

## MEMORY AND THE VITAL MOMENT

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WHEN WE KNOW the relative value of *things* we can do anything with them. We can build with them without destroying them. Under such conditions they are enhanced by coming into contact with each other.

The study of art is the study of the relative value of things. The factors of a work of art cannot be used constructively until their relative values are known. Unstable governments, like unstable works of art, are such as they are because values have not been appreciated.

The most vital things in the look of a face or of a landscape endure only for a moment. Work should be done from memory. The memory is of that vital movement. During that moment there is a correlation of the factors of that look. This correlation does not continue. New arrangements, greater or less, replace them as mood changes. The special order has to be retained in memory-that special look, and that order which was its expression. Memory must hold it. All work done from the subject thereafter must be no more than data-gathering. The subject is now in another mood. A new series of relations has been established. These may confound. The memory of that special look must be held, and the "subject" can now only serve as an indifferent manikin of its former self. The picture must not become a patchwork of parts of various moods. The original mood must be held to.

The artist sees only that in the model which may help him to build up the look he would record. His work is now very difficult. With the model before him he works from memory. He refers to the model, but he does not follow the new relations which differing moods establish. He chooses only from the appearance before him that which relates to his true subject-the look which first inspired him to work. That look has passed and it may not return. He is very fortunate if he can evoke again that look in the subject.

It is very difficult to go away from a subject after having received an impression and set that impression down from memory. It is yet more difficult to work from memory with the "subject" in its changing moods still before you. All good work is done from memory whether the model is still present or not. With the model present there is coupled with the distracting changes in its organization which must not be followed, the advantage of seeing, nevertheless, the material-the raw material one might say-of which the look was made.

Were the student constantly in the habit of memory practice there is little doubt but that he would dispense with the presence of the model at the time of the actual accomplishment of his work. But this would mean a form of study which has not yet come in vogue. There is no form of study more fascinating than this-that is, after the first disheartening steps are taken. The first steps are disheartening because while we may have learned copying right well the effort to put down what we actually know-that is, what we can carry away with us-is often a revelation of the very little understanding we had in the presence of the model.

I think it is safe to say that the kind of seeing and the kind of thinking done by one

who works with the model always before him is entirely different from the kind of seeing and thinking done by one who is about to lose the presence of the model and will have to continue his work from the knowledge he gained in the intimate presence.

The latter type of worker generally manifests a mental activity of much higher order than his apparently safe and secure confrere. He must know and he must know that he knows before the model is snatched away from him. He studies for information. A good painting is a remarkable feat of organization. Every part of it is wonderful in itself because it seems so alive in its share in the making of the unity of the whole, and the whole is so definitely one thing.

You can look at a good painting in but one way. That is, the way it is made. Whether you will or not you must follow its sequences. There are some paintings, very remarkable for the skill they display, which are, however, a mere welding together of factors which belong to many different expressions of nature. Many a school drawing of this character have I seen held up as an example, given a prize, and yet being but a mere patching together of many concepts-unrelated factors nevertheless cunningly interwoven-there is not in them that surge of life, that unity which is the mark of true organization.

If you wish your work to have organization your concept of the motive which is the incentive to your flight must be as certain and you must hold as well to it as you would have your organization certain and true to itself in all of its parts. No vacillating or uncertain interest can produce a unity.

I have often thought of an art school where the model might hold the pose in one room and the work might be done in another. The pupils would have their places in both rooms, one for observation and the other for work. The pupil could return to the model room for information. In getting the information he could view the model from *his* place or could walk about and get an all-around concept; he could also make any sketches he might desire to make-for information-but these drawings are not to be carried into the work room. Into this room he only carries what he *knows*.

It would be a wonderful school and the pupils in it would not only enjoy their work and profit more but they would be a much better class of students. For this class of work would demand such activity of mind and such energy that the practitioners of idle industry that now occupy so many places in school studios would eliminate themselves.

One might ask why this plan is not tried. The reason is the usual sad one. Good art schools are generally self-supporting. They barely pay their expenses. Innovations are financial risks. Besides, in this case the students have to be convinced, and, as I have said before, the initial steps in this kind of study are very discouraging.

Some tentative efforts have been made in memory study but perhaps the nearest we have come to it in any effective way has been through the introduction of the five, ten, or thirty minute poses. In these, mental activity, alertness, the quick seizing of essentials has been stimulated. We have proved that thirty minutes of high-pitch mentality and spirit is worth more than a whole week below par. And in such rapid work where seeing and doing is accomplished in five, ten, or thirty minutes the seeing must be certain, selective, and the memory must be good. This system of quick action has been of service.

In the old days, when a drawing was begun on Monday and finished on Saturday, the student who did not know how to *begin* a drawing "began" one a week and spent a week *finishing* the thing he had not known how to begin. A thing that has not been begun

cannot be finished.

But it took a terrible battle to introduce the Quick Sketch. It will not be easy to introduce this Concept-and-Carry method of study. A few individuals throughout the history of art have adopted this method in spite of the school conventions and these individuals are known to us through their works.

It should be noted that in this *memory* form of study it is not proposed that the model should be used less. It is proposed that the model should be used more. This is a thing that it would be well to understand. In fact, in observing the work of many students or artists where the model is before them for every stroke we may be impressed with the idea that it is the model who is using the artist instead of the artist using the model. This is certainly the case where the artist is following the moods of the model. Sometimes we see that the artist is not a willing slave, however, for we hear him complaining that "the model has moved," showing that somewhere in his mysterious consciousness there is a desire to do that thing which he started out to do.

The development of an ability to work from memory, to select factors, to take things of certain constructive values and build with them a special thing, your unique vision of nature, the thing you caught in an instant look of a face or the formations of a moment in the sky, will make it possible to state not only that face, that landscape, but make your statement of them as they were when they were most beautiful to you.

By this I mean that you will make an organization in paint on canvas; not a reproduction, but an organization, subject to the natural laws of paint and canvas, which will have an order in it kin to that order which has so impressed you in nature—in the look of a face, in the look of a landscape.

Faces are not permanently beautiful to us, nor are landscapes. There seem to be moments of revelation, moments when we see in the transition of one part to another the unification of the whole. There is a sense of comprehension and of great happiness. We have entered into a great order and have been carried into greater knowledge by it. This sometimes in a passing face, a landscape, a growing thing. We may call it a passage into another dimension than our ordinary. If one could but record the vision of these moments by some sort of sign! It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Signposts on the way to what may be. Signposts towards greater knowledge.

There are those who have found the sign and through their works we can to some degree follow, as we do at times when hearing music or in association with the works of the masters of other arts.

Everyone in some measure has these moments of clearer understanding, and it is equally important for all to hold and fix them.

It is really not important whether one's vision is as great as that of another. It is a personal question as to whether one shall live in and deal with his greatest moments of happiness.

The development of the power of seeing and the power to retain in the memory that which is essential and to make record and thus test out how true the seeing and the memory have been is the way to happiness.