

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



THE NATIVITY
WINDOW BY GUGLIELMO DE MARCILLAT
PAINTED IN 1517 FOR THE CATHEDRAL OF CORTONA
GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

A STAINED GLASS WINDOW OF THE NATIVITY BY GUGLIELMO DE MARCILLAT

Few artists of the High Renaissance were unaffected by the activity of Raphael and Michelangelo at Rome. The streams of influence issuing from what was then the artistic capital of the continent flowed through the countries of Europe, leaving their unmistakable mark upon all artistic endeavor. But Rome, in addition to being a fountainhead of artistic style, was a point of gravity as well. Attracted by the prestige of the Roman school, and the munificent bounty of her secular and ecclesiastical princes, it was not only Italian artists who flocked to enjoy the high noon of the Renaissance where the sun shone brightest, but artists from everywhere.

Among those who arrived about the year 1508 through the good offices of Bramante was Guglielmo de Marcillat,¹ a French glass-painter of repute who had sought the habit of a Dominican friar to escape punishment for a crime in which he was only circumstantially implicated. His friend and fellow countryman who was directly responsible for his coming to Rome was also a glass-painter, a certain Maestro Claudio. An artistic partnership was formed, and together they executed for Pope Julius II their first assignment, a pair of windows for the Vatican in an enframing by Bramante. The work of the Frenchmen was received with enthusiasm, and in consequence they were awarded numerous important and lucrative commissions. Among these is a pair of windows designed with scenes from the life of the Virgin in Sta. Maria del Popolo, which marked the pinnacle of their achievement together and brought them, as Vasari says, "fame and renown and the comforts of life";

but it also saw the end of their artistic partnership. For, to rely again on our biographer: "Maestro Claudio was very intemperate in eating and drinking, a common failing among his countrymen, and falling sick of a severe fever . . . he died in six days."

This early termination of the partnership was in fact a blessing in disguise for Guglielmo; for although he was for some time without work, his enforced self-reliance served to strengthen his style and develop his sense of design, with the result that he eventually emerged as one of the most distinguished masters of his art. At length his work attracted the eye of Cardinal Passerini of Cortona, who in 1515 induced the artist to accompany him to the city of his benefice to carry out various works at his order. Among his windows in Cortona, Vasari mentions two in the principal chapel of the Cathedral: one a Nativity, the other an Adoration of the Magi. The latter is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; the former² has recently found its way into the collection of the Institute as the gift of the Founders Society, and is now installed with special lights behind it in one of the windows of the Romanesque Hall. We know that as early as 1874 the windows had been removed from the Cathedral and were owned by a Signor Corazzo of Cortona³. Ours was lately in the collection of Richard Mortimer of Tuxedo Park, New York.

Another remarkable source has been discovered that gives us an almost daily account of the artist's activity. It was Guglielmo's habit during most of his years in Italy to keep a journal, the pages of which

1. He called himself after Marcillat, near his birthplace at LeChatre in Berry. He is often erroneously known as "William of Marcellus".

The year of his birth is uncertain, but he died April 13, 1529, having been active for twenty years not only in Cortona and Rome, but also in Arezzo, where he had been Vasari's first master.

tell us that this particular commission was given to him on the tenth of February, 1517. Thus the new acquisition has not only the uncommon distinction of being twice documented, but also of having a precise date.

In the Nativity we discover Guglielmo in the happiest moment of his artistic development. It follows the Roman period in which the artist was dominated by the older personality of Claudio, and it anticipates a time when another influence was to rest less gracefully upon his shoulders. He has become the master of a figure style not without its affinity to the forms of Raphael, and he has likewise been able, in the less subtle medium of stained glass, to recapture something of the lovely sentiment of that master. The triangular space composition in three dimensions with the Child effectively placed in the midst of it also shows us that he was keenly observant of the new trend in Rome. And Guglielmo's intimate association with Bramante left an indelible stamp upon his designs; it must account for the ever present setting of strongly classical Bramantesque architecture, of which there is a hint in the pure Tuscan columns of our example. From these remarks it would appear that Fra Guglielmo had become more Roman than the Romans. But happily his French origin is not entirely suppressed by the art of his adopted country. Guglielmo has remembered the tradition of French panel painting in his drawing of the expressive and carefully executed bearded face of Joseph. Likewise the fine detailed painting of the Saint's hands is a northern trait, as is the plump form of the Christ Child.

The window represents the complete realization of the pictorial in stained glass design. In the Middle Ages colored windows had been a



WINDOW BY MARCELLAT IN THE
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

mosaic of small gem-like pieces of glass composed in flat two-dimensional patterns and producing a hieratic and devotional effect. With the work of Guglielmo, the art has entirely given way to pictorial illusion under the influence of panel and fresco painting; the figures are realistically drawn, the composition is conceived in space, and human sentiment replaces the sacerdotal. But color which had ever been the chief glory of stained glass is in no measure lacking in Guglielmo's window. The main figures are painted in glowing crimson and deep blue, and further accented with golden yellow haloes, while more subdued harmonies of color are given to the angels, the stable animals and the architectural background with its glimpses of landscape and sky.

PERRY T. RATHBONE

2. Height 8 ft. 11 inches; width 5 ft. 3 inches.

3. Vasari's *Lives*, translated by Mrs. Jonathan Foster: Vol. III, p. 68.

A PORTRAIT OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

The *Portrait of C. Edwards Lester* by Charles Loring Elliott, loaned by Mr. Charles P. Larned of Detroit, is not only an excellent example of the romantic period of American painting, but represents an interesting figure in the history and criticism of American art. Lester was the author of *Artists of America, A Series of Biographical Sketches* (New York, 1846) which is, to my knowledge, the second history of American art. The first was, of course, Dunlap's entertaining and invaluable *History of the Rise and Progress of the Art of Design in the United States*, published in 1834, which is the source of most of what we know of the artists of the colonial period and the early Republic. The next study after Lester's was the well known *Book of the Artists* by Henry T. Tuckerman (1867) which gives the biographies of the Hudson River painters and their contemporaries.

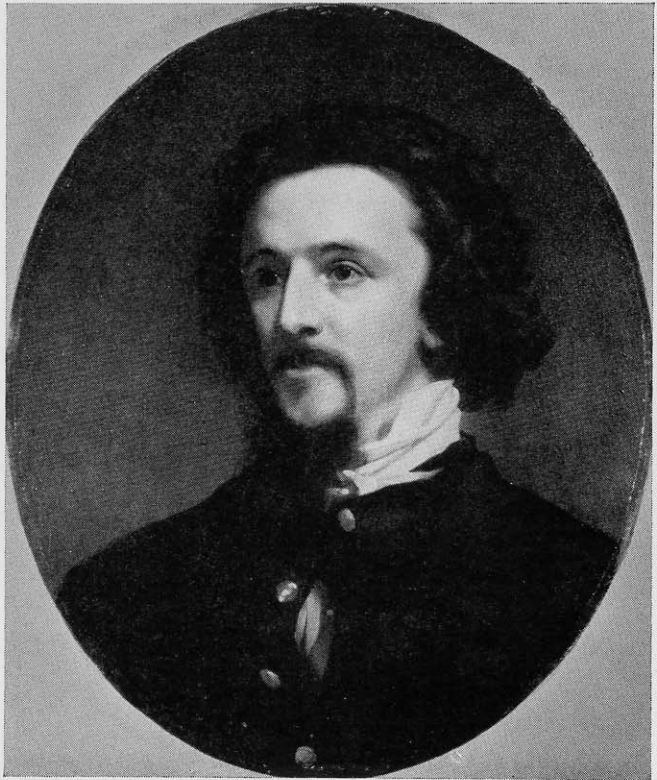
Lester's book is now exceedingly rare and it may be of interest to describe it, for it throws some light upon how American art appeared a century ago. The author had published in the preceding year a somewhat controversial volume, *The Artist, Merchant and Statesman*. In the preface to his *Artists of America* he abjures controversy. "Confining myself strictly to the object of this work . . . I shall endeavor only to make our Artists and their work better known to their own countrymen. No alarm need be felt by them; for I shall not consider it my business to deal with living men without their consent, however current the old adage may be that public men are public property." The artists whom he described are Allston, Inman, West, Stuart, Trumbull, De Veaux (a South Carolina portrait painter who died young), Rembrandt Peale, and the sculptor Craw-

ford. It is a kindly book, eulogistic in a rather romantic style, and animated by an ardent desire to create an understanding and patronage for American artists. But the older figures included in it are still better treated by Dunlap, while the few contemporaries are also included in Tuckerman's more comprehensive book, so that Lester's volume has dropped out of notice.

Yet the author was a figure of some interest in the great literary activity of his time. The 1840's saw the beginning of a remarkable period of American historical and critical study after the long and rather barren pause in our intellectual life that followed the close of the eighteenth century. While Bancroft, Prescott and Motley were working on a great scale, there were a great number of other historical studies being written; and Longfellow's translations and studies of European literature are the most famous examples of a great effort made in these same years to widen the horizon of American taste. Lester as an author, periodical writer and editor of various magazines and journals, had an honorable part in all this.

He visited England in 1840 and wrote two books on his observations; but his most fruitful experience was a stay as American consul at Genoa, from 1841 to 1848. His life in Italy, which he described in a still very readable travel book, *My Consulship*, resulted in his taking a great interest in the young American sculptors who were living there. He wrote *The Artist, Merchant and Statesman* largely to create an interest in Hiram Powers. But while in Italy he translated Alfieri's *Autobiography*, Massino d'Azeglio's *Challenge of Barletta*, Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* and Cebaz' *Citizen of a Republic* (all pub-

lished in the '40's), and prepared a history of the *Napoleon Dynasty* which came out in 1852. Prescott and Bancroft had created a great interest in the early explorers of America, which led Lester to write the *Life and Voyages of Americus Vesputius* (1846). He also wrote a life of *Sam Houston* of Texas, a life of *Sumner*, and three studies in American history of which the most ambitious was the *History of the United States* (1883). The Detroit Public Library lists fourteen of his titles.



PORTRAIT OF C. EDWARDS LESTER, BY CHARLES LORING ELLIOTT.
LOANED BY CHARLES F. LARNED

Elliott's portrait shows him in the blue coat

with brass buttons, which was the official uniform of the Consular Service during Lester's time. It must have been done during his brief visit home in 1845 or shortly after his return to New York in 1848. It is a good example of Elliott, whom Isham very fairly compares with Winterhalter as one of the best of the nineteenth century romantic portrait painters. But there is this difference, that Elliott was most successful in portraying men. He liked to do men of action, handsome, ruddy faced, energetic, with the Byronic touch of sentiment and enthusiasm which was the ideal of the day. He had modeled himself upon Gilbert

Stuart's style and, in a period of great weakness in American figure painting, was a consistently able and pleasant painter.

Elliott was born in Scipio, New York, in 1812. In early life he was a clerk in a store in Syracuse, but in his leisure time struggled to prepare himself as a painter. It was at this time that a portrait by Stuart fell into his hands, which was to be his real teacher; and it may be said that no one of that generation continued Stuart's fine painterlike style so well as Elliott. About 1834 he came to New York with a letter to Trumbull. The old painter, who had had his full share of the disappointments which were

the rule of life for American artists at this time, advised the boy to become an architect for the sake of greater returns in this profession. Although Trumbull gave the young painter an opportunity to study, his discouraging advice eventually caused Elliott to break away and study with an obscure painter named Quidor. After two or three years he produced a couple of pictures good enough to exhibit in a shop window. One day shortly after, to quote Isham "there appeared at his studio Colonel Trumbull, whom he had not seen since he left the Academy, and who, removing his hat with old-time dignity, solemnly said: 'You can go on painting, sir. You need not follow architecture. I wish you good day, sir,' and so departed, and Elliott never saw him again."

The lack of understanding and appreciation which embittered Trumbull's life and the lives of his gener-

ation of artists was a tremendous obstacle in the way of the development of the arts in the United States. Lester's importance is as a man who, in his own day, made a real contribution to American culture by his efforts to make the artists' contribution to society better known and valued. One of the most pleasant traits in the men of this period is their modesty. No generation has ever worked harder to add something to American culture, nor been more modest in its own pretensions. But very typical of Lester's spirit, and perhaps the best comment on his work is in the sentences, which I find very touching, written in the cover of the copy of his *Artists of America* which he gave to his daughter: "My dear Ellen—you love art, and in this volume I have spoken of the patriarchs of art in our own country. I deal with the sunrise. May you live to see its noonday".

E. P. RICHARDSON

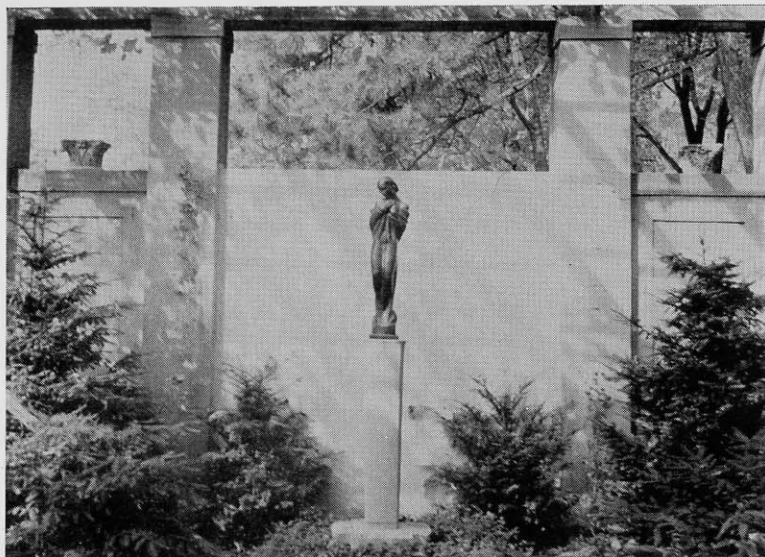
KOLBE'S ADAGIO AT ALGER HOUSE

During the summer a small bronze by Georg Kolbe, the gift of the Garden Club of Michigan in memory of Esther Longyear Murphy, was set up in the grounds at Alger House. Because Kolbe's draped female figure, called *Adagio*, is quiet and restrained, and is rich in spiritual content without sentimentality, it makes a unique memorial, remarkable for its beauty and appropriateness.

Kolbe (German, born 1877) modelled the figure in 1923 when Germany, disillusioned and bewildered, was struggling against the flood of economic and social evils that deluged the country in the wake of the World War. Not infrequently in times of stress have artists sought refuge in themselves by expressing an ideal. Of peaceable

and sensitive nature, this was Kolbe's retreat in a world that seemed to be collapsing about him. Thus he stands in sharp contrast to certain of his artist contemporaries who, deeply outraged towards a society that had perpetrated the Great War, expressed their bitterness with a truculent satire unmatched in its intense hideousness. Kolbe, on the other hand, looked in upon himself for inspiration. Externalized in the measured grace of the *Adagio*, in the loveliness of its quiet pose and gesture, the sculptor expresses his ideal of harmony, tranquility and spiritual beauty.

In order to keep the imaginary ideal of the *Adagio* remote enough



ADAGIO, BRONZE BY GEORGE KOLBE
 GIFT OF THE GARDEN CLUB OF MICHIGAN
 IN MEMORY OF ESTHER LONGYEAR MURPHY
 ALGER HOUSE GARDEN

from reality to express a thought rather than a fact, Kolbe has avoided the realistic, and has consciously cast his figure in an abstract mold. Though the figure is patently one of a young girl closely wrapt in heavy drapery, so strong is the abstract element that we cannot associate the figure with anything but a thought experience. She is the personification of a mood, the mood of introspective contemplation.

It is fitting in this connection to mention another Kolbe in the possession of the Institute, the life-size *Assunta* of 1921. Like the *Adagio* this figure comes from the years immediately succeeding the war and bears the same abstract, idealizing traits which lend it a similar sublimity. And as the *Adagio* takes a fitting place as a memorial to an individual, the *Assunta* in its more impersonal and monumental charac-

ter seems a memorial to the spirit of a people tried by cruel disaster.

Kolbe has given the *Adagio* a green-gold patina which harmonizes with the warm tones of the stone pedestal and ashlar background made of Mankato Limestone which is inscribed with Mrs. Murphy's name and a quotation from Bryant. The pedestal was designed by Ero Saarinen of Cranbrook.

Very great credit is due Mrs. Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., who was in charge of installing the sculpture in the arbor of the Alger House garden. Mrs. Ferry has surrounded the memorial with a rich planting of various evergreens and ground cover which not only complements the tranquil dignity of the sculpture but adds further significance to the memorial because of Mrs. Murphy's long devotion to horticulture.

PERRY T. RATHBONE

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER

EXHIBITIONS

- Annual Exhibition for Michigan Artists—until December 19.
 Fifty Lithographs by Honoré Daumier from the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Philadelphia—December 15th—January 15th.
 Art of The African Kingdom of Benin (Alger House)—December.

EVENTS

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| Wednesday | 1 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: <i>American Art Before Columbus</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Thursday | 2 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Friday | 3 | 7:00 | Department of Recreation drawing class. |
| Saturday | 4 | 10:15 | Motion Picture for Schools: <i>Declaration of Independence</i> . |
| Sunday | 5 | 2:15 | Radio Talk (Station CBW): <i>Byzantium and the Triumph of Christian Art</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Tuesday | 7 | 8:30 | Lecture, (A Survey of Textiles): <i>Textiles of the Renaissance and Baroque</i> , Mrs. Weibel. |
| Wednesday | 8 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: <i>Byzantium and the Triumph of Christian Art</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Thursday | 9 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Friday | 10 | 7:00 | Department of Recreation drawing class. |
| Saturday | 11 | 10:15 | Motion Picture for Schools: <i>Yorktown</i> . |
| Sunday | 12 | 2:15 | Radio Talk: <i>Gothic Europe</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Monday | 13 | 11:00 | Lecture, (for Detroit Artists Market): <i>The Quality of Imagination in Art</i> , Mr. Richardson. |
| Tuesday | 14 | 2:00 | Lecture, (Pageant of History for Schools): <i>Castles and Cathedrals of Europe</i> , Mrs. Heath. |
| | | 8:30 | Lecture, (A Survey of Textiles): <i>The Eighteenth Century: Climax of the Textile Art and the Fusion of East and West</i> , Mrs. Weibel. |
| Wednesday | 15 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: <i>Gothic Europe</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Thursday | 16 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Friday | 17 | 7:00 | Department of Recreation drawing class. |
| Saturday | 18 | 10:15 | Motion Picture for Schools: <i>Vincennes</i> . |
| Sunday | 19 | 2:15 | Radio Talk, <i>The Daumier Exhibition</i> , Mr. Morse. |
| Saturday | 25 | | Christmas. Museum closed. |