

Editorial

How far is painting an expression of personality? In this modern age when, despite the fall of Stalinism, personality is a cult that has its adherents in business, industry, education as well in the more obvious sectors of politics and entertainment, it is sure that in painting too it is a distinct ingredient that is plain to see if not in individual pieces at least in sequences of canvases. Picasso is the example *par excellence* yet his personality was never too patently apparent in the canvases that preceded his classic phase of the 1920s after his rejection of or tiring with analytical cubism. Artists when they are working in a common style or fashion are apt to have their identities submerged to the purpose that concerns them along with others. You can regard a group of early cubist painting by Picasso, Braque, Gris and Marcoussis and, devoid of hindsight, cannot determine easily who is the artist possessing the greater personality. Yet though Picasso has emerged in history as the performer with unlimited rôles in his repertoire it is in his individual paintings such as those of Dora Maar with eyes painted in profile and frontally that his personality becomes strongest.

Yet it is not always in the figurative idiom that personality is most dominant. Piet Mondrian's identity is capable of making itself felt even though his abstract design seems anonymous. It is not, of course, and it is interesting to determine why. Despite its apparent mathematical basis, the structure in a Mondrian painting has its very definite traces of a character that is definite and strong in its control of a large colour area bounded by black dividing lines that separate it from other areas of colour also carefully weighed in proportion and space. In its own manner the Mondrian is as forceful and dramatic as, say, one of the versions of the *Woman* paintings by Willem de Kooning.

Vincent van Gogh, viewed against the background of his short and belated creative period, is sometimes judged as a personality that had become enamoured of itself and violent excesses. Yet this view is entirely mistaken. Anyone who has read the letters of van Gogh must be conscious of the capacity of thought that lay behind every canvas painted by the Dutchman, some in several versions that betokened not a narcissistic urge to express his self-love in paint but an attempt to complete on canvas a work that would be conclusive of the ideas that motivated him. In the later paintings of St. Remy and Auvers, the signs of derangement are there and a frenzy in execution is explicit but this is scarcely to be construed as personality's handwriting. Artists who have been primarily concerned with methods of seeing and communicating their vision by specific means have usually been at pains to submerge their egos so that the overall scheme in its full working operation can produce its desired effect.

Personality can be seen even when individuality is lacking as, for example, when we compare Rubens with Jordaens. Though the latter's paint is sometimes indistinguishable from his master's there can be little doubt who was the author of *The Chapeau de Paille* in the National Gallery. Similarly, though the frequent discovery of so-called Rembrandts is a recognition of how like him superficially were some of his seventeenth-century Dutch contemporaries, the autographical quality in *A Woman bathing*, also in the National Gallery, is unmistakable. Frans Hals, by comparison, though he heightened the personalities of his sitters in a flamboyant and particular richness, as in the famous *Laughing Cavalier* in the Wallace Collection,

seems less of a person in depth than Rembrandt.

Personality in a painter, as is to be expected, has its dangers especially if it is one capable of deriving an influence from another and lacking the strength to establish its own power. Samuel Palmer, to be sure, in his 'Visionary years' in the Shoreham Valley had character beyond the ordinary, apparent in the shimmering little landscapes of wheatfields and woods in the pleasant Kentish landscape but he lacked the stamina to sustain the poetic mood on that idyllic level, unlike his mentor William Blake who carried through schemes of illustrations and texts for books that would have discouraged weaker men.

Coming to our own times, Augustus John was a painter who could almost always be expected to invoke the word 'bravura' in any discussion of his work and in the canvases that were capable of being finished fairly quickly there is no lack of specimens of both painterly prowess and a handwriting indicative of the Welsh artist's attractive and enlarging personality. But in the more ambitious projects, personality was not invariably capable of sustaining the energetic deployment of the characters throughout the composition. In sculpture, Epstein was a personality who impressed it in nearly everything he attempted even in the *Rock Drill*, that prophetic and dynamic sculpture in the Tate Gallery that marked the moment of real non-acceptance in his career. In the later portraits the mark of Epstein is ever present and in the greatest of his figures *The Madonna* on the wall of the convent in Cavendish Square, he himself could say that the hand of God was upon him when he made it.

Francis Bacon's paintings are the imprint of a personality as distinctive as a print from his thumb. The turbulent imagery is not descriptive of external observation but of an interior drama of which we receive the record. Bacon, in fact, is all personality with little of what is visual common ground with the rest of the world.

Personality is what distinguishes one person from another; it makes itself felt as much in paint as in conversation. It survives into a phase that is driving art into the dehumanised zone of electronic exercise; the mind and the character of the creative man is obscured by his inventions. Lacking them is to have lost a greatest communicable factor in art. Personality, as we can detect it, is valuable, warming and unifying. ■



2

Dzamonja of Yugoslavia works in nails and metal melted to congeal as a helmet skin. In ovals, torsos and armoured wood figures, his conceptions have the protective reticence of a hedgehog.

Gold medal for a foreign sculptor went to Marta Colvin of Chile for reasons impossible to divine without a tape recording of the jury's deliberations. Scale they had to be sure—massive ledged and stepped abstractions that at least bulked impressively.

Prints and drawings were a fascinating if smaller scale feature of many national pavilions especially Japan's where Masuo Ikada's sophisticated women had humour and pathos. Janez Bernik of Yugoslavia was the winner of the prize for the best foreign engraver.

As host country, Brazil occupied the ground floor and here in the paintings and prints one renewed acquaintance with most of the artists who exhibited in the Brazilian exhibition at the Royal College of Art in London earlier this year. Danilo di Prete whose cosmic landscapes were a feature in London won the gold medal as the best Brazilian painter. His is the informal abstract painting without a peculiarly personal style. Tomie Ohtake, Japanese born, creates the eye-filling impression from large areas of black and primary colours. Informal too but with textures of tactile interest. Yolanda Mohalyi, painting prize winner of the last



Bienal, showed abstractions in which her linear and paint motives move in equilibrium. Manabu Mabe and Frans Krajcberg, both outstanding in London, were equally impressive in their home territory. Absent were Antonio Bandeira who did not submit and Noemia Guerra, another Paris exile, whose excellent paintings were unaccepted. Hercules Barsotti, whose painting is reproduced on the cover, presents an optical derivation that is fixed rather than vibrating.

Sergio di Camargo, who also works part of the time in Paris, was the Brazilian sculpture gold medal winner with several subtly faceted white-painted wood reliefs such as were seen at his one-man exhibition at Signals, London. Other sculptors of some quality were Liuba, who in simple forms in bronze, models birds in massive

1
Sergio de Camargo, Brazil
Relief No. 24/55 1964
Wood painted white

2
Yolanda Mohalyi, Brazil
Painting 1965