EXTRACTS FROM "THE SPIRITUAL IN ART"

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These are the seekers of the inner spirit in outer things.

After a different fashion, and more nearly related to the purer methods of painting, did Cézanne, the seeker for new laws of form, take on like tasks. Cézanne knew how to put a soul into a tea-cup, or, to speak more correctly, he treated the cup as if it were a living thing. He raised "nature morte" (still-life) to that height where the outer dead things become essentially living. He treated things as he treated human beings, because he was gifted with the power of seeing the inner life of everything. He realizes them as color expressions, picturing them with the painter's inner note and compelling them to shapes which, radiating an abstract ringing harmony, are often drawn up in mathematical forms. What he places before us is not a human being, not an apple, not a tree, but all these things Cézanne requires for the purpose of creating an inner melodious painting, which is called the picture. That, also, is how one of the latest of modern Frenchmen, Henri Matisse, understands his own work. Matisse paints "pictures," and in these he seeks to reproduce the "divine" that is in things. To attain this end he requires no other means than the object (be it a man or anything else) for his starting point, and the painter's peculiar means—Color and Form.

Led by the purely personal quality of the Frenchman, specially and excellently gifted as a colorist, Matisse lays the greatest stress and weight on color. Like Debussy, he is not always able to free himself from conventional ideas of beauty—Impressionism runs in his blood. That is why we find in Matisse's work which is the expression of the larger, inward, living fact and which has been called forth as the necessary product of his point of view, other paintings which are chiefly the product of outward influences, outward stimuli (how often one thinks of Manet in this connection!), and chiefly or finally expressions of the outer world. Here is to be seen how the specially French conception of beauty in art, with its refined, epicurean and pure ringing melodious quality, is carried over clouds to cool and abiding heights.

That other great Parisian, the Spaniard, Pablo Picasso, never served this Beauty. Always moved, and always tempestuously torn by a compulsion for self-expression, Picasso throws himself from one extreme of means to another. If there is a chasm between the methods, Picasso takes a mad leap, and there he is on the other side to the astonishment of the enormous mass of followers. Just when these think they have reached him, the wearying descent and ascent must begin again for them. That is how the latest French movement of Cubists arose. Picasso strives to achieve construction by numerical proportion. In his last work (1911) he arrives by a logical road to an annihilation of the material, not by analysis, but by a kind of taking to pieces of each single part and a constructive laying out of them as a picture. At the same time his work shows in a remarkable way his desire to retain the appearance of the material things. Picasso is afraid of no means. If he disturbed by color in a problem of pure line form he throws color overboard and paints a picture in brown and white. And these problems are the high water mark of his art. Matisse—Color. Picasso—Form. Two great highways to one great goal.

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(Translated from the German.)