

Provincetown Torn by Strife Of Art Schools

Academicians and Modernists Make 3-Mile Exhibit on Main Street and War Draws in Villagers

Harry Kemp on the Scene Sends Vivid Eyewitness Account of Battle of Colors and Interpretation

By HARRY KEMP

PROVINCETOWN, Mass., Aug. 6.—Provincetown, the birthplace of 'Gene O'Neil's genius, and of the original Provincetown Players, the habitat of a dozen art schools, this quaint Cape Cod town is seething with war, the result of which, at the present moment, is yet to be determined.

The colorful little fisher village of Provincetown is at war: Provincetown, at the very end and wave-wreathed snout of Cape Cod, battered at on three sides by the whole Atlantic Ocean, and pushed down to the very water's fringe by multitudinous, huge, tawny, camel-backed dunes—where fish nets are so plentiful that they are strung up for fences, and built around wooden frameworks to serve for chicken coops—this whole community is at war.

Frank Shay Gave Inspiration

It all began with a brilliant idea of Frank Shay's, anthropologist and director of the "Barnstormers."

"In Paris they have their outdoor exhibits of paintings, on the Boulevard Raspail, scarcely extending a block, and, on certain occasions, the top of Montmartre is splashed with bits of gorgeous canvas.

"But let us be true Americans and go Europe one better; show 'em something—go Europe and all the rest of the world one better!"

"Which is to do?" broke in Auerbach Levy.

"To line up a whole community," took up Shay again—"line up a whole community on the side of art. There's too much privacy about artists and their work; they keep too much to themselves, then they blame the public at large for not caring."

We were standing in front of the postoffice waiting for the distribution of the noon mail. It was on the eve of the town's celebration of its anniversary. Already the streets were brilliant with flaunting flags and wind-rippled gay bunting.

"To line up a whole community— but how?" put in a bystander.

"There are approximately 100 painters of pictures in this town. Look down along the beaches; you'll see groups of students painting away from outdoor models.

Miles of "Show Windows"

"There are also three miles of exhibition frontage on our main street, three miles of store windows, and windows of private houses, going to utter waste—as far as art is concerned.

"We could have a three-mile-long exhibit of art—extending the whole length of the town—the merchants"

"Do you think they would take to the idea?" asked Niles Spencer, who had just strolled up.

"I most certainly do," put in Charles Hawthorne, "if we'd only give them the chance—bring the suggestion to them."

arl nath joined the informal conference and thought it a good idea.

"Why," I observed, "here we have the two schools of art—both agreed! It certainly ought to go over.

"Auerbach Levy and Charles Hawthorne, academicians; Spencer and nath, most modern of the moderns."

But as I cast my mind back on that now historic foregathering, I remember now, by the glint in the eyes of Hawthorne and Spencer, fronting each other, that their agreement was but the handshake of two prizefighters in the center of the ring before hostilities begin.

Merchants' Voice Doubts

The merchants along the main street were flattered, though a few were dubious:

"Do you think it will be good for my business?" asked one, who, when assured it would, on receiving his quota of paintings kept his window-lights flaring all night, "so 's even the fishermen on the way to their boats before dawn could get a good look."

Soon even the dubious were brought to see the thing.

Commercial Street, frankly formerly rather dull and conventional-looking in keeping with its name, now suddenly blossomed forth as with 1,000 flowers: every window grew glorious with unwonted art; pictures beckoned and flamed to the eye; still life and nudes (that a few objected to); boats and nets depicted; sedate portraits—they jostled canned goods, hardware, all the merchandise needed of man, pushing them back into indignant, secondary place.

that had thriven, unbeknown, in its midst, these many years.

Before every window hung bee-like knots of fresh-blown critics—taciturn New Englanders were stirred into volubility who seldom gave a thought before but to crisp, hard-worded trade and barter; Portuguese fishermen, whose sole idea hitherto had been whether or not there would be a good run of mackerel, and the varying prices of the catch.

Now they all milled about in little groups, excitedly discussing the merits and demerits of this three-mile frontage that was for the first time given over to what painters put down on canvas with the chastely or wantonly wielded brush.

Local Color, Local Critics

"That sh there ain't quite right; never seen a ma'k'rel like that before; don't look at all like that when I heap 'em up in the boat from the nets."

"What I want to know is where that feller ever saw a cow that color!"

But another's work was praised as being in every respect faithful to the nature and character of the subject.

The works of most received hearty layman praise, almost gratitude, from the mouth and heart, for being hung where they could be seen of all.

I shall swing my muse into the historical present, on this, the far-flung dawn of Provincetown's first day of celebration.

A rumble of battle grows ominous in the air.

Academician and Modernist—they are rapidly and mutteringly swinging deploying into two opposing camps, with glint of palette instead of gun-muzzle; with shine of angry paint instead of forth-drawn sword.

Palette knives are already in evidence—here and there a clenched fist is raised—and a folded easel, make no mistake, heftily swung by brawny arms is, when wielded expertly, a most lethal weapon.

On the side of the Conservatives, Charles Hawthorne calls the roll. He finds unflinching partisanship in Auerbach Levy, Richard Miller, Woelffe, Beniker, Desch, Ferguson, Webster and a most of others, including students who answer the clarion from all states of the Union:

Niles Spencer anxiously but confidently looks along the ranks of the Moderns, Moffett, Kaeselov, Howland, Lindennuth, Knath, and a host of others, including a few students who have seceded from the ranks of their conservative leaders.

The town itself breaks in an almost strict line of cleavage distinctly racial.

Foreigners Join Modernists

The staid New-England citizen, with his front-yard garden still full of quaint old-fashioned flowers such as heart's ease and the bachelor button; with the figure-head of the whaling ship his grandfather sailed to far and barbarous seas now stuck over his door—post as a remembrance—invariably stands by the academician.

The Portuguese fisherman ranks with the modernist, perhaps because he sees in the helter-skelter spiles, underneath, that sustain the rambling, rowdy wharves, in the jumbled heap of raging, gasping colors of fish heaping iridescent from tumultuous nets, the truth of the modernist side!...

From the West End of Town—"from up-along" as the natives say—comes the glorying, sweet sound of advancing, belligerent guitars, grimly strung and tasseled with ribbons: The Portuguese and the moderns advance singing songs of romance, battlesongs from Lisbon and "The Islands."

Colorful words of Latin derivation sing high, replete with the orderly exuberance of indiscipline that can fight right handily when put to it.

Conservatives Advance to Fray

Orderly advance from The East—from "down-along," the more carefully ranged battalions under Hawthorne and Corporal Levy.

A boatswain's whistle is heard; the cry of a clear bugle rises like the challenging crow of a cock.

Conflict first is seriously joined by The Town Movie House. A bloody battle is fought before Adams's Drug Store. The huge plate glass window is in imminent danger of contributing an immense crystal shower of sudden, impartial glass on the combatants, who recognize their danger, to the relief of Mr. Adams, and veer over toward the post office.

The two fronts are now clashing before Patrick's News Store. There goes his popcorn stand with a splurge of white.

Up and down the entire main street the combat seethes—pigment flies like belligerent dawns striking against russet fringes of night.

Was that a sunset exploding—or a pot of many paints flung by Lindennuth at the head of Webster?

Relief!

Here come the seventeen state police, together with the four town officers and several hastily sworn deputies. The seventeen state police wear spick and span uniforms, rather natty ones, that I am afraid are about to assume the color of Joseph's coat, in the flying paint.

Ship's Guns Cover Town

Out in the sun-glorious bay exploding into glints of sunlight, out there rides the battleship Arkansas. I detect a glint of guns. Will they soon speak or not?

Will these men of war—and order—preserve order, or will they, in common with the townsmen, scenting the spilled paint, leap to the fray as at the smell of blood? Will they too take

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