

A meeting of the Art Division was held on Tuesday, March 7, 1939 at 2:00 P.M. in Bingham Living Room. Present: Mr. Leigh, Mr. Hirsch, Mrs. Hirsch, Mr. Moselsio, Mrs. Moselsio, Miss Shelly, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Moore, Mr. Park, Mr. Krob, N. Disston, Secretary.

EXHIBITIONS FOR SPRING TERM

Mr. Hirsch reported that there will be a symposium at the College early in April on the American Foreign Policy with relation to Latin America. The Music Division is planning a program of Latin American music, and Mr. Hirsch suggested that during that period it would be a good idea to have an exhibition of Latin American arts and crafts, and asked for the opinion of the division on such an exhibition. It was suggested that the exhibition should contain not only Mexican work but also work from South America, and that the emphasis should be on contemporary arts and crafts rather than ancient. The division approved of such an exhibition to be held about April 10th to 19th. Mr. Hirsch then asked for suggestions on the exhibition for the term as tentatively set up, consisting of suggested exhibitions of the Bauhaus, the Wheaton College competition, John Marin water colors, etc. Mr. Park said that Farkas, the Hungarian architect, would be at the College sometime in April to talk with students and lecture, and will bring with him photographs and information about current architecture on the continent. It was suggested that this might overlap the Bauhaus exhibition, although Farkas is not in sympathy with the Bauhaus method. From the opinion of those members of the division who have seen the Bauhaus exhibition, however, it was felt that the exhibition was not too successful, because it was not inclusive enough, and that these exhibitions of a teaching method are not interesting to the College as a whole. It was therefore decided not to hold this exhibition, and Mr. Park suggested in its place an exhibition of housing in America. He said he would go about getting information for such an exhibition. It was also felt there should be an exhibition of sculpture, and Mr. Moselsio offered to help arrange an exhibition of Lehmbruck's work. It was then felt that the Wheaton College exhibition would make too much architecture on the exhibition schedule for this year and it was thought this could be held at some time in the future. Mr. Krob suggested an exhibition of the sculpture competition of Plexiglas, which would be related as much to design as to sculpture. It was decided to ask Mr. Farkas to come after April 20th, after the Latin American exhibition.

"COMMERCIAL ART"

After a reading of the minutes of the last meeting, Mr. Hirsch announced that he had invited Mr. Leigh to the meeting in order to discuss again the question of "commercial art" and its place in the curriculum of the Art Division, with special relation to a possible poster class, which had been discussed at the last meeting.

Hirsch: After reading this over I decided that the poster class should not be instituted without further discussion by the division. While the poster class in itself is not a very serious thing, what is involved is serious. The question that seems fundamental is the question of the

scope of the Art Division. While it was suggested that the question be studied by a group or committee, that does not appeal to me because this is the group that should study the question. Everyone in the division has something to do with it. That is this question of commercial art and the question of extra-curricular work which can remain supervised or unsupervised. It does not seem to me that we have no philosophy; we simply haven't stated it. The art division seems to fall into two parts, almost a split: 1) the representative or pictorial arts, painting, sculpture, graphic arts, all those that deal with depicting or representing phases of nature, things to look at that interpret nature; and 2) on the other hand, the utilitarian arts, such as architecture, design, and part of the graphic arts - typography, textile design, dress design. That split has caused more trouble than one thinks at first. A lot of students have counseled on one side or the other too much. It is very difficult to get some students interested in whatever the other side happens to be. That has sometimes caused trouble and has appeared to be done at the instigation of the instructors. I don't believe this is so - there are some students who have no interest in the other field and there is no way of forcing them to acquire it, and if they don't acquire it, we have to let them go on their side of the fence. This poster idea falls neatly between two fields and for that reason is becoming a problem child. I would like to throw this open for discussion. The objection seems to have been that it is a highly specialized field - a field that has an especially bad odor because of the use to which it is put in our social life. On the other hand, there are some demands for it not only from various agencies in the College, but from the students.

Park: It is possible that within the scope of our teaching efforts, by being an undergraduate college, we might set some limit to our teaching of art to the acquiring of techniques of painting, color, form, etc., and to let each student decide for herself their application to painting, posters, advertising, etc. It might be we could define our principles to stop with the teaching of form and color. Let the special application of these skills be a matter of the student's choice and be enlarged upon after graduation.

Hirsch: That would apply equally with photography, which deals with black and white. Anyone who knows black and white could apply it to photography, except there is a special technique that has to be studied and understood. Moreover, I don't think students can think in those terms, as a rule, and hang on the special techniques that might be necessary. For that reason we have introduced photography, which falls neatly between the two sides, straddles the two fields, inasmuch as it is a commercial art yet uses features of the less commercial side.

Park: It is a tool for what people want to use it for. Technical instruction is given; students use it in social studies, science, some pure art, photography

Moselsio: I feel that this talk about the poster class underestimates the whole problem. This art requires more than putting letters on..... it requires a psychological feeling. I feel it is very important in that there is so much demand for it and it involves so many problems... I feel this should be given and it should be scheduled and planned very carefully.

Leigh: When one reads over the catalogue statement of art instruction and the Executive Committee minutes, there seems to be a clear philosophy of art. If there is no philosophy of art in the division, I would say you don't all subscribe to that statement rather than that the statement doesn't say anything. I was wondering, in the case of Billy's statement, if you teach form and color, how could you tell what a student did unless she applied it? They wouldn't get any specific application of what they had learned. The other divisions apply what they teach: the drama productions in drama, the survey in social studies..... If you should retreat into teaching fundamentals only, if that is a correct picture of it, it seems to me to be absolutely opposed to our teaching standpoint.

Park: I feel about the poster work that it is an application of the techniques of modern painting.... Much of modern painting is just poster work. Cassandre illustrates that point.

Hirsch: I am using the phrases "commercial art" and poster work because they are terms used by the students here. I think from what I have seen of painting students, you get two types of students: those who have a great deal of free and individual imagination, where the student thinks of something, has some inspiration to paint something - in other words, a student is inspired by what she has seen or thought; and then you get a student who has a desire to paint and doesn't know exactly what to do and it is these students who are interested in this sort of thing where an outside demand exists. "I want you to do a poster about Noah", for example. She inquires into copy, what Noah is, and so on, and then she can proceed in that direction. This kind of thing would open the way for students who have the desire to paint, but are not particularly apt to do free, imaginative work. In this way they can function to apply their talents in connection with social demand.

Park: That outlet for painting in the shape of posters is quite clear. To enlarge our argument, the application of painting to advertising pure - where do you say that is fitting into our values?

E. Hirsch: Are you not making an issue of the poster work here?

Park: I am not trying to make an issue. I think this is clear.

Leigh: I don't think it is settled. I would like to ask a few questions. If painting on cardboard is a problem that can be solved, I don't see why students cannot take that as well as painting on canvas. But as a separate technique, if it gives students enough to do..... I am afraid of its being too narrow an experience.

Hirsch: You mean to instruct students how to get copy from the theatre and how to make something, it would make a narrow situation if it is not at the same time made up of instruction in painting?

Leigh: Suppose you organize a group of one eighth which has as its title Poster Painting, then you may, I suppose, do all kinds of posters; but if you limit it to the college demand there would not be enough good work in technique.

Hirsch: The demand is larger than you think. The store cries for posters, likes to announce its wares.

E. Hirsch: They are also used to announce exhibitions. We fell behind last term because of the few students.

Hirsch: They could also do statistical charts for social studies. That could and should be combined with this sort of work.

Smith: Some of them have been done.

Hirsch: But was not included in this kind of work. I saw one in the Barn which was confused and hard to read.

Leigh: If a group of students deals with that material, with the aims of the art division in mind, of getting skills in various techniques and sound critical taste, would that come out of it? How would you define what we take as techniques here? I can see no distinction between commercial art and pure art, if there is such a thing. I see only vital arts being taught, things being used in the world. We have to stop our teaching where there is a budget limitation. I should think the division would have to make up its mind that these are significant arts, not whether they are commercial or non-commercial. We have long ago discarded that idea.

E. Hirsch: Is it not true that a great many of these things would poach on various departments of the art division? Posters could be done in connection with design or painting or printing. I don't agree that posters are a province of modern painting.

Hirsch: You might say that painting is a province of design....

E. Hirsch: Textile design could be taught by a dress designer or by a printer or by a designer or by a painter. Is it not largely a question of how to deal with it and a question of taking a student in the way of her interests and demands?

Moselsio: In Europe today there are artists making their livings by making posters. Their point of view changes when they get in touch with other people. When you talk to a student in a trade school, he knows the importance of work, he knows how to think; when you talk to academy people, they live in the museums.

Leigh: If someone had asked me the difference between the art division of Bennington College and those of other schools, I should have said: 1) first of all, they believe in combining studio work and historical and critical work; 2) that as compared with other places, the art of our own time has an important place. The College does not think of itself as having a saving function....maybe we have gone too far in emphasizing the contemporary; 3) we don't preserve the old distinction between the "fine arts" and other arts, but emphasize expressing life in artistic form. I would say this was our pretty universally accepted philosophy. I did not feel it was an issue with this...I was trained by the art division to think this was not an issue.

Park: I don't think there is an issue there. The thing will build itself up, but it is necessary to discuss the thing again and find out how we are going to describe the special application of work.

Leigh: Another point to whole college educational programif people are going to learn this, they like to deal with materials that appeal to them. Try in our work to help students to know something about painting by doing poster work rather than by doing jewelry.... We have to limit ourselves by the number of skilled teachers there are. I agree with Mrs. Hirsch - it would seem to me that the problem is one of administration. We have had the experience before that everything that has not been scheduled falls between two stools. My fear is that it would be too thin. Would one of the introductions be poster work?

Hirsch: Probably not.

Leigh: Why not? What is there about it that doesn't make it as good as another?

Hirsch: As a workshop group it is perfectly conceivable. Just as you would not have an introduction to mural painting - you are limiting yourself to a section of the field of painting.

Leigh: This is another section of the field of painting.

Hirsch: Even printing and painting could be seen together if you wanted. On account of the highly specialized techniques there have to be two people to teach it. For instance Charles has done.....

Smith: It seems to me a poster is a painting until you have added the letters to it. Are there any different principles to painting a poster than a picture? Isn't the problem the same until you add the printed letters?

Krob: It does include many other things - printing, design, organization in a spatial sense. The danger in this would be in too much specialization, unless it were understood with the counselor that a student would not take it more than one or two terms.

Hirsch: That is why I said last time that I would consider one eighth permissible. It could be taken as part of printing, part of painting, part of design - a legitimate part of the student's schedule. It could be taught by any one of us.

Krob: It would tend to the commercial side student would have to learn copy-writing....

Leigh: If a man learned to do good painting and earned his living by it, he would be a commercial artist.

Park: The application of painting to the advertising field includes more things; economics, psychology....it might result in something interesting if we did it for one term here.

Hirsch: It is one of the two branches of painting that relates itself to the world more than just painting a picture. When you paint a picture you don't know where it is going, who wants it - this thing has all these connections which can be worked with.....the present poster painters have come out of free painting.

Leigh: There is a reason for it. A student would not become as good a poster painter if she did not do sculpture, etc. If you oppose the catalogue statement, students might get the idea that manual skill is the only thing about it. Manual skill in painting would be just as vicious....

Hirsch: There are two kinds of narrowness - the narrowness of the student in one specific thing, and the narrowness of the skill taught by one person in one class.

Leigh: Our organization is based on the cooperation of many persons who are skilled.

E. Hirsch: Isn't it true that a student going to do poster work is apt to display this interest as symptomatic of a further interest?

Hirsch: Should work on her and try to broaden her...

E. Hirsch: Through temporary holding of office girls get social and educational philosophy. If they tended to hold office continually and wanted to go into politics, you would feel that there was something spurious about it unless they got something broader from it.

Leigh: We are engaged in knocking down straw men. You are united in the idea of changing your skills around and getting a broad outlook in art. I don't think there is much of a real issue there.

Hirsch: We cannot let a student go through four or even two years of strict poster work or anything else. If she were that interested she would have to go to a trade school where they prepare her for the rough outside world.

Park: All this clarifies the question in my mind. We certainly cannot even refer to commercial art, but must use the term industrial art in the catalogue.

Leigh: I would rather have a paragraph about our attitude toward commercial art, but we can switch to industrial art.

Hirsch: Students who want to do commercial art mean posters and illustration of a pretty low calibre.... don't go to college to learn to earn a living.

Leigh: There is a definite trend in the trade schools - when it will hit the commercial schools, I don't know - to narrow down to skills. These schools were very much hit by the depression - young people went to these schools and then didn't get jobs. The jobs they are going

to hold, it would take six months to train them for. Graduate and professional schools are coming more and more to realize that they would rather get students who have had general education - that that is the best training for any vocation. We have to put more pressure on the youngsters to show them that they are doing themselves a dis-favor by going to art and training schools, by going into the training of a narrow defined skill which will leave them less equipped than generalized schools. A student trained in poster work would not make as much money as one trained in art in general. I would say that there is no better training school than Bennington College for any job in art. We ought to try to dispel some of the ignorance of the kids. Don't say, "If you want to go to art school", but say, "You don't know what you want."

Hirsch: Several of the kids in dress design have gotten jobs already.

Leigh: If you talk to the personnel manager of any large enterprise he will know about these trends. The education should be general; the training should be gotten on the job.

Moselsio: My understanding is that students talk about commercial art and they want to know everything about it but don't know how to apply it. With some of them it offers a sense of security.

Leigh: They ought not to be under any illusions - there is no open road to a sure job. This is true unless they happen to pick up one or two skills where the supply is less than the demand at that time. We can't give them security and they can't get it by going to trade schools.

Hirsch: That the best training for the job is in the job, I agree with you with one exception. A girl applying for a job in dress design will not get the job unless she has had some expert training in that line. She won't get expert in college or trade school, but she has to have some training.

Smith: To illustrate, Emily Jamison is now doing fashion illustration for Lord and Taylor.

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Leigh: Is there time to talk with the division a little about some of the unsolved problems? In preparation for this meeting I read all the material in my files about the division. It seems to me that the statement of purpose is very clear. But there remain two problems - between now and next June we want to bring out into the open any unsolved problems for the new president. One problem is the position of the history of art in the curriculum. The catalogue states that two things are done: a general background is given and the modern is related to the past. The other question is the preparation of our Senior Division students for what they want to do - graduate school, teaching, general education.

There is the whole question of whether the history of art is adequately done in relation to general history. What is coming out of it? Does it involve a restatement of the aims of the art division? One could go back to general college policy with relation to the content of the history of art. There are two approaches: 1) the history of art means the factual absorption of a lot of examples of art and the attempt to retain these in memory; and 2) one should know about a past work of art, how it relates to its time, individual judgment of it as criticism - all of which involves more intensive treatment of works of art.

Park: Is there anything in that which includes student demand for something they have been conditioned to accept?

Leigh: It is a fact that that has to be taken into consideration. We are all the time introducing them to things which is our conception of changing their ideas.

Hirsch: The freshman thinks that art is simply taught by teaching history of art.

Leigh: If I am correct there is a feeling in the college now that the thing we don't do, people want. What we don't pretend to give, we don't believe is the important thing. There is something missing that I think the students want to have. Sense of inadequacy in our education...

Hirsch: Both Lambert and Randolph went into critical work after Bennington - both of them in the historical field at Fogg - both of them did very well and when we saw them individually they did not say that we had not taught them the right subjects but rather the opposite. They had learned things that other students had not learned. I don't think we have to worry so much about it, but we do have to clarify it.

Leigh: From the student point of view there may be something they are not getting, but we must be clear about it so there will be no student dissatisfaction. We must come to an agreement. For instance, a synthesis is largely something that could be done in senior year in each of our majors to the emotional satisfaction of the students. Could do a lot of reading for a symposium at the end - I do think it would give students a good feeling at the end. I would stick to that discipline of a person getting stuff together.

Park: I am surprised to learn that we are not in agreement on that.

Hirsch: I think we are.

Leigh: last year in memo there was discussion:

Hirsch: Yes, ways and means of having certain required content within two years, so that Junior and Senior Division could cover a certain amount of content in last two years that would get elsewhere. We don't call our courses 18th Century, Renaissance, etc. Maybe we should give names to our courses and teach what we want anyhow.

E. Hirsch: Students applying for graduate school come up against such questions as: What periods have you studied? and students are somewhat at a loss to answer. They have not studied according to a period but according to a point of view as departure.

Shelly: Are the students conscious of the two ways of going about it and do they participate in discussion of it?

Hirsch: The answer to your first question is yes and to your second, no.

Shelly: In expounding the argument, the student should have some defense of what she has learned.

Leigh: Is it not true that no graduate school asks other than an A.B.?

Shelly: You can go to graduate school with deficiencies in requirements that you have not met.

E. Hirsch: At Columbia they even ask for a certain amount of history of art.

Leigh: Don't you think there ought to be some reports of your decision, some explanation of what we do or some revision of the proposal of what we do? In Senior Division there might be a semester of what is not usually done here - some sort of syllabus with student reading, which would be a prospectus of the history of art. This might be a proper balance after two or three years of their own judgment.

Krob: It would take a year or a year and a half to cover the material.

Leigh: They come to the last semester and there is no way of finishing a history of art course. Whether for a whole year or a year and a half you could not have a heavy reading group with some discussion, allowing teachers to do what they wanted to do. If they had covered material would not have to cover it again.

Par.: There also has been open to them any special application they want to make. I have taken two girls and gone right through the world - going right through the sequence to tie it up in their minds.

Leigh: There is little tendency in looking over the art division policy to draw away from... If all the faculty had the same experience you would get a pretty uniform Senior Division curriculum. Students have made their choice... various requirements made for protection, etc. It would probably be defeating our college organization to have much organization.... I think art was the first of the majors along with music to have a Junior Division curriculum. I don't know the facts, but it looks as if there was very little development of a Senior Division curriculum. When a student goes into art, we ought to assume she wants a full curriculum that you could agree on. Just as in

social studies they all do statistics. In looking over the studies that have been made, I wonder if part of the difficulty of students hasn't been that there has not been enough major control over Senior Division programs. There is nothing opposed to the Bennington program in the conception of the Senior Division curriculum. Individual variations all the way through Senior Division, but there is pretty general agreement that a student wants to get this training and you could certainly agree on certain requirements.

Hirsch: We could agree on individual Senior Division requirements, but a clear statement on general Senior Division curriculum could not be agreed upon because of the individual branching out of the students. In social studies the branches overlap each other more than in techniques of art. A student who has received a broad art conception in Junior Division will be justified to work very hard in architecture without working too much on the other side and dabbling around in the field.

Leigh: Architecture is not a good example because it is itself so broad. A person could work in painting and sculpture, but could not work only in these but would have to develop a certain knowledge which would be tested, such as painting and its relation to the social field.

Hirsch: Historical, theoretical field that would be uniting factor there. The curriculum could be stated in clearer terms.

Park: Was I not right in quoting that history serves as a tool at Bennington?

Leigh: There is a history taught behind every field here and that is what we proceeded on.

Park: There is no history taught per se.

E. Hirsch: Didn't Mr. Brockway teach history?

Leigh: There was a lot of discussion in the early years. Political, social, economic history is general history. It was in our second year's discussion that we came to the conclusion that we were going to stand by our concept that history was one aspect of every division in the college and that every division should develop its historical background. Where I was defeated was in the idea of teaching cultural history, which would bring all these histories together and make them clear. This method has proved unsuccessful elsewhere and was abandoned here.

Hirsch: Of course, if you want to think of history as a tool, you could think of it in the art division as a tool for bringing about a synthesis...

Park: It interrelates and interprets the work of the division.