

WALKOWITZ*

WALKOWITZ, the painter, is entirely ONE with the man, with his subject, with its pictorial transformation. His work is his personality. Oriental-Russian, quiet, undemonstrative, with the look of a musician besides, breathing sincerity, neither his Caucasian-Slavish nor his Jewish blood predominates. What distinguishes him from the louder radicals, is his concentration, the absence of pretension and strife, he goes about like a keeper, who knows his wild animals well; as a shepherd in the meadow or in the church, who has his flock well in hand. If one can at all entangle him in a controversy on art, he will start by saying: "Art is only through feeling, so alive and sensitive that the picture is as the breath out of the mouth, but coming from the heart; a distillation upon painting-ground, from compassion, absorption, exhalation—a phonographic record in color, line and tone—or else there is no art." He is Tolstoian in his affection for humanity, for the laboring, sorrowing, struggling millions which throng the east side, or frolic in parks and on the seashore. Amidst such he absorbs and afterwards records his impressions. Not in naturalistic-academic pictures, for he is the living antithesis of the Academic. Rather he proceeds in a reconstructive way to recreate. From a motif of reality—be it a laborer laboring, lovers loving, a family reuniting, a dancer dancing, a park colorfully spotted with a crowd, a market group—he develops one idea at a time. This idea he constructs solely from the pictorially expressive features of the motif, as a logical function, in each instance. Hence the enormous variety and power in his work; entirely composed of lineaments, formations, tonalities which precisely correspond to the feeling engendered by nature. So each picture has its own reality and inner laws, by which it is an organism, totally and purposely different from nature. A picture should have beauty of intense vision—be it simple or complex, subtle or powerful. Walkowitz is master of his pictorial means; a draftsman facile in all requirements. So, that he can sensitize a surface and make it alive, refract expressions of life through pictorial equivalents; with him the bare enclosed spaces live. At the same time, to a feeling eye, his pictures look "naturalistic," real, by way of the imagination and memory of corresponding experience. We need only examine the drawings, inch for inch, in order to become aware of the pictorial metamorphosis that reality undergoes in his vision. Walkowitz carries forward Cézanne's standard consciously, and like him, conscientiously. In results he differs from Cézanne. Walkowitz requires form or tone, only, after the line has fully served, has lived its life—as it were—in behalf of the motive; his lines may be the merest thread of a silhouette, or a heavy organic skeleton—their qualities, of touch, "modulation," express life. The simpler the lines are, the

*Extract from "Kandinsky and Walkowitz," an essay by Oscar Bluemner which will be published in a future Number of CAMERA WORK.