

A GUIDE TO PRINT ANALYSIS

By Dr. S. D. Jouhar, F.R.P.S.

Mr. Dudley Johnston took the chair at a meeting of the Pictorial Group held at 16, Prince's Gate, on November 6th, 1946, when Dr. S. D. Jouhar delivered the following lecture :

IN matters we are about to discuss, nothing is definite or absolute. And yet for the purpose of any fruitful discussion one must perforce be as precise in presenting the ideas and thoughts as the vocabulary of a mutually understood language will humanly allow. We must have some arbitrary common ground, some definite hypotheses and definitions. Maybe, here and there in my statements I may appear to be dogmatic, but in defence I should say at the outset that I really do not claim to know much about anything! It is usually the ignorant that know all.

Quite frankly, my outlook is that of an agnostic. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, to go through life as best one can, one has got to have defined attitudes towards one's environments, things and people. One has got to have beliefs, unsubstantiated perhaps, but beliefs, to take every single step or to perform any single act or judgment during one's short span on this earth. Every reasonable person of sound mind usually has, or ought to have, a perfectly clear-cut and defined attitude towards things or even the thoughts that surround him. We ought to have, therefore, for practical purposes, some guiding definitions. And here I am going to venture certain definitions that have a direct or indirect bearing on the subject of "Print Analysis." I would like you to keep in mind, however, that these definitions are neither claimed to be original nor watertight. They may be looked upon merely as a practical guide to matters under discussion.

Now what is Pictorialism? The word "pictorialism" appears to be a coined one and is not found in the dictionary. So we have to try to define it ourselves. My suggested definition is: "Pictorialism is the fine art of making and appreciating decorative pictures." The word "picture" is here used in a limited sense, quite distinct from an ordinary photographic "record." The distinction between the two types of graphic work I tried to define during my talk on Pictorial Composition reproduced in our *Photographic Journal* of April, 1945, page 80, so I shall not dwell upon it here. But in passing I may

point out as examples, some of the pictures that are usually displayed annually at the Pictorial Section of The Royal and the London Salon, the two major exhibitions in this country. Pictorialism is practised mainly by amateurs and a lesser number of professionals who really are amateurs at heart. They indulge in art for the love of it and not for any monetary gain.

And what is art? The dictionary meaning is that art is an employment of means to a desired end. We are, however, concerned here with one of the "Fine Arts," which is creative and aims solely at giving aesthetic pleasure. So, for our practical purposes it boils down to "an employment of means," viz. the camera, "to a desired end," which is a picture produced mainly for giving aesthetic pleasure.

Now you may well ask, why do people indulge in Art or Fine Arts? Human nature is constantly seeking pleasure and trying to run away from unpleasant situations. The practice of art, unconsciously, serves as a means of escape from the often unpalatable and stern world of reality to a more pleasant world of phantasy and make-believe. Moreover, it is a function of human nature somehow to assert and express itself, since the very act of expression in any form results in personal satisfaction.

There are, of course, other forms of escape. Many of these activities, however, are uncreative, whereas by making pictures we not only attempt to perpetuate our pleasurable experiences but we also attempt to give pleasure to others, often without any material profit to ourselves. The means or the tools in graphic arts really do not matter. Some may use pencil or brush, others draw with light, i.e., photographically. An infant may express and amuse himself by smearing or moulding any mud around, or perhaps plasticine, but later may develop into a fully-fledged sculptor.

It is my contention that, basically, all art is indivisible; and whether photography is an art or not depends entirely on whether the photographer is an artist or not. Buying a paintbrush and canvas, adopting peculiar

mannerisms, and living a Bohemian life in Chelsea will not, *ipso facto*, make one into an artist, any more than buying a box Brownie or even a Leica will turn one into a rare photographic artist.

In the case of outstanding artists an inherited germ is present, which, may develop and flourish later. A proclaimed artist will be a person who could not only appreciate a beautiful scene himself but who is capable of transmitting some of the beauty to others as well. There are some people, however, who are unable to appreciate beauty in any form. They are like the colour blind who are unable to perceive or distinguish between the colours of the rainbow. As it is not possible verbally to describe or to convey the beauty of colour to a blind man, similarly, it is impossible to convince the mentally incapable of the subtle difference that does undoubtedly exist between, say, a pictorial photograph and a mere "record." In such a situation argument is quite futile and settles nothing.

In the world of pictorial photography the pictorialists have to have a thorough practical knowledge of how to produce a technically competent print, apart from any aesthetic considerations. The art of looking at pictures can only be properly acquired by constantly looking at pictures. The more pictures of all sorts which you see and examine, the more comparative knowledge you will store in your memory, which will enable you the more precisely to assess the merits of a particular picture.

And here I would like to emphasise that, provided the mind is constantly exercised, the age of the critic ought to become an asset rather than a handicap. Most of us tend to become more selective and fastidious as time goes on. People who wish to analyse and criticise pictures should read and digest a book or two on psychology, then visit the best exhibitions and art galleries, and contrive to study as many works of art, books and periodicals, etc., as possible. It is only by studying the very best that we learn to recognise the inferior. The most successful monochrome

pictures, on analysis, appear to be constructed on simple patterns. Those of you who have read Mortensen's book will be familiar with the examples which he gives. These are not the only patterns, but it is as well to keep them in mind.

Technique may be looked upon as a sort of "tangible quality," which can be learnt by any person of average education and intelligence. Technical perfection alone, however, is not to be confused with artistic achievement. There are certain "intangible" qualities far more important that are usually discernible to the esoteric eye in any outstanding work of art. These qualities are so ethereal and indefinite that it is not possible to measure them by definite yardstick. Yet in order to analyse a print we must have a working hypothesis as to what are the generally accepted attributes of an aesthetically satisfying print. Critics, therefore, must have some idea as to what is good and what is not so good. These, of course, will vary from individual to individual but would be found more or less constant amongst a group of individuals belonging to a particular civilisation or culture.

Some say we ought to have an "open mind" in matters of art. A very fine ideal, but it would appear to be humanly impracticable. Whether one knows it or not, every one of us has more or less set ideas about everything around us. Even a child would differentiate between chalk and cheese. An open mind, if too open, is quite unable to separate the coarse from the fine.

Let us now discuss some of these "intangible" qualities.

EMOTIONAL APPEAL. Does a given work evoke some emotion or aesthetic appeal? There are several methods which artists may employ to evoke emotion:

1. Choice of subject matter to give *human interest*, such as impersonal portraits, character studies, figures and nudes.

2. *Sentiment*.—Animals, children, churches and temples.

3. *Wonder Theme*.—Mysterious mountains, landscapes suggesting aerial perspective, immense distance beyond. Vastness of space, grandeur of rough sea and sky, sunshine and showers—weather in all its multifarious moods. Wonders of the occult, religions and mythology.

4. *Suitable composition*.—For example, diagonal (for action), light or dark tone, "height" by a choice of vertical framing.

5. *High or Low key*.

6. *Tone*.—Blue for cold, red or brown for warmth.

7. *Surface of paper*.—Rough for broad effects and old characters, smooth for delicate scenes and children.

8. *Abstract imagination*.—Table-top work, shadow patterns, surrealism.

9. *Peace*.—Use of *horizontal lines*.

10. Telling one single story or presenting *one idea at a time*. You can only sing one note at once!

11. *Size of frame* in relation to its pictorial content. This, too, has its bearing on the emotional appeal. Small and large prints have their place and significance.

ORIGINALITY. One of the most important factors about a print is its originality. Is it original in its conception, composition and/or treatment? What the subject is, is not the thing which matters so much. It is virtually impossible to find a new subject; what matters is how one treats a subject.

UNITY. Another quality to look out for in a print is unity. Does the picture express one theme, one mood, one idea, etc.?

VITALITY. Has the print the quality of vitality? Is it alive or is it just an inanimate photographic diagram?

INFINITY. Does it leave something to your imagination by possessing atmosphere, aerial perspective or "losing and finding lines" in its composition? In other words, if the print has left something to one's imagination, it has succeeded. On the other hand, a print very straightforward in its details may not possess that quality of infinity.

REPOSE. Could one live with the picture or would one tire after a short while?

These are some of the more obvious qualities that a competent critic should be able to recognise on sight. The process of analysis could be carried on to very exhaustive limits according to the analytical capacity of the expert. For instance, in an attempt to analyse one single work of art, "Moses," by Michael Angelo, Freud has written a book running into several hundred pages! In most clubs and societies during criticism and analysis evenings, far too many prints are dealt with in too short a time. In the end nobody is any the wiser.

The analysis of a given print may be considered from the point of view of its suitability for an open exhibition. In this case the picture will have to be considered more objectively. A good selector would often select for exhibition a print that he personally may not like, provided it is the best of its type, showing some vision, innovation or originality. "Vision" is largely a matter of

eugenics. If it were possible to marry Michael Angelo to Dame Laura Knight, then it might be possible to have genius to order.

Criticism can sometimes be quite destructive and useless. The critic may merely say, for instance, "I like this," or "I don't like that," or "Isn't that beautiful?" and then pass on to the next one. Such a critic merely gives vent to his personal likes and dislikes and does not much help the eager-to-learn audience. Or to remark, "This print is of poor quality" or "This is bad compositionally," without giving reasons, can hardly be helpful.

If, on the other hand, one says that "This print is grey and poor in quality because it has been taken out of the developer too soon, or too soft paper or cold "M.Q." developer is probably the cause," and one points out the remedy whenever possible, that would be an example of helpful and constructive criticism. Similarly, if the critic says: "The composition is unbalanced," he should be able to give reasons in support of his contention and should suggest a better alternative.

Now let us consider titles. In most cases a picture should reveal itself without a title. But if a title is chosen, then it must be a befitting one. If you call a picture "Dawn" and another one "Evening," and it obviously looks like midday, then the title is a bad one.

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1. Is the *Technique* good? Consider quality, colour, highlights, shadows, etc. (Possible points, 30.)

2. *Emotion and Appeal*. Does it evoke impersonal emotion? Has it aesthetic appeal? (15)

3. *Originality*. Is it original in conception, composition and/or treatment? Would it improve by trimming? (15).

4. *Unity*. Does the picture express one theme, one mood, one expression of the idea, etc.? (10).

5. *Vitality*. Is it "alive" or is it just an inanimate photographic diagram? (10).

6. *Infinity*. Does it leave something to your imagination by possessing atmosphere, aerial perspective or "losing and finding" lines in its composition? (10).

7. *Repose*. Could one "live" with it, or would it tire after a short time? (5).

8. *Title*. Is the title apt and fitting to the subject portrayed? (5).
(Total Possible Points, 100.)

Above is a copy of an analysis form which I drew up for the Twickenham Photographic Society some seven or eight years ago.

I found this, although by no means perfect, did help people to decide what to look for in a picture. Many other considerations occur to persons with further study. One suggestion I have to make to this Group is for the formation of a portfolio containing examples of first quality prints for circulation to members, particularly to those who are unable to visit exhibitions or to attend meetings, and amongst affiliated societies and clubs, for instruction and education in the appreciation of what is a good photograph.

What of exhibitions? Exhibitions are competitions. In most quarters, the judges and selectors are usually blamed for poor shows at exhibitions, but the real cause is lack of talent on the part of exhibitors. The materialistic outlook to-day is not conducive to the production of outstanding works of art. I feel certain that the practice of putting up a number of prints at once for consideration by the selectors is a bad method. It might be tedious, but it would give a fairer chance to all if one print only were considered at a time. No names should appear on mounts. Many times the association of a well-known name has been apt to hypnotise the selector into its unmerited acceptance. A print should stand or fall entirely on its own merit. Far too many prints are being hung in all exhibitions to-day and that is inviting adverse criticism, because on account of this inferior quality prints do get on the walls. If our object is to advance pictorial quality, we ought to show only the best.

Discussion

Mrs. MAINGOT asked whether, in the pairs of prints which Dr. Jouhar had shown to illustrate his remarks on technique, one print was finished and the other not? Dr. JOUHAR said this was so in the case of some.

Mr. BERTRAM PARK remarked of Dr. Jouhar's suggestion that all prints submitted for exhibition should be unsigned: "If I did not sign mine, should I ever get anything hung!" As to eugenics, if one married a Michael Angelo to a Dame Laura Knight, according to Mendal's law one would get an idiot.

He said that for a critic to talk about technique was to admit that he had nothing to say. There was no such thing as technique in respect of exhibition work. Technique was a thing of the school-room. He thought what Dr. Jouhar really meant was that indefinable factor, "quality."

A MEMBER said he would like to hear how Dr. Jouhar's analysis process was carried out at the Twickenham Photographic Society.

It seemed to him an ideal one but laborious and impractical if one had a lot of prints to consider.

Mr. RUPERT SWAFFIELD, speaking from experience as an officer at the Twickenham Photographic Society, said that on the introduction of Dr. Jouhar's system of analysis, as shown in the leaflet, the quality definitely began to improve, until now it was good. Dr. Jouhar's method had been found to be efficacious.

Dr. JOUHAR agreed there had been definite individual improvement among members. To the suggestion that the method was laborious he would reply: "All education is laborious." It was not necessary to use the method on every single picture. One would pick out say half a dozen prints at an exhibition, for an exercise, and apply the analysis to each of these.

Mr. Park had said technique should not be taken into consideration. He did not agree. How could one express oneself in photography unless one was a master of one's tools! If one could not control technique, how could one convey what one wanted to convey?

Mr. SCOTT BUSH asked whether Dr. Jouhar did not agree with a high key print? Although a complete range of tone was important for most subjects, he thought one ought not to lay it down as a hard-and-fast rule.

Dr. JOUHAR said he had not meant to do that. A high key print could be delightful. The range of tones employed could vary according to what one wanted to express.

One could not, however, live with pictures of violent emotion, such as the girl-with-the-sparkling-smile advertisement for toothpaste. Such a photograph attracted one at once and was therefore appropriate for an advertisement, but he doubted whether one could live with it. The other kind of photograph one could live with, because it did not show a fleeting emotion of laughter. It also had got a quality of vitality and it had in addition another quality which the other had not.

As regards originality, it was, as he had said, difficult to be original in subject matter but one could be original in treatment and he showed some examples of some original presentation of ideas. It was an expression in the picture of the personality of the photographer that mattered. One must learn technique first and then study pictures. It was only by study, study and more study that the photographer could advance in his work.

Mr. K. J. W. Lowes asked Dr.

Jouhar what he meant when he said that far too many prints were being hung. If the judges only found six that were perfect in all respects, would those be the only ones he would hang? Was there not something to be gained by hanging those prints which, though not the best, had some points?

Dr. JOUHAR said he had yet to see a perfect print; there was no such thing. All he had been saying was that far too many prints of inferior quality were being shown to-day. As to numbers, about one hundred prints would represent the cream of all schools of thought at an exhibition. He would not mind including one or two prints where the technique was not good, if they had other qualities.

To sum up: There was no such thing as a "perfect" print. All one could hope to do was to find that which was the nearest approach, which had the most qualities, technical as well as aesthetic, and was the best of its kind.

The CHAIRMAN said he thought Dr. Jouhar had had a "good innings." He was pleased to see that Dr. Jouhar backed up an opinion which he had held for a long time, namely that far too many prints were being hung in exhibitions.

Both Mr. Park and Dr. Jouhar had said things which he agreed with on the question of technique, but they said them from different angles. Technique was, of course, necessary. He thought what Mr. Park had meant was that for good photography, technique should be unconscious. The Royal Photographic Society laid much stress on technique for the Associateship, but when they came to the Fellowship, that was not what they put first; they assumed that by that stage the man had learnt his technique and they looked for something more.

The meeting ended by passing a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Jouhar, on the proposition of the CHAIRMAN.