

# OUR READERS SAY . . .

## More about modern art

Dear Sir—I do not believe that anything of much value is achieved by bandying wordy arguments on aesthetics. However, for the reasons I have given, I do believe that we should do something helpful and positive to try to create a living visual art within the community. We can do a lot if we are so disposed, one way or the other.

"Spartacus," unfortunately, it would seem, continues to argue that his superior attitude of patronising belittlement to what is a laudable and unusual effort in a very genuine attempt by a group of young Limerick artists to bring art more directly to its people as a whole, serves a useful purpose. I find it unhelpful and I think that this kind of cold warfare should stop if we are to get anywhere in something of immediate importance.

His accusation that my putting the basic facts and case for visual art is not an original one is surely quite beside the point. How, indeed, could it be? But where the arts are so regularly misunderstood and destroyed, by the mistaken application to them of an all-dominant literary convention and criterion, it is of very immediate importance that we continually remind ourselves, and not least of all "Spartacus," of those primary values on which alone visual art can once more come alive and active in contemporary life.

As to his rather jaundiced repetition of the complaint about young artists using word clichés in trying to explain their work, though those he quotes are eminently sensible, I still think that he can understand little about visual artists or the young generally if he thinks that they will be able to translate their own original feeling in another medium into words without the use of clichés, which the public might understand, or that such a failure in words, if it is so, is of any significance in evaluating their own art or sincerity.

Like so many of the general public, "Spartacus" informs us in so many words that he is professionally competent to evaluate and to say what is and what is not genuine in any new expression of art. I wonder, I very much wonder, what these qualifications are?

He suggests that art should thrive and presumably that artists should enjoy the kind of indiscriminate, unspecified judgment of insincerity and ridicule he is versed in. I suggest that it does not do so. On the contrary it seems clear from the past that it is precisely this rejection out of hand of what is new in visual art with which journalism has often done so much to eradicate visual expression from any living place in ordinary life over the last two centuries.

In my experience the more able and competent the professional art critic the more

scrupulous he is not to destroy but to try himself to understand and to help us to see and to say what is good.

I challenge him to produce definite chapter and verse to prove his pronouncements that there is any very considerable body of professional criticism, holding the formula he provides, that eighty per cent. of contemporary or modern expression is insincere and valueless.

Personally, I am aware of no such art critics who hold any such thing either in public or in private, and through all the range of the qualified and more illuminating critics of art, say from the more conservative like Eric Newton to the more advanced approach of Sir Herbert Read, none, I feel sure, would wish to claim the rather godlike insight to judge on the spot of the genuineness or falsity of any individual new expression of art, as "Spartacus" suggests it is comparatively easy to achieve.

Surely we must somehow drag in Ruskin, but has "Spartacus" forgotten that Ruskin, in a ridiculous uncomprehending piece of journalism, declared that Whistler was throwing a pot of paint at the canvas ("sheer daubing," in fact) and, insulting the beholder (shades of "why does Mr. Turner abuse his talents and insult the public by painting landscapes unlike the nature anyone has ever seen") and that by so doing he not only ridiculed a great artist but prevented other such masterpieces from enriching our understanding because of course the work of which he spoke so disparagingly has now for so long been recognised as one of the world's masterpieces, but, unfortunately, too late for Whistler.

One may wonder why it seems to be the almost inevitable fate of great artists from say, Constable to Paul Klee, to be subjected over their most creative years to the monotonous cat-call repetition of "insulting the public," of "insincerity," and of course of "sheer daubing," until at last and too late their work suddenly becomes popular and the journalist is then first to be able to explain its virtues to a wondering public.

Could it be in fact that it is not really so easy for the professional artist or art critic to be sure of such things as "Spartacus" seems to imagine? Is it not true that often these outrageous people who are prepared to starve in order to paint and who don't conform to many of the conventions of a commercial civilisation now the less have more to give it in the long run than the more popular and prosperous third hand conventional painter whose statements are so safe and so easy to understand.

We are all aware that less than one per cent. of any contemporary expression in visual art will survive or have signifi-

ficance for future generations. Nonetheless, such a general vital and original body of experiment is essential for the moment and it is only because of and out of this striving and discovery of the many that a greater art, having the power to create a larger perception of human vision and achievement, will come.

If the ferment of ordinary creation is not there alive and active no other foreign introduction of imaginative insight can be imposed from above. As we are seeing so clearly to-day there will be no significant expression of art in the community at all. One source of inspiration is dead.

If as "Spartacus" tells us, about twenty per cent. of these Every Square paintings were genuine and of interest one wonders why he cannot say something that is, in the least helpful and encouraging about them. In neither of his two pronouncements does he volunteer one helpful, constructive or generous thing about this considerable and most laudable effort on behalf of the encouragement of the art which Limerick does so very much need.

If we must deal in so unsympathetic a measure of art and artists by valuing them in percentages will "Spartacus" maintain on the one hand that there was anything in the nature of twenty per cent. of the last exhibition of the work of Limerick painters, about two months ago in the City Library, that came up to his standard in having any real first-hand aesthetic significance as art at all? Or, on the other hand, does he not think that, in the large exhibition hall in this gallery last autumn when there was a predominance of more modern expression, there was as the distinguished opener implied a good deal more than twenty per cent. of this contemporary field which not only had a validity in being original expression of a common experience but also was most moving and sensitive in the use of the medium for this end.

In fact, as he indicated, here there was a beginning for valuable growth in Limerick's search for an art which is indigenous. What, however, it would seem that we urgently need to develop side by side with such a native tradition is a perceptive and constructive criticism which may help to make this art intelligible and effective in the life of the community for the many.

In this next major art exhibition I would ask "Spartacus" now to forget any need to destroy any eighty per cent. but if he will to concentrate solely on what is good in the twenty per cent. of which he approves. If he will tell us specifically and simply what the artist is doing and what is valuable in this and explain professionally its qualities and achievements so that we can have the benefit of his greater knowledge, then, I feel sure, he will be doing both visual art in Limerick and his public a service. They both need it.

Without such criticism and, perhaps, even some space given at the time of exhibitions for discussions on art, whether with clichés or not, I do not believe that we will bring about the essential liaison between public and artist (instead of the state of cold war which appears to exist) that alone will enable the effective expression of art and group of artists to arise which could help to invigorate and enrich Limerick life.

Yours, etc., "ATHENICUS."

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## Motorcycling Notes

Scarlett Greeves Machines for Castleconnell.

The stage is now set for the fourth August Sunday Championship Grass Track Races in McGrath's Field at Castleconnell, kindly given by the owner.

Entries up to the time of going to press number 42 include all the acknowledged experts as well as club competitors. The most interesting entry is that of Gerry Scarlett riding Greeves, who is returning to Dublin on Friday together with John Harrison, after five months racing on the Continent. Gerry, who in the past has rode magnificently on Dots, winning 200, 250 and 350 c.c. classes, will be expected to keep to this standard on his 250 and 225 Greeves.

Leading the strong Northern contingent will be that ever popular Jackit Agnew, with two very potent Japs 344 and 497 c.c. In 1961 he had the spectators on their toes in that hectic dice in the 500 c.c. championship, when our local star, John Harrington, challenged him for the lead in this race for four laps. Agnew won by a short distance.

In the 500 c.c. Southern Centre Championship race, as well as Agnew, we have Eric Williams (Jap 500 c.c.), well known by the followers of the sport for his fast, keen riding and winner of this event last year. From Clonakilty we have D. McCarthy riding a Jap 500, as well as fellow county man Mick O'Mahony on a B.S.A. 500 and Jim Porter, senr., on a A.J.S. 500.

The President's Cup, presented by Alderman Ted Russell and confined to local riders—this race is 5 laps—has an entry to date of six riders who all have previously raced for this coveted trophy: Tommy Morrow, Pat Franklin, Matt Murphy, Reggie Bennett, John Meaney, Lionel Watts, who was 2nd last year. Its present holder, Murty Kearney, is a doubtful starter, as mechanical trouble with his machine has set in, and it is not possible to have it ready by Sunday.

There will be nine races, and practising starts at 2 p.m. for one hour, first race at 3.15.

All officials, as well as the local men who generally offer their services on that day, are to report to clerk of course, Gerry Lennon, at 1.15 p.m. on field. There will be two outings to the course at 7.30 p.m. both on Friday and Saturday night, and all who are interested in the success of Sunday's races should be their.

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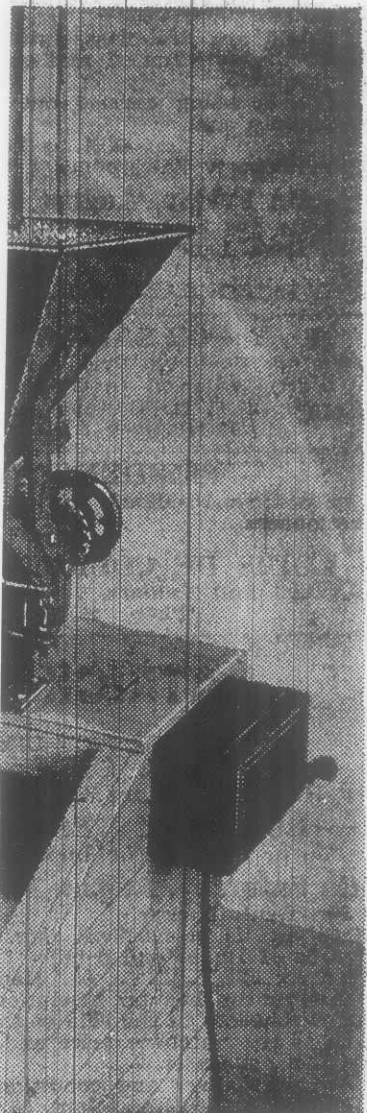
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ous third hand conventional painter whose statements are so safe and so easy to understand.  
We are all aware that less than one per cent of any contemporary expression in visual art will survive or have signi-

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Yours, etc.,  
"ATHENICUS."

"Spartacus" says: — My goodness gracious me! So now it would appear that one cannot express an opinion without being tainted with the schoolboy's popular last ditch defence of his argument, "What do you know about it anyway?" Quite honestly, like any humble devotee of art, very little really. I have studied it, read about it, listened to lectures on it, dabbled rather unsuccessfully with brush and paints, travelled to galleries around the Continent to see examples of all that is best in the various schools of art, and discussed it with friends and acquaintances who are good, bad and indifferent artists.  
My views on art have been derided, laughed at, taken seriously, ignored, debated and debunked. It has been most stimulating all along the line. It will be a sad day for us all when our right to hold an opinion will be regarded as an intrusion into the hallowed sanctuary that is reserved for themselves by the inner circles of the various arts and sciences.  
What strikes me very forcibly is that the young artists who, according to "Athenicus," were so ignorantly and ruthlessly attacked by me, did not individually or collectively reply to the attack on their work and their lack of originality. Maybe, as he suggests, they are better at the painting than they are with the words. That may be the reason for their silence and, if so, no one will fault them on that score. However, even a cliché ridden defence, or explanation of their aims and their motives, would have been preferable to the ominous silence that greeted my few observations.  
An inarticulate group, who purport to stand for something that they themselves cannot explain in words, must surely be unique in the realms of art. At least our correspondent "Athenicus" has his views and I have mine, even though we might not agree on many points. It would, indeed, be a very dull world if we all agreed on all points. Having seen what our young artists had to offer on canvas, and having heard some of their off-the-cuff observations, I must honestly say that I was not very impressed. I thought that my few remarks would have the effect of getting them to sit down and give us a well thought out statement of their aims, and their views on contemporary art. Strange as it may seem, I would much prefer to have their views, the short and simple annals of our local artists, rather than the thunderous expert explanations of "Athenicus."  
In short, I went fishing for sprats. I caught a whale!  
"SPARTACUS"

## Markets

SATURDAY, JULY 27  
Butter 9/8 to 4 1/2, milk 10

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