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GIRL WITH A LUTE
by FRANCESCO MELZI,
ITALIAN (1493-1570)
*Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
William A. Fisher,
1949*





THE VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH SIX ANGELS by LUCA DELLA ROBBIA, ITALIAN (ca. 1399-1482)
Gift of Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, 1949

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH SIX ANGELS by LUCA DELLA ROBBIA

The name Luca della Robbia is so well known and calls up instantly such familiar images — a blue and white glazed relief; simple, monumental figures of the Virgin and Child; a cheerful frame of flowers and fruits — that one tends to take this art for granted. Yes, we know all that; we have seen these things since childhood and we expect no surprises. Yet if one asks where did this art spring from, and by what steps did it develop to such perfection, one finds, surprisingly, that the origins of della Robbia's art are obscure. Vasari says that Luca's father, after having him taught to read, write and figure, set him to learn the goldsmith's art under Leonardo di Ser Giovanni, who taught him first to design and to model in wax, and afterward to carve in marble and bronze. But Vasari seems

to have been in error. Baldinucci, the seventeenth century historian, says that Luca learned his art in the workshop of Ghiberti, which seems more probable.

Luca della Robbia appears first in documents as a sculptor in marble, employed by the Board of Works of the Cathedral in Florence upon a series of important works — a choir gallery (1431-38) for the great octagon of the Cathedral (over which Brunelleschi's dome was then rising); two lunettes in terra cotta over the sacristy doors (1431-43); the completion of the famous series of hexagonal reliefs on the Campanile begun by Giotto and Andrea Pisano (1437-39); and a commission to design a marble altar for one of the fifteen apsidal chapels of the Cathedral, while Donatello was to execute another (the marble altar of St. Peter, 1439). In the earliest and most famous of these commissions, the Singing Gallery, Luca was already an independent and mature artist, taking his place as one of the great masters of Tuscan sculpture beside his older contemporaries Ghiberti and Donatello. He received the commission for the Singing Gallery in 1431 at the suggestion, Vasari says, of Messer Vieri de' Medici, "then a prominent, popular citizen who was very fond of Luca." But the sculptor, who was then thirty-one years old, must have done some work previously to show his competence. In this first dated work he was already a master. Were his first steps already masterly?

Dr. Bode, in the 1880's, was the first modern scholar to attempt to rediscover Luca's youthful work. He suggested that a group of terra cotta reliefs which had formerly been attributed to Ghiberti were actually the work of Luca, developing under Ghiberti's influence. These reliefs show the strong influence of Ghiberti but are already marked by the simple, robust spirit — what Adolfo Venturi called the *dolce lingua paesana* — of Luca. In the intervening seventy years the consensus of scholars has supported Bode's suggestion. The most beautiful of all these early works is a relief showing the *Virgin and Child with Six Angels* which exists in several versions, in terra cotta and stucco, of which the best known is in the Louvre (No. 420). A second fine terra cotta example, once in the collections of Sir J. C. Robinson, London, Gustave Dreyfus, Paris, and Edsel B. Ford, Detroit, has now been given to our museum by the generosity of Mrs. Edsel B. Ford.¹

This relief has been variously dated from about 1428 to 1438; but the earlier date is more probable, for this relief shows Luca della Robbia still half a Gothic sculptor, strongly influenced by Ghiberti's style as it was at the inception of his second pair of bronze doors, in the late 1420's. The angels floating in wonder and adoration about the Virgin and Child show the influence of Ghiberti's "dolce stil nuovo." As Luca developed his independence, instead of following Ghiberti's direction toward pictorial relief, he turned toward a classical style of simple, plastic figures against a plain background.

The beauty of this piece lies both in its feeling and in its execution. Luca della Robbia was an artist of simple, human feelings which he expressed with all their power to touch the emotions, but without sentimentality. Youth, grace, tenderness, peace, human dignity, the poetry of prayer, the beauty of holiness,

exert a natural attraction upon almost every human being. No artist expresses their poetry more naturally or more graciously than does Luca della Robbia. He never, or almost never, ventures outside this circle of feeling; within it he is one of the most eloquent of artists.

He was essentially a sculptor. His forms are large and noble, even in an early work like this, which is executed with a great delicacy of touch and in an almost miniature scale. The figures are solid but clearly formed. Their gestures are easy and graceful, in movement or at rest. His line is flowing and large, but at the same time so subtle that it seems to melt and change constantly, as the eye follows it, without losing its firm, clear movement. The surface of the terra cotta is so tenderly modeled, with a thousand imperceptible changes and modulations, that the light seems to shimmer over it. The whole floats before the eye, a vision at once solid, convincing and airy, gracious, serene. It is the perfection of a certain kind of sculptural poetry that occurs seldom in this art. This is a work that delights the eye and rouses in the mind emotions that refresh the spirit.

E. P. RICHARDSON

¹ Terra cotta relief, circular. Diameter, 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Other examples are, or were, in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, no. 88 (before the last war); the Courajod collection, Paris; the Museo Industriale, Rome; the Mond collection, London. Collections: Sir J. C. Robinson, London; Gustave Dreyfus, Paris; Edsel B. Ford, Detroit. References: T. de Wyzewa, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1889, p. 544; Paris, Palais des Arts Libéraux, 1889, *Exposition rétrospective de l'histoire du travail*; Paul Vitry, *Les Arts*, no. 72 (December, 1907), p. 16 and illus. p. 2; Allan Marquand, *Luca della Robbia*, 1914, p. 230, no. 69; W. von Bode, *Florentiner Bildhauer*, 1921, p. 170; W. R. Valentiner, *Italian Sculpture, 1250-1500*, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1938, no. 35; Giuseppe Galassi, *Scultura fiorentina del Quattrocento*, Milan, 1949, pl. 143. Acc. no. 49.533. Gift of Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, 1949.

AN IDEAL PORTRAIT by FRANCESCO MELZI

In the circle of artists around Leonardo da Vinci, Francesco Melzi is one of the rarest and most interesting. Born in Milan about 1490 of patrician family, he became Leonardo's pupil while still a boy. The earliest mention of him is in a letter from Leonardo to Salai in 1508. When Leonardo left Milan for Rome in 1513, Melzi accompanied him and afterward went with him to France. We know that he there painted under Leonardo's supervision. On October 10, 1517, Leonardo was visited by Cardinal Louis of Aragon, whose secretary left an account of the visit. ". . . On account of a certain paralysis having seized him (Leonardo) in the right hand," the latter said, "one cannot expect more fine things from him. He has well instructed a Milanese disciple [Melzi] who works very well . . ." When Leonardo died in 1519 Melzi wrote a letter to his half-brother in Florence which shows that he cared for the old man with solicitude and affection. Leonardo's will left to him the artist's artistic and scientific estate, which included all his drawings and manuscripts. Vasari visited Melzi at his

house in Vaprio d'Adda in 1565 and found him a handsome, kindly old man and saw Leonardo's drawings and manuscripts, as well as his portraits.

But this artist, who figures so interestingly in history, left very few works. A monkish writer, Gianambrogio Mazzenta, who knew Melzi's son very well, wrote: "Francesco Melzi, pupil and heir of Leonardo, approached more closely than others to the art of Vinci. He worked little, since he was rich. But his pictures are finely executed and might frequently be mistaken for works of the master." Only two signed works have come down to us, a drawing in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, done at the age of nineteen, and a portrait, still owned by the Melzi family. On this slender basis other pictures have been attributed to him, a *Vertumnus and Pomona* (in Berlin until the last war), a *Holy Family* formerly in the von Nemes collection, Munich, a *Columbine* in the Hermitage, Leningrad, a drawing of a woman's head in the Academy, Venice; and, very similar to this last, *A Girl with a Lute* which has just been presented as the generous gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Fisher to our museum. In the early years of the century this picture was in the collection of Sir John Leslie, London, but it has been the jewel of Mr. and Mrs. Fisher's collection for the past twenty-five years (see front cover).

A young woman in sumptuous and bejeweled costume leans on a balustrade, holding a lute over which she lets her fingers fall lightly. Her eyes are downcast and veiled by a self-absorbed mood of reverie. Behind her is the foliage and glowing fruit of an orange tree, against a brownish gold sky. That is all. Yet few pictures from the circle of Leonardo express so attractively the mood of dreamlike sweetness which was Leonardo's *tone* that captivated the taste of the world, and which his pupils and imitators were rarely able to re-echo. This picture is distinguished by its luminous color and rich decorative glow from the grey and melancholy tone too often met with in the pictures of Leonardo's Milanese followers. This painting is pensive, but it is also easy, calm and pleasing. Its enameled greens and golds and oranges, lightened by touches of silver white in the sleeves and by the gleam of pearls, rubies and sapphires in the jewelry, are softened by the subtle puce color of the mantle and given resonance by the light veil of shadow over the whole. It is a firm, lustrous picture. It has the magnificence and architectonic dignity of a great age. It gives off a sentiment of grace and splendor; it stirs the feelings and quiets one's restless thoughts; it makes one pleased with life where so many other Milanese pictures make one sad.

E. P. RICHARDSON

Cat. no. 977. Panel. H. 25 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches; w. 20 inches. Exhibited at the Detroit Institute in 1927, in the exhibition "Old and Modern Masters," no. 15; reproduced in Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, III, 1933, pl. 482; exhibited in the Leonardo da Vinci and his Circle exhibitions in Milan (1939, p. 228) and Los Angeles (1949, no. 60). Of it the Milan catalogue says, *I restauri che hanno gravato il dipinto non sembrano permettere nessuna ragionevole certezza*. Acc. no. 49.505. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Fisher, 1949.

RUISDAEL'S LANDSCAPE WITH A WATER MILL

The *Landscape with a Water Mill* by Jacob van Ruisdael (1629-1682) which is the generous gift to our museum of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred J. Fisher is a major work of the artist. It shows him as one of the great landscape painters of the western world, working with the largeness of style and grandeur of feeling that distinguish him in his highest moments.

Ruisdael was a master of tone, an artistic means which painting has nearly abandoned since Impressionism. The effect of the Impressionists' work, seventy-five years ago, was to banish the tonal style (of which Corot was one of the last representatives) in favor of one based upon variety and intensity of hue, and in this they have been followed by most, although not all, subsequent painters. This canvas is a masterpiece of the older tonal style which is equalled by very few pictures in America in force, clarity and perfect preservation of every nuance of the color harmony.

The picture (Fig. 1) belongs to Ruisdael's heroic phase. If a landscape of any period by Ruisdael hangs in a room with the work of other painters, his picture has a force that compels the eye and outweighs everything else on the wall. This force lies in part in a cool, dark, blue-green tone of peculiar depth and resonance which marks his palette. Very often, indeed usually, this massive dark has a tinge of melancholy, a pensive, brooding note that is the special poetry of Ruisdael. The tone of our picture is reflective, brooding, but heroic. It exhilarates one by its grandeur, its rich and intricate structure, its trumpet note of splendour.

This energetic, stirring quality comes partly from Ruisdael's drawing. His line is peculiarly nervous and dramatic. It gives grandeur to the rolling contours of the hills and expression to all things. The trees and clouds seem alive, moving in the wind. Ruisdael's use of light and dark has the same drama and animation. The cool, dark blue-green of earth and trees is varied by contrasting notes of warm or rosy brown. The light which glows so triumphantly in the clouds seems to ripple and gleam in the half-lights which flash across the dark earth. Nothing is static. Everything moves and lives.

Ruisdael began to develop his heroic style, it is generally agreed, in the years 1650 to 1655, when he left the flat landscape of polder and dunes around his native Haarlem to explore the landscape of the Lower Rhine. There he found a countryside of rolling hills, great oak forests, half timbered houses and deep, silent-flowing rivers, which furnished him with new themes of nature. At the same time he broke away from the early baroque landscape style developed in Haarlem by his uncle Salomon van Ruysdael and Jan van Goyen, a calm spacious style built upon the low horizons and wide distances of the Dutch landscapes. The high baroque style developed in Italy by Poussin and Claude Lorrain had been brought back to Holland in the 1640's by Dutch painters who had been to Italy. Ruisdael launched himself into this more dramatic and architectonic style in the fifties with the landscapes of his wander-years.

*Fig. 1. LANDSCAPE WITH
A WATER MILL
by JACOB VAN RUISDAEL,
DUTCH (1629-1682)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
Alfred J. Fisher,
1949*



But there is considerable disagreement in dating some of the greatest of his heroic landscapes. The moods of grandeur, drama and repose, were interwoven in his art. He seems to have continued to paint simple scenes of the dune landscape even during his period of wandering (1650-55) and to have painted reveries upon the Rhine country after his return to Holland. The difficulty in dating these heroic landscapes in his work is illustrated by the fact that one of the most famous, *The Cemetery*, in our own collection, is placed by some students in his wander-years, about 1653-55, by others as late as 1678. Twenty-five years is a long time in the life of a painter. Ordinarily so much happens in his art that a student of his work has no difficulty in saying at least, this is an early work, that is a late one, this belongs to his middle years.

It is interesting, therefore, that although the *Landscape with a Water Mill* bears no date, it can be dated by internal evidence in the years 1661 or shortly after, when the artist was in his early thirties and at the height of his powers. He had moved from his native Haarlem to Amsterdam at about the age of twenty-five. Amsterdam was a much bigger city and offered a greater opportunity. Within a year or two after his arrival he took as pupil the young Meindert Hobbema. The two young men painted together and sometimes the same theme appears in their pictures. In a signed and dated picture of 1661 in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (No. 2077), Ruisdael painted a *Water Mill in a Wooded Landscape*. The same mill was also painted by Hobbema and became one of the favorite themes of the younger landscapist. Hobbema used it at least seven times in various pictures of the years 1661 to 1663. This mill appears in almost exactly the same form in our picture and in Hobbema's *Water Mill with the Great Red Roof*, in the Art Institute of Chicago. It seems therefore reasonable to believe that our picture was painted by Ruisdael within a few years after 1661.

If so, it emphasizes the importance of memory in Ruisdael's art. These high hills, so cool and inviting in the evening light, these airy groves hanging above the valley, these houses nestled in the folds of the hills, this poetry of evening coolness and the close of day, are a reverie upon his experiences of past years, distilled by time and affection into this powerful, eloquent and moving image. It is not the portrait of an actual scene but an assemblage of memories. Its mingled emotions of grandeur and peace, intimacy and heroic splendor are the moods of a dramatic poem upon nature's beauty. The structure of that poem is complex. It is built, in part, of three different paths which one can follow in imagination into the picture, lingering by the way to enjoy a variety of pleasures. One path leads along the riverbank at the left and bends quickly out of sight where a man carrying a sack plods around the curve. The second begins with the ford across which a shepherd drives his flock of sheep, leads up to the three figures standing by the houses at the right (Fig. 2), then turns and follows the riverbank on the farther side, past the mill, through the dark woods beyond it, and leads eventually out onto the open hillside in the distance. The third path turns off from this by the group of three people, passes behind the houses into the wooded valley, climbs upward through the trees and comes out into the

open in front of the houses and church clustered upon the height. The observer who, standing in front of this picture, follows those three paths in his imagination, will experience many phases and moods of nature.

The picture gives the impression of very precise detail. One receives the feeling of exact detail in the rambling old mill and the timbered houses. The sense of nature's profusion, of reeds and grasses, lichened rocks, rutted earthy paths, flowering shrubs, water, trees of all shapes and sizes, the varied outline of hills, birds flying overhead, is so convincing that one accepts it, feels it, believes it all there. Look once again. The details seem to be there because the artist makes you believe they are there. Actually he paints all this with a broad simple stroke of the brush which creates a shimmer of light and shadow, as an Impressionist picture is made of a shimmer of colors. Ruysdael is a master not only of fine expressive drawing and dramatic tone but of the power to create an utterly convincing, imaginative world, nature transposed into art.

E. P. RICHARDSON

Cat. no. 981. Canvas. H. 42 inches; w. 52½ inches. Signed on a rock at the lower right: J. V. Ruysdael, the JVR forming a monogram. Collections: Lord Haldon, London, 1897; Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1898; Count Palffy, Paris; Howard Young, New York; Alfred J. Fisher, Detroit. References: Hofstede de Groot, no. 154; Detroit Institute of Arts, *Loan Exhibition of Old and Modern Masters*, 1927, no. 48; Jakob Rosenberg, *Jacob van Ruysdael*, 1928, no. 105. Acc. no. 49.532. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred J. Fisher, 1949.

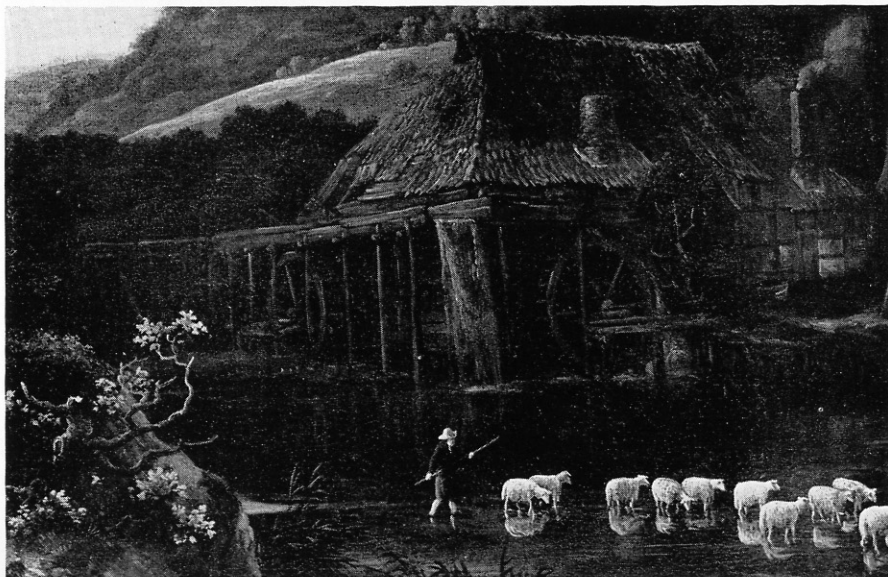


Fig. 2. LANDSCAPE WITH A WATER MILL (Detail)

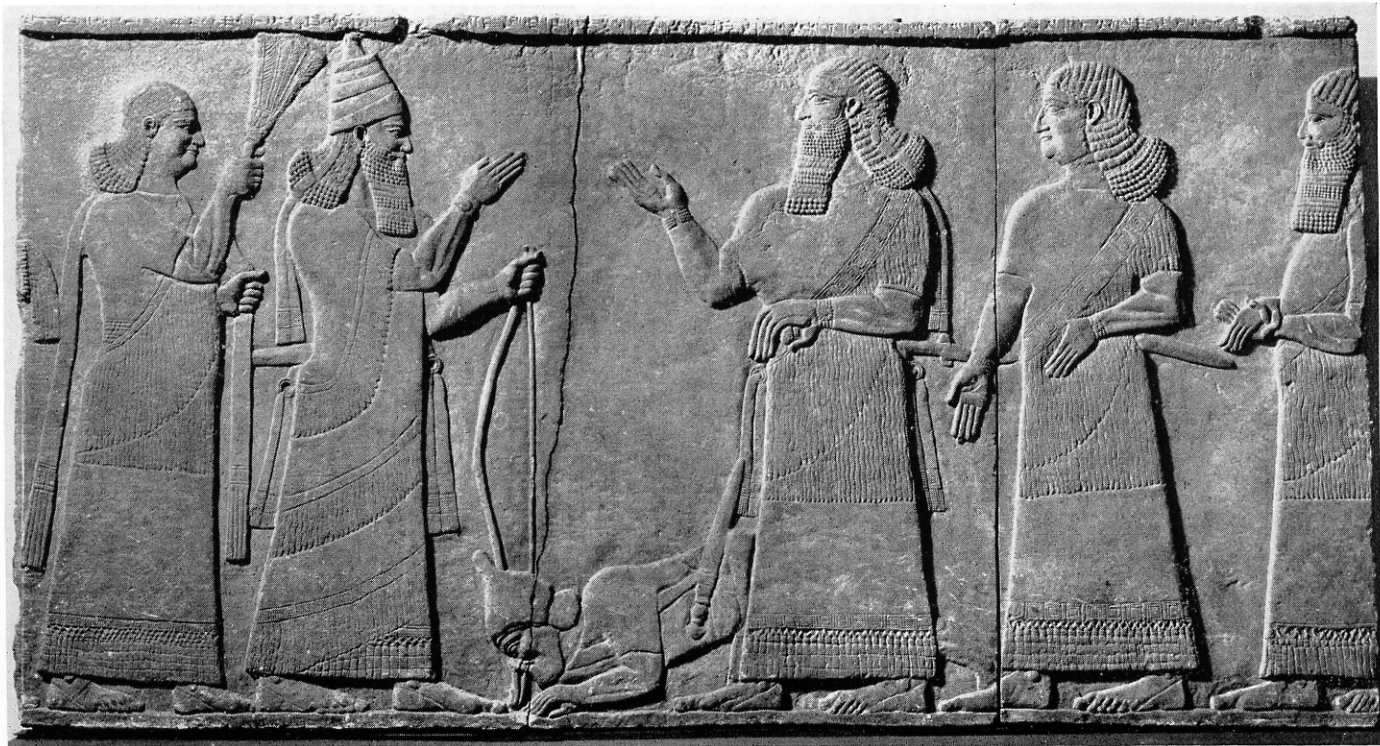
AN ASSYRIAN RELIEF OF TIGLATH-PILESER III

Through the Ralph Harman Booth Fund, the Detroit Institute of Arts has recently acquired its most important work of art recovered by archaeological excavation, a relief of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria, 745-727 B.C., receiving homage from a warrior in the presence of officials and attendants. This relief, in alabastrous limestone, comes from one of the royal palaces in the ancient city of Calah, which, after Ashur and before Nineveh and Khorsabad, was the second capital of the ancient Assyrian kingdom. Today the mound of Nimrud some twenty miles below the town of Mosul on the east bank of the river Tigris in Iraq marks the site.

Here in 1845 Austen Henry Layard began excavations for Sir Stratford Canning, British Ambassador to Turkey, which were later carried on for the Trustees of the British Museum. His first campaign at Nimrud lasted from 1845 to 1847; his second, in which he was assisted by Hormuzd Rassam, from 1849 to 1850. Hormuzd Rassam, Julius Weber, and George Smith later carried on excavations on the same site. During the forties and fifties of the last century, the public mind of Europe was thrilled by the rediscovery of the ancient Assyria of the Bible, its kings, its towns and palaces, and its sculpture in relief and in the round; and scientists were rejoicing in the decipherment of the ancient cuneiform writing which revealed not only the names of the rulers but also the accounts of their reigns, their military campaigns and their building achievements.

Layard, in his book, *Nineveh and its Remains*, first published in 1849, records the finding of the relief, now in Detroit, in February 1846. It stood in the South-West Palace at Nimrud, but like so many other reliefs found in this palace, it gave evidence of having been brought from another site. The finds show that the South-West Palace was in the course of construction by Esarhaddon, King of Assyria from 681 to 669 B.C., with material plundered from the Central Palace at Nimrud and elsewhere, when it was destroyed by fire and as a result much of its sculpture was mistreated in the re-using, then was damaged by the heat, and finally suffered from exposure to the elements. The present relief is remarkably well preserved. It has become separated from the adjoining slabs and the fragmentary remains of the upper register which contained figures on horseback have been cut off, probably before the lower register was brought to England.

The majority of the sculptures from Nimrud found their way into the British Museum where they may be seen today. Some went into other museums and some to individuals. The relief now in Detroit was acquired by the Honorable Robert Clive who illustrated it on the title-page of his book, *Sketches between the Persian Gulf and Black Sea*, published in 1852, with the following statement: "This slab from the mound of Nimroud was obtained from H. B. M. Vice-Consul at Moosul, 1850, & is now in the possession of the Hon. R. H. Clive, at Hewell." The British Vice-Consul at Mosul at this time was Christian Rassam, brother of the excavator Hormuzd Rassam and sometimes an excavator himself.



TIGLATH-PILESER III, KING OF ASSYRIA (745-727 B.C.), RECEIVING HOMAGE
From a Royal Palace at Nimrud (Ancient Calah). Assyrian, Eighth Century B.C.
Gift of the Ralph Harman Booth Fund, 1950

The relief was installed at Hewell Grange, Redditch, Worcestershire, England, and remained there in comparative seclusion and oblivion until it was removed by the Honorable Ivor Miles Windsor-Clive, the present Earl of Plymouth and a descendant of the original owner. It was sold at auction in London in July 1946 and passed into the hands of H. Kevorkian in New York, from whom it was acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Such Assyrian reliefs of court scenes are not common in American collections or elsewhere. Over the years the ancient ruined palaces of the Assyrian kings have been stripped of their sculptures which are to be found in many collections, public and private, throughout the world. In American collections the Assyrian reliefs concern themselves largely with representations of mythological figures and religious scenes, often on a large scale, and, in some cases, with scenes of military campaigns. Detroit is fortunate in acquiring so handsome and so unusual a relief of a court scene.

The relief, 7 feet 10 inches in length and 4 feet in height, includes six figures. It is incomplete at both ends, showing that it formed part of a longer procession of figures; and its height confirms the fact that it was the lower of two friezes separated by a band of inscription. The subject is truly majestic. In typical Assyrian style the figures stand in one plane, rooted in place but expressing animation through their varied gestures. The King, wearing a distinguishing conical headdress, stands facing to the right, holding his bow in his left hand, and making a gesture of greeting with his right. Behind him an attendant raises a fly whisk. Before the King, in the presence of three officials advancing to the left, is prostrated a helmeted warrior — perhaps a soldier-prince vanquished on the field of battle or a conquered king of an adjoining land.

Above the relief a fragment of inscription remains. It is chiseled out in the cuneiform or wedge-shaped characters of ancient Mesopotamian writing, used by the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others in the Near East. It is a part of the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, recording his military campaigns and conquests. According to a translation kindly supplied by Dr. I. J. Gelb of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, it reads: "I conquered the city of Sibur together with the cities of its environs. I carried off their booty. The man Tanus fled to the mountains. I offered pure libations to the god Marduk who dwells in Til-Ashuri." This refers to a campaign into Media, lying northeast of Assyria, an event which occurred in 737 B.C.

The power of Assyria, once so mighty, was already on the wane when Tiglath-Pileser usurped the throne in 745 B.C. and by a program of vigorous military conquests, now to the north, now to the east, now to the west, and finally to the south, expanded the empire, curbed the power of the priests and strengthened the position of the king. In Babylonia, he was recognized as ruler and called by the special name of Pulu or Pul, the name by which he is mentioned in the Bible (II Kings 15:19). The Bible also contains reference to the campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser against Syria and Palestine, and gives glimpses of the methods pursued by the king to subdue countries, secure allegiance, and enrich Assyria —

the destruction of cities, the deportation of peoples, and the carrying off of booty and tribute. All this is confirmed in the written annals of the Assyrian kings and in the sculptured reliefs, both of which were spread upon their palace walls.

In stately processions of deities and courtiers, in portraits of the king and scenes of his campaigns, the record of the Assyrian rulers was presented in low relief carved upon limestone or alabaster slabs lining the mud-brick walls of the temples and palaces of Nineveh (Kuyunjik), Calah (Nimrud), and other royal cities. Numerous must have been the artists who carved these reliefs and some of them showed great skill in the rendering of plastic form, of ornamental detail, and of pictorial design. The newly-acquired relief in Detroit will amply repay the inquiring spectator who keeps these ideas in mind. Whereas the representations of the winged deities are often overpoweringly severe, and the scenes of the attacks upon cities, the punishment of captives, and the carrying away of booty, are restless and nerve-straining, the majestic scenes of court life, such as in the present relief, have a dignity that reveals the best in Assyrian imperialism and in Assyrian official sculpture.

As the collection of ancient Mesopotamian art in the Detroit Institute of Arts grows, it becomes possible to secure a broader and sounder idea of the accomplishment of the artists of the Ancient Near East. Whereas Mesopotamia was represented here for thirty years almost entirely by cuneiform inscriptions, a brick of Shalmaneser III from the Ziggurat of Calah (Nimrud), given by George S. Waite of Kalamazoo in 1900, and a group of small inscribed tablets, mostly business records, acquired in 1919, the past twenty years have seen the acquisition of some monuments of outstanding importance: a Sumerian sculpture in the round, a Neo-Babylonian tile relief, and lately three examples of Assyrian relief sculpture of different periods. The oldest is the winged eagle-headed genius performing a sacred rite from the North-West palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud, dating from the ninth century before Christ. This was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie H. Green in 1947. The next oldest, the largest, and to date the most important, is the relief of Tiglath-Pileser III, dating from the eighth century B.C., which has just been acquired through the Ralph Harman Booth Fund. The third relief is a fragment of a campaign scene, a man with horses, from the palace of Sennacherib, built about 700 B.C. at Kuyunjik (ancient Nineveh). This was the gift of Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haass in 1944.

FRANCIS W. ROBINSON

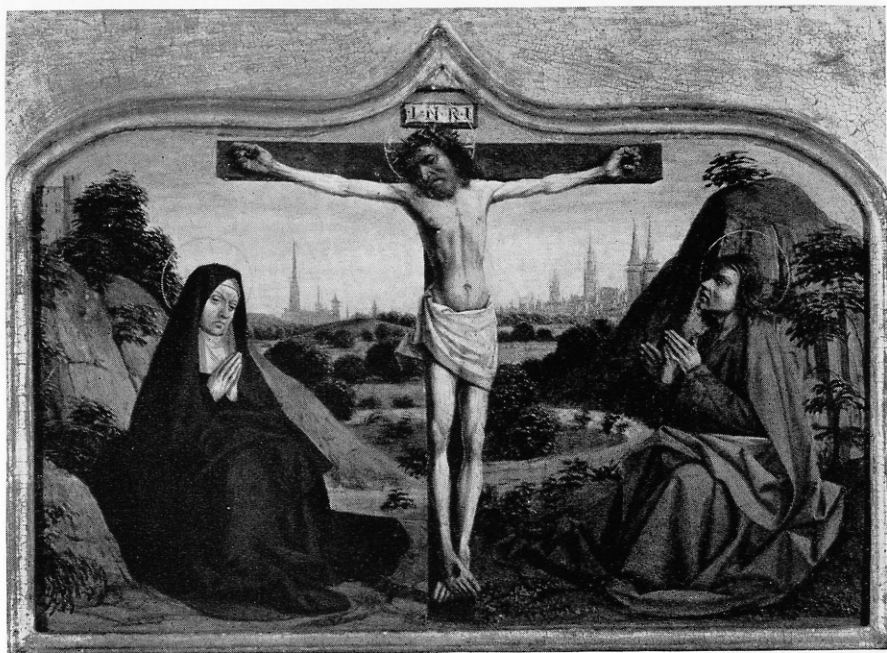
Acc. no. 50.32. Limestone. Comprised of two slabs, one of which is divided by a slightly oblique break. Height 4 feet; width 7 feet 10 inches. References: Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, London, 1849, vol. I, pp. 60, 379 (in American edition, New York, 1854, vol. I, pp. 68, 307); Robert Clive, *Sketches between the Persian Gulf and Black Sea*, London, 1852, vignette and caption on title-page; Sotheby & Co., London, *Catalogue of . . . an important Assyrian Stone Bas-Relief, the Property of The Earl of Plymouth*, July 29, 1946, p. 15, no. 162, and pl. V. Gift of the Ralph Harman Booth Fund, 1950.

A CRUCIFIXION FROM PROVENCE

Judging from its unusual shape the small fifteenth century Provençal *Crucifixion*¹ recently acquired by the Institute was apparently part of a large altarpiece, perhaps the central panel of its predella, more probably its pediment or pinnacle. In any case it formed only a small and, in a way, secondary section of a complex decorative ensemble. Therefore, like so many mediocre French and Italian examples of the pathetic and hackneyed theme, it could have been left to a studio assistant to execute, while the master himself worked on the larger panels. But its painter was evidently one of the most original French artists of the period, with stylistic peculiarities of his own and, above all, with an uncompromising feeling for realism. While accepting the iconographical traditions which all craftsmen respected, he created a work, plebeian and austere, monumental in conception, untinged by mere decorative charm yet with passages of exquisite quality, which for boldness and emotive power stands apart from the contemporary production. The Detroit *Crucifixion* possesses the vitality of great art, the poignancy of works which instinctively attempt to express elemental emotions. In its honesty and pathos it is unsurpassed in our collections, and we are proud to have it.

The figure of the Crucified hangs on a low cross, standing in gray paleness against the luminous blue sky. He is flanked by the massive, motionless silhouettes of the Virgin and John, seated in sorrowful meditation at the foot of the cross and, as it were, imprisoned by the silhouettes of the rocks behind them; the balance created by the three figures, placed almost on the same front plane, yet each pitilessly isolated from the others, adds to the impression of absolute hopelessness. Only a great artist could thus convey, through such a relationship, not of figure to figure, but of figure to space, the dramatic tension and quiet horror of the scene. At the same time this compatriot of Cézanne, working in a land where artists always have been "*des assembleurs de formes,*" was unconsciously absorbed in the ever present problems of three dimensional design. His figures have the solidity and compactness of the *Card Players*, express the same feeling for concentrated plastic form; they too suggest depth and, more significant still, sculptural relief and volume. Even the technique, with its use of a dense, heavy impasto, is that which the painters of Provence, Fragonard, Monticelli, Daumier, Cézanne himself, were to employ with such gusto. The paint is laid broadly, and minute highlights, formed by the modulations of the relief, give glitter to numberless details, the folds of John's red garment, the leaves in the bushy shrubs exquisitely placed in the middle distance, the towers and spires, gray-blue and blue-green in the saturating light, outlined upon the horizon.

This feeling for the solidity of form and the eloquence of empty space in a compact composition, this luxuriance and boldness of technique, are great qualities in a late fifteenth century painter. But many French artists, then and later, have possessed them. What belongs peculiarly to the author of the *Crucifixion* and makes the small panel a precious and fascinating thing, is the absolute,



CRUCIFIXION, FRENCH (SCHOOL OF PROVENCE), LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY
Gift of the Founders Society, 1950

ruthless realism of its conception. The landscape is the conventional Eyckian landscape, delicately treated and bathed in a soft silvery light, it is true. But even this idyllic background, by contrast, adds to the starkness and despair of the scene: nature, it seems, remains indifferent. All the drama is concentrated in the foreground, in the faces and attitudes of the protagonists. Stupefied, mouth gaping and eyes half closed, Christ on the cross turns toward His mother. In the head, too large for the slender body, there is no trace of nobility, not even the conventional nobility which to poets and painters is that of approaching death. Christ's hair falls harshly in long dishevelled curls. His graying beard is that of the vagabonds one meets on the road from Arles to Tarascon. Furrows line the broad forehead and outline the high cheek bones, a mysterious earthy shadow mercifully hides half of the face. On a rachitic body, undressed rather than nude, this head has a directness, a vulgarity almost, which are unique in Latin Europe in the century of the Parisian "*très subtils faiseurs d'images.*" Lack of taste? Irreverence, or blasphemy, one might ask? No, but on the part of an original artist, the expression of an emotion so deep and personal that it is akin to the mysticism of St. John of the Cross or St. Theresa. Hardly less impressive is the figure of the Virgin. In the very great majority of the representations of the Mother of God, even in the case of the most pathetic, the Pietà, Mary conserves the dignity of the great court ladies and their conventional aristocratic

beauty; here she is like a French peasant, a humble nun perhaps or, like Villon's mother, just a "*femme . . . povrette et ancienne*." Her protruding eyes and drawn mouth, her monachal paleness emphasized by the unbroken mass of dark blue of her cloak, her immobility even, have the haunting quality of common humanity which one finds only in Daumier's lithographs or in certain Expressionist works, in the late self portraits of Käthe Kollwitz for example. There again, in this delineation of sorrow, the painter introduced nothing banal, nothing obvious. As André Malraux says of some other artist, "in place of seduction he substituted revelation."

Christ and the Virgin are expressionless, outwardly passive. Not so John. His long, bony hands are lifted in orison, his lips tremble while, lost in mystical awe, he contemplates his Redeemer. His sensitive face, the most perfectly conceived passage in the entire panel, is unforgettable. Obviously the artist brought special care to his depiction of Christ's beloved disciple. Like the other faces, John's is painted *staccato*, with emphatic, nervous strokes reminiscent of glass painting. But the painter has introduced unexpectedly delicate details. John's blond hair flows in light curls upon the luminous carmine red of his cloak, which alone in the picture is high in key, as if to render more visible John's presence. His eyes are glowing with an extraordinary intensity of feeling; minute, transparent tears, invisible a few feet away, fall on his cheeks. In this pathetic figure, less noble in conception perhaps, less austere, but so deeply felt and so moving in its reticence, the tenderness of the scene becomes immediately apparent.

We do not yet know who the painter of the Detroit *Crucifixion* may be. That he belonged to the School of Provence of the later fifteenth century is evident: such a work, so uncompromisingly realistic, monumental in design, broad in technique, with the effect of low sculptural relief which characterizes the Provençal School throughout the fifteenth century, could have been conceived nowhere else in France—neither in Touraine, where delicacy and elegance were requisites, nor even in Burgundy, influenced deeply by the sculptors of the Sluter School. Like all painters of the School of Provence, the painter of the *Crucifixion* was an eclectic, acquainted with the art of the rest of Europe, that of Flanders and Italy particularly. Avignon, so well situated on the Rhône in a fertile valley, had kept its commercial and cultural importance after the Papacy returned to Rome; one of the great markets for works of art of the fifteenth century, it attracted craftsmen of all nationalities, Catalans as well as Neapolitans, Swiss as well as Flemings. Its artists could not help being influenced by the outside world, and our painter was no exception: the landscape of the *Crucifixion* represents a northern town bathed in the cool light of Ghent or Bruges, while the theme of the *Crucifixion* with Mary and John seated on the ground, which is found already in Simone Martini and Jacopo di Cione, apparently remained more popular in Italy than in other countries.

Only two names have been mentioned, with caution, in connection with the Detroit *Crucifixion*, those of Nicolas Dipre and of the "Master of the Altarpiece of the Life of the Virgin." Nicolas Dipre, a native of Paris,

belonged, as so many artists did in the middle ages, to a family of artists. Both his father and grandfather were painters, and his own son, who emigrated to Rome, followed the ancestral profession. He is first mentioned in Avignon in 1495; he was still living in 1531. As Mr. Sterling states in the only extensive study of the painter, Dipre must have come to Provence young enough to have been formed there. In any case, the only panel definitely attributed to him, a *Meeting of Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate* (Carpentras Museum), which may be dated 1499, is strongly influenced by the Provençal School, and has a Provençal flavor, an unmistakable *goût du terroir*.² The squat figures, the heavy folds, the bony hands and protruding eyes of the Carpentras picture are found in our *Crucifixion* and in another panel of somewhat similar shape, *The Marriage of the Virgin*, in a French private collection. Is the *Crucifixion* then a lost work by Nicolas Dipre? The similarities are great, even in the way in which the foliage of the larger trees is conceived. But the style of the Detroit picture seems to indicate a date earlier at least by a decade than any work known to have been accomplished by Dipre. Miss Ring, who recently published the *Crucifixion* in her *Century of French Painting*, attributes it, along with three other panels, to the "Master of the Altarpiece of the Life of the Virgin." She considers the four panels, all concerned with episodes of the Life of the Virgin, as parts of an altarpiece executed about 1490/1500, although, as she remarks, the measurements do not perfectly coincide. All four paintings are reproduced in that excellent volume, and seem to prove Miss Ring's contention, even in the shape of the haloes. Yet the Detroit *Crucifixion* is far simpler in conception, far more "archaic" (not *retardataire*) and northern in feeling, when compared to the Italianate panels of the *Marriage of the Virgin* and the *Presentation*. In addition, judging from photographs, the relationship of the figures to the composition, their position in space, their relative proportions in the different panels, seem different. The calligraphy is the same in all four panels; yet the spirit is different. Only a study of the paintings side by side can solve this problem.

PAUL L. GRIGAUT

¹ Cat. no. 1000. Panel. H. 11½ inches; w. 17⁷/₁₆ inches. Collections: Marquese Durazzo, Genoa; Breschi, Rome; Vitale Bloch, Amsterdam. Acc. no. 50.57. Gift of the Founders Society, 1950.

Bibliography: Charles Sterling, *Les Peintres Français du Moyen Age*, 1940, p. 29, No. 49 of *Répertoire A*; Charles Sterling, "Two XVth century Provençal Painters," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Oct. 1942, p. 14; Grete Ring, *A Century of French Painting, 1400-1500*, p. 233 (repr. Pl. 142). In addition the painting is mentioned in the Frick Collection *Catalogue of Paintings*, 1949, Vol. I, p. 226, in connection with the Frick *Pietà*, the compiler of the catalogue finding an analogy between the two Virgins; there the *Crucifixion* is attributed without reserve to Nicolas Dipre.

² L. H. Labande, in his comprehensive work on the Primitives of Provence (*Les Primitifs français*, Marseille, 1932, Vol. I, p. 38), discussing Nicolas Froment's influence in Provence, mentions the "tonalité trop claire [of the *Meeting at the Golden Gate*] pour être sortie de l'atelier de Froment." The color scheme of the *Crucifixion*, on the contrary, is somber, with the exception of John's robe. In this connection it may be mentioned here that, judging from Mr. Sterling's description of the *Marriage of the Virgin* in the *Gazette* article, the color schemes of the *Marriage* and of the *Crucifixion* are quite different.

THREE BROCADES by PHILIPPE DE LASSALLE

Greatest of all the silk artists of Lyons was Philippe de Lassalle (1723-1803). His teachers were Daniel Sarrabat at Lyons, Bachelier and Boucher in Paris. Charryé, a designer-manufacturer, induced him to return to Lyons, where he became Charryé's partner and son-in-law. Later he joined the firm of Camille Pernon (1753-1808) who, among the manufacturer-merchants of Lyons, stands supreme as the champion of taste and quality. And now Lassalle designed wonderful brocades, for Louis XV and his father-in-law the exiled king of Poland Stanislas Leszcynski who resided at Nancy, for Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, for Catherine the Great of Russia and for the court of Spain. Louis XVI gave him the order of St. Michael and everything must have looked rosy, when the Revolution brought absolute, complete ruin. Lassalle could not adjust himself to the changed taste of the Directoire and Empire and for the last ten years of his life he eked out a miserable existence, working on improvements of the loom in a garret allotted to him by the city of Lyons.

Philippe de Lassalle was the ideal combination of artist and craftsman. Equally skilled as a designer and as a weaver, he created his masterworks from the first pencil sketch to the finished fabric. He did not like the obtrusive gleam of metal thread and used only silks and chenille thread. He began with purely floral designs; then he interspersed his garlands, bouquets and festoons with baskets and musical instruments, with bird and animals. To Philippe de Lassalle the silk style of Louis XVI owes what it has of grandeur. With his brocades, the exuberance of multicolored floral design reaches its apogee.

The Detroit Institute of Arts owns three of these brocades. The first of these,¹ woven about 1760, belongs to the first period in the young artist's development as a textile designer (Fig. 1). It must have been woven soon after his return from Paris, with all he had learned in the great Boucher's atelier fresh in his mind. It is the back of a chasuble, with the orphrey removed and the selvages stitched together. The brocade had been cut so carefully that the two parts now fit together and produce the design perfectly. The heavy festoon of the garland of roses and peonies might have fitted into a painting, or the cartoon of a tapestry, as a splendid accessory. It is perfect as a textile design, with the swathes of field flowers and ferns dangling from the festoon and the double strings of pearls with their charmingly irrelevant tassel. This early brocade shows all the admirable qualities of the great artist.² On the cream faille ground he places his colors side by side, never using the *point rentré*. Yet, with one dark and one light supporting tone and the main color he achieves a perfect modeling. His flowers look as if they were freshly culled, the pearls have a deep luster.

The second brocade is the *panier fleuri*³ (Fig. 2). This specimen was formerly in the collection of Herman A. Elsberg. It had been cut and used to cover a bergère; the basket covered the seat and is slightly rubbed, but the design is practically complete. Ribbons of two tones of blue flutter over the cream white ground. They frame a basket filled with flowers and hold together bouquets and



Fig. 1. FLOWERS AND PEARLS
by PHILIPPE DE LASSALLE
French (1723-1803)
Gift of Adolph Loewi, 1950



Fig. 2. LE PANIER FLEURI
by PHILIPPE DE LASSALLE
French (1723-1803)
Gift of Mrs. E. S. Fehimer, 1948



Fig. 3. LES PERDRIX
by PHILIPPE DE LASSALLE
French (1723-1803)
City Appropriation, 1931

a garland. The ground-weave of small chevrons, called *dauphiné* in contemporary bills and descriptions, may have been named in honor of Marie-Antoinette, archduchess of Austria, who on the sixteenth of May, 1770, had become the wife of the dauphin Louis. The *panier fleuri*, woven about 1770, inaugurates the unique series of magnificent brocades which are due to the collaboration of Philippe de Lassalle and Camille Pernon.

The third brocade is called "aux perdrix"⁴ (Fig. 3). A large wreath of summer flowers is loosely tied with a white scarf to a sheaf of golden wheat, which forms a frame for a little idyllic scene, three partridges looking out from a thicket of poppies and cornflowers. This brocade, woven about 1780, shows the prince of textile designers at his best and most original. The exquisite modeling of the birds, the softness of their plumage which seems to invite the caress of a stroking hand, is achieved by brown chenille among the silks. Here also occur those sudden sharp accents of deepest black in the rich polychromy. The ground is a soft old rose, a variant of the earlier *dauphiné*. Lassalle must have liked the effect of light and shadows in his backgrounds, for even in his earliest works he prefers *faïence* to taffeta or satin. The panel belonged originally to the wall decoration of a bedroom at Peterhof, the summer residence of Catherine the Great, near St. Petersburg.

The beauty of these brocades fills us with a nostalgic longing for the enchanted world of flowers, birds and insects which had been created by the genius of Philippe de Lassalle.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

¹ *Flowers and Pearls*. Length 48 inches; width 20½ inches. Acc. no. 50.39. Gift of Adolph Loewi, 1950.

² "Chose unique dans l'immense bagage du passé, toute œuvre de Philippe de Lassalle se signe d'elle-même, comme celles d'ailleurs des plus grands maîtres" (Raymond Cose, *Les Soieries d'Art*, Paris, 1914, p. 195).

³ *Le Panier Fleuri*. Length 52½ inches; width 37 inches. Acc. no. 48.18. Gift of Mrs. E. S. Fechimer, 1948.

⁴ *Les Perdrix*. Length 44 inches; width 21¼ inches. Acc. no. 31.63. City Appropriation, 1931.

TWO POTTERY BOWLS by EDWIN AND MARY SCHEIER

"Pottery is at once the simplest and the most difficult of all arts. It is the simplest because it is the most elemental, it is the most difficult because it is the most abstract." Thus does Herbert Read, in an illuminating chapter of his *Meaning of Art*, define what is to those who practice it the most fascinating of all arts. The definition applies perfectly to the two bowls by Edwin and Mary Scheier recently presented to the Institute¹.

There is no doubt that Edwin and Mary Scheier are among the foremost potters of America today. In their studio in New Hampshire, where they have experimented for some ten years, they have created, year after year, almost month



TWO BOWLS by EDWIN AND MARY SCHEIER, AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY
Left: Gift of Mrs. John Owen, III, 1950. Right: Gift of Mrs. Richard H. Webber, 1950

after month, designs and shapes which in their whimsicality and charm are perhaps the most original of their kind. But theirs is not a vehicle for over-sophisticated expression. Edwin and Mary Scheier possess to a supreme degree the two qualities which they feel all good potters must have: humility and restraint. They know that a craft in which technique plays such a vital part lends itself to virtuosity, *bravura*, preciosity — the great enemies of even the best potters. They know, too, that what of course matters most in ceramics, in which fast, immediate development of essentials is a primary quality, is not the use of a new red or the discovery of a new glaze, but the expression of a creative urge and a clear translation of a personal emotion.

Once upon a time Edwin and Mary Scheier and this writer decided to write together something which turned out to be a hymn to the craft of pottery. The result may have been a *péché de jeunesse*. Yet I believe that these notes express well what we should feel in front of the two bowls shown here, and this may be the place to reproduce a few of them, without changes and without apology:

"Flexible, moldable, supremely plastic, clay is responsive to the slightest pressure of the fingers, the slightest touch of the potter's hand. It has the permanent quality of things found in the earth. The transmutations of the damp, ignoble material into successive shapes, each with its own individuality, its own completeness and beauty, are for him one of the great mysteries of creation, until, by elimination and concentration, he is finally able to give a spark of life to the thing he has created."

"To what Goethe called "the mood of the artist's mind at the time of creation," clay gives expression. It also translates into something concrete, definitive, the character of the craftsman, whether it is the placidity of the Sung potter or the often tragic sense of repression of the present day potter. Usually too abstract to reproduce a visual experience, clay sets down a mental impression, conveys the personal expression of an emotion which could not have been con-

veyed in any other way. The immediacy of the medium, its basically austere quality, are a warrant of the artist's sensitiveness and sincerity. Of all arts, except possibly drawing (but without the incompleteness of drawing), pottery alone has the spontaneity of the unconscious gesture, of the quickly forgotten flash of the mind. For us today, so rarely satisfied with the carefully conceived, deceptively finished work of art, handling a piece of pottery can become a sort of communion with the artist."

The final paragraph of the essay (which we called *Clay and the Potter*), is also important, I feel, since it is the credo of all original American craftsmen. I can do no better than reproduce it here:

"Working with such a primitive material, but without the support of folk traditions and living in a complex world, the American potter too often feels separated from real life. Two obvious possibilities are offered to him: he can escape into the precious, and for him abnormal, calm of the Chinese potter, without realizing that the attempts of the Tang or Sung craftsmen were for their time bold innovations, or he can try to relate the skill and sensibility he has acquired to the requirements and limitations of machine processes. But still another possibility exists. The American potter may add to the interpretation of the contemporary world by evolving new forms which, by their validity, will take their place along with those contributions of the other plastic arts that will be considered significant."

P.L.G.

¹ Acc. no. 50.25. H. 6½ in.; diam. 9½ inches. Gift of Mrs. John Owen, III, 1950; acc. no. 50.26. H. 6¼ in.; diam. 10½ inches. Gift of Mrs. Richard H. Webber, 1950.

A VIEW OF NORRISTOWN by WALTER STUEMPFIG

The contemporary American section of the Museum collection has been enriched recently by the gift of *View of Norristown* by Walter Stuempfig. Our painting is a typical example of the fine craftsmanship and study which Stuempfig combines with a deep emotional reaction to the subjects he paints, most frequently the landscape of his native Pennsylvania.

These finely detailed landscapes, built over a strong abstract pattern, suggest in color and composition the eighteenth century Venetian painters of city views. In *View of Norristown* the organization of space is achieved by a complex arrangement of buildings leading the eye deep into the painting. Using the near buildings and the figure of a youth as a point of reference for the observer, Stuempfig proceeds through a broad spatial view of the city. The organization of light and color is equally strong, built with a lower keyed palette, his tonal relationships are closely controlled, yet richly varied. These effects of color and light are carefully worked out in the studio from pencil and watercolor sketches. In this manner the artist reorganizes and refines, slowly building his mood with layers of color.

The thoughtful, rather lonely mood of Stuempfig's painting comes from the

combination of romantic reverie heightened by an almost over-real attention to details. One of his favorite themes is the lonely figure of a youth brought out in sharp focus against the soft tonal background. This contrast of man against the vastness of nature, or more often man alone against the overpowering vastness of a modern city, is a recurring, haunting note in Stuempfig's work. The half built edges of cities with their characteristic railroads, shacks, junk yards and debris are in great contrast to the polished style and elegance of paint texture, the contrast which gives reality to such a scene.

WILLIAM E. WOOLFENDEN

Cat. no. 993. Canvas. H., 33 inches; w., 39 inches. Acc. no. 50.24. Anonymous gift, 1950.



VIEW OF NORRISTOWN, by WALTER STUEMPFIG, AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY
Anonymous gift, 1950

A GROUP OF WORKS FROM THE EXHIBITION FOR MICHIGAN ARTISTS

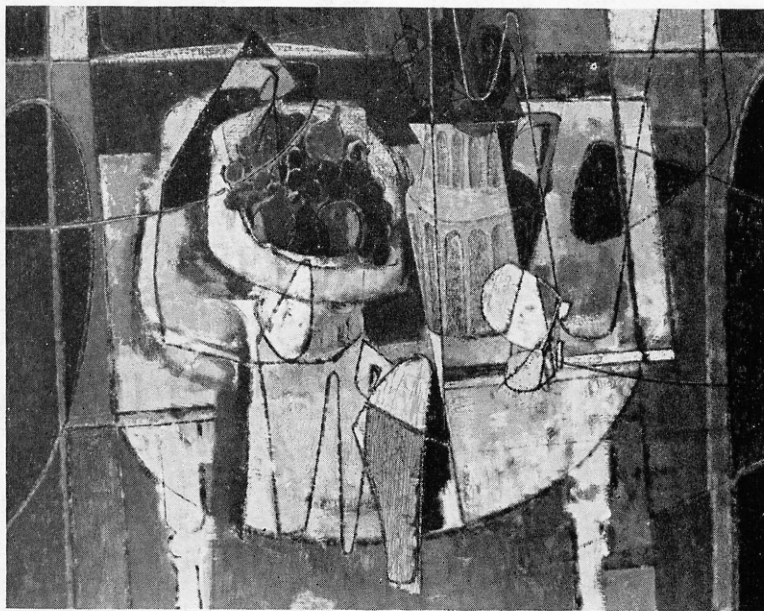
From the fortieth Annual Exhibition for Michigan Artists held from December 13, 1949 through January 15, 1950, the Institute has acquired a notable group of paintings, graphic works and sculpture.

Among these is Emil Weddige's sensitive and subtly tinted lithograph, *The Colosseum*. Mr. Weddige was awarded the Hal H. Smith Memorial Prize for this print. More abstract in style is Sarkis Sarkisian's gray, pink and green *Still Life with Grapes and Figs*, which was awarded the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society Prize and the Delia Imerman Meyers Memorial Prize. Guy Palazzola's *Allium Sativum*, which won the Museum Collection Purchase Prize, displays an accomplished technique in the sharply realistic depiction of a cluster of garlic cloves. The David B. Werbe Memorial Prize and the Scarab Club Prize were awarded to Benjamin Glicker's *Harlequin Musician*, the only large figure piece in the group.

Also acquired were Frederick Simper's water color *Breakfast*, through the Mrs. Owen R. Skelton Prize; Reynold Weidenaar's *Insurgentes Market* (Print Prize); Carl Hall's water color *Night Scene* (Purchase Prize); and Thomas F. McClure's sculpture *Cat's Cradle*, a gift of Henry T. Ewald.

This group of local works, which may be taken as a cross section of the type of work shown in the Exhibition, is important in terms of the national scene as well. It proves that artists in Michigan are producing sound and worthwhile art. Moreover, the pictures reflect a sporadically manifested but vigorously stated national trend toward a new realistic style.

A.S.C.



STILL LIFE WITH GRAPES AND FIGS by SARKIS SARKISIAN, AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY
Awarded the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society Prize and the Delia Imerman Meyers
Memorial Prize, 1949 Exhibition for Michigan Artists