

INTERNATIONAL
STUDIO

The EAST MEETS the WEST

KIPLING with his lilting rhythm has fixed upon us one of the most fallacious of the many false clichés that are an unfortunate substitute for ideas. That East and West never shall meet is not only arrant nonsense but destructive nonsense, for it is when they do meet that great things are born. The contact should be, therefore, encouraged rather than denied in advance. Indeed it is almost safe to say that it is only when the cultures of the East and the West are intermingled that there is a great period of artistic production.

The anthropologists generalize this observation into the theory that great and fine productivity is the result of the confluence of different cultural traditions. The historians substantiate the theory by citing the specific instances. First there is the Hellenic art, not pure Greek even in its most classical moment, but nourished by the Egyptian and Cretan civilizations and stimulated by the contact with Persia. Next, even as the oriental tradition had thus first traveled west so then the Hellenic and Roman traditions traveled in the opposite direction and met at Constantinople the luxurious arts of India and Persia whence the Byzantine style was born. On the following swing of the pendulum the art of the East was carried by the crusades into France and Italy and the Romanesque was born. And then, the pendulum swinging rapidly back and forth in the quick interchanges of travel and trade, the Gothic was evolved, built on oriental prototypes though built in western terms. And thus the history of art has repeated itself with the Renaissance the last great brilliant instance. Artistic productivity came when East and West did meet.

In the sculpture of Beniamino Bufano the forms of the Orient express Western ideas

PHYLLIS ACKERMAN



"PORTRAIT OF A CHINESE"

BY BENIAMINO BUFANO

A strikingly original contemporary instance of this fusion of the two tastes is the work of Beniamino Bufano. Bufano is himself a European, an Italian born and purely Italian until adolescence. Before he left Italy, moreover, he was already a sculptor of parts with Paris and Roman successes to his credit in spite of his scant years. Then he came to New York and became, insofar as there is such a thing artistically, an American. He studied in the Art Students' League, took prizes there, worked in the studios of several New York sculptors including Paul Manship, studied and learned wherever there was anything of beautiful form to see. Then he went to the Orient. He went to Cambodia and saw the architectural sculpture in rich massing which he still considers the greatest sculptural art of the world; went to Java and watched the silhouettes of the shadow plays; went to Sumatra and collected the sumptuous native fabrics; and finally went to China and was reborn. China gave him, first, a profound obsession with a new point of view. He was absorbed by the monumental calm, the unhurried certainty of an old, wise race. In the still but deep flowing detachment of the Chinese individual and the Chinese art of the Tang and Sung Dynasties he found something fundamentally sympathetic. He walked over the unusual ways, came upon abandoned temples, ferreted out bits of discarded statues, a head, an arm, a foot, studied them, took them with him, where the taking was legitimate. Out of his own personal instinct for coherent form grew a direct understanding of these simplified but inevitable Chinese forms. China gave him a lesser but yet important thing, a heightened awareness of decoration.

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