

November, 1915 * p. 42

FRANCIS PICABIA AND HIS PUZZLING ART

An Extremely Modernized Academician



F FRANCIS PICABIA, who is now in New York on a fleeting visit, is regarded properly as a French painter. In the present war his sympathies are all with the French, in spite of his immediate Cuban, and remoter Spanish, ancestry. Though one of the most extreme of the moderns, he is not subject to the usual taunt of being unable to paint, as he had attained, before he took to "abstract" art, a very considerable recognition as a painter of the conventional school, and was, in fact, quite a pet of the Academicians.

At the age of twelve, Picabia was drawing; at sixteen, attending *Les Arts Decoratifs*, while at seventeen he exhibited his first picture, in the Salon des Artistes Français.

His early work was influenced by the Romantic schools. Fifteen years ago he was classed with the Impressionists. Until 1908 his work was still "objective," so called: then he joined the "Abstract" painters. A certain class of critics, following the process (adopted, perhaps, as a mental labor-saving device) of shoving everything and everyone into some neatly labelled pigeon-hole, have tagged him, at times, as an "Orphist" and a "Cubist." His work has been familiar to us since the

Armory Exhibition in New York in 1913, the most noticed picture of the four which he showed there being the "Procession, Seville."

"Seven years ago," Picabia says, "I tried to make a painting that would live by its own resources, like music. I was trying to make a psychic painting. At the present time I am doing research in art. My conclusions? I cannot explain my present researches until I have myself evolved out of them, that is to say, until I have gone further in my artistic evolution."

Judging from some of his recent drawings, he has gone, for his inspiration, to the sphere of engineering and machinery. For example, take his "Portrait of a Young American Girl," which might be a cut taken straight out of a book on physics, or take, again, the portraits of some of his friends, drawn in terms of mechanics. Picabia likes to make a picture of the interior of a motor-car and call it a portrait. A good joke, perhaps, but would it not spoil it to take it seriously?

Picabia served eight months with the French Army, in the automobile corps. He is now here on a mission for the French military department. He is subject to a call at any moment to return to his post on the firing line.