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Art in Advertising

Author(s): Frank Alvah Parsons

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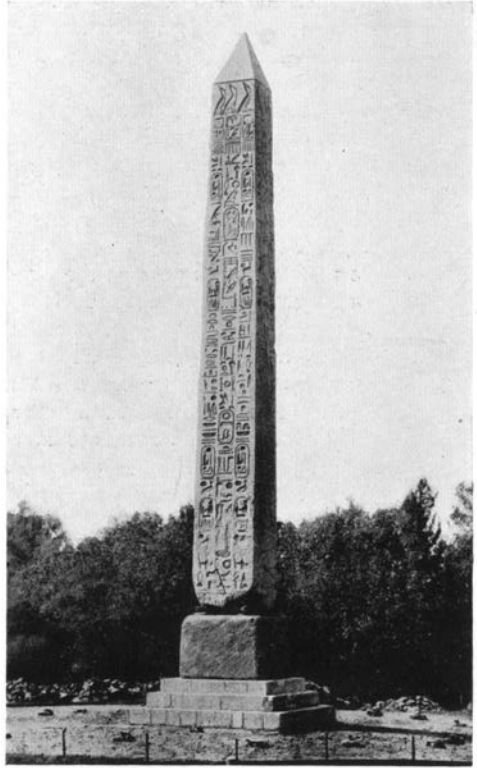
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dents, from that of the overcoming of the sentiment of Egyptian citizens against the removal of the obelisk when this became an actual thing, through the events connected with the loading of the boat built expressly for the voyage, the disembarking, the transportation through the City of New York by means of trestle-work of special construction, to its final swinging into position. An impression of the old irregular base of the shaft was taken, a stone pedestal was erected and new forms of crabs were cast, following as closely as careful plans could accomplish the form and material of the originals. Molten lead, rods, and clamps have bound the shaft, the crabs and the pedestal so firmly that the vandalism which carried off their predecessors could find no repetition with these bronzes. Their theft would be no easy matter without this security—however tempting the metal might be—since the present crabs weigh thirty-seven hundred pounds!

Following the plan of the early inscriptions upon the crabs of Alexandrian residence, the history of the obelisk has been recorded in eight legends, placed, one upon each claw of the four existing crabs—a story of an existence younger than its god, the Sun, of a symbolism as old as all things. And throughout the years these forms of bronze will bear the burden of the obelisk and, with it, cry



"CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE," NEW YORK

to mankind the message which they symbolize—the re-creation of the life about them, the re-creation of all beauty and all life.

## ART IN ADVERTISING\*

BY FRANK ALVAH PARSONS

DIRECTOR OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL OF FINE AND APPLIED ART

**I**N the past, nations and people have given their thoughts and their feelings to the world in material things. Each nation, as it has followed the last preceding it, has recorded its thoughts and its feeling in stone, wood, metal, cloth, and what not, and through these objects we know the thoughts and something of the feel-

ings of those who have long preceded us.

We, too, are recording in sundry ways, and in various mediums, our thoughts and our feelings. That is, our emotional and our intellectual activity is being expressed in certain mediums or materials, for future generations to judge us by. The

\*An address delivered at the Annual Convention of the American Federation of Arts, held at Washington, D. C., May 16, 17, 18, 1911.

quality of this record is our art—because quality is art, and where quality is, there art is. The quality that makes a cathedral an art product, that made the Parthenon an art product, that makes sculpture and furniture art products, is the quality that makes all things else art, or artistic, as we generally put it. It is this same quality which will make advertisements art.

I take it that we can agree at the outset that this quality must have at least two elements present. If we examine the Parthenon, the Gothic cathedral, the modern business apartment house, we shall find that architecture has recorded some of the quality which different nations have had to express, in these buildings, but that, present in each and all of these, is at least the element of fitness, and the element of beauty, or pleasure to the esthetic sense.

May not we then, at the beginning, recognize that art is not necessarily pictures? That art is not sculpture, not architecture, not drawing, not painting, but a quality. This quality must measure up to, at least your degree of intelligence and mine, in two elements. That is, the object made must be fitted for what it is, and it must be beautiful to the esthetic sense, to have art merit to any man who judges it.

There will be no art in advertising, and there will be no art expressed in anything else worth while, until we see that those two elements must be present in every art object.

The more practical, the more commercial, the more industrial, and the more social the era, the more must this first element, fitness, measure up to our degree of intelligence. It must do so in its fitness to use. So that in teaching, and making, and appreciating art, we must remember that the household utensil, that the architectural construction, that the painted picture, that the costume worn, that the thing created, is for use; and inasmuch as it fills this requirement, it has the first element of a sensible art object. And then, inasmuch as my quality, if I create, allows me to inject into this made thing something which is beautiful, something

which is harmonious, according to the laws of harmony, you will respond, if you have the same quality present in you, and you will know by the response that art is present.

Advertising is an immediate expression between man and man in the most forceful, the most commercial, the greatest age of progress in the world's history. It is the broadest medium of communication between the producer and the consumer. How shall men know what you have to sell, what you have to give, what you have to place in the world's markets, except for advertisements? The more practical your work in life the more dependent you are upon advertisement to bring this work to public attention. Since the advertising man is the man who brings the producer's goods to the consumer's notice, he, too, is of the greatest importance.

The advertisement must have at least four qualities to be successful. First, it must arrest your attention without your effort. This has led the advertising man to make the fearful mistake of putting every color, every shape, every kind of ornament, every type he can bring together, into one advertisement, believing he will make you look.

Second, your attention must be held. You must not look, and look away, else what good is the effort made? Your attention can only be held through your interest in what is there.

Third, having held your attention, the advertisement must convince you of the merit of the material which is exploited, and this, I think, affords the strongest point of attack in advocating art in advertising. It is here that the advertising man is susceptible, for when you convince him that his advertisement does not make a man wish to own or use that which he has to sell, then he will admit that it is ineffective.

Fourth, after having convinced of merit, the advertisement should entice to buy, or should, after its merit, have a quality which makes you feel you cannot do without it.

What then, in the field of art expression, has a greater promise now than advertising, which has for its aim the in-

roduction to the public of every made thing in this country?

The advertising man's media for expressing his thought are the illustration, decorative ornament, and type matter; in various colors and forms, and in varied arrangements. How then does this affect man's use of illustrative matter? To strike at the root of bad advertising is to strike at the root of pictorial naturalistic representation misused. There has been in this country for the last fifty years a prevalent belief that the pictorial element was necessary in every art object. The picture is without doubt the last word in fine art expression, so-called, but if it lacks the quality to appeal to the esthetic sense, it is of necessity bad art. We have been taught to go to pictures for beauty, whether there was beauty there or not, until wall papers and carpets and clothes and calendars and all such have become picture books of naturalistic people, naturalistic objects, all of which are bad from their beginning both in conception and technique. Anything which teaches them that pictures may be applied to, or stuck on to, or woven into, material for which they never were suited, and into which they never should go, is bad art—if there is such a thing as bad art. It is the belief that everything in the way of pictures is good that leads us astray. Things are not good because they are done in Rome, or because they are not done in Rome; they are not good because they are naturalistic, or because they are not naturalistic, they are good or bad because of the quality of consistency that is or is not in them. That is the standard of judgment.

First of all, then, the advertising man must stop using pictures, or else use fit ones. Quality in these things must be the ideal, rather than the use of the thing. Then bad naturalism will disappear from off your china plates. You will no longer eat ice cream off of dishes which have crabs painted on them; you will no longer be discomforted by naturalistic thorns and roses projecting from the back of your chair. When the art teachers of this country see that the naturalistic pictorial is not an ideal in applied art objects, then

all these inconsistencies will gradually disappear.

People also believe that so long as a piece of ornament is extracted from any place and put on any object, the thing is decorated; and it is the style to decorate. This is seen in the work of the interior decorator. There is poster decoration and plate decoration; chair, church and hotel decoration, and plenty of it, but decoration is not necessarily art. The public believes that so long as it decorates it is doing the right thing; and it does not matter, if a man has a reputation as a decorator, what he does, so long as he decorates. Anybody who has the money will pay him to decorate as long as he puts things on things, and in great variety. Remember this, when decoration exists for itself, art moves out; when decoration exists for the sake of the ornament it exploits, art is no longer present; when decoration exists for the thing it represents, and when it lends beauty and charm, then it deserves its name and art is present. The cultivated esthetic sense is the criterion, not the tawdry judgment of the multitude. I saw last winter the same ornament, from the French Louis XV style, advertising caskets, Oxford Bibles, a dinner at the Waldorf and a machine factory at Bridgeport, Connecticut. It is inconceivable how little people know about ornament in its real meaning. They do not know, and cannot know, unless they are told, why an ornament of the Louis XV period differs from an ornament of the time of the building of the Parthenon, nor do they understand why different ornament was developed in the days of Marie Antoinette from the days of the Italian Renaissance. People know these things exist, but they think they may be extracted at will and placed on something, and that this is art.

We can get no further as a people until we rise up and teach the fundamental things that concern decorative art to the masses. But how is this to be done?

First, let us not belittle the work of the public school teacher. The public school is the foundation of everything that is to be in this country in art and in everything else. This is a democratic

country and without the public school we should establish few ideals. Let us begin here then by teaching truths about color and form. When we discountenance art that does not represent to the child what it ought to represent; when we teach that over-ornamentation is the expression of vulgarity; when we teach respect for periods because they represent history, and not because of their gilt and ornamentation, then we shall be laying a foundation for true art progress in the United States.

Second, let us induce the women's clubs to unite in interesting the people in art, rather than in pictures, and sculpture. They will then be in touch with the work in the public schools, and great impetus will be given to art.

The next place of attack should be the museum, which is the greatest art institution to-day, I believe, in existence. There are many things to be done with a museum that even the men at the head do not suspect. Few have any idea what museums would mean to the public if they could be used. Begin with the fourth grade in the grammar school, and end with the man when he dies. Study every phase of man's development in every material. It is wrong for the people to go to the museum, to rest there, to see pictures only, and say, "Isn't it lovely," and then to go out through the back door. The museum, I reiterate, presents more opportunities for teaching people facts as against fancy than any other institution in the world at the present time. Somebody must sort out and adapt. Somebody must nail the things people are ready for. We are trying to feed people what they cannot swallow. It is wrong to put before the child a huge piece of beef and say, "Swallow that whole." He cannot swallow it, and he looks at it in dismay, much as he wants it. People who go to the museum look at it in dismay. Where begin, where end? What ought they to remember, and what not? Organization and direction are what is needed.

A short time ago a woman told me that she loved to go to the Egyptian Room in the Metropolitan Museum, and asked me whether she was wrong in that. I re-

plied, "I begin there with my classes every year, and can't get much further, and I have been going there fifteen years. I think it is a good place to begin and to stay." She said, "I like those things, but I didn't know but what it was wrong." That much people know about museums.

Now it is necessary that the public school system take this matter up. I shall not speak of the technical schools nor the fine arts institutions. I will say, however, with reference to the latter, that I have seen pupils draw from life year after year, their clothing getting shabbier, their faces more worn until finally they had to seek other work because art to them meant merely painting. It is not possible for all people to paint pictures; therefore, let us recognize in our institutions that art has a place outside of the painting of pictures and that those who do not possess genius must be weeded out of the fine arts institutions, and put in other places where they can learn to do something.

In a word, then, the remedy for bad advertising is the remedy for everything else bad. It is to understand clearly what are the possibilities and what is the problem in this country. It is a social, industrial one, and unless we recognize that fact, we are not in the field of understanding.

Second, we must recognize that through the public schools, the women's clubs, the art museums, and the technical and fine art institutions, must come the education that the public want and require to appreciate and produce art in any field.

We must realize that irrelevant illustration and ornament are deadly enemies to art appreciation and that their use and their abuse is the ruin of this country from an artistic standpoint. We must teach and practice principles of consistency, not emotional gratification.

Let us then make "Art for Life, for Life is Art," our watchword; for the finest art known to men is the art of right living. To live right one must think right. Let us begin, then, to think in terms of fitness and beauty from the foundation up, then will these qualities appear in our work and the public will grow with us.