

OBITER

PORTUGUESE ART 800-1800; at the Royal Academy. The art of Portugal depends from a series of imported styles taken from the various lands where the Portuguese traded; especially Flanders and the Orient. As a nation they were remarkably susceptible to external influences, but lacked the power to create original images. For this reason the visitor to the exhibition can hope for few stimulating aesthetic surprises or important revelations. Nevertheless the applied arts reveal pleasing and distinctive features where the diverse foreign influences were most readily integrated with the indigenous vision. These sections are admirably arranged, and the whole show is assembled with imagination and taste. Unfortunately tasteful display cannot disguise the imaginative poverty of the fine arts. There is also a helpful series of architectural photographs showing the exuberance of the Baroque, and the solid intractable Romanesque building and carving. The latter is simple and the treatment of capitals and tympanons tends to a static effect.

One of the most sensitive and original sculptors was Master Pero. While his work lacks either the expressionist vigour of German Gothic, or the power to communicate the spiritual enigma of man which characterizes the French School of the period, his conceptions are entirely personal and imbued with a gentle optimism. His restrained forms, unemphatic rhythms, and modest sense of scale are in conformity with his general unconcern for the deeper implications of sacred art. Undoubtedly the most profoundly moving sculpture is the early fourteenth-century 'Christ on the Cross' from Coimbra.

Many of the paintings are influenced by the sixteenth-century Flemish Mannerists. However, one earlier artist, Nuno Gonçalves, attained to a European eminence and surmounted the prevailing provincialism. His debt to Flemish painters is undeniable, and it is Hugo van der Goes and his followers like Justus of Ghent who leap to mind, although chronologically (Gonçalves was active *c.* 1450-1467) Rogier van der Weyden is the more probable source of inspiration. But he was able to assimilate their message and evolve an idiom which was original in conception and presentation. The metallic fleshtones, silvery greys, mauves and olive greens, reveal in the nude St Vincent an artist of rare colouristic gifts. These are more daringly exploited in the large 'Veneration of St Vincent', where these muted harmonies are enlivened by the vivid hues of court apparel and the juxtaposition of olive and sea-green in the panel of the fishermen. The grouping has a naïve directness but gains in psychological intensity and thematic continuity. All who care for painting should visit the Academy to see his work.

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