

"What is the true function of painting, what the province of the painter--and not of him alone, but of all artists and all art? Let us attempt to summarize, even though we should repeat. In so doing we shall by no means imagine that we are expressing any new thought, or one that has not been said in clearer and better phrase oft-times before; yet in this intensely practical and realistic age, the reminder can scarce come too often. Once more let us put the old wine into new bottles!

It is then the province of art, not so much to represent nature as to interpret her. Nature, that is, in her highest; Nature at her best! The artist should have all the knowledge of technique which goes with the strongest Realism. He shall abide in that land for a reason, but he may not inhabit it. He shall work through Realism into Idealism. He shall attain first to the body, and then to the soul that informs it.

The Poet first drinks at the fountain of preceding poets; he is an imitator before he is original. "He lisps in numbers ere the numbers come."

The Sculptor may well study first, and long, anatomy and models of classic beauty, till at last the flowing outlines of grace shall naturally and fitly drape the form whose face shall image the grand conceptions of beauty and purity that his artist soul shall shadow forth.

The Painter should, indeed, study nature. To him, all Nature and all Art should render up their secrets of light and shade, of form and coloring. Nature in sunshine and in storm: the broad prairie, the mountain cliff, the tumbling waterfall, the surge of ocean, the desert sand; the blue skies of Capri, the brassy glow of Egypt, the opal tints of Labrador;--all these should be known to the great painter. What then: Shall he stop at the pictured representation of these things on canvas? If so, what has he achieved? Simply a magnificent colored photograph!

No! He must, first of all, perceive what is picturesque in nature, what is worthy of translation, and then give us all this and far more than the form and tint of mountain, sea and sky. He must shed upon the canvas that glory without which, rock nor tree, nor curled wave, nor tinted cloud has valid excuse for being; that glory which, shining in the soul of the artist, an inner sense of something finer than all these, in a mystic world within or beyond, shall reflect upon the canvas before us, suggesting a yet greater glory:--

"The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream."

To enter into the finer sense of things around us; to follow out the suggestions of beauty and glory that ordinarily lie hidden in grass or flower, in tinkle of waterfall or tone of speech, in glow of sunset or tender irradiation of the face we love, all this appeals to a sense that, for want of better naming, let us term the poetry of life!

We choose to take it for granted that all the Finer Arts are correlated, and all pervaded in their higher forms with a spirit and essence, to grasp at whose expression we must reach far beyond all mere representation of things we see around us, however beautiful they may be. This spirit may find some manifestation alike through kindling eye, through eloquent or rhythmic speech, through music, through all the elevated forms of artistic expression:

"The kindled marble's bust may wear
More Poetry upon its speaking brow,
Than aught less than th' Homeric page may bear.
One noble stroke with a whole life may glow,
Or deify the canvas till it shine
With beauty so surpassing all below,
That they who kneel to idols so divine
Break no commandment, for high heaven is there,
Transfused--transfigured."