A selective summary of the contents

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THE WORLD OF COUNT PRIMOLI
By Lamberto Vitali

Count Giuseppe Primoli (1851-1927), on the distaff side a member of the Napoleonic family, great-grandson of the first Emperor, educated at the Court of the second and favourite of Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, whose heir he was to become, had the entrée both to the Quirinal and the Vatican and was well-connected with the aristocracy in both Rome and Paris. He was an admirer of Stendhal and acquainted with Maupassant, Edmond de Goncourt, Bécque, Sardou, Verga, D’Amantium, the younger Dumas, Alphonse Daubet, Buret, Proust, Meissonier, Forain, Degas and J.-E. Blanche.

In 1886 Primoli, then aged 37, was seized with a passionate enthusiasm for photography which he was not to lose until around the turn of the century, and which caused him to become the first free-lance photo reporter. For ten years he recorded everything that went on around him. But he did not merely accept the subjects which came along in the course of everyday life; he went out and looked for themes which seemed to him to be worth taking. Thus, in 1893 he made a trip to the Pontine Marshes to photograph the buffalos, “don’t les silhouettes m’intéressent”. The thousands of photographs Primoli left behind constitute a monumental photographic archive presenting the image of his age. We owe it to a fortunate chance that 12,075 of his plates and about 1,000 copies taken from negatives no longer extant have been preserved. And this probably represents only a small portion of his work, the importance of which arises not only from the fact that it documents the most varied and contradictory aspects of the life of a bygone age, but also because Giuseppe Primoli in many ways anticipated the style and working methods of 20th-century photo reporters. This applies particularly to his efforts to record events not only as he saw them, but also as they might have looked from another perspective, and as he might have seen them, had he been with more than one camera, to his spontaneity, resulting in taking approximations to snapshots, to his boldness in mixing with people to be in the right place at the right time, to his habit of cutting his ties and to his unmistakable talent for interpreting rather than merely recording events. In all these respects, Primoli is the equal of any modern photo reporter.

NINE DRAWINGS BY EDGAR DEGAS FROM AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

Foreword by the Editor

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of the artist, the City Art Museum of Saint Louis, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts staged an exhibition of drawings by Degas. The spiritus rector of this exhibition, Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs, was fortuitous in that her considerable collection of drawings by Degas, together with that of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, provided the opportunity to present the whole range of the artist’s work, with the emphasis, of course, on the works he considered the most important for his oeuvre.

It is interesting to note the sources of this well-chosen selection. There were 21 drawings from French collections, 14 each from English and Swiss ones, 7 from Holland, 5 from Germany, 1 from Italy and 55—almost half—of the total number exhibited—from American museums and private collectors.

Hans Naeff, who visited the exhibition of Degas drawings at St. Louis, has selected for us 9 of these 95 drawings in American ownership. All of them originate from the period 1860 to 1875, i.e. from the first half of the artist’s life. The fact that the later work has thus been neglected is probably explained by Naeff’s special research subject, the Ingres drawings.

Our thanks are due to Hans Naeff for his contribution and to the American museums and collectors for making available their reproduction facilities.

THE OTHER DIMENSION

Photographs by Thomas Cugel of Toys in the Collection of Hans Peter Hu of Basle, with a text by Erich Bartl

Many people have heard of Shock-heads Peter; a far less well-known picture-book by the same author and telling the story of an allying little boy whose Christmas dreams come true moved Hans Peter Hu to build his first doll’s-house, which was a three-dimensional visualization of the illustrations in it, showing the mother watching at the bedside, the candle-lit tree and the presents strewn around the floor. The figures and objects are so completely in proportion that the illusion is perfect. The same applies to all the other “houses” that have been planned, designed, built and equipped during the intervening years. The results may be described as doll-houses for grown-ups, miniature displays of cultural history or potted museums, with equal justification.

In my view, we owe this work to an individual who has been bold enough to give practical expression to the child to be found inside every man, and to have translated his phantasies into an eloquent language. A man who, in the atomic age, can convert into a storehouse of cultural treasures a house whose windows look out upon the polluted waters of the Rhine and whose window-frames transform the river into an infinitely-changing, never-ending picture, is a master of white magic. Yet this master is fully aware that these things are only for such as love them, for even lifeless objects have their history and their fate—especially those objects which relate to unfilled dreams. In the long run, they lose their power to resist the desires that bear them. They allow themselves to be discovered by the really enthusiastic collector in the most
remarkable places. Hans Peter His reunites objects which had been torn from their surroundings and sold, auctioned or pawned separately. The paths he tends to do so lead him beyond his original objectives into a world of extra-reality. Things happen which seem to exclude the element of chance. Yet ever again it is chance which brings the collector direct to the pieces he seeks. “What I could not find I made myself. I have learnt to do carpentry, paper walls, cut glass, lay flooring and bind books”. His thumbs through a book as small as a thimble from the library of painter Gerhard von Köglingen. He turns up polar bear heads, stars indicated by a black spot, boats as fragile as insects.

The studio built behind the detachable sheet of glass shows in full detail the equipment described by the painter’s son in “Jugendinnerungen eines alten Mannes”. Hans Peter His loves these descriptions. He is fascinated by literary documents, artistic objects and untruths which give intensive expression to the Zeitgeist which produced them. Paras pro toto. A pearl recalls its oyster; an oyster implies the sea. Andersen’s Steadfast Tin Soldier represents the battle sent into the field by the youth of the good old days. An agate-knobbled umbrella and a figure of Napoleon in porcelain (both from Amélie’s Christmas room) allude to one and the same period. The “Salon de Madame Bovary”, built as an accurate copy of its literary predecessor, may be seen as an allegory of an age. Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, a dissatisfied, bored lady living in the provinces and beyond her means is seen face to face with her reflection in the mirror as she deters, on her 30th birthday, her first white hair. The significant utilisation of artifacts and articles of luxury (Persian carpet, opaline vase, a silver solitaire, ancestral pictures, a solid gold thimble, a ruby-studded dog-collar, a bell-rope, a volume of poetry and a fireplace) enable this interior to capture the atmosphere of a period in which a woman aged 30 was regarded as old. This very portentous morning, the pug bitch has had a litter. The frosted windows indicate a winter morning and form the background for an azalea in full bloom. I asked His how he had constructed this picture so true to life. He said it was “an industrial secret”.

A SON OF THE TYROL—PAUL FLORA

Portrait of a caricaturist by Francesco Ciametti (Photos) and M.G. (Text)

Paul Flora comes from the Tyrol. Indeed, in one sense he is doubly a Tyrolean, for he was born on June 29, 1922 at Glaruns on the Etsch in what was used to be called the South Tyrol, and when he was five he moved with his family to the northern Tyrol, first to Matrei on the Brenner and then to Innsbruck-Pradl.

Flora still lives at Innsbruck, or rather high above it on the Hungerburg, happily married and the father of two sons and a daughter. He lives in a perfectly normal house with a garden, but next to the house is a twisted snake of concrete studded with glass bollards that looks like some Aztec place of worship or a fragment of the labyrinth of Daeaddus. In fact, however, it is a swimming pool on a plan so twisted that it is impossible to see from one end of it to the other.

Flora’s inward life is equally buffing to the striking gate. It is true that in the autobiographical introduction to “Ein Schloß für ein Zierthum” he did once expose himself with considerable frankness. But “revelations” of this kind are comparable with the coded references on the map of a treasure-seeker—they require interpretation before they can be used. He says, for example, “I am indeed a Tyrolean, but not a happy one in the sense of the common German phrase”. Yet anyone who concludes from this sentence that Flora is a sad or grumpy or unhappy Tyrolean will be making a mistake.

So what sort of a chap is he? I would say he is an unusually clever one. He is clever enough to have grasped the inadequacy of human knowledge and capability and by consequence to have ceased to take things like politics, economics, and artistic or literary activity seriously. So it would seem that a preliminary classification as a sceptical Tyrolean might suffice. But he is a sceptic who starts by mistrusting himself, for he says, “Circumstances have brought it about that I am a political draftsmen, but my attitude to politics is so superfluous that I am more interested in the moustaches and noses of the participants than in their acts”.

This sounds modest, but in fact is about as crushing a judgment as could be made of politics and politicians. For it must be recalled that the man who wrote that sentence has been publishing half a dozen political caricatures in “Die Zeit” week after week for years and to do so spends hours every day in reading political essays and articles. And when he is not producing landscapes, star-dotted constellations with the art of stencilling, moustaches and noses! In other words, the realization that politics is in the first place Vanity Fair.

But vanity is not the sole key to Flora’s character. The make-up of a great caricaturist must also include wisdom, or in words others a serenity which no one is allowed to upset.

This is an intellectual characteristic which Flora possesses to a high degree. He himself puts it like this, “I do my best to sail around the rocks of inadvertence. My efforts in this direction are aided by a latent tendency to indolence. If hard work ennuiel, I prefer to stay an ordinary citizen, or at best to remain on the lowest rung of the ladder of nobility. Contemplating my navel is more in my line than action”.

His powerful appearance rounds off the picture—very big, as powerful as a bear, large, clearly marked features, slow and deliberate of movement, somewhat inhibited or reserved and hesitant rather than clumsy, and with all his introversion attentive and obliging. In a word, a perfect example of an amiable man of the Alps.

NETSUKE

Miniature masterpieces of Japanese art from the collection of H.-U. Z., Arlesheim


The meaning of the word Netsuke derives from its etymology. It means a root and tsuke means to append, so that the word in effect means something upon which to hang other things.

Ancient Japanese clothing had no pockets. Things to be carried were either enounced in the roomy sleeves or were pushed into the obi, or belt, to which were also affixed the inro (a medicament case), a pipe and tobacco jar and writing materials. These items and segune or hanging objects in Japanese, were prevented from slipping off by a silken cord pulled up behind the belt and attached to a button or netsuke.

The Japanese, being Shintoists, do not recognize anything as being without a soul, and by consequence from the very first this all-important button was deemed to be a spirit which manifested itself externally in ever-increasing beauty as it constantly evolved towards classical perfection. The beginnings of netsuke can be traced back to the late 17th century, but its great period was the 18th century and the first half of the 19th.

Indigenous Japanese animal and mineral materials of the most diverse kinds, including horn, horseshorn, bone, mother-of-pearl, copper, iron, silver, gold and semi-precious stones, were used by artists to make netsuke. Yet the important thing was the effect achieved and not the value of the materials used.

Netsuke artists usually worked without models. In Japanese miniature sculpture, a talent for observation and artistic craftsmanship are extremely highly developed. As a consequence, a netsuke is an impromptu design produced without the use of drafts and must therefore be regarded as a small sculpture in its own right, capable not only of being observed from all sides but also sensed with the eyes closed.

Netsuke are usually of a size around 4-5 cm. In exceptional cases, for instance in the so-called wrestler’s netsuke, they may be as much as 10 cm high. The extreme opposite to these wrestler’s netsuke are the geisha netsuke, which are often astonishingly tiny.

Netsuke are based on the most diverse motifs. They amount to a documentation of Japanese life and customs. They represent gods, animals or vegetation, or may allude to a hobby of the weaver. However great its external beauty, each netsuke representation also has in addition a deeper mythological or profane meaning.

As in European art, the netsuke carvers have their own Masters and their schools and in addition there are whole families of artists who have passed their skill down from generation to generation over the centuries. The most famous of them are particularly remarkable for their powerfully personal styles and their unique characteristics. Examples of these are Shu-zan, Masano and Tomotada. Many of the Masters sign their works. But it has also occurred that highly talented pupils have signed unusually fine work with the name of their teacher. In Japanese eyes, these signatures are a respectful acknowledgement by the pupil that he does not feel himself worthy to usurp a Master’s right of signature.

Classical netsuke are recognizable by the complete absence of protruding points and sharp edges, while the latter-day netsuke of the decadent period (subsequent to 1860), although they are more finely worked, often display the fault of projecting limbs, feet, arms and the like which can easily be broken off. A real netsuke is a delight not only to the eyes. It must be felt, and its shape traced with the tips of the fingers, to enjoy completely the charming, delicate details created by the artist. Netsuke possess monumental effect within the dimensions of a miniature.

ABOUT THE NEXT ISSUE

In hardly another country are the contrasts of flora and fauna so great as those in Peru. Peru is traversed by the immense range of the Andes from one end to the other. To the west of the summit ridge extends a sandy waste hostile to all life. But to the east is located the greatest expanse of virgin forest in the world, which reaches across to the Atlantic coast. Three completely different types of fauna are found in these completely different climatic zones—desert, high mountain and forest (or Costa, Sierra and Selva, as the Latin Americans call them).

The animal photographer Hans Dosenbach, well known to our readers for his many works, has spent a protracted period in Peru. The pictorial material he has submitted to us for publication not only provides a definitive survey of the fauna of Peru but also contains numerous pictures of animals only very infrequently photographed.