

## **"New Training for Future Artists and Art Lovers," 1934**

The significance of this exhibition lay (1), in the indication of the potentialities of children to use a medium of expression, considered the heritage only of the highly gifted, the well-trained and the experienced; (2), in the intrinsic value of this work as art, and (3), in the value of such expressions both in the development of appreciation of art and in the future creation of art by those of the children who may be inclined to continue painting or sculpture as a major interest in life.

Laymen usually have a wrong conception of the relationship of natural talent, training and experience to art. Of course, no one will deny the benefits of long experience, discipline, and above all, talent. Yet we may look at the matter in a different fashion. Our children, as well as ourselves, employ the common medium of speech. We all tell stories, narrate events, indulge in correspondence, sometimes with great feeling and artistry. Yet, we do not feel that our expression in this medium is dependent on our knowledge of grammar, syntax or the rules of rhetoric. Likewise we sing melodies and improvise tunes for ourselves and I am sure that we can do both without voice culture and a knowledge of harmony and counterpoint. Painting is just as natural a language as singing or speaking. It is a method of making a visible record of our experience, visual or imaginative, colored by our own feelings and reactions and indicated with the same simplicity and directness as singing or speaking. If you do not believe this, watch these children work, and you will see them put forms, figures and views into pictorial arrangements, employing of necessity most of the rules of optical perspective and geometry, but without the knowledge that they are employing them. They do so in the same manner as they speak, unconscious that they are using the rules of grammar.

*Brooklyn Jewish Center Review* 14 (February–March 1934): 10–11. Signed Marcus Rothkowitz, this is the first publication by Rothko in a professional venue. As an artist who gives classes to young children whose works are exhibited, he presents, at the request of the journal editor, what he considers to be the keys to artistic education. Rothko defends an innate and natural vision of painting: a language as natural as speech.

It is just with that simplicity that we allow the children in our class to paint, and that is why, perhaps, their paintings are so fresh, so vivid and varied. And it is these qualities, which, no matter how skilled an artist may be, he must obtain to make his work arresting and provoking of attention.

Let me describe how our children work. They enter the art room. Their paints, paper, brushes, clay, pastels—all the working material is ready. Most of them, full of ideas and interests, know just what they want to portray. Sometimes it is something from the history lesson, sometimes from Hebrew history; at other times, something they might have seen in the movies, on a summer trip, on a visit to the docks or at a factory, or some scene observed on the street; often it is a subject that is born entirely in their own minds as a result of reflection, or of particular sympathies and dreams.

They proceed to work. Unconscious of any difficulties, they chop their way and surmount obstacles that might turn an adult grey, and presto! Soon their ideas become visible in a clearly intelligent form. As their experience increases, they gain in sureness, and soon nothing is too difficult. They handle crowds, vistas, panoramas, landscapes, portraits—every conceivable idea, with the same ease that a more timid person might draw a simple house.

The function of the instructor is to stimulate and maintain their emotional excitement, and suggest solutions of difficulties which might prove a snag, and above all to inspire self-confidence on their part, always, however, taking the utmost care not to impose laws which might induce imaginative stagnation and repetition. Then, too, the instructor, by approving or disapproving, maintains a standard as to the amount of realization which the child must attain in his work before it is laid aside.

As a result of this method, each child works on his own idea, and actually develops a style of his own whereby his work is distinguishable from everyone else's. He achieves a skill and personal technique of representing his ideas. Working side by side, as these children do, you will never see them copying or being influenced by another's work. Hence the variety, the skill, the sureness which were visible in our exhibition.

As an example of the community spirit found in this art class, the following incident may be cited. One of the boys was at a loss for a subject. The instructor suggested a painting based on something he had seen on a visit to a factory or other plant. The boy had never been in such a place, but a girl standing near by came to his assistance. She had visited a cotton gin on a recent trip and was able to describe it to him. The two decided to do a joint painting, one supplying the

details for the picture and the other giving them pictorial illustration by means of paint and brush.

That is, they are complete realizations of a subject that moves us by the beauty of its moods, by the fulness of its forms, and the excitement of its design. In short, many of these pieces are capable of moving us emotionally. Without going into an involved discussion of the aesthetics involved, that is more or less what fine works of art do to us. It is significant, that dozens of artists viewed this exhibition and were amazed and stirred by it.

These children have ideas, often fine ones, and they express them vividly and beautifully, so that they make us feel what they feel. Hence their efforts are intrinsically works of art.

Our critics of art, poetry, music, theatre and movies deplore that so many artists occupy themselves with precious themes, such as still life in painting, decadent amatory situations in the drama and literature and futile atonalities in music. They accuse our artists of being unsocial, that they neglect the life about them, and urge that they turn toward the surging tide which is their life. Well, let the critics view our children's work. Everything is there: factories, docks, streets, crowds, mountains, lakes, farms, cattle, men, women, ships, water—everything conceivable. Here is a social art.

Most of these children will probably lose their imaginativeness and vivacity as they mature. But a few will not. And it is hoped that in their cases, the experience of eight years will not be forgotten and they will continue to find the same beauty about them. As to the others, it is hoped, that their experience will help them to revive their own early artistic pleasures in the work of others.

It should be noted that while about a hundred and fifty works were shown in the Brooklyn Museum more than twice that number could have been selected with equal justification. Only the limitations of the available wall space reduced the selection to the number exhibited.

Similarly, practical reasons confined the selections for illustrating this article to only five subjects. Some of the paintings which were admired could not be used because they would not have reproduced well in print.