Rob Wagner's Script
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ARTISTS OF DEMOCRACY

Rockwell Kent

LISTED in SCRIPT under "Art'n' Stuff" is: "Stendahl Art Gallery, Exhibition of forty paintings of America and the far-flung outposts of our hemisphere—Alaska, Greenland, Cape Horn—by Rockwell Kent (to April 18)."

Under the privilege of being the painter of the pictures, and bound to the observance toward him of no professional etiquette, I may say that whether they are art or not is as it may be; and that "Stuff" or, in particular, The Stuff, is all the painter of them hoped that they might prove to be. They are presented as factual records of the geography and, to some degree, the life of those three outposts of our Western Hemisphere which have become, or threaten to become, regions in the news, and of a portion of that country for whose right to freedom and life we are at war.

Art is mainly an expression of man's interest in life, and the art most properly recognized in a democracy is that art which will have been found to reflect the people's interests. In times of peace, our interests are as dispersed and varied as men's thoughts, free from the compulsion of events or of necessity, incline to be. They ranged, three decades ago and in the decade immediately succeeding World War I, the whole breadth of the external universe and the whole depth of that universe within ourselves which psychology, pandering to introspection, opened to our thoughts. They were narrowed by the stress of the Depression and the enforced concentration upon the material problems of our personal and national life into concern with the actualities of our environment in America. Of this concern was born that national art which is in being now. It proves a solid starting point for that new and tragic change that has been forced upon us.

Awareness of America, of its infinitely varied beauties and of its sometimes sordid, man-made ugliness; awareness of the life of America, of its fulfillments and its failures; awareness, if you like, of God, the landscape

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architect supreme—and political failure: of the promise of America and of its problems, art has been, or has aimed to be, a revelation. It is for the right to solve these problems *our* way that we are now at war.

The art of a democracy is an art that must be, like democracy itself, of and by and for the people. It must and will reflect the public mood and public interest; or, rather—for the artist is essentially a seer—it will foresee that interest and, with all the special power of eloquence that art possesses, proclaim it. We have one proper interest, one will, one purpose now, today. We sum it up in one word, "Victory." Whatever may be said, in times of peace, of art for art and culture's sake —and, I would say, not much—such art must, in the essential streamlining of our national life and activities for victory, be put aside. Art is a means of utterance and a powerful one. The arts in their entirety represent the whole latent power of utterance of the American people. This is no time for voices to be latent. We have a faith and a purpose to proclaim. We have a slumbering people needing to be roused to action. And let me say, with the conviction of one who has recently traveled the length and breadth of America, who has looked and listened everywhere, who has tried by every faculty he has to feel and ascertain the public pulse, that not even the trumpet of Gabriel, if we could call it, would be too strident or too loud in this emergency.

Well, the trumpeters—the artists, the musicians, the writers, the speakers of America—are ready. Our masters, for this is a democracy, are the American people. They must express their need, their will, through Government.

Four months at war: the brass bands of America are silent; the silos, the grain elevators, the sides of buildings are empty spaces—blank spaces waiting to be written on; the billboards of America proclaim in almost all they say—East, West, North, South—"Business as usual." Four months of war! It's time America woke up.

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