

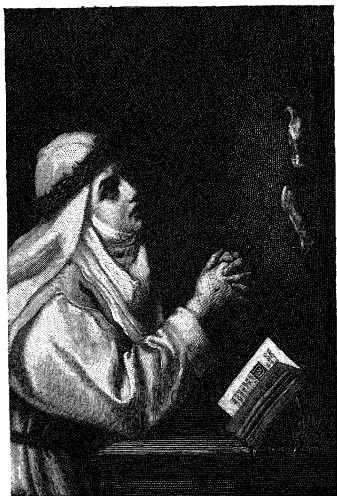
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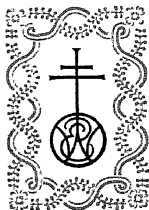
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Timothy Cole

ART BY THE WAY
By TIMOTHY COLE



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Art by the Way



CANNOT subscribe entirely to the definition of art as "humbug," though it is acknowledged by those who pronounce it such—*denounce* it rather—that the term humbug is only used for want of a better word, it is merely suggestive, the true one belonging to that zone of thought beyond the range of verbal expression—which, of course, is nowhere. To be sure, in art, as in every other human activity, there is a certain admixture of—whatever you might call it—and it may be said, jocosely—but this should rather make us blush—that art *is* humbug when we come to know the many tricks and artifices the artist resorts to in the construction of his work, and how the artist himself often must advertise, and pose and affect eccentricities, with the object ostensibly of boosting his wares. I remember a very popular American artist, years ago, who used to promenade Fifth Avenue in New York of a Saturday afternoon, when crowds of the élite in all their finery were on view, accom-



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panied by a friend and the extraordinary spectacle of two enormous and very beautiful wolf-hounds. He had a very fine studio, high, spacious and lighted from above, with elegant appointments, and on the ground floor—you walked into it from the street, for it would never do to have patrons walk up stairs (There were no elevators to artists' studios in those days, and no sky-scrapers.) I remember being somewhat overawed on glancing into it and seeing the beautiful model seated sumptuously on the stand, wonderfully draped against a lovely colored screen, with a large ancient guitar in her lap from which she occasionally struck entrancing harmonies that echoed through the gorgeous space, and were even heard from the street. It was whispered that the rent of that studio was \$50,000 a year. Of course, in the eyes of the world, an artist who could afford to pay so high a rent would be thought to be very successful, and as "nothing succeeds like success," this business slogan has invaded the ateliers, and we find artists vying with each other in decorating their studios with costly ancient draperies, quaint bric-à-brac, elegant vases of palms and such like humbugging paraphernalia, with the shopkeeper's instinct for business. What a contrast poor Millet's studio presents, which I saw intact at Barbizon thirty-seven years ago: A little room, about fourteen feet square, on the ground floor of his cot, with a little barn-like win-

dow, three by three feet, a pine table in the center with portfolios and sketches scattered about; nothing more. And I'll not forget another fellow who affected very high ladies' heels to his shoes, painted red to attract the eye, and long flowing locks capped with a Rubens chapeau. He wore a cape, and he walked with a mincing gait, keeping his gaze steadfastly upon the ground, yet taking furtive glances sidewise to see if people were looking at *him* and his Mexican hairless dog, that followed close upon his painted red heels. Those were the days of the long-haired æsthetics, when Oscar Wilde in his 15th century costume started his memorable "walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily" in his "mediæval hand," as was sung by Gilbert and Sullivan. It was said that Oscar realized, by that clever piece of humbug, a very considerable increase in the sale of his poems, which were then newly launched upon the market. This is not "art for art's sake," but for the artist's sake. But it is not the predominant characteristic of the true artist, though the incentive for money is not incompatible with a high ideal in art and an indefatigable endeavor to achieve it. Naturally, artists, like other folk, are human and have their idiosyncrasies and weaknesses, and it is a peculiarity of many good people to be on the lookout for their peculiar freaks and to attribute them to genius—"idiosyncrasies

of genius, you know!" I have seen Whistler, upon entering his studio of a morning, confront again the canvas he had left painting the day before, and rub his hands together in glee, like a boy, chuckling to himself with the utmost complacency, so enamored was he of his own performance, and quite oblivious apparently to the visitor at his elbow, whom he had received the moment before (which was myself). And of Corot, I have heard it said by one who knew him that, upon the completion of his landscapes, he would often be seen silently throwing them kisses, so enraptured was he with his own productions, from which we must charitably conclude that as Nature paints the best part of the picture, according to Emerson, the artist beholds in it qualities of beauty he was not conscious of having produced: he did not consciously seek the beauty, therefore, the beauty came—for beauty, like happiness, is not found by those who seek it, but rather by those who, happily, are able to place themselves in an attitude of receptivity towards it.

I once talked with the president of one of our most important railroads, spanning the country from ocean to ocean, whose avocation was art. He was certainly a skillful artist of the brush as well as a generous patron of art and a man of broad culture (There is nothing incongruous in the blending of culture with practical efficiency.) He was thoroughly

convinced of the humbug of his particular vocation, that of railroad-man, and in fact of the humbug of everything—art, science, religion, medicine—“all, all is humbug and vexation of spirit.” But here it may be interposed, by way of parenthesis, that if “all is humbug,” then there is no criterion upon which to form this judgment, and it were the same as if we averred that truth alone prevailed; but the mere statement that “all is humbug” carries with it its own refutation, for humbug cannot judge of humbug, there must be something that is not humbug which serves as a basis of judgment. There must be something stationary from which to judge the revolution of things: straight lines to tell us what curved and crooked ones are. If we could abolish shade, we could not appreciate what light is, therefore, light, as well as shade, would cease to exist. It would be the same with good and evil. It was salutary for Adam and Eve to be expelled from Paradise, since living forever in a state of bliss could never teach them what bliss or Paradise was. Our whole education consists in acquiring a just sense of the proportion, relativity, and value of things. We all know that the most incorrigible liar carries with him that which, as a compass, indicates to him his deviation from the path of rectitude—there could be no proceeding otherwise. The vantage ground then, from which to judge of the

humbug of things, must be in the spirit where is the immovable seat of truth. But to return to our railroad magnate: "This running to and fro—What folly!" he said. "The more we travel the more restless we become! Instead of restlessly exploring the universe in the vain hope of finally, 'in the beautiful land of somewhere,' arriving at the El Dorado of our dreams, we should use our time and money and brains to more sensible advantage if we endeavored to become more expert in home cosmography [this from a railroad man!] by cultivating our garden plots and thus proving ourselves real patriots in contributing our mite towards beautifying the land that we profess so much to love" (This in allusion to the humbug of patriotism.) Of course, it was by no means his policy to discourage travel, but, on the contrary, to foster it by every device imaginable. And in exposing the humbug attaching to his own particular calling, he said: "The problem with us always—with respect to the traveling public—is *how to catch 'em*: we appeal to their imagination by issuing illustrated pamphlets—colored, if possible—showing beautiful views of the scenery along our railroad, telling them that as true patriots and lovers of their native land they should not think of dying before getting acquainted with its glorious 'rocks and rills,' its 'woods and templed hills,' the mighty canyons and the awe-inspiring mountains of the

wonderful country of which it is our proud privilege to boast as citizens. We show also pictures of the company's hotels, by the way. We make our stations and stopping places," he said, "as attractive as possible with flower beds (red and yellow prevailing), lawns and fountains; and we are careful to have wary agents and good-looking servants affable and agreeably condescending, with that risibility of aspect, modest cadence of body, and conciliating cooperation of the whole man, that makes every one feel well pleased with him or herself—the problem being *how to catch 'em*, so that they will travel by our route again, you know. You see," he continued, "we are all pretty well weighted with our own particular heads, we like to be flattered—to be smiled upon, cajoled, taken in and done with a grace, befooled and bamboozled, so long as it is accompanied with *deferential respect!* And art," he went on, "you must know well enough what a camouflage that is! Is not the idea *how to catch 'em*, always the main thing with you artists? A patch of red," he continued, "how it catches the eye! That red is the most humbugging color of the whole gamut. The crafty artist knows just how sparingly and effectively to use it. It was said of Turner that he once sent to the Royal Academy a delicate grey water-scape, which the jealous hanging committee—his enemies—placed between two large pictures

of strong flaring colors, hoping thereby to submerge it. On varnishing day, Turner noted the outrage, for his picture languished like the man, spoken of in Scripture, who had fallen among thieves. So, procuring his paints, he merely touched in a floating red buoy—a miraculous stroke—which, upon the broad expanse of grey, proved a most powerful 'hit-me-in-the-eye,' and made his picture a howling success. Ruskin sent it soaring with his humbugging florid phrases. It was pronounced the gem of the collection and people thronged to see it and to gloat over that little red apple of a buoy floating in its silvery grey expanse, while the two pictures between which it was hoped to be submerged were ignored as vulgar nonentities. Now *that*," he remarked, "was a signal stroke of wit on Turner's part—a literal illustration of the proverb 'a word fitly spoken is like an apple of gold in a picture of silver'—a red gold apple on a silvery grey expanse as the Japanese have taught us the trick. But you see how little it takes to humbug the people if you can only hit upon that *little*." "Man wants but little here below, but wants that little strong"—despite prohibition.

Now we all know that if art is not imitation (humbug), it largely concerns itself in that endeavor to deceive. The artist from the very first is schooled in the practice, and the more he can make his picture life-like, the more he is praised by a certain

cult that goes crazy over realism. I remember when Herkomer—that English business artist—came over here some forty years ago on a flying visit, and incidentally to keep his brush in activity. He cleverly contrived to advertise his proposed advent, and was consequently heralded on his arrival by the press. He began making a painting, large and imposing, of Castle Garden, showing the various types of immigrants going to and fro, with touches of red things flying in between, which was immediately bought, though unfinished, by the City Fathers for \$15,000. Where it is now Heaven only knows. Grand advertisement! He commenced forthwith to hold a one-man's exhibition at the then newly built Rembrandt Studios. That was before the skyscrapers. His father, who accompanied him, was a wood-carver, and his works were also on show, each piece decorated with a strip of blue ribbon tied about it, which trick of enlivenment, catching the eye, certainly gave a touch of *éclat* to each object. He was in his heyday of popularity—most indefatigable and determined to make hay while the sun shone. He enlarged one of my small engravings after *Fortuny* of a few inches in width, to something over five feet, and had some student go over each line, reënforcing it with color, and did not fail to tell how much the experiment cost him. This he also had on exhibition and served him to expatiate

upon, reading more into it than I had ever dreamed of. I stumbled into his reception, quite unexpectedly, with a friend who dragged me in, in my old work-clothes, and was overcome, almost, as he approached me threateningly, and said, pointing to the enlargement, "Do you see what you have done?" I stammered somewhat in a daze that "I didn't recognize having done anything of the kind," which was nothing but the evident truth, but which failure on my part to rise wittily and sympathetically to the occasion—to bob up with an apple of gold in this "network of silver"—together with my country bumpkin manner and workaday clothes, evidently disappointed him, and he turned abruptly from me into the company; but I overheard him, as I quietly withdrew, speaking against the famous Holbein and telling the ladies what a dull fellow he was—merely a plodding topographer of the face! The female element was charmed with Herkomer's personality, declaring he had a head like Jesus Christ. He began painting their portraits forthwith at five thousand dollars a sitting, check in advance, and on the understanding that if said portrait was not finished in the one sitting, it had to go at that. Every day, therefore, he had a new sitter and all declared that his portraits were so marvelously like-life—super life-like, in fact—that they fairly seemed to walk out of their frames, which is the very thing

Whistler—a far greater artist—says a portrait should *not* do, but to lie quietly within the confinement of its representation. It certainly looks like a sad commentary on art that the frame, with its tinsel glitter, should seem to play the important rôle of accomplice in the humbug of a picture, to which is sometimes added the shady trick of the shadow-frame—an artful dodge for lending greater mystery. This, as many of us know, is simply a box—cabinet finished, of some fine wood—into which picture and frame are let, and which projects two or three or four inches beyond the frame, thus casting the picture into a delicate shade. It has the same effect that the broad-brimmed hat has over a lady's face, softening the light; only with the face there is the added charm of increased lustre to the eyes, since they catch the reflection of light from beneath (especially if the blouse be white) causing them to gleam apparently with a light of their own. The broad-brimmed hat is undoubtedly a fascinating yet humbugging device. Some managers of exhibitions now give notice to intending exhibitors "No shadow frames allowed," realizing that this contrivance gives undue advantage over pictures lacking it, and that a square deal by juries, *to all*, is their first thought. "The square deal" reminds me, in this connection, of what a cubist is reported to have said. that a square deal by a jury was only possible

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from square men, and square men are always, and only, *cubists*! There is a certain element of truth underlying the cubist's theory, as with all theories generally. To the square head there is not that obloquy attaching as to that perverse fellow known as the "round head"! The basic forms of things are not round but proceed in straight lines from the apex to the apex of the curve in each form. Clouds now, for example, are perceived to be not round, as depicted by the old school forty years ago. Art is a structure with a geometric basis and must be squarely built and conform, as all true theories, to the rectitude of the earth. The whole thing they say—beauty, poetry and all—rests upon the plumb-line and the level. *Rectitude, probity*, first, afterwards your flourishes and ornaments if you will. The Cubists' art was but a passing phase. It failed in that it was but skeletal, admitting no flesh to adorn its bony or angular framework; no beauty. Think of having your portrait painted with your nose drawn exactly the shape of a triangle!

The artist must speak in a language that all may comprehend and in addition he must flatter. Not by any means does the policy of his craft consist in telling "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." Far from it—it can't be done. Nobody yet has succeeded in accomplishing it. He has his secret tact of omissions, his subtle secrets of form

and color, his craft-mysteries and deliberate schemes of artistic method. He is a fabricator, a calculator and an exaggerator. When, in process of time, as a master-craftsman, grown grey in the craft, he may finally come to confess to the truth of what Blake said, that "the devil, not God, made nature."

However paradoxical it may appear, in *art*, the more near-sighted, to a degree, the seeing becomes, the broader grows the vision. Artists whose eyes are normal, as the good God meant them, see far too much for art's sake. The devil is forever attendant at their elbows whispering "yea, skin for skin," leading them astray into the shallows. Thus Corot, when in the full power of sight, painted works that were dry, hard and narrow as compared with his latest achievements when he was about sixty years old and myopia had set in. His work then assumed a breadth and fulness that was hailed as something new and made him at once famous, though Whistler told me *he* had painted Corots before Corot was heard of, which is a very different thing to painting them *afterwards*. There are *now* as many Corots in existence as there are crows scattered over our corn-fields at seed-time. It would, of course, be invidious to infer that, in Corot's case, the mere altered physical condition of his eyesight, coincident as it was with his gain in breadth of view, resulted in the singular charm of his final or silvery period

Nor would the fact that he discovered the secret (which he discreetly kept to himself) of employing the middle distance—in which lies the chief charm of a landscape—as the foreground of his pictures—though possibly a contributing factor—account for their power to hold us spellbound. There never will be any recipe for the making of a work of art. It is a fact, however, that it happens sometimes that the impairment or loss of vision is compensated for by a gain in inward sight or illumination, showing that sight is not so much a matter of the physical eyes after all. Not long since, we had artists of the supermundane schools affecting an unknown tongue; of perfectly normal vision, practicing optical distortion, so as to see things myopically and astigmat-ically, and who show us landscapes that look as intelligible upside down as in any position of men as trees walking and trees like the cross-pieces of a railroad sign, and portraits that resembled a rug thrown over the back of a chair, or if material-looking enough to picture a human being, then of some creature one might never wish to meet in the flesh. The astonishing thing is that such things have been sold at good prices to intelligent folk!—doubtless through the enchanting wiles of the art dealer aided and abetted by the art critic. In the face of the manœuvrings of the art dealer, however, the poor artist is more sinned against than sinning. I

was once staying at the house of a millionaire, engraving his old master, and an art dealer, one of the guests, had just managed to sell him a picture by Cézanne—a portrait of an ugly-faced female worker of repulsive, ignorant mien and cross eye—the squint being the main feature. An art critic called—evidently an important personage from his bearing—and the host exclaimed, “Come and see my new find” It was on an easel and the light was carefully adjusted by the knowing dealer. “Now sit right here”—and the chair was placed by the host who stood over him, in his rear. “Now what do you think of that?” The critic was overcome, even as he was overborne. There was nothing to do but to launch out in words of admiration: “wonderful!” “stunning!” (he doubtless was stunned) “Such life!”, “Such a brow the eyes have to live under, clear as flint, on either side the formidable nose, curved, cut and colored like an eagle’s claw!” etc. The host naturally beamed with pleasure and, turning, asked me what I had to say. I confessed that I could add nothing in praise of what was already so poetically pronounced, but before I could view the picture in the light of the honorable critic, I should have to rinse my eyes from the old masters in which they had been steeped for so long. “Yes, yes,” they all conceded, “the old masters are all right, but you know we can’t forever be thinking in terms of the

old fellows, progress ' progress ' you know." Thus, in the name of "progress," as in that of liberty, how many crimes are committed !

A very essential ingredient of art, to be sure, is novelty. Often it is mere novelty irrespective of fitness that is sought, as with the fashions in dress. We wake up every day inquiring if there is anything new. If we progressed at as rapid a rate as this desire in human nature, left to itself, would force us, we would soon be all top and little root; hence the value of conservatism. standards, grammars and dictionaries, laws and constitutions, which act as brakes upon the wheels of progress—for the road of progress, you know, is always one of up and down hill. There is a beautiful picture by Botticelli illustrating this idea in the Uffizi gallery of Florence called *The Birth of Venus*. The beauty, poised upon a shell, is being wafted to the shore by the combined blowing of two geni of the air, representative of Æolus. One, with cheeks distended, is blowing furiously, but his companion is restraining him, and with open mouth is merely breathing lightly upon the goddess. In these geni are figured the liberal and conservative elements that are continually playing upon human nature—the one shouting "progress," the other counseling "not so fast." There are fashions in art as in costumes—they vary from epoch to epoch, and every generation laughs

at the old fashions but seriously follows the new. But raiment, however, we always will have, so *that* much is standard with us; the forms of the clouds vary, but the clouds, thank Heaven, will always float in view, as reminders of the passing nature of all things. So art will endure, as long as the sun—the master artist—emblem of the human spirit that colors for us the black and the blank—continues to paint us pictures for our delectation. This may be, but what must we think of the present Russian revolution with its program for artists—the very liberality of which presages a serious menace to art in that classing artists with teachers (who are in the first grade and receive a hundred dollars a week), it lets them do as they please! Relieved, therefore, of the salutary obligation of painting pot-boilers, they can then “loaf and invite their souls” and the result will be either chaos in art, or masterpieces will be so common that nobody will care for them, and there will then be repeated that condition which Taine records in his *Philosophy of Art*, when, at the summit of the Renaissance, for fifty years the gods of art had been pouring out unsurpassable masterpieces, people, finally, through being surfeited thus, turned up their noses at them. They wanted something new and they got it, so great Italian art died. If we could pave the streets with gold and jewels, we would naturally tread them

under foot—old mother Earth seems ever bound to assert her sway in the end

Now, if the studied exaggeration of things is next door to lying, art—great art, I mean—is emphatically of this nature. Many a promising young man starts in life with a poetical and natural gift for exaggeration, which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models—the old masters, if studying art—might flower into something really great and wonderful. Of course, it must be along the lines of the beautiful; and the fictitious must always be held up as fact—the very reflection of nature, as Shakespeare admonishes, but never practices. But as a rule the hopeful young son (through the unhealthy environment of this scientific age in its monstrous worship of facts) gravitates to an academy, if determined to paint pictures, where if he stays as long as the majority unfortunately are enabled to do (by indulgent parents, who, if they really understood what was salutary for them, would cast their bantlings on the rocks), he comes out trimmed and ready for—*business*. As an instance of one example out of many, I knew just such an one who spent years at the model, learning to draw, and in studying anatomy, and who finally painted a crucifixion, so frightfully insistent in its ghastly pallor of death, swollen livid hands and feet and contorted muscles,

that it seemed to me only hardened doctors, students of anatomy or criminal vivisectionists, whose æsthetic faculties are completely atrophied, could calmly face the horror of it. The old masters, with wisdom of insight, have treated such themes so as to glorify the crucified Christ—quicken the dead fact so as to make it mean something in the emotional sphere—to touch the hearts of the devotional. One may see the sun rise and only remark a disc as round as a saucepan, while another may behold in it a pæan to the glory of God. One may paint a dunghill so honestly as to suggest its natural exhalation, another so that it calls up the vision of Chanticleer. It is related that Turgenieff, the great Russian realist, commenting upon the realism of Zola, said "I don't care to know how a woman sweats, whether down her back or under her arms. I want to know how she thinks." The character of one's thoughts is the sum of the individual. And Turgenieff's diagnosis indicates the true distinction between realism and reality. Realism tends to degenerate into emphasis on sensational but relatively unimportant detail—it is analytical and is a matter of time and space. Reality is synthetical—takes in the whole of life—and by its essence is spiritual and goes hand in hand with idealism.

There is such a thing in art as unimaginative realism, against which we may place imaginative

reality, the former as illustrated in the case just cited, the latter as may be exemplified, let us say, in the glorious productions of the renowned Velasquez, and this is the pronounced difference between art as *reality* and art as *humbug*. Not that Velasquez's art, as reality, is any the more real or any the less idealistic than the art of Titian, Michelangelo, or Raphael. Art, as we know, is selection; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis. Art has no other aim than her own perfection and proceeds simply by her own laws. The artist, to a certain extent, is a law unto himself, since he is guided by an intuitive feeling in his judgment, and he endeavors by every means at his disposal to mount the impression, or fact he is seeking to convey, by selecting from his reminiscences of nature only those salient truths that will contribute to the mounting of his idea—like the poet who seeks the most expressive word, or the jeweler who polishes his brilliant with many facets and mounts it in the most effective manner that it may shine forth, infinitely more really a brilliant than in its natural state. I once saw a few tourists who had climbed, from curiosity, upon the pedestals of Michelangelo's *Night and Day* and *Dawn and Evening*, in the Medici chapel of Florence, and I could not help noting how curiously small and in-

significant they appeared beside the god-like magnificence of the artist's creation. Here was the overpowering weight of reality—of something supremely real—and you felt that the great sculptor was the creator of life and not the copier of it. A steady course in Michelangelo reduces our living friends to shadows and our acquaintances to the shadows of shades. His prophets and sibyls have a kind of fervent immortality that dominates us and defies scepticism. And it is not otherwise with Velasquez, who peoples his canvases with a like enduring vitality, different in kind, doubtless, but not in degree. As his great predecessor, he used life not as an *imitative*, but as a *creative* medium. It was the same with Millet, who never painted from nature but went to her as to a book of reference. The like also is true of Whistler, and of our contemporary Joseph Pennell, whose lithographs and etchings are on the highest plane of creative art. These, as true artists, see something that is worth seeing, and see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is as far wider, in spiritual scope, as it is far more splendid in artistic purpose.

“What is that abridgment and selection we behold in all spiritual activity,” Emerson observes, “but itself the creative impulse? For it is the inlet of that higher illumination which teaches to con-

vey a larger sense by simpler symbols. What is man but nature's finer success in self-explication? What is man but a finer, compacter landscape than the horizon figures—nature's electricism? And what is his speech, his love of painting, and the reality of truth he deduces from nature, but a still finer success? All the weary miles and tons of space and bulk left out, and the spirit or moral of it contracted into a musical word, or the most cunning stroke of the pencil."

I remember, years ago Pennell did some illustrations of Perugia, and among them was one that particularly charmed me called a Perugino Landscape. In the course of my perigrinations in Italy, I went to Perugia to realize, alas! that only in the land of eternal realities and verities might I discover that lovely Perugino landscape. It would be the same if we journeyed to Japan expecting to encounter there, in its life, the beautiful imaginative quality that delights us in the charming works of the great artists such as Hokusai, Hokkei or of other of their native painters. We would only behold in Tokio, for instance, pretty much the same workaday folk moving in a similar atmosphere of common everyday existence and weighted with the mediocre cares of life imprinted on the general run of faces, as here at home, from which moribund conditions art prays, "good Lord, deliver us." Na-

ture is stupid as compared with art, and misleading if implicitly trusted, despite Wordsworth to the contrary, who tells us that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her"—as though nature had predelictions, and was not completely indifferent as to whom she betrays by her will-o'-the-wisp into the bog, or into the thirsty desert by her mirage, or swallows up with her earthquake. And as for holding up the mirror to nature, as Shakespeare is thought to teach with respect to art, what would we get but a reflection! We may as well hold up the camera and call the photograph art. But art is a *re-creation*, the spirit of the artist must dominate nature, using her but as raw material. He must "subdue the earth," as God admonished Adam to do in the garden of Eden. It is the letter that killeth but the spirit giveth life. Nature is inarticulate if man does not make her vocal. Therefore, it is man that we must look to who "lent from the glow of his nature warmth to the cold, and with light, colored the black and the blank," as Browning tells us. Evidently art is a distillation. From out the gross groceries of life and nature are distilled through the alembic of the artist—supposing he has a secret distilling apparatus—its choicest essences. The world cares little for anything a man has to offer that has not previously been distilled in the alembic of his life. Nature, we see, is matter struggling into mind, and so art is

mind expressing itself under the conditions of matter, and yet by no means is art a physical fact. Art is *vision* or "intuition," to quote from a very profound scholar and critic, the Italian, Benedetto Croce, apropos of the subject, who says: "The artist produces an image or a phantasm, and he who enjoys art turns his gaze upon the point to which the artist has directed, looks through the chink which he has opened, and reproduces that image in himself. 'Intuition,' 'vision,' 'contemplation,' 'imagination,' 'fancy,' 'lyrical,' 'figurations,' 'representations,' and so on, are words continually recurring, like synonyms, when discoursing upon art, and they all lead the mind to the same conceptual sphere which indicates general agreement. But the fact that art is intuition, obtains its force and meaning from all that it implicitly denies and from which it distinguishes art. It denies, above all, that art is a *physical fact*: for example, certain determined colors, or relations of colors, certain definite forms of bodies, certain definite sounds or relations of sounds—in short, whatsoever be designated as 'physical.' The inclination toward this error of physicizing art is already present in ordinary thought, and as children who touch the soap-bubble and would wish to touch the rainbow, so the human spirit, admiring beautiful things, hastens spontaneously to trace out the reasons for them in external nature, and *proves* that it must

think, or *believes* that it should think certain colors beautiful and certain other colors ugly, certain forms beautiful and certain other forms ugly. And if it be asked why art cannot be a physical fact, we must reply in the first place that physical facts do not possess reality, and that art, to which so many devote their whole lives and fills all with a divine joy is *supremely real*; thus it cannot be a physical fact, which is something *unreal*. This sounds at first paradoxical, for nothing seems more solid and secure to the ordinary man than the physical world, and besides, in order to surpass what of strange and difficult may be contained in that truth, to become at home with it, we may take into consideration the fact that the demonstration of the unreality of the physical world has not only been proved in an indisputable manner and is admitted by all philosophers (who are not crass materialists and are not involved in the strident contradictions of materialism), but is professed by these same physicists in the spontaneous philosophy which they mingle with their physics, when they conceive physical phenomena as products of principles that are beyond experience, of atoms, electrons, or of ether, or as the manifestation of an Unknowable: besides, the matter itself of the materialists is a super-material principle. Thus, physical facts reveal themselves, by their internal logic and by common consent, not

as reality, but as a *construction of our intellect for the purposes of science*. Consequently, the question whether art be a physical fact must rationally assume this different signification; that is to say, *whether it be possible to construct art physically*. And this, to speak ironically, is certainly possible, for we indeed carry it out always, when, turning from the sense of a poem and ceasing to enjoy it, we set ourselves, for example to count the words of which the poem is composed, and to divide them into syllables and letters, or, disregarding the æsthetic effect of a statue, we weigh and measure it—a most useful performance for the packers of statues, as is the other for the typesetters who have to set up pages of poetry, but most useless for the contemplator and student of art, to whom it is neither useful nor licit to allow himself to be ‘distracted’ from his proper object. Thus, art is not a physical fact in this second sense, either, which amounts to saying that when we propose to ourselves to penetrate its nature and mode of action, to construct it physically is of no avail.”

Albeit we must not lose sight of the fact that, while it is manifestly absurd to attempt to physimize art, it is equally as absurd to imagine “that art—an inspiration—can stand alone and independent of its physical representation! Without matter there can be no art. Without matter there is no stuff

in which imagination may create an image. You may *tell* me of a delicious pudding that you have made, but I shall want to taste it, since the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. The apostle James says, in a passage with which we are all familiar: "Show me your faith" (and your faith is nothing more or less than your art of life)—"show me your faith without your works, and I will show you *my* faith [or my art of life] by my works." "An aspiration enshrined within the bounds of a representation"—that is art. There has got to be representation. To quote again from Benedetto Croce, "In reality we know nothing but expressed intuitions a thought is not a thought for us, unless it be possible to formulate it in words—a musical fancy only when it becomes concrete in sounds, a pictorial image only when it is colored. It is certain that when a thought is really thought, when it has attained to the maturity of thought, the words run through our whole organism, soliciting the muscles of our mouth and ringing internally in our ears, when music is truly music, it trills in the throat and shivers in the fingers that touch ideal notes, when a pictorial image is pictorially real, we are impregnated with lymphs that are colors, and maybe, where the coloring matters were not at our disposition, we might spontaneously color surrounding objects by a sort of irradiation, as is said of certain hysterics and of certain saints, who

caused the stigmata upon their hands and feet by an act of the imagination ! Thought, musical fancy, pictorial image, did not exist without expression, they did not exist at all previous to the formation of this expressive state of the spirit. If we take from a poem its metre, its rhythm and its words, poetical thought does not, as some opine, remain behind. there remains nothing. The poetry is born, simultaneously, with those words, that rhythm, and that metre. Art therefore, like the force and matter of the physical world, is inseparable and inconceivable apart from its physical substance. Therefore, also it must be emphasized that intuition and expression, fancy and technique, or more plainly art and matter, are rationally distinguished, though not as elements of art, and they are related and united between themselves, though not in the field of art but in the *wider field of the spirit in its totality*. Technical or practical problems to be solved, difficulties to be vanquished are ever present to the artist and there is truly something which, without being really physical, and being, like everything real, a spiritual act, can be metaphoricized as physical in respect to the intuition. What is this something? Let us see. the artist is, above all, a *practical man*—practical in the sense that while working every thought means for him a stroke, since his labor is to render possible or easy, for himself and for others, the repro-

duction of his ideas or images. He must see his image reproduced. He alone can reproduce it, if he would have the beholder reproduce it in himself. Thus, his practical acts which assist that work of reproduction, guided by his acquired knowledge, practice, and reason, are called his technique: and since they are practical, they are distinguished from contemplation and reverie, which is theoretical, and seem to be external to it, and are therefore called physical; and they assume this name the more easily in so far as they are fixed and made abstract by the intellect. Thus, writing and phonography are united with words and music, canvas, wood and walls covered with colors, stone or wood cut and engraved, iron, bronze and other metals melted and molded to certain shapes by sculpture and architecture. And this apparent transformation of the intuitions into physical things—analogue with the apparent transformation of wants and economic labor into things and into merchandise—also explains how people have come to talk not only of “artistic things” and of “beautiful things”—blending unconsciously the intuitional with the physical—but also of “a beautiful of nature.” It is evident that, besides the instruments that are made for the reproduction of images (reproduced in the beholder) objects already existing can be met with whether produced by man or not, which perform such a

service—that is to say, are more or less adapted to fixing the memory of our intuitions: and these things take the name of “natural beauties,” and exercise their fascination *only when we know how to understand them with the same soul with which the artist or artists have taken and appropriated them*, giving value to them and indicating the *point of view* from which we must look at them, thus connecting them with their own intuitions. But the always imperfect adaptability, the fugitive nature, the mutability of “natural beauties” also justify the inferior place accorded to them, compared with beauties produced by art. Let us leave it to rhetoricians or madmen to affirm that a beautiful tree, a beautiful river, a sublime mountain, or even a beautiful horse or a beautiful human figure are superior to the chisel-stroke of Michelangelo or the verse of Shakespeare or Browning, but let us repeat with greater propriety that “Nature is stupid as compared to art, and that she is mute if man does not make her speak,” and she speaks by the virtue of technique

Thus it is that we venture to affirm that art is no humbug—so far as realistic or great art is concerned—but that, on the contrary, it is a real, a very real, a supremely real thing. It is only those unfortunate and benighted folk who are indifferent to its spiritual influence that are unreal, or whose

existence does not call for any sort of proof, and there are shoals of them submerged in the sea of humanity.

The artist, like the evangelist, is a fisher of men. He wants to bring them all within his gospel net. His is the gospel of beauty. He believes that the world (of men and women) is saved, and is being saved, and will yet be wholly saved through the benign, ameliorating and uplifting influence of beauty.

There is truth of meaning in what Goethe says, that "the beautiful is greater than the good; for it includes the good and adds something to it"; it is the good made perfect. And this sense of perfection, which prompts us to ask from every creation of man the very utmost that it ought to give, and renders us intolerant of the smallest fault in ourselves or anything we do, is one of the results of art cultivation. No other human productions come so near to perfection as works of art. Art when really cultivated, trains us never to be completely satisfied with imperfection in what we ourselves do and are, to idealize, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all our own characters and lives.

It is the delightful Oscar Wilde who tells us that "Life gains from art not merely spirituality, depth of thought and feeling, but from the models art holds up, *life* can form itself materially along *art's* lines." Darwin tells us, in his remarks on sexual

selection, of the susceptibility of birds to bright colors in the formation of their brilliant plumage. And we are all familiar with how Jacob increased his flocks and herds at his uncle Laban's expense. How he agreed with his uncle to take for his hire all the cattle that were ring-streaked, speckled and spotted, and then set to work and peeled rods of poplar, making the white appear which was beneath the bark, setting these in the drinking troughs where the cattle came to drink, so that the flocks brought forth ring-streaked, speckled and spotted. The novelty of the rods so treated was such as the animals had not been used to seeing in the fields and woods, and must have impressed their dull brains with a dim stirring of something analogous to a sense of beauty. The Greeks, with their quick artistic instinct, saw the value of the influence of beauty and set lovely statues in their public squares and by the fountains where the women congregated with their urns to draw water. Also in the bride's chamber was set the statue of Hermes or of Apollo that she might bear children as lovely as the works of art it was her wont to gaze upon. I remember while engraving a picture by Gentile da Fabriano of *The Adoration of the Magi* in the *Belli Arti* of Florence, that a lady would often come and dwell in contemplation, silently and long, over the lovely picture, which depicted the beautiful Madonna with

her charming infant receiving the adoration of the three wise kings; one, a very old reverend being, was in the act of kissing the infant's little bare foot, while the little hand of the child was resting upon the grizzly bald head. The lady would stand as though entranced with the beauty of the scene, and unable to withdraw from it. I know this lady and she kept a proof of my engraving of this old master in her bedroom, and the male child that was subsequently born of her, seemed to be the very counterpart of the infant by Gentile da Fabriano, both as to form and color; for it remained, for a period of its infancy, of the golden hue of the painting. It developed a most charming disposition of sweetness, combined with manly virility, and is now living in America.

A beauty that is indefinable, not explicable, is rarer and dearer than one that we can see to the end of. We are creatures more particularly of environment than heredity; in fact, strictly speaking, of *environment wholly*—heredity being but the sum total of many past environments. The protoplasm of our nature is of such extreme tremulous impressionability that nothing is comparable to its delicate sensitiveness. Hence, it is but reasonable to infer that an environment of beautiful and noble works, *to the appreciation of which we are educated*, must naturally result in a society of enduring charm, and this is what Plato thought—to quote from a pas-

sage in his Republic "a simple atmosphere of all fair things, where beauty, which is the spirit of art, will come on eye and ear like a fresh breath of wind that brings health from a clear upland, and insensibly and gradually draw the child's soul into harmony with all knowledge and all wisdom, so that he will love what is beautiful and good, and hate what is evil and ugly (for they always go together) long before he knows the reason why, and then, when reason comes, will kiss her on the cheek as a friend " When we realize that art is an indispensable accompaniment of life, we shall teach our children to use color, pattern and design with such skill that they may make their daily life a thing of constant inspiration and enthusiasm—their very existence "a thing of beauty and a joy forever " So the patient artist, like the true fisher of men that he is, with his line artfully baited—with that little red apple of a buoy—is forever on the job, because, you know, the problem is, and ever will be, "*how to catch 'em.*"

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