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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 Napoleon 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 to both the Quirinal and the Vatican and was well-connected with the aristocracy in both Rome and Paris. He was an admirer of Stendhal and associated with Macassar, Edmond de Goncourt, Bécque, Sardou, Verga, D'Annunzio, the younger Dumas, Alphonse Daudet, Bourget, Proust, Meissonier, Forain, Degas and J.-E. Blanche.

In 1880 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 1891 he made a trip to the Pontine Marshes to photograph the buffalo, "d'ont 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 and to make his work more than one camera), to his spontaneity, resulting in an approach to the whole and his boldness in mixing with people to be in the right place at the right time, to his habit of cutting his work to its measure and to its inimitable talent for interpreting rather than merely recording events. In all these respects, Primoli is the equal of any modern photo reporter.

Examples like Primoli indicate the value of the outsider in the history of photography. From the genuine innovations never came from professional photographers but from outsiders such as David Octavius Hill and Lewis Carroll, Maxime du Camp and Nadar, of whom the latter, remarkably enough, has never received the attention of a biographer. Nadar, with his diligence and his technical skill, is the one who has worked on public and private collections.

In spite of everything already written and all the research already done, the history of photography has surely not been exhausted, for it can by no means be excluded that more surprises like those of Primoli and Larique remain in store for us.

NINE DRAWINGS BY EDGAR DEGAS FROM AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

Foreword by the Editor

On the occasion of the 10th 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 the exhibition, Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs was fortunate to see the art of Degas in the hands of two of the most discerning collectors of our age. This exhibition is important because it shows to the general public that Degas was a draughtsman of the first rank.

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, 3 from Italy and 1 each from the works of other Masters as well.

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

THE OTHER DIMENSION

Photographs by Thomas Coghill of Toys in the Collection of Hans Peter Hug of Basel, with a text by Édika Kurunt

Many people have heard of Shock-headed Peter; a far less well-known picture-book by the same author and telling the story of an ailing little boy whose Christmas dreams come true moved Hans Peter Hug 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 about 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 poted 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 showhouse 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 unfulfilled 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 even 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 tusks, stars indicated by one fish, boots 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 "Jugenderinnerungen eines alten Mannes". Hans Peter His loves these descriptions. He is fascinated by literary documents, artistic objects and unnicals which give intensive expression to the Zeitgeist which produced them. Pars 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-knobbed 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 derects, on her 30th birthday, her first white hair. The significant utilization 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, an album 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 Him 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 Franco 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 Glurns on the Enz in what 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 Daedalus. 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 baffling to the questioning gate. It is true that in the autobiographical introduction to "Ein Schloss für ein Zeitruhn" 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 grouchly 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 superficial 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 judgement as could be made of politicians and politicians. 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 which political product is so intensive occurring with the art of stereotyping moustaches and noses! In other words, the realization that politics is in the first place Vanity Fair.

Spinozism is not the sole key to Flora's character. The make-up of a great caricaturist must also include wisdom, or in other words 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 round the rocks of indolence. My efforts in this direction are aided by a latent tendency to indolence. If hard work ennui's, 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
Miniatures masterpieces of Japanese art from the collection of H.-U. Z., Arlesheim

The meaning of the word Netsuke derives from its etymology. Ne 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 enconced in the roomy sleeves or were pushed into the obi, or belt, to which were also affixed the inro (a medecimant case), a pipe and tobacco jar and writing materials. These items—cellophane 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. By 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 wearer. 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, Masamo 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.