tradition, either dance at a spot near the village or form a dance procession through the streets. In some places costumes are worn or special uniform kimonos, while at others it is sufficient to tie a white cloth around one's head. Only Western clothes, as are now usually worn by men at their work, are regarded as unsuitable.

At the Bon dances, the atmosphere of Nature in summer is just as important as the dance itself. The dancers—often the whole village community—get into a kind of ecstasy, especially toward evening, an ecstasy arising from the rhythm of the dance and the all-penetrating presence of Nature. The dancer gradually forgets his own individuality and becomes a tiny part of his beloved Japanese countryside, with its fertile, familiar soil and its mysterious world of mountains, trees, and plants. In the hot summer nights, not only the living are present, but also the dead, who come for a visit during the days of the festival of the dead. In many places, lights and little fires are lit to show the spirits the way.

In Japanese dancing we can observe the same strange phenomenon as in all other spheres of Japanese life: side by side with progressing or newly added things there are always almost archaic remainders which have not progressed but yet have remained alive, sound, and significant. In all branches of cultural life there has, moreover, always been an essentially Japanese atmosphere which, in the course of time, has developed into the Japanese style. This Japanese style, however, has meanwhile soaked up so many other influences that Japanese culture, in spite of the uniformity of its essential atmosphere, presents a picture of overwhelming colorfulness and variety. This abundance of diverse themes and forms is to be found, perhaps more than anywhere else, in the sphere of Japanese dancing.

GERMANY'S CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

By MAX LOEHR

People usually know more about the art of the past than about that of contemporary times. The art of former ages has long been systematized and evaluated; it is taught in school, and certain generally accepted ideas exist regarding it. But contemporary art is still so close to us that we find it difficult to see it in its right proportions. Yet it has much to tell us about our own times.

Dr. Loehr studied art at German universities and is now Director of the Deutschland Institut in Peking. His article offers a small glimpse into a large topic. The examples were selected by him, not because of any outstanding value, but because they are typical and serve well as an introduction to the trends in modern art.—K.M.

MUNICH, the gay capital of Bavaria, has always been an important art center. Its famous Glaspalast (Crystal Palace) contained many an international exhibition of painting and sculpture—until, a few years ago, it fell victim to a devastating fire. But Munich was soon to be compensated for this loss: the German Government decided to present the town with a new, beautifully constructed exhibition hall, and on July 18, 1937, the first exhibition was opened in this "House of German Art." On the same day the doors of another exhibition were opened in Munich. This exhibition, entitled "Degenerate Art," had also been assembled by the Government and presented all those manifestations of painting and sculpture that no longer had any place in Germany. Here, perhaps for the first time in history, the State actively took a hand in this sphere of life. This event meant nothing less than that from then on the State exerted a decisive influence in all questions of art.

Let us outline in a few words the type of art that was branded here as degenerate. It included products of the
last three decades, especially of the period after the Great War. Of course, the convulsions of the Great War had somehow to find expression. If they had not become apparent at all in art, it would have only proved insincerity or indifference on the part of the artists. Decisive was the manner in which those artists expressed themselves. What is condemned in Germany today is not the compassionate attention paid to social misery, but the one-sided accentuating, even glorification, of all that flourished in misery, in paintings which are poor from the artistic point of view but rich in the invention of ignoble motifs. Condemned is also the tendentious treatment of themes directed against society, State, and the armed forces.

WHAT IS EXPRESSIONISM?

In the same exhibition certain other manifestations in German expressionism and its branches, which were formerly tolerated or even taken seriously, were now ruthlessly exposed in their unworthiness. Expressionism had completely overturned the customary ideas of painting of the nineteenth century, and for that reason there were many who did not understand it. The problems which it sought to solve had arisen in European painting subsequent to Cézanne and Van Gogh. They consisted chiefly of the following:

Reduction of perspective depth in favor of surface effects;

Emphasis on line, in contrast to impressionism’s alinear, disintegrating manner of painting;

New color combinations with symbolical and decorative meaning;

New subjects, in which can be recognized the desire to place the typical before the individual, the common before the accidental, the timeless before the momentary.

The real content of this strongly meditative art is its urge to grasp what is absolute. Consequently, more and more stress was placed on the invisible. The mental image of the world gradually shifted more and more from the visual to the thought structure, so that the final result was the loss of all that was concrete: a pure abstraction.

By this we do not mean to say anything against expressionism as such. However, these inclinations toward the abstract have facilitated the growth of a pseudoartistic production, since all former rules and laws seemed to have lost their validity in expressionism, which encouraged every dilettante to join in. As a result, a lot of worthless stuff was produced which, however, might have appeared to the unschooled or prejudiced eye as no less representative than real art. For the spectator required schooling to be able to judge here.

"If modern painting appeals only to a small, constantly narrowing circle of connoisseurs, this represents a turning away from the generally comprehensive subject," wrote Oswald Spengler. The exhibition "Degenerate Art" was, sociologically speaking, a revolt against this state of affairs. With it an important attempt was made to confirm to the layman his right to a generally comprehensible subject.

NEW TRENDS

There were also strong forces within modern art itself which revolted against plunging into abstraction, where painting started a desperate race with music, as Wilhelm Pinder put it. A desire for new simplicity, for undecorated truthness to the object, for the resurrection of plastic values began to make itself felt. New roads were entered upon more or less simultaneously in Germany, Italy, and France, for which new names were not long in coming: in Germany "Neue Sachlichkeit" (New Objectivity); in Italy "Valori Plastici" (Plastic Values) and later "Novecento Italiano" (Twentieth-century Italian Art); and in France "Réalisme magique" and "Surréalisme." All these trends, however, still contain some of that which they really set out to do away with, namely, an inclination for representing something unfathomable or even uncanny, something mechanistic or
primitive. In almost every painting of this kind there is something unreal that gives the spectator a feeling of dread or discomfort. It is to this that the Italian expression "pittura metafisica," metaphysical painting, refers.

In Italy the exponents of this trend, which is no longer regarded as representative, are allowed free rein and are even permitted to exhibit their works at the Quadriennale, the State exhibition in Rome, the more so as their influence is steadily decreasing. In Germany, however, this development is being, so to speak, accelerated by State intervention. This intervention consists in a selection being made. The decisive factor in this selection is the artistic level of the work. But the painting is also judged as to whether it is worthy of enduring as a document of present-day Germany. Thus the ever difficult question of judging and selecting paintings has now been placed on the same plane as that on which the basic standards of political life are valid. There can be no doubt that the renewal and clarification of values arising from the political sphere are not enough to produce new talents, but that a new balance between will and feeling on the one hand, and an appropriate formal expression on the other, has in most cases still to be found. Nevertheless, the beginnings are there, and in some cases even more.

Let us look at a few samples of what has appeared in the way of new painting during the last few years.

AN EXPONENT OF "NEW OBJECTIVITY"

First we have a work by Franz Lenk, Watering Can and Garbage Bucket, painted in 1927. This painting is a good example of what the exponents of "New Objectivity" wished to express. It is not a very impressive motif: a packing case, a tin bucket and watering can, a fence with barbed wire and, in the background, a ship. All in all a very ordinary, common combination which one might find any day in the corner of any back garden on the lower Elbe. From the purely formal aspect we notice the employment of simple geometrical shapes as a drastic means of order, and the stressing of verticals and horizontals parallel to the frame, varied by delicate displacements of the axes of the objects in the foreground. This gives their relative position a certain appearance of severity, of not being accidental.

On closer inspection we perceive that less obvious movements of lines are repeated, to balance each other and bring harmony into the coherence of the painting. Thus, for example, in the handle of the bucket and the branches in the flowerpot; in the piece of string hanging from the fence and—at right angles—the gangway of the ship; or in the ingenious way in which the up-and-down of the planks over the straight beam corresponds to the up-and-down of the outline of the ship over the pure horizontal of the waterline, which is emphasized in its horizontal character by the irregular shape of the barbed wire running above it. Even if one does not become conscious of such details of creative logic, they nevertheless have their effect upon the sensitive observer. They show that the picture has been executed according to a strictly planned structure.

The reason for the poverty and simplicity of the motif is to be found in the desire for form expressed by the composition. But are there not more pleasant, more meaningful objects? Why this almost offensive combination of lowly commonplaceness? It cannot be entirely explained. But there is at least one deep-seated reason for it: such things do exist. The painter takes the trouble to analyze them. He penetrates into a sphere hitherto without aesthetic attractions and is perhaps able to discover something worthy of being painted. Thus it gains a new, reconciling aspect. Something has been opened up which existed only as a thing without artistic value.

To this something else must be added: it requires more courage and greater ability to deal artistically with a subject that is not popular or beautiful in itself. All the art the painter unfolds in dealing
MODERN
GERMAN
PAINTINGS

"Landscape with Cows"
by
Georg Schrimpf

"Watering Can
and Garbage Bucket"
by
Franz Lenk

This painting is an example of
the "New Objectivity" trend in
the middle twenties.
with this objective minimum is art that he has developed himself.

And finally the painting contains its measure of true symbolism. It touches upon certain forms of life, which are contrasted here by the garbage heap inside the fence and the barbed wire and the ship outside. Thus, by undue accident, narrow confinement has met with utmost freedom and movement. Looking at it from this point of view, we soon realize that a perhaps much prettier subject, such as a garden with a ship gliding by, would be incomparably more banal and characterless, that thus the minus actually represents a plus.

**LANDSCAPES**

Next we have a painting by Georg Schrimpf: *Landscape with Cows*. Schrimpf, who died several years ago, belonged to the leading postexpressionists in Germany. This picture of his shows the most simple structure, with broad expanses, carefully drawn horizontals, and smooth, firmly modeled outlines. The scene looks as if it had been tidied up. In that respect it is related to the landscapes of the Classicist period of the early nineteenth century. The painting is filled with a profound tranquillity, entirely without pathos. However, it is not prosaic but rather breathes a mood of gentle sadness.

Paul Tilly’s *Reed Gatherer*, painted in 1938, expresses a somewhat similar mood. The picture is even more stripped and melancholy than the former one. The theme of “Man in Nature” has been reduced to a minimum. Simply presented, with impersonal restraint, it is yet genuine and has something to say. Just as in Schrimpf’s work, we find a rejection of all that is pompous in painting, of scintillating brushwork, and dazzling color combinations. In every respect, the painting is simple and sincere. Subjects of this kind, showing the life of peasants, in a serious manner, without the peasant appearing—as so often in the nineteenth century—as a comical or monumentalized figure, but seen soberly and humanly, play an important role in recent painting.

**NEW INSPIRATION**

Among the frequent subjects of painting are the realities of public life. An unexpected artistic yield is presented by works dealing with the theme of the giant road construction in Germany. One example is Theodor Protzen’s *Speedway Bridge in Württemberg*. It shows a construction site on the banks of a river in winter. The wooden scaffolding of the unfinished arches spans the valley in a mighty rhythm. In spite of the many carefully executed details, the formal emphasis is on the order created by the constructive coherence. The dreamlike tranquillity which the painting contains as a result of this order relates it to the much more idyllic subject of Schrimpf’s *Landscape with Cows*. In spite of the technical theme, the painting of the bridge is not unromantic. Here engineering does not violate or destroy Nature but unites with it organically, as if the valley wanted the bridge.

That which is common to almost all paintings of recent years is their formal simplicity and precision, the distinct apprehension of the subject matter. The clarity which most of the present-day painters demand from their work is an ideal that has by no means always existed. In the picturesque painting of Rembrandt and the Impressionists there is often no actual drawing to be seen; their clarity is provided solely by the elements of color and light and is therefore a very limited one. Today, line and clear modeling are again strongly emphasized. And this means nothing less than a resurrection of the plastic spirit.