

OBITER

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ART. The exhibition of European Masters of the Eighteenth Century at Burlington House is a revelation, not merely for its surprises—such as the Liotard portraits of Earl and Lady Bessborough or the Menendez still life groups—but because it prompts a reconsideration of the century's artistic rôle.

English Palladian mansions, the grand manner of Reynolds' portraiture or Boucher's Rococo gaiety, encourage the assumption that eighteenth-century art was luxurious and confident. Those qualities abound, but they are by no means exclusive. They are countered not only by the realism of Chardin or Goya, but by a nervous sensibility which is present in the flecks of paint on Watteau's exquisite little panel from Oxford, or his superb drawings—whether they represent an animated musician, the absorbed concentration of a young sempstress or the sensual melancholy of a negro's head. More unexpectedly perhaps, this characteristic appears in the volatile brush drawing of the heads in G. B. Tiepolo's large version of 'Cleopatra's Banquet'. Compared with Veronese (to whom he owed so much), Tiepolo's textures are less sumptuous, the colours more reticent; a range of gamboge, yellow ochre, Venetian red, muted crimson, the sombre green of Prato marble and cool silvery highlights.

Fragonard is the most widely represented among the French. His magical 'Fête de Saint Cloud', so splendid yet so evanescent, is one of the triumphs of the show; there is also the excellent 'Man in Fancy Dress' and a delightful head of a 'Coquette' where the fresh, delicate textures and colours anticipate Renoir. Courbet, too, must have learnt much from the innocent sensuality of Chardin's fruits. Beside their vivid hues are the subtle nuances of the figure groups, couched in creamy tones, grey-blues, modest reds and neutral browns. Oudry's masterly 'White Duck' is an urbane, highly sophisticated performance. The Spaniard Menendez handles his sensuous themes with the austere touch of a Zurbaran or an early Velasquez.

The landscapes are dominated by a magnificent assembly of Canaletto and Guardi. The latter, his pictures enlivened by sudden Titianesque roseate, golden, and cerulean tints, suggests the crumbling façade of Venetian splendour. Unfortunately the beauty of Canaletto's dun and buff colours is lost against the brown Academy walls. Alexander Cozen's drawings and Gainsborough's 'Crossing the Ford' are outstanding amongst the British landscapes. The British school emerges surprisingly diverse; not only are there the famous portraits both human and animal—Stubbs' 'Gimcrack' is included—but lesser names like Wright of Derby.

But diversity is the keynote of the exhibition; a brief summary is impossible. The unifying principle lies not so much in a style, as in an unparalleled *achievement* of style.

M. SHIRLEY

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MATISSE. The death of Henri Matisse has brought to an end an achievement unique in our time: that of a 'revolutionary' artist who in his last years turned to the sacred, and asked to be judged by the chapel at Vence which was even to its humblest detail his own creation. Whatever may be the ultimate judgment on his work, it is certain that his chapel will redeem our own generation from the charge that the serious creative artist has no place in the service of the Church. Matisse's death followed that of Père Couturier by only a few months, and their names will unquestionably be linked, for it was the latter's courageous conviction that 'to effect a revival of liturgical art it may be safer to turn to geniuses without faith than to believers without talent' which led to the decoration of the church at Assy and in effect made Vence possible. The question of Matisse's faith can no longer be a matter for question, and his chapel, already belonging as of right to the hillside it adorns and as it were completes, is itself a motive for believing: a creation of our time that asserts without any ambiguity that the things of the spirit are those that endure.

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CATHOLICS AND TELEVISION. The proceedings of the first international Conference for Catholic Television, of which some account was given in last April's issue of BLACKFRIARS, have now been fully published in the latest number of the *Revue Internationale de Télévision et de Radio* (31 Boulevard Latour-Maubourg, Paris 7; 400 francs). Detailed reports of religious television in many countries give an encouraging picture of the Church's response to a powerful new medium for its apostolate. In particular, Père Roguet's paper on the televising of the Mass is a brilliantly effective answer to the usual objections.

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OBITER, in this revived form, will hope to discuss each month recent art exhibitions, music, films and radio.

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