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Visual Education as an essential element in human development 259

by Erich Müller

The 20th Century has become aware of children's drawings and, at first, great artists like Léger, e.g., put them on the same level as serious art. We are more cautious nowadays and we realize that the really creative period of childhood (from the age of 5 to the age of 10 or 11) is a pre-personal phase, in which the self and the world are not yet distinct. In this sense, what is created in this period is not yet art. But we are still faced with the educational problem of preserving as much as possible of the creative power of this first period so it can contribute to the development of the adolescent and the adult. For we must realize, in furthering the development of the individual – in other words, in promoting a solidly based humanism – that the intellectual and verbal knowledge which our schools maintain is amply sufficient, is nothing, in the present circumstances, but a dehumanization of the pupil and of the great person he will some day be. Otherwise how can we explain the fact that the majority of those who have taken their secondary school diploma are indifferent to art or have the most execrable taste?

In presenting the problem of visual training to the schools, we must bear in mind that the young person goes through three successive phases. The first, mentioned above, can be called the period of symbolic imitation. A great deal has already been done to stimulate this phase in the elementary schools. The second phase (from 12 to 14) is the period when realistic accuracy becomes dominant. The old teaching method sought to force exact representations from the pupils before they were ready for them; it is just as stupid to seek to prolong artificially the naive first phase, although some teachers succumb to this error. Finally, the third phase, coming at the end of puberty and afterwards, extends from the age of 16 to 19: parallel with the development of logical and rational thinking, there is a resurgence of the subjective element, which conditions interest in art (provided that the adolescent, who would otherwise lapse into sentimental bad taste, is given intelligent guidance and forms the habit of liking authentically beautiful things). It is in this last phase that present-day teaching is most inadequate, by reason of the exclusive emphasis attached to everything purely rational and verbal, whereas it would be well to devote to visual training and practice at least as much attention as to matters which are now regarded as essential. Already, in Germany, secondary schools have been created in which the pupils can choose as "elective subjects" the plastic arts (or music), which count for credit toward the diploma.

Bannfeld Primary School at Olten

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1954/56, Hermann Frey, arch. FAS/SIA, Olten

This school, which was opened in October 1956, comprises: a main building containing 18 classrooms, plus various rooms for girls' and boys' handicrafts, a masters' room, a small display room, air raid shelters, recreation rooms; a building containing the gymnasium and utility rooms, the caretaker's flat, a music room, etc. Also, a playground. Kindergarten planned. Total cost (including grounds): Fr. 3,655,100.

Geisendorf Park Primary School, Geneva

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1952/56, Georges Brera & Paul Waltenspuhl, arch. FAS/SIA, Geneva

Important primary school for around 1000 boys and girls from 6 to 15. Comprises: 1) pavilion A (6 classrooms and a game room), constituting the pre-school; 2) a main building (C) with 16 classrooms for the intermediate and upper grades, 2 recreation rooms, with, in the background, a mezzanine floor containing the manual training rooms; 3) a building for the gymnasium. A large part of the complex is already in service.

Im Hofacker Primary School, Zurich-Schlieren

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1955/56, Hans Hubacher, arch. FAS/SIA, Zurich

School of 14 classrooms, 2 kindergartens and a gymnasium. The angle formed by the buildings opens to the south-east and commands a fine view. The main building, of two storeys, comprises 8 classrooms, and is flanked by a second building housing the music room, the masters' rooms and board rooms and the caretaker's flat. Also, 2 pavilions of 3 classrooms each; a kindergarten adjoins each pavilion. Finally, the gymnasium has the standard dimensions. It has been endeavoured to surround each age group (very young, intermediate and older pupils) with the atmosphere most congenial to it. The kindergartens form a little world to themselves; the classrooms for intermediate grades are in the pavilions; and finally, the older pupils in the main building constitute a kind of proto-community. Tables, seats and even some of the toys were designed by the architect. The music room also serves as a theatre. Inclusive cost: Fr. 104.50 per cu.m.

Holderbach School, Zurich-Affoltern

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1953/57, Max Ziegler, arch. FAS/SIA, Zurich

3 pavilions of 4 classrooms, plus a building containing the gymnasium, a music room and 2 manual training rooms; this second building is connected by a playground to a third building housing the canteen and the caretaker's flat. All the dimensions are on a scale in keeping with the age of the children. Total effect of great simplicity.

School at Niederweningen, Canton of Zurich

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1955/57, Hans von Meyenburg, arch. FAS/SIA, Zurich

An already existing residence serves as caretaker's flat, while there has been erected a school building (4 classrooms on the 1st floor) towards the village, a gymnasium in the centre, and a kindergarten in the more secluded area along the river Surb. There will be added later on a secondary school of 3 classrooms (the ground floor of the 1st building housing the rooms which will be used by the primary and the secondary pupils in common). Cost: Fr. 80.52 and Fr. 179.95 per sq.m. of built-over ground.

The Artistic Ornamentation of the new Schools in Basle

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by Maria Netter

Three new schools (Secondary Modern School, Hirzbrunnen School and the renovated Gellert School) have created a splendid opportunity for beautiful works of art, thanks to the collaboration of the authorities. The photographs reproduced in the present issue will give the reader a better idea of these creations than any commentary. We should like to point out here what can be achieved when architects and artists collaborate.

Elementary School at West Bridgewater, Mass., U. S. A.

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1955/56, The Architects' Collaborative (J.B. & N. Fletcher, W. Gropius, S. & J.N. Harknell, L.A. McMillan, Ch. Nagel, B. Thompson)

This was originally a plan for "Colliers" magazine, the intention being to promote a new, rational type of school building – this being an actual application of the plan. Basic element: classroom measuring 11 m. x 11 m. The present school comprises 2 groups of 7 classrooms each. The outer surface of one of the walls was painted by Josef Albers.