BOOK REVIEWS


What a pity, in some respects, that accidents of geography set the location of Upper Paleolithic art in Gallic rather than Germanic territory! As a consequence the French, with their flair for the appreciation of "Art" and their sturdy individualism, have been forced to the grubby and impersonal observation and description, and the ethnocentric explanation, of those monuments in the possession of which, for all their age, their national pride rejoices; even a Luquet is forced to qualify his theoretical interpretation by practical considerations to the point of almost fatal weakness. German scholarship, on the contrary, lacking the impetus furnished by possession, has seldom felt inclined to apply to this material the great resources of its literal and methodical painstakingness; instead that opposite propensity of the Teutonic mind, toward unrestrained theoretical speculation, has run riot over the field and in such dicta as that of the "parity" of Paleolithic art, to which "my secret mystical influence is entirely foreign" (Kühn), has given peremptory statement to what is without doubt the most egregious example in art-historical research of anachronistic interpretation, the "art for art's sake" explanation of Franco-Cantabrian art. And now does Max Raphael's book constitute an exception to this, with its advertised declaration that art "was based on hunting and on an elaborate ideology which tied together magic and totemism"?

At the beginning of Chapter 1, "The Elements of the Paleolithic World," we find these statements of point of view: a) Paleolithic (Franco-Cantabrian) art is not primitive art; b) it cannot therefore be interpreted through comparison with the art of modern primitive cultures; c) the present theoretical basis of art history prevents historians from interpreting art and translating "the language of artistic forms into universal philosophical concepts." These statements are presented as self-evident propositions, with no marshalling of meaningful evidence, but with the mere accompaniment of other bald assertions. On these unsupported assumptions, the author then proceeds to develop his own interpretation, one heavily interlarded with abstract philosophical considerations. The groups of animals as found in the cave art are not chance aggregations of individual representations, but purposeful group compositions whose significance lies in magic (hunting, propitiation, fertility) and totemism (events of clan history). The synthesis of the expression of magical and totemic meaning is what gives the art its formal character and this character permits various aesthetic, psychic and philosophical deductions to be made about Paleolithic man: "... this much is certain: the paleolithic artists ... were quite familiar with all the innermost recesses of the human soul, with the comedy that is daily acted out between consciousness and being" (p. 11). Then follow interpretations of the non-zoomorphic signs and the anthropoid figures.

Chapter 2, "The Magic of the Hand," treats in similar vein the relations of the curve and plane in the representation of the animals (p. 20): "... the curve is not a sequence of points that obey a rigid and always identical course, but a motion caused by an elemental force (mana) whose rhythm it follows," the representation of space, the arithmetical and geometrical proportions which were based on the hand as the device of mensuration, and the general character of Paleolithic art. In Chapter 3, "The Composition of the Magic Battle at Altamira," the author expounds upon the ceiling as revealing a single conception represented by an equally unified composition which he interprets as illustrating the victorious conquest of the magically potent hind over the physically potent bison, in which representation actual contest, propitiation, and other qualities are discernible: "The materially and historically determined opposition between the two clans (or between a clan and an animal) has been transformed into a conflict between feminine tenderness and masculine bulk, between spirit and physical force; the hunting and fighting ideology of the early paleolithic period has become the conflict between spontaneous action and broken will; natural and historical facts have been transfigured to represent the power of Being, its constancy in change, the tragic break in human life" (p. 42).

Only quotations can possibly indicate the completely otherworldly quality of the author's treatment. Here are a few more, shorter but otherwise characteristic: "... the scenes ... express one as state occasions ... some ... have the grandeur of Aeschylean tragedies" (p. 9); "... the author's position, like a man's religion, is a matter of faith, out of sight of all critical inquiry appropriate to historical research. Apart from its acceptance of a general social origin for Paleolithic art it is as unrealistic as the asseverations of the "art for art's sake" school, and in the fantasy of its interpretations it almost vies with the pathetic ingenuity of those who read world prophecy in the dimensions of the pyramid of Khufu.

Such excursions into the imagination need not, of course, be wholly useless; positively they may suggest a new way of looking at old material and negatively they have the shock effect of encouraging further study in opposition. Here, however, the
treatment is so extreme and goes so far beyond any interpreta-
tion which are at all reasonable in the light of present informa-
tion that it seems ineffectual in any sense. Is it not about time
that, in the presence of such stratagraphic intellectual acro-
batics as are displayed in this juggling with metaphorical ver-
balisms, someone should remark, like the child in Andersen's
story, "But the emperor hasn't got anything on?" Certainly
the use of such abstract terms and concepts in writings and
criticisms about art objects has done more to confuse and an-
tagonize the population at large than the best efforts of some
artists themselves. There is an occasion for these speculations,
perhaps after the third or fourth cocktail when helium-light
minds can rocket far above the phenomenal world, and a place
for them as essays in publications devoted to the more extreme
elements of the Zeitgeist and Gefühl school of thought. But
they should not be dressed up as, or otherwise confused with,
art history in even the broadest sense, for its boundary is set at
but one remove from the phenomenal world. To make an at-
tribution from an attribution leaves little of validity; to make a
speculation from a groundless assumption, or from another
speculation, leaves none.

F. O. WAAGE
Cornell University

RODOLFO PALLUCCHINI, Guardi's Zeichnungen im Museum
$18.00.

This is the translation by Eckart Peterich of the Italian edi-
tion published at Venice in 1942 by Daria Guarnati. Sra. Guarn-
nati's prefatory note gives to her father, the distinguished
artist-historian Henry Lapiizeu, credit for the impulse obeyed in
this publication (she herself having begun with an inventory
of the Correr's Guardis in 1911).

The volume is described as having been published in an edi-
tion of five thousand (the size of the Italian edition is not
mentioned). One's first thought is not to believe it; one's sec-
ond is to wonder whether the comparatively low price (it works
out at about twelve and a half cents a plate) is the result of the
size of the edition or rather of the current Italian exchange;
one's third thought is to be grateful, regardless of Axis com-
placency in 1942-1943, for the production of a good art refer-
ence book in that quantity. Your reviewer has squawked often
before about artificial rarity and limited editions in a field in
which almost everything has to be subsidized anyway if it is to
see the light of day. Why, for instance, should so fine a book as
Fiske Kimball's The Creation of the Rococo be so very expen-
sively produced and then in an edition of only one thousand?
The result is to make it inaccessible, which is a shame. It is said
that Italian activity in publishing has almost caught up with
Swiss; one looks forward to the arrival here, for instance, of
Beno Geiger's new book on Magnasco drawings, published at
Pavia in 1945. At any rate, let us search no further for the ul-
terior motive than to remind ourselves that Guardi's mother
was an Austrian, and get on to the book.

No doubt the Museo Correr has the largest assembly of
Guardi drawings anywhere, though not perhaps the majority of
his existing drawings, as Pallucchini suggests. The publication
of this marvelous group is, however, a vast pleasure in itself for
the consumer, and may encourage a monograph. As a picture-
book, this is high grade B, and I doubt that anything but a per-
fect set of four-color facsimiles on much finer paper could be
better. The plates for such drawings as are in red chalk are
printed in red, and the three sheets adorned with watercolor
are reproduced in full color. The paper is of extremely matte
surface and has a slightly deadening quality. There are special
difficulties in the way of reproducing anything drawn on the
very absorbent papers Guardi enjoyed, to say nothing of his
anti-graphic handwriting. Even if he had more often used the
harder-surfaced white papers chosen by Tiepolo for pen and
ink, he would have been hard to reproduce.

Pallucchini presents all the drawings of Francesco at full di-
ensions, reducing some of his selections from the work of
Gianantonio, Niccolò, and Giacomo, of which he makes a use-
ful appendix. His point that reductions, even to understanding
persons, are deceptive, is well taken but rather typical of his
anxiety to say absolutely everything he can think of. In general
his critical apparatus seems fancier than is justified by the num-
ber of new or startling judgments in its content. Thoroughness
is admirable but pretentiousness is not, and there is surely no
longer any reason for going over the familiar prefatory jumps
about the previous neglect of Such-and-such. The earlier litera-
ture is well used and justly appraised (e.g., a few disquieting
attributions of drawings shown at Springfield, Massachusetts, in
the important Guardi show of 1937, are revised). All the neces-
sary technical points are gone over. In other words, the author
has done everything that he should have done as a scholar with a
catalogue to produce; he has also written a handsome apprecia-
tion under the headings of Analyse and Formenansprache der
Zeichnungen, which (though Italian may suffer in German
translation) is devoted, understanding, and enthusiastic. Yet one
does not find any conspicuous contribution to artistic judgment
to be grateful for. The critical section and catalogue are in a
way a statistical travail de vulgarisation; so that with the picture-
book the whole is not so much a new tool for the profession as a
permanent.