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Summaries in English

Translations by Dr. J. Hull

Artists over seventy

Niklaus Stoecklin and Théodore Bally

(See page 655)

In exhibitions in most galleries the accent is on young artists, and they receive the publicity. It is good that the careers of young, and perhaps unknown, artists are furthered in this way, but this oneness gives rise to certain questions.

In art circles the word «young» represents an evaluation and does not indicate merely an age group. Rather, it has assumed various diffuse meanings, which are usual in advertizing, e.g., the smoke for young people, housing for the young, young fashions, etc. The fashions industry shows how seriously this is to be taken: every season something different is designated «youthful». And in advertizing the idea of youth is put across even more intensely by images than by verbal slogans. Youth dominates the ads to such an extent that an elderly person immediately attracts attention when one appears in an ad. This youth cult has spread into the field of art, where preference is shown for young artists.

The result is a distortion. For one thing, the impression is given – and it is often deliberately fostered – that only young artists create relevant works. How-

ever, we need only recall the late landscapes of Cézanne, the water-lily pictures of Monet or Le Corbusier in order to realize how important the works of an artist's old age can be.

Moreover, the idea is launched that young artists exclusively have determined the artistic climate of a city, of a region. Indeed, because young artists have an easier time attracting public notice, they do in fact determine this climate to a great extent. This situation results in a further withdrawal of older artists from artistic activity, and they become correspondingly less influential.

Our references to Niklaus Stoecklin and Théodore Bally, who will both be eighty next year, are connected up with the problems outlined above. They are of the same age and they both spent their youth in Basel; otherwise all they have in common is the fact that they live in comfortable financial circumstances. Their personal and artistic developments are totally divergent.

Niklaus Stoecklin is an example of a painter who became known and appreciated at the age of barely twenty. This fact does not contradict what I have said above, for my remarks were directed only against excessive favouritism towards young artists. Stoecklin at

that time developed a style that was independent of contemporary painting in Basel, and he nurtured and perfected this style of his over a period of decades. When, after 1945, representational art receded into the background, less and less was published on him.

Owing to the renewed interest in the representational painting of the first half of the century and, above all, owing to recent discussions of the problem of realism, Stoecklin's work has again become timely.

Théodore Bally's work began in a representational idiom, and developed in the forties in the direction of lyrical abstraction – presumably. Nothing more precise than this can be said at the present time, because Bally, as it were, destroyed all his works from that period. Since 1955 we can see how his development, moving through radically different phases, has led to his present severity and simplicity. An unprepared viewer of his work would assume that Bally was in his thirties, so up-to-date is it and so direct in its effect. A more thorough study, to be sure, shows what a wealth of visual experiments and visual experience forms the basis of his simplicity. It is not yet possible to sum up Bally's work. However, the Théodore Bally Foundation, set up by the artist at the Aargau Kunsthaus in Aarau, now makes an assessment possible.

Hans Baumann

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