

THE NEW AGE

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF POLITICS, LITERATURE, AND ART.

No. 1115] NEW SERIES. Vol. XIV. No. 12. THURSDAY, JAN. 22, 1914. [Registered at G.P.O. as a Newspaper.] **SIXPENCE.**

The New Age was published under the editorship of Alfred Richard Orage from 1907 to 1922 in London. Calling itself “a weekly review of politics, literature and art,” the journal printed articles on a dizzying array of topics – considering Fabian socialism alongside women’s suffrage, Nietzscheanism alongside Theosophism, and the essays of Ezra Pound alongside short stories by Katherine Mansfield.

When it came to criticism of the visual arts, Orage’s editorial policy was similarly inclusive. Featuring pieces that celebrated as well as critiqued Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Vorticism and Neo-Realism (to name only a few of the disparate and varied movements discussed), *The New Age* presented itself as a public forum for debate about the nature of modern art. For some of its critics, who saw “newness” in the kinds of abstract painting being developed on the continent, foreign objects were to be brought into the city’s gallery spaces and their styles and aesthetics were to be imitated by British artists; for others, contemporary London was to be represented as realistically and truthfully as possible, and the modernity of the city, translated into art, would remake it as “modern.”

This exhibition includes works printed in *The New Age* between 1910 and 1914. Closely following developments in the London art scene during these years, and exposing its readers to works currently being shown (and offered for sale) in local galleries, *The New Age* provided a crucial stage upon which the nature of the “modern” could be contested. In its pages, a reader could find the neo-realist drawings of Charles Ginner and Walter Sickert along with the experimental art of Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and David Bomberg. These works were reproduced within several weekly series, each of which can be understood as presenting a particular polemic in the debates between critics and artists.

The years between 1910 and 1914 were selected because of the unusual richness of the debate that occurred in the magazine at the time, but the period was also noteworthy for the circulation of European (especially French) paintings in England and for resulting developments in British art. We can see this in the public response to Manet and the Post-Impressionists, which opened late in 1910, and was considered by many critics to be the

first major show of modern art in London. Organized by Bloomsbury Group member Roger Fry, the exhibition featured works by more than two hundred continental artists, including Cézanne, Gauguin, Herbin, Manet and Picasso. This show provided most Londoners with their first opportunity to see continental avant-garde painting in person. Greeted with indignant outrage by some critics, and celebrated by others for enacting a radical break with Victorian convention, Fry’s show opened the floodgates of debate about the value of modern art in the London press in general – and in the pages of *The New Age* in particular.

The weekly magazine’s in-house art critic, Huntly Carter, offered an impassioned defense of the show, claiming it anticipated the aesthetic “principles of the future,” while disgruntled readers complained of the exhibit’s “vulgarity” and “decadence.” Other correspondents questioned the British public’s readiness for truly novel developments in painting, suggesting that such art was appropriate only for a Parisian audience because Paris was a kind of cultural capital that London could never be. It was this question – about the nature of “modern” art for a British viewing public, which *The New Age* would concern itself with in the years to come. In one view, a “modern” aesthetic should represent the contemporary city as accurately as possible, in accordance with the latest theories of perception.

This was the position of Walter Sickert, a regular contributor to *The New Age* in the period following the first Post-Impressionist show. The first series of drawings that the journal included during these years was comprised solely of his work. Begun in June of 1911, the series continued on a near-weekly basis until August of that same year; a second series ran from January to June of 1912. Interested in portraying everyday life in the bustling metropolis of modern London, Sickert was “modern” in his choice of subject matter. Intimately concerned with local detail and the patterns of line and color to be found inside the English household, Sickert sought to create a “modern” art appropriate to his climate and his city – one that was not based on the continental models to be found at the Post-Impressionist shows.

In November of 1911, Huntly Carter, the writer of a regular art column in *The New Age*, began editing a series of his own – designed to bring the magazine’s

readership a vastly different conception of the latest developments in modern art, one in which all innovation emanated from the continent. Featuring reproductions of paintings by Picasso, Herbin and Segonzac, as well as the Italian Futurist Russolo, this series presented various forms of abstraction, from Picasso's labyrinthian figurative style, to Herbin's mechanized geometricism, to Russolo's use of pattern and vivid color (impossible to reproduce in *The New Age's* black and white format), which attempts to present the frenetic energy of the modern city in an unmediated form. While Sickert called Picasso's art "an academic formula which is the salvation of all arrivistes without talent" (*NA* 14.18:569), Carter contended that his work "attains an abstraction which to [the artist] is the soul of the subject, though this subject be composed only of ordinary objects" (*NA* 10.4:88). For its advocates, abstract art offers a way of imagining an object world possessing as much interiority and complexity as the human subject, and offers to reproduce this complexity in a manner that is both timeless and beyond the bounds of convention.

The contrast between Carter's position and that of his neo-realist opponents intensified with *The New Age's* publication of two more series. In January 1914, *The New Age* celebrated the New Year by presenting a new selection of artworks, entitled "Modern Drawings" and edited by Walter Sickert. Featuring the works of a coterie of local artists, the series attempted to aestheticize the everyday – to transform the banal and local details of London life into high art. It featured works by Sickert himself, as well as a number of the artists who frequented the regular Saturday afternoon salon he conducted at his Fitzroy Street studio, and his art school pupils. Throughout his lifetime, Sickert held an abiding interest in the principles of art instruction, and the drawings of his students evidence the transmission of Sickert's own theories of art. Images in the "Modern Drawings" series tend to highlight details in the daily routines of working-class Londoners, and to present scenes of the London street life that Sickert so highly valued. They represent the efforts of a group of artists determined to define themselves as "new," even while eschewing the kinds of nonrepresentational abstraction practiced by the cubists and the futurists.

But Sickert's series could also be viewed as a polemic – one that was quickly answered by the philosopher and critic T. E. Hulme, who organized a competing series, called "Contemporary Drawings" that reproduced geometricist artworks, this time created by London artists. Although his series includes works by local painters, Hulme was critical of the narrow focus of the neo-realists, claiming that their attention to London life results in paintings that are "full of detail that is entirely accidental in character" (*NA* 14.21:661). Hulme's ideal is an art in which all detail is transcended, offering its viewer a sensory pleasure grounded in an imagined

universal human response to aesthetic experience. Deliberate construction and the use of models from primitive and African art result in the production of "monumental" art – one in which purely formal relations "might make up an understandable kind of music without the picture containing any representative element whatsoever" (*ibid.*). Gaudier-Brzeska's *The Dancer*, printed first in the series, was a study for a sculpture exhibited in the Grafton Galleries in January 1914, just as Sickert's *Enid Bagnold* made its appearance in the pages of the magazine. In its use of overlapping shapes to represent temporally discrete stages in the body's movement, the drawing employs a futurist vocabulary, but it also adopts a "primitive" style in its simplified forms and thickly aggressive use of line. While Sickert's drawing of Bagnold permitted its viewer a glimpse into the drawing room of a London artist, Gaudier-Brzeska's drawing invites its viewer to consider the primal and masculine energies at work in a "universal" way of imagining the human psyche.

Throughout the period when the "Modern" and "Contemporary" drawings were featured in the center folio of *The New Age*, each number also included a second piece of artwork: a cartoon drawn by J.J. de Roscizewski, published under the pseudonym of Tom Titt. In 1914, concurrent with the publication of images representing the two rival versions of British "modern" art, Titt's contributions took the form of sketches of London. Illustrating the specific setting where the debates about visual art were taking place, these cartoons also offered themselves as an alternative representational strategy, one that made everyday life in the modern city into the object of satire. While drawings like St. Paul's Churchyard, which is evocative of the futurists in its use of repeated patterns to capture movement, seem to be mocking the new abstract forms of art, others, especially Charing Cross Road, 11 p.m., more closely resemble Sickert's style, with its dark palette, use of emphatic, heavy line and focus on architectural detail. The vision of urban life that these drawings present is bewildering and often threatening, hinting perhaps, at the disturbances to come.

In April of 1914, *The New Age* abruptly ceased publishing drawings and cartoons; by August of that year, with the onset of hostilities in the First World War, debates about representational strategies and aesthetic values had become suddenly and completely irrelevant to most Londoners. During the brief period before the war, however, *The New Age* presented itself as an idealized version of the public sphere, offering space in its pages to artists and critics with widely varying beliefs and backgrounds. In so doing, *The New Age* became a place where a broad reading public could access works of high culture from Paris as well as Camden Town in the vital contest over how to represent London's modernity.

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