

Baldy

15th July, 1936.

Dear Fred,

I am sending you, under separate cover, the July "Apollo" in which you will find, on page 53, an editorial comment on my lecture to the R.S.A. I would like to reply to this, and send you herewith my thoughts, which I would be glad if you would put into the right form for publication. I feel I should not leave the matter as it is, as the paragraph is evidently written either by an ignorant man or with the deliberate intention to be unpleasant.

I shall be interested to know what you think about it.

Please do not return "Apollo".

When I said that Art from its earliest beginnings has concerned itself primarily with the representation of nature, that certainly did not exclude the symbolism of nature, which, in a portrait, is the life and soul, the psychological part, of the sitter - or, in a landscape, the atmospheric conditions. My reference was to modern so-called "Abstract Art" which today is thrust upon the public. Abstract it may be, but it certainly does not represent nature.

My reply to the Editor's statement that I have no conception that all painting, including my own, is at bottom abstract, is that I am, and always have been, primarily concerned with representing nature.

It is necessary for art, be it painting, sculpture or music, that the artist should first completely understand his metier. What he produces becomes art only when this understanding is combined with the abstract, which is the soul, the expression of individuality of the subject. The essential is the intuition which can express this. The products of the so-called "abstract" pictures we see now are in the same position as a writer would be who had imagination, but no command of language. There may be an abstract idea there, but the painter is unable, through ignorance, to express himself intelligibly, or, in other words, to "represent nature". It is the true relationship between the representation of nature and the expression of the abstract which gives us perfection.

When I said that art from its earliest beginnings has concerned itself primarily with the representation of nature, I stated a fact that surely ought to be obvious to every intelligent student of art history. Art in its origin was purely illustrative and upon a gradually built up foundation of accurate representation it based securely its symbolical and abstract developments. Art to-day, however, symbolical and abstract it aspires to become, needs just this same foundation and if it is not concerned primarily with the representation of nature - with, that is to say, correctness of vision and accuracy of statement - its efforts to express itself by abstract devices must inevitably make it ridiculous. The painter of "abstract" pictures, who has no practical knowledge of nature and no trained ability to realise what he sees, is in the same unhappy position as a writer who is trying to give rein to his imagination without having had any contact with the world or possessing any command of language. The stuff that such people produce is not art and to thrust it upon the public is an offence against good taste and ordinary common sense, for it is only by establishing the right relationship between the representation of nature and the expression of intellectual abstractions that true artistic creation is made possible.