



ANALYSIS  
OF WORKS OF ART  
*by Petronius Arbiter*

## A DEGENERATE WORK OF ART A CUBISTIC CREATION

IN the world of art, as in the world at large, we have moral degeneracy and intellectual degeneracy. The latter nearly always is the result of the former.

The intellectual degeneracy of the modernistic movement of to-day can be easily traced back to the moral degeneracy of Paris during the period of the Second Empire, created by that mephistophic traitor and despot Napoleon III, when Paris had fallen so low that, as an authoritative writer says: "There was then no longer any tribune, no press, no public opinion. The unique care was the material interests and the satisfaction of coarse pleasures towards which the government itself pushed the people." Alcoholism, drug-addiction and sex-perversion became so common that Paris was redolent with vices and excessivism of all kinds, until finally moral depression, pessimism and a hunger for a change suggested a revolution, not only in government but in life and everything. Art did not escape. Therefore excessivism ending in modernism was the natural result.

Like a disease the Empire had run its course. It was finally destroyed because contrary to the nature of the French people. Likewise modernism, like a plague, will have to run its course. It will also be soon destroyed because contrary to the nature of mankind and nature's laws of the beautiful, and because it is a manifestation of intellectual degeneracy rooted, we repeat, in the moral degeneracy of the past.

The cubistic picture we show on page 424 is a degenerate work of art.

We do not remember how the photograph from which the plate of this creation was made came into our hands, do not know the title nor the author and do not care to know. It violates every law of art, is a negation of all beauty and a libel on the human form which it presumes to represent and in a vague way recalls.

Whenever we wish to expose the fallacy of any social or æsthetic gospel we need only to go to nature to obtain the most useful weapons. Nature is our mother and always gives us the soundest hints and suggestions, though the profound secrets of nature will always elude man. But she reveals to us all that is best for us to know, and we can learn those things if we will only humbly look about for her suggestions and then modestly act upon them.

All the indications offered us by nature prove that—*Nature abhors the straight line, even more the rectangle and cube, avoids them when possible, and always seeks the curve.* There are almost no rectangles in nature and few, if any, cubes even among the lowest crystals.

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*It is the curve which dominates nature. Our eyes, mind and soul are adjusted to the curve. Therefore there is nothing so disagreeable to us, in form, as a severely plain and empty picture frame of say about a yard square. Why? Because the eyes, being compelled to follow the lines of a picture frame when they arrive at a corner, are suddenly switched in a different direction, and this sudden switching jostles, shocks and twitches the muscles which move the eyes. Whereas the eyes follow easily all curves, and also positively enjoy this following of the curves. When a frame is filled with a picture full of curves we forget the frame, because the mind is focused upon the picture; but an empty frame on a wall is a disagreeable object simply because its angularity at each corner shocks the eyes.*

Therefore a cubistic picture full of straight lines and right-angles, such as we find in the one we illustrate on page 424, is contrary to the laws of nature, which laws insist upon the establishment of curves, not rectangles, not cubes. Hence cubism as an æsthetic theory is fundamentally fallacious and absurd.

But it is absurd from another point of view. The advent of cubism was a sudden apparition. It announced a revolution in the world of art. But nature also abhors sudden revolutions and is governed always by evolution. Nature never somersaults, she always transforms. Nature is never sudden. Hence we can trace the transformation of the Arabian charger from the prehistoric, pigmy horse and note its growth through millions of years. Likewise we can study the transformation of the Corinthian style of architecture into the Byzantine, the Romanesque, the Gothic, etc. Each type and style was an outgrowth of a previous one, there were no sudden, revolutionary inventions and introductions of styles completely new. And this is because the outward manifestations of nature are governed by two laws—the law of “The Continuity of Effects” which seeks always to maintain the type and “The Law of Differentiation” which seeks always to vary the type. Thus we have traditional stability coupled with eternal originality. So that no two rose leaves ever were exactly alike, nor two human finger-prints.

Finally, because of the laws of nature, any sudden revolutionary form of art cannot possibly live. Therefore cubism is already dead. We have only hinted at why it died. The men who originally created cubism “out of their heads,” as the boys say, lived in a degenerate period and were more or less a degenerate lot, intellectually and morally. The first cubist’s works were jokes. How they were imitated at the instigation of certain European art dealers and critics we will make clear some other time.

That those who now are fascinated by the spirit of anarchistic monstrosity inherent in all cubism and waste their lives in imitating it are entirely sane, may with safety be questioned. How many of them are drug fiends, alcoholic victims or sex-perversers we can let our alienists determine. That the majority of them are abnormal, at least men-

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tally, is certain.

It is the curio-dealers of the future who will profit by these creations, because human curiosity is eternally active and people will buy them twenty years from now to prove what degenerates there were among the artists, what fools among the public and charlatans among the critics and dealers in this epoch. There are men buying these things now solely because they are speculating on their future value—as curios—which will, they think bring high prices as other rare curios do—such as postage stamps, old buttons and whiskey bottles.

To try to obtain even a glimpse of the meaning or purpose of this art atrocity would be futile. The lowest savages of the prehistoric period could not have been guilty of fabricating such a monstrosity. The drawings on the walls of the caves of Dordogne are infinitely superior.

How any dealer, having the least concern for his reputation as an advisor of his clients could give space in his gallery to such æsthetic warts passes understanding. Their excuse may be that such aberrations were first exhibited in the Paris Salon. But, we repeat, the first were jokes! To-day they are nothing but bunco-impositions and a disgrace to the dealer who handles them.

If such things were the result of the meeting of some Caricaturist Club and preserved in the archives of an insane asylum, as evidence of the strange and abnormal working of the human mind when under the influence of an over-dose of such a mixture as a Manhattan cocktail, champagne and terrapin, we would not notice them. But when they are dignified as "high art" by being hung in the galleries of art-dealers and lauded by cunning-eyed hired clerks, paid go-betweens or interested critics, then it is time to analyze the causes which produced them and to ridicule them.

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