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Eccentric School of Painting Increases Its Vogue in the Current Art Exhibition--- What Its Followers Attempt to Do.

AMONG all the paintings on exhibition at the Paris Fall Salon none is attracting so much attention as the extraordinary productions of the so-called "Cubist" school. In fact, dispatches from Paris suggest that these works are easily the main feature of the exhibition.

The "Cubists," be it known, are a school of artists who believe that the right way to paint persons and things is to paint them in cubes, squares, and lozenges. They have been before the public now for several years.

When they first burst on the astonished gaze of Paris and the rest of the universe they were known as the "Invertebrates." That was in 1905. On recovering from its first fit of amazement at the astonishing productions of the, "Invertebrates" the public promptly dubbed them the "Wild Beasts." Now they are "les Cubistes."

Whatever their name, they continue to paint pictures before which descriptive adjectives retreat in disorder. They slap colors, apparently in haphazard fashion, on their canvases, draw back a step, slap on another assortment, and then calmly label the sensational result "A Woman," "A Landscape," "Still Life," or something equally innocent and inadequate. If you seek to find out where they got their ideas you will learn that the "Invertebrates" and "Wild Beasts" and "Cubists" call themselves disciples of Matisse. But there are those who say that Matisse stands aghast before these madnesses.

In spite of the crazy nature of the "Cubist" theories the number of those professing them is fairly respectable. Georges Braque, André Derain, Picasso, Czobel, Othon Friesz, Herbin, Metzinger—these are a few of the names signed to canvases before which Paris has stood and now again stands in blank amazement.

What do they mean? Have those responsible for them taken leave of their senses? Is this art or madness? Who knows?

At all events the devoted group, advancing—or receding—year by year, can at least say that plenty of people waste time and adjectives upon them. If, like Kipling's "Bandar-Log," the foolish monkey-folk of the jungle, their desire is to be "noticed," they have been richly rewarded during their brief existence

Last year Gelett Burgess, he of "Purple-Cow" fame, also known as an artist of eccentric habit, went to Paris and became inspired with a desire to find out something about this weird school. Perhaps the same twist of mind that caused him to turn out his sinuous and popular "Goops" moved him to undertake this voyage of discovery among hidden Parisian studios. Anyhow, he ventured forth on his quest, found what he sought, and described what he found in The Architectural Record.

The lust for discovery first stirred in Gelett Burgess when he entered the Salon des Indépendants and caught his first glimpse of a painting by one of the "Wild Men of Paris"—thus it is that he dubs those we know as "Cubists."

Here is how he describes that first glimpse:

"I had scarcely entered the Salon des Indépendants when I heard shrieks of

laughter coming from an adjoining wing. I hurried along from room to room under the huge canvas roof until I came upon a party of well-dressed Parisians in a paroxysm of merriment, gazing through weeping eyes at a picture. Even in my haste I had noticed other spectators lurching hysterically in and out of the galleries; I had caught sight of paintings that made me gasp.

"But here I stopped in amazement. It was a thing to startle even Paris. I realized for the first time that my views on art needed a radical reconstruction. Suddenly I had entered a new world, a universe of ugliness. And, ever since, I have been mentally standing on my head in the endeavor to get a new point of view on beauty so as to understand and appreciate this new movement in art.

"'Une Soirée dans le Désert' was a fearful initiation.

"It was a painting of a nude female, seated on a stretch of sand, devouring her own knee. The gore dripped into a wine glass. A palm tree and two cacti furnished the environment. Two large snakes with target-shaped eyes assisted at the debauch, while two small giraffes hurried away from the scene.

"What did it all mean? The drawing was crude past all belief; the color was as atrocious as the subject. Had a new era of art begun? Was ugliness to supersede beauty, technique to give way to naïveté, and vibrant discordant color, a very patchwork of horrid hues, take the place of subtle, studied nuances of tonality? Was nothing sacred, not even beauty?

"If this example of the new art was shocking there were other paintings at the Salon that were almost as dire.

"If you can imagine what a particularly sanguinary little girl of eight, half-crazed with gin, would do to a whitewashed wall if left alone with a box of crayons, then you will come near to fancying what most of this work was like.

"Or you might take a red-hot poker in your left hand, shut your eyes, and etch a landscape upon a door.

"There were no limits to the audacity and ugliness of the canvases. Still-life sketches of round, round apples and yellow, yellow oranges, on square, square tables, seen in impossible perspective; landscapes of squirming trees, with blobs of virgin color gone wrong, fierce greens and coruscating yellows, violent purples, sickening reds, and shuddering blues.

"But the nudes! They looked like flayed Martians, like pathological charts—hideous old women, patched with gruesome hues, lopsided, with arms like the arms of a Swastika, sprawling on vivid backgrounds, or frozen stiffly upright, glaring through misshapen eyes, with noses or fingers missing.

"They defied anatomy, physiology, almost geometry itself!"

Burgess shares the opinion that, although Matisse is named as the man responsible for all these horrors, he is, in reality, by no means so black as he is painted.

Matisse may have said, perhaps, conjectures Burgess, that "the equilateral triangle is a symbol and manifestation of the absolute—if one could get that absolute quality into a painting it would be a work of art."

Thereupon one of the maddest of his pupils dashes off and builds a woman entirely out of triangles.

Then, perchance, Matisse talks of the "harmony of volume" and "architectural values."

Result: Another madman "builds an architectural monster which he names Woman, with balanced masses and parts, columnar legs and cornices," and still another—"molds a neolithic man into a solid cube, creates a woman of spheres, stretches a cat out into a cylinder, and paints it red and yellow!"

"Les Cubistes"

All that may shock Matisse; nevertheless, he is accused of painting his own wife with a stripe of green down her nose, so he is by no means so quiet and conventional himself, in spite of his sad sighs when confronted with the work of his "disciples."

Tea-Time by Jean Metzinger (1883 - 1956)

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