

Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit

Vol. X

DECEMBER, 1928

No. 3



BRAHMA IMAGE
INDIA. X-XI CENTURY

A BRAHMA IMAGE OF THE X-XI CENTURY

A significant and most welcome addition to the department of Asiatic art is a large stone figure of Brahma, dating between the tenth and eleventh century, our first sizable and complete example of an Indian figure sculpture. It is one of four Brahma images from a temple in southern India, all except one, which is now in a private collection in New York, being in American museums.¹

The mid-Medieval period is one of prolific construction of both Buddhist and Brahmanical temples and the complete development of "schools" of architecture and sculpture, which for convenience have been divided in a very general way into northern and southern, to which latter our image can be assigned.

Brahma was worshipped both as one of a trinity in which Vishnu or Siva were regarded as supreme, and as a separate divinity, in which case he is regarded as the creator of the universe. In the former the sculptor represents the concept in a composite image, called "Trimurti", conveying thereby the idea of "the powers of evolution, continuance and involution".²

As creator, Brahma is represented alone but always with four heads and arms, a convention in Indian art symbolizing the multiple powers of deity, the heads in this especial instance representing his sovereignty over the four quarters of the earth. It was as early as the second century A. D. that deities came first to be represented with four arms, such representations coming down to us on the few coins of Kaniksa's reign (B. C. 74-120 A. D.),³ and a three-headed though unidentified small figure (Brahmanical of course), is known as of the Mathura school between the second and third century.⁴ Not much later the lower hands came by their gesture to be the standard

symbols for deities when showing protection or charity to their worshippers, though other gestures, but less often, were sometimes used in four-armed images; the upper hands were to carry attributes.

Our Brahma, whose posture strikes one forcibly as having majesty and poise, is seated in the position of "ease" (lalitasana) on a lotus pedestal, that is to say, one leg pendant, the other bent inwards, lying flat, the foot coming against the opposite thigh. The upper right hand is in the gesture of fearlessness (abhaya mudra) the fingers extended upward, the palm outward, the lower left, in the gesture of charity (varada mudra) with the palm outwards, the fingers directed downward, while the lower right and upper left hands hold respectively the attributes of a lotus bud and rosary. The lotus refers probably to the Brahma's legendary birth from the loins of "Prajapati" who was born of the waters, the rosary to his power to fulfill the petitions of his devotees. Yet notwithstanding the multiple arms, the figure is perfectly balanced, each limb correctly corresponding to balance the other, while the whole figure is constructed upon a vertical axis.

Except for the langoti at the waist (whose folds are beautifully modelled) an abbreviated form of dhoti, worn by ascetics, the figure is nude. On the other hand, as is typical in the portrayal of deities of major importance, they are represented as royalty, wearing many jewels, though in the case of Brahmin deities the torso is usually bare. A large band richly ornamented lies on the chest. Below this is a bead necklace with attached jewelled pendant; a jewelled belt girdles the waist, and the sacred thread (Yajnopavita), here composed of three jewelled strands, forming a chain and held together by an elaborate clasp at the chest, makes up the

1 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Albright Gallery, Buffalo.

2 Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts*, Part 2, p. 14 (Sculpture).

3 *Idem*, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Pl. XXX (illustrating early coinage).

4 *Ibid*, p. 66.

remaining jewelry on the torso. The sacred chain divides rather unusually below the clasp, adding simply a thread to the strands. A chain composed of several strands is characteristic of medieval stone sculpture and of most of the southern bronzes, later examples from the twelfth century on having as a rule merely a single cord, such as is worn by the three higher castes.¹

The head is crowned, in this case jeweled and combined with a four-pointed diadem (*usnisha bhusana*), with festoons of pearls. The hair is dressed high (*jata mukata*) in ascetic fashion, the wavy locks drawn up on the top of the head, the hair tied in a knot in the center with an elaborate ornament. Large circular earrings, though partly broken, are in the lobes of the ear, which are considerably extended, another type convention in Indian art to symbolize self mortification of deities and holy personages, weights being purposely put in the lobes to distend them.

Stylistically our figure belongs to the middle of the medieval period and to the southern school, the oval shaped face together with the prominent mouth and sharply defined features, as well as the modelling of the body being characteristic of this school and date. The dark granite stone is also typical of the southern school.

Esthetically, our Brahma has majesty, directness and loftiness of statement. One is aware that the period is completely developed artistically, that stone sculpture has reached its culmination. There is no longer any trace of the primitive, which though almost always possessing grandeur, nevertheless, through lack of knowledge of technique, has various crudities. Here we have refinement of surface modelling and outline: the refinement of a cultural period becoming dominant in the sculpture, so that, with mastery of his technique, he is able to completely formulate his emotional expression

in stone. The serene and contemplative facial expressions, with the mere suggestion of a blissful smile, bear out this point more clearly perhaps. It is interesting to note, however, that no two of the faces are even intended to be quite alike and furthermore that the head in its normal position is the only one completely finished. At least, the others are not so highly polished, nor have the details of the crown been as clearly defined; the fourth head at the back of the body as well as the entire back of the figure is left in a semi-rough state. The head, as will be readily seen in the print, was once severed, and the neck became consequently chipped and the features slightly damaged, but the joining is made in such a way as to present the image practically in its complete state, with little if any of its aesthetic appeal impaired.

Lastly, a word might be added concerning the Indian sculptor's means of approach to his subject, so totally different from our western method. The Indian artist was first a deeply religious person and was born to his profession of craftsmanship, following in the footsteps of his father and generations of ancestors before him. He worked directly from canons laid down in such texts as the *Sila Sastras*, in use some time late in the Gupta period (320-650 A.D.), canons prescribing the particular types of images and the method by which the craftsman should represent them, that is by "mental vision" induced by long meditation. Canons of proportion based on the "face" as the chief unit are given, varying with the deity to be represented.² Likenesses of men, though pleasing, were regarded as "unholy," and images, though in some instances without pleasing characteristics, were "auspicious."

No one has stated this method so well as Dr. Coomaraswamy, in his discussion of aesthetics in his catalogue of the Indian sculpture in the Boston museum: "The

¹ In this connection, compare southern Indian bronzes in the Boston Museum from the tenth to the seventeenth century. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of Indian Collections*, Pl. II, p. 35, 36.

² *Ibid.* Part I, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, p. 36.

essential part of art, the visualization (as also in the parallel case of audition) is thus a kind of yoga, and the artist is sometimes referred to as a Yogi: in many cases a special ritual, calculated to set aside the working of conscious will and to set free

the subjective powers is performed before the work is undertaken. Here truth is not a product of visual observation, but of movement understood and realized by the artist in the muscular tensions of his own body". —ALVAN C. EASTMAN.

A PORTRAIT BY FRANCIABIGIO

The proximity of the three mighty stars in the firmament of Florentine High Renaissance art, Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael (who was "Florentine" in so far as it was only in the Arno city that he became the sublime master of painting), naturally obscured the neighboring stars of lesser magnitude. They seem to be without any luminosity of their own, reflecting only the radiance which falls upon them from those greater and more brilliant stars. But they appear so to the superficial observer only. To the student it is unnecessary to point out that Fra Bartolommeo and Andrea del Sarto are anything but mere "followers," both being highly creative and decidedly original artistic personalities. When considering "influences," in the case of the Dominican monk it is almost more appropriate to speak of the influence which he exerted on the formation of Raphael's monumental style than vice versa; and in the mastery of the "pictoresque" problems proper (so important in the development of painting during the following centuries) it is Andrea who, with his extremely delicate coloring and the charm of his spirited brush technic, surpasses all other Florentine painters, including even the very greatest.

But even those stars of a still lesser order, painters such as Franciabigio, Bugiardini, Ridolfo Ghirlandajo and others, reveal distinct and even remarkable individualities, if one will study their works carefully. The fact alone that some of their paintings, such as the *Madonna del Pozzo* in the Uffizi in Florence, though

bearing Franciabigio's monogram and showing all of the characteristics of this master's art, or the so-called "Monaca" in the same gallery (now attributed to Bugiardini) were mistaken for centuries for works of Raphael, or in other instances of Leonardo, will indicate something of their high artistic quality.

Perhaps the best, and certainly the most original achievement of these artists is in portraiture. Lacking the creative imagination of real genius, so that in their monumental compositions they could but imitate and—vainly endeavoring to improve—deteriorate the standards set by their great predecessors, they nearly all possessed that cultivated taste and technical skill which suffice for the production of good and even exquisite likenesses. The most characteristic example of this type of artist is Angelo Bronzino, most of whose altarpieces and mythological compositions, made up of and excessively crowded with "Michelangesque" motives, are thoroughly unpleasant, while his splendid and exceedingly distinguished renderings of the Florentine courtiers belong to the best portraits of all times.

Franciabigio, one of whose portraits was recently added to our collection as the gift of Sir Joseph Duveen, is also at his best in the field of portrait painting, although his frescoes and altarpieces too show remarkable merit, so that the difference in quality between these two branches of his art is not nearly as striking as in the case of Bronzino.

Francesco di Christofano, called Franciabigio, was born in Florence in 1482. A



PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST
 FRANCIABIGIO
 (FRANCESCO DI CHRISTOFANO)
 FLORENCE. 1432-1525
 GIFT OF SIR JOSEPH DUVEEN

pupil of Mariotto Albertinelli, he was indirectly influenced by Leonardo and Raphael. Having no temperamental affinity with, he remained entirely outside of the artistic current which Michelangelo had set in motion. At an early age he met Andrea del Sarto, forming an acquaintance which grew into a close friendship and resulted in the establishment of a joint atelier. Franciabigio, being inferior

in talent and less outspoken as a personality than his comrade, naturally gained more artistic profit from this association than did Andrea, the style of his later years, in fact, showing much resemblance to that of the greater artist. It is particularly in two places in Florence that the two painters worked together—in the court of the church of SS. Annunciata and in the Chiostro dello Scalzo, Andrea

doing by far the greater part of the work. It seems indeed that it was he who originally received the commission, through his recommendation procuring a share of the work for his friend. Andrea's fresco cycles, picturing the life of Mary and of St. Filippo Benizzi in the Annunciata and that of St. John the Baptist in the Chiostrò dello Scalzo are world famous. But Franciabigio's few frescoes here may also be counted among his best productions, especially that noble composition in the Annunciata representing the *sposalizio*, the betrothal of Mary and Joseph, which unfortunately was partly destroyed by the artist himself, who, furious over the removal before his authorization of the screen covering the painting, seized a hammer and almost struck out the heads of the Virgin and some of the other figures. As neither entreaties nor threats could cause the artist to repair the damage, and as none of his fellow craftsmen would consent to restore the destroyed parts, the fresco remains in the court to this day as he left it.

Franciabigio died in 1525 as a young man of forty-two. The most famous of his devotional paintings done in oil is the above mentioned *Madonna del Pozzo* from the Uffizi in Florence. There are good portraits by him in the Berlin Museum

EXHIBITION OF FRENCH GOTHIC ART

One of the most important exhibitions ever assembled in America is the exhibition of French Gothic Art which opened at The Detroit Institute of Arts on November 16, continuing through December 6. In the two or three exhibitions of the art of this period which have been held in America previously (an exhibition of tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art during the past summer and an exhibition of French primitives at the Kleinberger Galleries in New York in 1927), only one phase of its art has been shown, while the Detroit exhibition includes not only important paintings and as

the Pitti in Florence, the National Gallery in London and in several other public and private collections. Franciabigio is not a genius, but a skillful craftsman of good taste who, placed in a golden era of art in the most favorable surroundings, was able to receive and cleverly use the stimulus and the formal suggestions the greater ones offered. His portraits alone will suffice to secure for him a lasting significance.

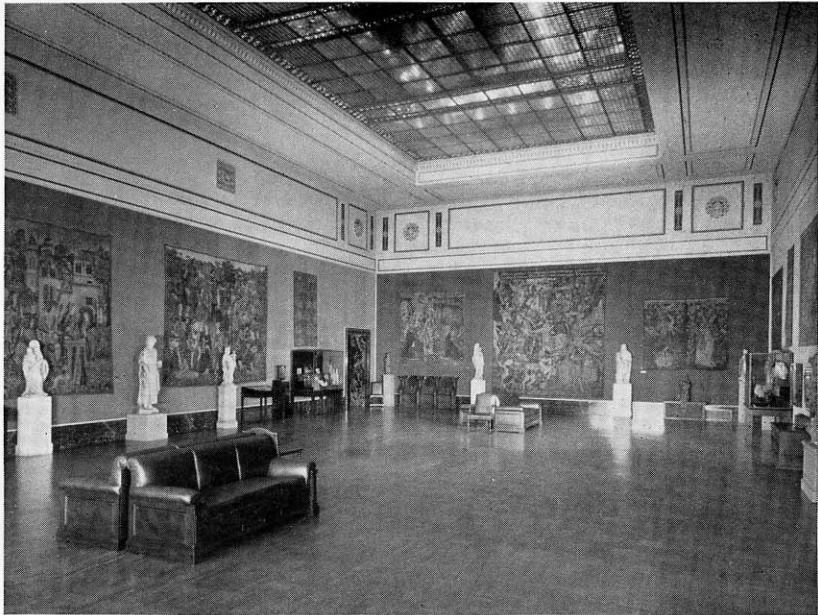
Our painting, unusual but quite effective in composition, because of the motive of the raised right arm has been regarded as a portrait of a painter who, working at his easel, is turning his head over his shoulder toward his subject. The idea seems not at all improbable, as the expression of tension in the face of the man, his general type, with his keen searching eyes, would support the theory that he was an artist. The painting is simple but convincing in color, the black of the costume and the pale face framed by chestnut brown hair set against a back ground of soft pearly gray, and is in a good state of preservation. It was originally in the Palazzo Panciatichi in Florence and comes to us from the Benson collection in London. The attribution to Franciabigio is generally accepted.¹

WALTER HEIL.

many tapestries as were shown in the Metropolitan exhibition, but sculpture, ivory carvings, enamels, orfèverie, and furniture as well.

The seventh in a series of important loan exhibitions of the work of past centuries inaugurated by the Institute in 1925, it is in many respects the most significant of them all, for French Gothic art—particularly painting—is very rare in America, and it has afforded students, art lovers and collectors an unusual opportunity to study at first hand this important and fascinating period.

¹ The painting has been published and illustrated by Lionel Cust in *Les Arts*, October, 1907, p. 23, and is mentioned in B. Berenson's *Florentine Painters*, London, 1908, p. 134, and in Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Painting in Italy*, Ed. T. Borenius, London, 1914, Vol. VI, p. 132.



VIEW OF GOTHIC EXHIBITION

The exhibition was made possible through the cooperation of private collectors of Detroit, Chicago, New York and Washington, and leading art dealers of New York; it also includes a few pieces from the Museums of New York, Cleveland and Chicago. It has been installed in the main exhibition gallery of the Institute, where the seventeen magnificent tapestries—an important exhibition in themselves—form a rich and glowing background for the paintings, sculpture, furniture and smaller objects.

The paintings are of especial interest to the student, both on account of their rarity and the uncertainty of their attributions, for, with no Ruskin to blazon their way, as had happened with the Italian Primitives, the study of French Primitives has practically only begun, for as short a time as thirty years ago they were almost unknown, the origin of French painting before that time having been placed in the early days of the sixteenth century, with the artists who had been

directly influenced by the imported Italians at the court of Francis I—Primaticcio, Bosso, etc. But with the exhibition of French Primitives held at Paris in 1904, the beginnings of French painting were carried back two centuries, and it became suddenly evident that there had existed important schools of painting at Paris, Avignon, Dijon, Aix, Douai and Valenciennes. The close connection with the art of Flanders, whose painters were so popular at the French and Burgundian courts, and the floating and indeterminate condition of political frontiers during this period, often makes it difficult to differentiate between the painters of the various schools, or to tell with certainty whether the artist was of French or Flemish birth. But it is this very uncertainty which adds zest to the study, and as it can usually be determined for what church, monastery or castle the picture was painted, it can at least be assigned to a definite locality.

The paintings in the exhibition, many of them by important masters who worked in the different centers mentioned, date from about 1370 to 1512. The earliest of them, and one of the earliest of existing French Primitives, a charming *Annunciation*, executed in the time of Charles V (1364-1380), is closely related to the *Parament de Narbonne* in the Louvre and shows the close connection which existed in the fourteenth century between panel painting and book illuminations, the latter of which are also well represented in the exhibition, so that it is easy to observe this connection.

Of a later date, the middle of the fifteenth century, are several excellent portraits, which show a much freer technic. A Portrait of a Gentleman by an unknown Flemish-French master, from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Sachs of New York, has particular vigor and animation. The strong Flemish influence apparent suggests a painter at the Burgundian court who both in conception and execution was closely related to the great Jean Fouquet.

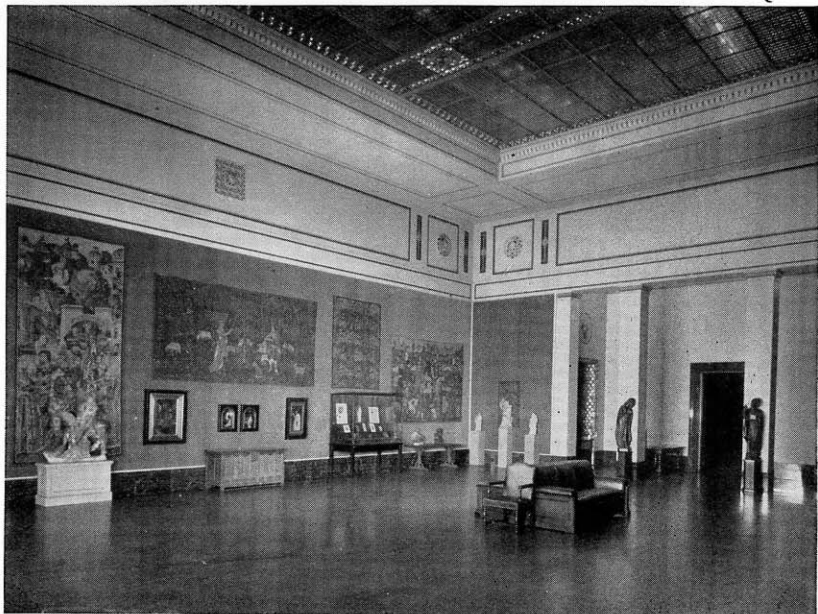
Another striking full-length portrait, which once formed the right wing of an altarpiece painted for one of the Clunisian monasteries, is the St. Robertus of Molesmes, at one time chief abbot of that monastery. It belongs to the school of Provence and can be dated about 1440.

The exhibition includes three splendid paintings—an *Annunciation*, a *Portrait of a Knight of the Golden Fleece*, and a *Portrait of Denise Fournier*—by the Maitre de Moulins, an unknown artist active in the valley of the Loire in the latter part of the fifteenth century. He is perhaps the most important artist at the end of the century in the center of France and combines in his charming and forceful compositions the style of Jean Fouquet and the decided Flemish influence found in such French masters as Jean Bourdichon, the court painter of Louis XI, Charles VIII and Louis XII.

There are several other fifteenth-century portraits and figure compositions by unknown masters of the schools of Provence, Paris and Amiens, all showing those qualities of artistic restraint and charm which we always associate with the French genius, at this period seasoned with the vigorous realism and love of detail which the close proximity of Flanders made inevitable.

In the paintings by Simon Marmion, called the "Prince of Colorists", and Jean Bellegambe of Douai, both represented by characteristic works, the influence of the master of Bruges and Antwerp is particularly apparent, though their French milieu gives an unmistakable French flavour to their charming compositions.

French sculpture, with architecture the leading art in Gothic times and created not as an end in itself but as architectural embellishment, shows in the pieces in the exhibition this close relation to and dependence upon its architectural background, particularly in such pieces as the *Mourning Virgin* and the *St. John* which once formed part of a Crucifixion group and which still seem to be parts of columns, or in the lovely Madonna statues from Gothic churches in the Ile de France and Burgundy. Of idealized beauty and dignity of bearing is a life-sized figure of St. John the Evangelist from the Hospice de Salin, Jura, lent by Mr. Dikran G. Kelekian of New York, and an impressive head of Christ from the Church of St. Jacques in Paris. The art student will be greatly interested in the small but monumental figure of St. John the Baptist from the workshop of and possibly by the hand of the great Claus Sluter, who had so strong an influence upon French sculpture in the fourteenth century, working at Dijon, the capital of Burgundy, and showing in his art the first premonitions of the realistic tendencies of the coming new era of the Renaissance.



VIEW OF GOTHIC EXHIBITION

The fascinating art of ivory carving—sculpture *en miniature*—is shown to excellent advantage in the exhibition, ranging from the exquisite pieces made in the second half of the thirteenth century, to late fifteenth century diptychs and triptychs.

The art of tapestry weaving, practised with such marvelous proficiency by the French and Burgundian weavers of this period, first at Arras, then at Tournay and Brussels, and finally after the close of the Hundred Years War, which had practically put an end to this splendid craft, at Tours, is shown in seventeen splendid examples. Nearly all of the different subjects which the weavers of this period chose for their themes: scenes from the Old and New Testament, the legends of the Saints, the fashionable romances of the day, wild men and women, pastoral scenes, scenes from court life, etc., as well

as the later *a fleurette* and *mille fleurs* pieces from the end of the fifteenth century, will be found. Of special beauty are two tapestries lent by the P. W. French Company of New York depicting scenes from the Trojan War. They are supposed to have come from the workshop of Pasquier Grenier and are part of a large series based on Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. Another lovely piece is a mille fleurs with shepherd scene woven about 1500 from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford of Detroit. It hangs directly over the diptych by Jean Bellegambe, which has as a background on the right wing a very similar mille fleurs tapestry. Since the painting was done for the Cistercian monastery at Flines near Arras, and as Bellegambe worked for the Cathedral of Arras, it is quite likely that he would have used a tapestry made in this locality, which



MADONNA AND CHILD
BURGUNDIAN, EARLY XV CENTURY

would indicate that mille fleurs tapestries were already woven at Arras and not only at Tournai or in Touraine as is generally believed.

The small fragment lent by Seidlitz and Van Baarn of New York once formed part of the famous Angers Apocalypse tapestry, the oldest French tapestry preserved, having been woven about 1380 for a brother of Charles V.

The art of the goldsmith and enamer, both practised with such marvelous perfection during the Gothic period, are also represented in the exhibition. Among the enamels, both the earlier *champlevé* and the later painted technic are included, and these, together with the splendid pieces of *orfèverrie*—reliquaries, croziers, necklaces, crowns, and tiny statuettes—speak glowingly of the golden days when



CHRIST ENTHRONED
 ILE DE FRANCE, XIV CENTURY

a craftsman was also an artist of high rank and when loving care and devotion and days and weeks of patient labor went into the making of objects which to-day are turned out by scores of hundreds by the soulless machines of our boasted era of speed and efficiency. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this perfection of handicraft is the marvelous little clock in the form of a miniature Gothic chapel, made for that fastidious ruler, Philip the Good of Burgundy, in the early days of the fifteenth century, thus making it one

of the very oldest if not the oldest spring-wound clock in existence. The beauty of its design and execution, the exquisite modelling of the tiny delicate figures in the niches, the realistic couchant lions at the base, the finely wrought coats of arms of the House of Burgundy, faultlessly embellished with richly colored enamels, give an indescribable charm and fascination to this piece of handiwork made in an epoch of artistic accomplishment which stands at the pinnacle of the art cycle of the Western world. —JOSEPHINE WALTHER

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES AND MUSICAL PROGRAMS

Auditorium—8:00 o'clock. Free

December 4. Organ recital by Palmer Christian of Ann Arbor. Lecture, "Modern American Painting" by Bruce M. Donaldson, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, University of Michigan.

December 11. At 8:15. Lecture, "David and the French Revolution", by Dr. W. R. Valentiner, Art Director, The Detroit Institute of Arts.

December 18. Organ recital by Dr. Alle D. Zuidema. Lecture, "The Most Fastidious Courts of Europe: (1) Burgundy, by Adèle Coulin Weibel, Curator of Textiles, The Detroit Institute of Arts.

WEDNESDAY MORNING LECTURES

On the appreciation of important objects in the Museum collections, and their historical backgrounds. Free to members of the Founders Society; a fee of fifty cents will be charged non-members.

Lecture Hall—11:00 A. M.

December 5. Two French Artists Satirize Their Times: Daumier and Gavarni, by Isabel Weadock, Curator of Prints.

December 12. A People of Exquisite Refinement: The Korin Screen, by Benjamin March, Curator of Asiatic Art.

December 19. Christmas in Art, by Adèle C. Weibel, Curator of Textiles.

SATURDAY MORNING PHOTOPLAYS AND STORIES

Auditorium—10:45

December 1. Peter Stuyvesant.

December 8. The Gateway to the West.

December 15. Wolfe and Montcalm.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Beginning December 2 and continuing each Sunday during the winter, gallery tours will be conducted by a Museum Instructor. They will start from the Information Desk at 3:30.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Tours of Special Galleries with a Museum Instructor at 2:30.

December 4. 18th century English and French (Galleries 2 and 3).

December 11. Primitive American and Colonial Wing—(Galleries 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30).

December 18. 19th century European and American Painting—1, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35.

EXHIBITIONS

November 16. December 6—French Gothic Decorative Arts.

December 10-30. Thumb Tack Club of Detroit Architectural Exhibition.