

The last decade has seen a steady albeit modest growth in Brazil of initiatives in the field of children's art. Starting from Rio and São Paulo, these activities have already reached other cultural centers of the country and even the interior through the influence and financial support of museums, specialized organizations, private schools, and experimental government projects. These activities differ greatly as to values, techniques, and goals, making difficult here a treatment of the full scope of the movement. Nevertheless, the courses for youngsters held now for ten uninterrupted years by the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro under the firm orientation of Ivan Serpa and with the enthusiastic support of Niomar Moniz Sodré -- former director of the Museum -- can be taken as a model of other, still more less scattered initiatives. The methods employed in these courses, the values constantly defended and expressed, the quality of the work presented in course exhibits have all attracted the attention of Brazilians and foreigners seriously concerned with the development of creative children's art. The high level of achievement that distinguishes the Museum's experience is sustained by the coherent application and constant improvement of a method that seeks to satisfy the aspirations and canons of art and of education while remaining responsive to social needs.

An increasing number of boys and girls between three and fifteen years old are benefitting from the tranquil, constructive, yet vital atmosphere of the Museum "classes," a term perhaps inappropriate in a system where there is no instruction or teacher as these words are traditionally understood. Every week three groups of approximately twenty children work for about two hours in this understanding, joyful, and serious climate.

Dedicated primarily to the development of the individual characteristics of each child, the professor subtly seeks to center the attention of the child on what he is producing, stimulates in each child the total use of motor, psychic,

and intellectual capabilities, accelerating the processes of visual control and organization of perceptual experiences. With the greatest care he seeks also to orient the occasional disturbed expressions of emotion and conflict, preventing the child from becoming lost in his own work and from reducing art to a mere technique for the release of tensions, leading to the achievement of facile effects and superficial solutions.

What Ivan Serpa does, in other words, is to awaken the child to his external environment, enriching and diversifying the child's interior experiences through a method or discipline that is essentially artistic, that is, creative and not imposed, capable of developing fresh sensibility and contributing to intellectual growth. Consequently, the process demands a carefully structured setting, flexible enough to avoid any loss of the energy or constructive potential that each child brings along.

It is worth noting that these experiences are incorporated into the developing personality and endure in the most various forms in the subsequent phases of adolescence and adulthood. The satisfaction in work well done, the obtaining each day of a bit more from oneself, the gains in the capacity to observe and judge more accurately and coherently -- these values the child absorbs and internalizes permanently in the environment the course provides. Surely, none of this would be possible where the intention is simply to perfect manual skills, to provide recreation, or produce a passive acceptance of the individual to the norms and dictates of the professor. But the aim, as has been seen, is to maintain a unified spirit of action -- a spirit that can reach out to the parents and the schools, whose effects can extend out into the different spheres of action of the child, gaining significance and effectiveness in the shaping of the whole individual.

The introduction in these courses of textile design along with drawing, gouache, and painting in oils intends more than the enlargement of choices open

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to the child or the presentation of new technical problems. No doubt these are important considerations, but the chief innovation in textile painting is the fact that it gives the child an opportunity for a closer integration of his private and social experiences. By giving a sense of utility to his work, transforming it almost into a craft, the child relates his work more directly to the significant persons that people his social world, giving these persons a chance of greater participation in the interior life of the child.

We are dealing then with an activity that preserves the expressive potentialities of other plastic experiences while emphasizing the sense of reciprocity and the socializing of creative work for the growing individual.

The examination of the textiles exhibited, together with the observation of class activities, reveals some other significant aspects. The designs are painted directly with a brush on white or raw cotton or linen, with appropriate quick-drying paints almost exclusively in primary colors. The resulting techniques grow naturally from the individual efforts of each child, through a spontaneous process of successive contacts with the material and the new problems it presents. Most of the time the work is done on big tables along the length of the fabric, completed sections being allowed to fall to the floor while succeeding sections are painted. Alternatively, a full length of fabric is placed over a table or semi-fixed upon it while the child moves from one side to the other in executing his work. Whatever technique is used, the rich variation of elements that emerge without destroying the sequence or unity of the pattern seldom fails to surprise the viewer. Frequently, solutions such as bars, symmetries, and repetition of symbols can be seen. But the repetition that occurs in the designs goes beyond decoration and is far from automatic. Designing on fabrics gives the child an opportunity to repeat something he considers good and to test intensively his new discoveries.

Another advantages of this activity is that despite the children's continuous observation and use of textiles, the painting is not marked by traditional notions of

"right", "wrong", or "pretty", nor does it tend to identify with established models as occasionally occurs with drawing. The need for speed in the design and the impossibility of any kind of correction at once makes more difficult and enriches the experience. In general, one observes a sure adaptation of available materials to the intended uses of each design. Only in a few cases does one perceive a preoccupation with "closing" the drawing in the space of the fabric. Most of the time the child is caught unaware as he reaches the end, and takes pleasure in the completion of his task.

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