much like discovering the North pole. One has to believe in hearsay.

Form and color are the only means to suggest or reproduce an illusion of the rotundity of objects in space. Form is either an elaboration or simplification of line and plane facts. With Matisse, despite all exaggeration and inconsistency, satire, anatomical and geometrical emphasis, it is simplification. But it is not a new form factor. It is rather a spiral return from a more scientific age to the primitive conceptions of an antique world, where instinct reigned supreme. The childlike attitude is impossible to the eclectic mind. Little round men, who brag incessantly about their discoveries, can not in the appearance of things feel the same innocent delight as a child in the prettiness of a world of new toys.

Matisse is at present the recipient of most rigorous denunciation. Art journalism apparently has concentrated its magnifying glass upon his technical eccentricities, and the public is at loss as to an accurate estimate of the painter's