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**FACULTY  
RESEARCH  
EDITION**

of

**The Savannah State  
College Bulletin**

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Volume 10, No. 2

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SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE  
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# FACULTY RESEARCH EDITION

*Published by*

## THE SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE

Volume 10, No. 2

Savannah, Georgia

October, 1956

William K. Payne, President

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# Impressions of College Art

By Phillip J. Hampton

Somewhere a wise man once stated that there is nothing new under the sun. To the best of the writer's knowledge; this argument has never been disproved. On the other hand, perhaps it has never merited proof. However, for a man to have made a statement of this nature indicated that he was stimulated by some observation or occurrence in his environment that these tangible and intangible things confused men and caused them to think that the last form taken by these things should be called new. Hence, there is nothing new—just evolution.

The statements that are presented are not intended to be new; they are merely a sequence of statements of which many persons have at one time or another been aware. They are set down with the purpose to stimulate re-evaluation of the knowledge we already possess. This humble writer is concerned with art in a college curriculum.

Most teachers well know art as an integrated feature in the college curriculum has come a long and laborious way. Needless to say, its proof as justification for being in and remaining in the curriculum is still in the process of prognosis by the floundering (train the mind through exercise) individual.

The minds of these individuals date back to the Latin, Greek and mathematics schools of the past, where these subjects were emphasized as calisthenics for the brain. The basic assumption here was that the brain was like a muscle and needed strengthening to enable it to absorb other subjects. Art at this time was certainly not considered as a strengthening exercise. For at this time John Adams asserted he would not give a sixpence for a Raphael; he rejoiced that America had not reached the age of painting and sculpture which, he thought, would certainly lead to the corruption of our beloved country.<sup>1</sup>

It is, however, ironical that this same sour man could later state that he enjoyed sitting for the prominent artist, Gilbert Stuart.

There is something mysterious and powerful about the medium of art. Art can be soothing and gentle, like a breeze; or it can be furious, like a storm; it can be convincing, like a top television commercial. Art lies dormant,

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lincoln Kelly, *The American College and the Social Order*, New York, 1940, p. 229.

amendable and powerful. Its energies need only to be put to work.

Since the advent of progressive education, art has become more and more a part of our students' lives. In the days of John Adams art development was practically non-existent. However, much has preceded our growing concept of art today. To very rapidly cite a few examples of unstable occurrence: the French and Spanish contribution to aesthetic influence in America (Washington, D. C. and New Orleans Architecture). Barthold's Statue of Liberty; Franklin and Jefferson sculptured by Houdon, the re-arrangement caused by the civil war, western expansion railroads, gold, etc.

It seems that unrest and calamity immediately stimulates renewed interest in the arts. For an example, it was not until after the First World War that any great interest was shown in the teaching of fine arts in college. In the great depression more art attention was stimulated. And after the Second World War, art gained more attention. Now in fear of future rearrangements man is giving great attention to his soul, his church and his art. D. W. Gotshalk states, "There is today all over the world a profound sense of the awful horror and tragedy that will be unloosed by another war and a yearning for peace rarely, if ever, equaled in human history."<sup>2</sup>

Is there some possibility that thinking men now see in art a molding character and ethical values that have been, prior and during the past catastrophies, overlooked?

What would the results have been had more emphasis been placed upon man and his sensuous ideals, especially at the time these men who decided our fates attended school?

The development of art has been slow in American schools. It was not until 233 years after Harvard had been founded that Charles Eliot Norton had been installed as professor of art.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it was not until the early 1930's that 23 percent of 400 institutions offered art studio courses and 66 percent offered history of art. After this late beginning Vassar enrolled one-fifth of its students in art courses and Antioch required every student to take an introductory course in art.<sup>4</sup>

These were perhaps experiments and from all appearances they have proven themselves to be worthy. However, these subjects did not appear without some overt resonance from the inert thinkers. They felt that such subject matter was frivolous and merely a fad. But all subjects,

<sup>2</sup>D. W. Gotshalk, *Art and Social Order*, Chicago: 1947, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup>Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 240.

even the "three R's," have been criticized. Even English, something that no contemporary American can feel secure without, had to fight for its survival in the curriculum one-half century ago. The architects of the curricula must be aware that a fad of yesterday may become a need of today.

It is not universally understood that those who make curricula must be aware of the changes of our time and therefore re-evaluate their aims from time to time. Ward G. Reeder states in effect that we must make it clear that the "central aim of education" is "creative thinking."<sup>5</sup> This is but one of the many philosophies or aims that has been cited in behalf of sound education.

However, in spite of observations presented there are some who yet have not perceived beyond their narrow periphery. An example of this is the concept scientists (or some among their ranks) entertain for art. It is basically this: there is no sense in art; it springs from nowhere and results in nothing—the artist is the playboy of the western world. The scientist feels that anything that cannot be said clearly is feeling—thus feeling is nonsense. However, the antithesis to this is, what human being has clear thoughts only. If education is to follow this method of thinking there can be only one way of thinking, other methods must go unguided, hence the method and approach will be mathematical and without feeling. James B. Conant finds there is no such things as the scientific method, for even the scientist has had to use various methods.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in the development of an art curriculum there is little need for an established and precise method; we need only to be cognizant of what art is and where it is going.

Many of these goals are now being established in some of the Humanities courses. We realize we come close to a satisfactory definition of art when we cite phrases of this nature: "There are thoughts, . . . too deep or too vague for words. They may remain buried too far back into consciousness. When they do appear, . . . they may take form in painting, sculpture, music, or the dance."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, concerning the Humanities program, I feel they are essential in breaking down the barriers of ignorance and isolation of the arts. Hatstadter and Hardy state in effect that the Humanities quicken the perception and sensitiveness of the student, and that educators feel the student can best learn by actually participating in the act of creating. Further "(the Humanities) are essentially the study of the values man has been able to gain from his ex-

<sup>5</sup>Ward G. Reeder, *A First Course in Education*, New York, 1950.

<sup>6</sup>See Richard Hatstadter and C. Dewitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States*. New York, 1952, p. 201.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 220.

perience and significance they give to his life.”<sup>8</sup> They again quote after Suzanne L. Langer<sup>9</sup> that “all sensitivity bears the stamp of mentality . . . seeing is itself a process of formulation; our understanding of the visible world being in the eye.”<sup>10</sup>

There we may assume that the Humanities program is the effects of critical scholarship. This type of thinking is bringing to society a knowledge of what the artist is doing and what he is trying to express.

Needless to say, it is a common occurrence for the average person to think that art is a framed oil painting and that “art is a product of dead men.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Thomas M. Folds states, “Faculty, alumni, trustees and parents still think of art as a highly specialized course in drawing, (and) painting. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

These attitudes and others previously cited are due to an inadvertent conditioning process existing in our society. This process is due, in part, to our educators having elided art in the curriculum and then having become solicitous upon its advent. Then on the other hand teachers of art have been, in some cases, haphazard in their methods. Especially in the teaching of art appreciation, we have done no more than to give the student material for “polite tea table chatter.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps it is that the job is too great for a teacher to try eradicating years of misguided thinking, namely, the art, or rather, the little undirected art, that students get in secondary and elementary schools. (There are a few exceptions here of course.) It is at the tender age of youth that a well organized art curriculum could prevent the perversion of art attitudes. As Thomas M. Folds states, “this age is the age when youth stares out upon a world of commercial ugliness.”<sup>14</sup> It is therefore easy to understand how one can, without proper guidance, misconstrue what he sees.

Therefore, teachers of art should abolish top-heavy theories in the laboratory and let the child coordinate hand and eye and become as a whole individual filled with expression. Teachers must be aware that they are developing for

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 217-18.

<sup>9</sup>Suzanne L. Langer, *Philosophy In A New Key* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 90.

<sup>10</sup>Hatstadter & Hardy, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup>Fred Logan, “Progressive Education, Creative Expression and Art Appreciation” *College Art Journal*, 11 (Summer 1952), 248.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas M. Folds, “Art Before College”, *The Magazine of Art*, 32 (June 1939) p. 347.

<sup>13</sup>See Fred Logan, pp. 247-48. He further states on this that the term “art appreciation” should be junked—that our art knowledge is being limited to remote scenes in Europe, etc. We need “strong creative convictions.”

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 343.

tomorrow the potential patrons of art; whether they purchase expensive art objects or whether their sensitive perception is a contributing factor to slum clearance, the effects should be the same—a keen desire for quality and beauty.

The average youth is interested in such art subjects as commercial art, photography, cartoons and industrial design. Then these can well be points of departure for the teacher of art. There is room for much creative activity and learning by a comparison between a popular cartoon and a serious painting or between a painting of Piet Mondrain's and a magazine, newspaper or billboard advertisement. It should be made clear that in all probability, had Michaelangelo lived today very likely he would have been an expert illustrator or advertising designer; and if Jon Whitcomb had lived during the Renaissance he would have been a great painter of murals and chapels, instead of a modern illustrator.

This is not a statement to defend the theories of those who believe that all art, especially of this age, should be functional and utilitarian. One must not endeavor to defend either side, nor must one try to work in between, but one must face facts; **art is being reorganized, as it needs to be, to fit a changing society.** John Dewey somewhere stated in effect that sometimes neither extreme, nor an amalgamation of the two can be the solution to the problem at hand. He further stated that the decay of art in the Alexandrian period was caused principally because art was not part of society—it was not in keeping with the social changes that were taking place.<sup>15</sup>

Today our changes are rapid and prodigious; television, atomic energy, jazz, mechanization, organized crime and speed. These, to be sure, are but a few of the changes taking place today. But what is important is that American art instructors cannot sit idly by and let true art die out because they are not alert enough to keep abreast of the rearrangements.

Briefly, concerning a brave and very far-sighted adjustment is the change in 1921 by Antioch College. Basically its program is concerned with the development of the individual through liberal education, work experience, and group responsibility. It is commonly felt at Antioch that art should be placed close to the public—even in factories. Concerning work experience or "Field" work, a student will actually go to an enterprise where his particular type of activity is carried on.

Another contender for a change might be Worth D.

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<sup>15</sup>John Dewey, *Art As Experience*, New York: 1934, p. 328.

Griffin in his article "University Art Training For What?"<sup>16</sup> He states, "There has been no agreement as to what should be taught, how much, how it should be taught, or toward what art study and teaching should be directed."<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Griffin feels University Art training is fallacious; no emphasis has been placed upon commercial or industrial art. However, as an antithesis to this thinking Peter Kahn<sup>18</sup> states in his article that art training on the college level should not be the teaching of certain techniques—but the teaching of values that make life worth living. He further states that even Mr. Griffin cannot deny that drawing, painting, and art history have an important place.

Griffin condescends a little however in stating that applied art is a need of our contemporary society—but we must not become so absorbed in function that we lose sight of the ethic values of art—we must stress the development of creative expression.

Griffin becomes more specific where he points out three objectives in art training; they are: (1) to emphasize a broad, general education program, (2) to become devoted to a basic art program, (3) set up a provision for specialization in some useful phase of art.

And even more specific, he suggests courses that might be used for commercial and industrial preparation: advertising production, typography, photo engraving, offset lithography, interior design, textile design, book illustration, cartooning and silk screen. He feels in relation to this that professional schools have come closer to this ideal than universities and college departments.

To be sure, this argument is nothing new; it has been going on for ages. However, the writer feels that the solution is not far-fetched.

In light of the fact that the art department has come a long way from its embryonic beginnings there are nevertheless yet major problems to be solved. One of the most important needs is a good physical plant, proper lighting, adequate room and storage space. In addition to this a very important part of the curriculum or a contributing factor should be the gallery; a specifically prepared, spacious place that can be used to exhibit works of art. Needless to say, this is just as much a part of the students education as the classroom experience; in fact they should be combined.

<sup>16</sup>Worth D. Griffin, "University Art Training For What?" *College Art Journal* 11 (Winter 1951-52) pp. 87-92.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup>Peter Kahn, "The Utilitarian Fallacy in Art Training" *College Art Journal* 11 (Summer 1952) pp. 261-65.

Marion Cordice Parham<sup>19</sup> states some facts of a survey dealing with college art gallery programs. Some of his findings were that there is a developing trend to expand gallery space. And further, that a large percentage of students are enrolled in the study of art because of the following as listed:

1. Requirements from other departments for art.
2. Humanities.
3. Students enroll in art as an elective. (About 37 percent.)

Undoubtedly, a venture such as this entails some expense. Frequently this is met through the budget and special appropriations. Sometimes a campus community program can be a great asset with membership fees, financial drives and admission or patron fees, etc. Also an experiment that has had quite some success is the picture rental program; this is often, however, limited to the campus and faculty members.

In reference to stocking the gallery with works of art, it is, as we all know, impossible for schools to own a great number of expensive works. This problem is solved by circulating exhibitions, original prints, donations, excellent photographic reproductions, students' work and, of course, slides, photographs and books.

All these things mentioned will need storage. The author states that it is more important to have good storage than to have a gallery. He offers a suggestion, however, that the backs of the gallery walls might be used as storage spots, providing of course, that the art is protected.

Beyond a doubt, the gallery is emerging as a definite need to a college art program. It is the very subtle radio and television commercial; it is an educating process, not only for the student but for the student's parent and his parent's neighbors—more so if the work on exhibit belongs to the student.

The art department has come a long way. It is a reflection of change. It did not come an easy way nor did it come by mere idiosyncratic desire; it came by force—the force and needs of our times. Art is rapidly becoming an essential part of the whole man. Art is nothing new—it is evolutionary. As John Dewey once stated, in effect, it is the celebration of our civilization.

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<sup>19</sup>Marion Cordice Parham, "College Art Gallery Programs" *College Art Journal*, 12 (Spring 1953) pp. 251-56.