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

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH AN ADORING FIGURE
DETAIL—HEAD OF THE MADONNA
GIOVANNI BATTISTA TIEPOLO
1695—1770
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. EDSEL FORD

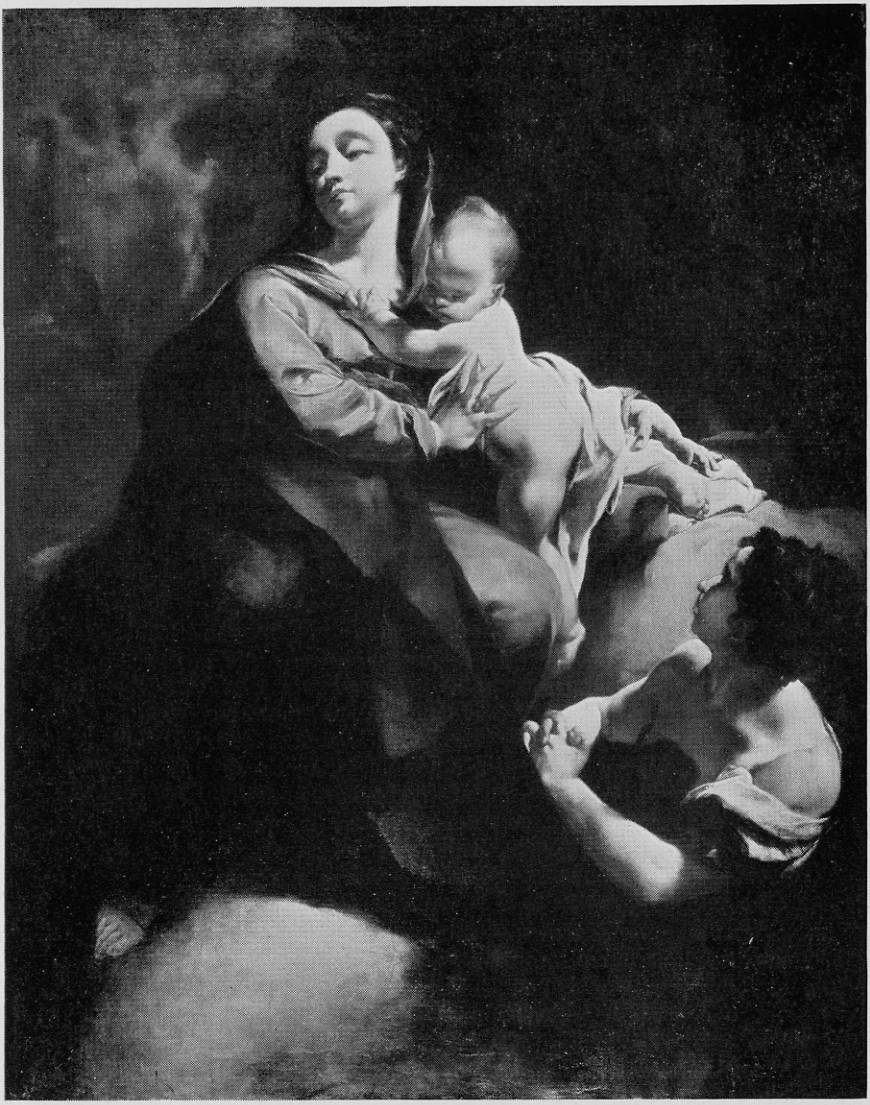
Vol. XVIII DECEMBER, 1938 No. 3

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH AN ADORING FIGURE BY TIEPOLO

The Art Institute has received as the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford a large altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with an Adoring Figure* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1695-1770) which will take an important place among the masterpieces of Italian art in our museum.[1] It is a painting of exceptional size (6 feet high and nearly 5 feet wide) as well as exceptional quality. The grand scale of its figures and the splendor of its color were designed to hold their own in the great perspective of a Venetian baroque church; in a museum gallery their decorative power is enormous. The baroque gallery in which the altarpiece is placed contains some of the most brilliant and imposing pictures in the museum's collection, but the new altarpiece has become unquestionably the focal point of the room.

In Tiepolo the Venetian tradition of painting, which during the Renaissance had produced some of the greatest names in the history of art, rose to its last high peak. It is unnecessary, I believe, to repeat all the details of his life. Two great exhibitions have been devoted to him and his circle within the present year, at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, testifying to the interest which he arouses in America today; while in Europe no field of art arouses keener interest than the Venetian eighteenth century. With Tiepolo himself, as he is exhibited in the great steady stream of production which flowed in a golden flood from his brush from the time when he first discovered Veronese's decorations to his death at the court of Madrid, — a period of forty-five years, from about 1725 to 1770 — all who are interested in art are familiar. But the new altarpiece in Detroit belongs to the earliest phase of his work which is very rare in Europe and hitherto not represented by any important picture in America. Those who know him only by the light, floating movement and pale gold, azure and red color scheme of his later work will be unprepared for the rich, dark magnificence of his color and the massive grandeur of his drawing in the present picture. It represents Tiepolo at his beginning as a baroque artist (and, it may be said, one of the greatest masters of the baroque) before his study of Veronese had changed his palette and produced the rococo artist with whom we are familiar.

Tiepolo received his first commission at the age of nineteen to paint a series of saints in the Ospedaletto, Venice, but his reputation dates from his twentieth year when he exhibited a canvas of *Pharaoh Drowned* in the Piazza San Rocco on the festival of the saint, to the great acclaim of the public. The incident is like a scene from Goldoni's autobiography or the memoirs of the Cavaliere Ghozzi, at once real, charming and theatrical. The open air festival, the young artist with his picture disposed to catch the eye of the crowd, the sudden success, have something of the carnival spirit which made Venice in the eighteenth century the pageant and playground of Europe. The *Pharaoh Drowned* is today lost or unrecognized. But the Detroit altar was painted within the next three or four years, during the



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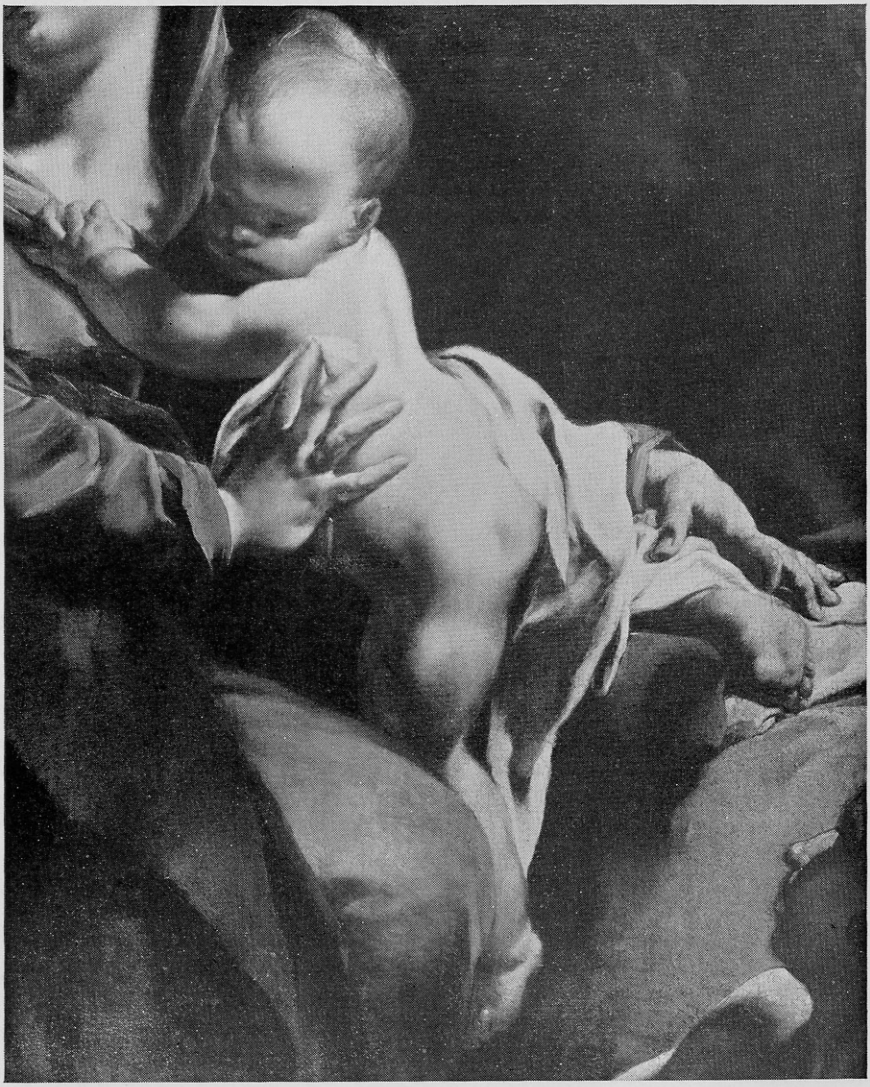
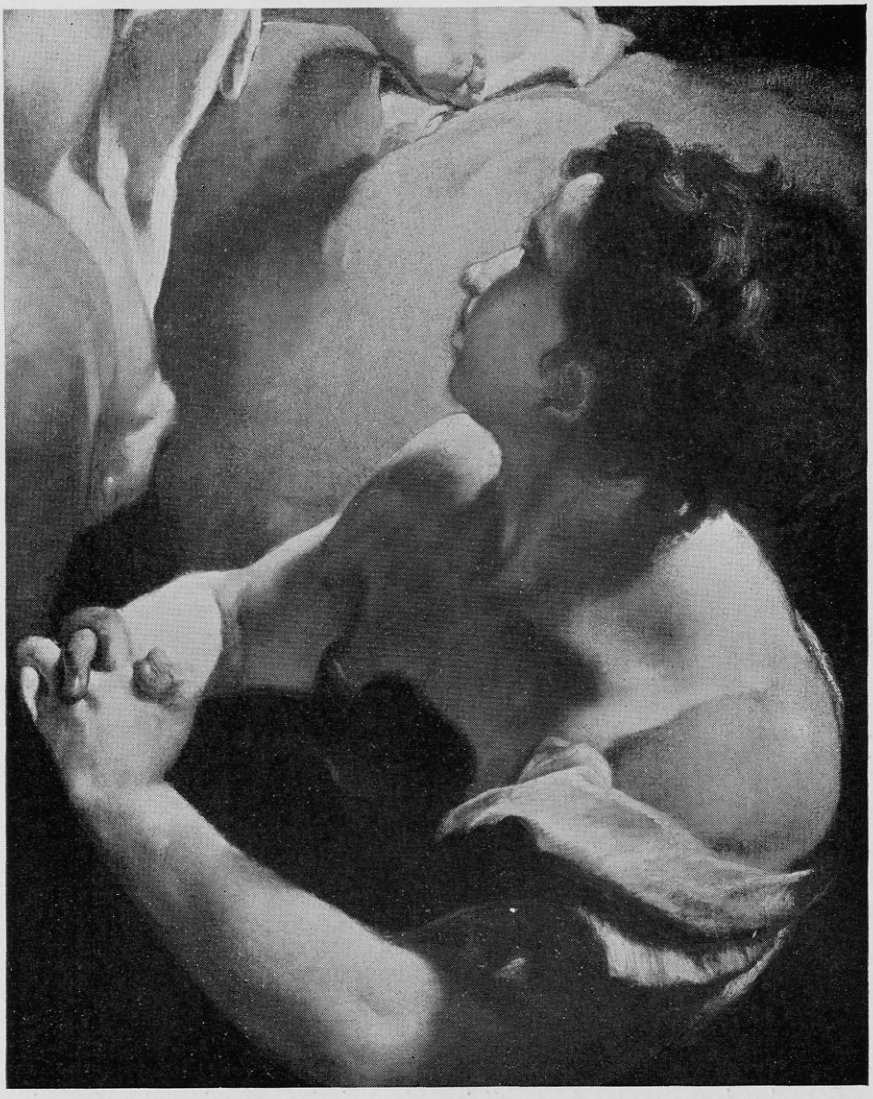
first spectacular outburst of creative energy which made the young man's fame; and it is a perfect example of the mingled grandeur and charm which captivated the Venetian public then as it still delights us today.

Our picture can be dated on grounds of style between the *Prophets* of the Ospedaletto (1715-6) and the huge *Madonna of Mount Carmel* in



MADONNA AND CHILD WITH AN ADORING FIGURE
DETAIL—THE CHRIST CHILD

the Brera (which Modigliani[2] and Morassi date 1720-22). The same model used here for the Madonna appears as Hagar in a small picture of *The Expulsion of Hagar* (private collection, Milan)[3] which is signed and dated almost certainly 1719. The same model of the Christ Child appears in a beautiful small *Madonna and Child* in the collection of Dr. Rasini, Milan.[4] In all of these early works the influences of Tiepolo's baroque predeces-



MADONNA AND CHILD WITH AN ADORING FIGURE
DETAIL—THE ADORING FIGURE

sors are visible: Magnasco in the Ospedaletto pictures, and Piazzetta very strongly in the Detroit and Brera altars. Morassi also believes that he can trace the influence of the Neapolitan Solimena in the compositon of our picture. But if the young Tiepolo was still influenced by others, he was already a great artist. The *Madonna of Mount Carmel* hangs in a gallery of the Brera with some of the greatest Venetian Renaissance decorations in

existence, and speaks to the eye with an authority and splendor equal to its greatest predecessors. The same may be said of our new *Madonna.* The rich warm shadows are still reminiscent of Piazzetta's style, but the heavy impasto and the harmonies of the luminous color chords in the light are already characteristic of Tiepolo. Morassi believes that our picture was once larger than it is today. There is a sketch in the gallery at Cassel which shows the same three figures in the middle ground, with flying angels in the sky behind and in the foreground a guardian angel protecting a child from a demon. I venture to differ, however, with this scholar in his interpretation of the sketch's relation to the finished work. It is not uncommon for an artist to improve his idea when carrying it from sketch to finished work. Rembrandt frequently eliminated many figures from the original sketch, as did Tiepolo himself, for instance, in the later composition of the *Adoration of the Magi* in Munich, for which the sketch is in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. I believe that is what happened in this work of the young artist. The group of the *Madonna and Child with an Adoring Figure* is here moved from the middle ground forward close to the picture plane, showing a complete change in the artist's idea by which the charming but confused and many-centered composition of the sketch has been transformed into a compact, concentrated effect of great monumentality.

But what is the source, when all is said and done, of the deep and lasting pleasure which Tiepolo's work offers to us today, to make him in the twentieth century still one of the most popular of artists? His fame rests upon his decorations in the churches and palaces of Venice and its mainland dependencies, and upon the great decorative projects he executed in Germany and Spain; but his smallest pen drawings and chalk studies are also eagerly sought after today. The interest in him cannot come from the modern interest in mural decorations, for his works are the antithesis of the sculptural and illustrative style of the modern mural painter. The pleasure comes, I believe, partly from the beauty of the light which floods his pictures, bathing all things within them in the transparent, liquid gold of Venetian sunlight. Partly it comes also from the mingled humanity and classic calm of his figures, which have both the grandeur and detachment of the ideal and the grace and sweetness of human life at its loveliest. But the grace that infuses every face and every movement, every line and every accent of the soft light in his pictures, is an effect which is allied rather to the music of his age than to anything more describable. The impersonality and the charm, the intricate soaring and answering voices, the buoyant and confident spirit of eighteenth century music, at once so far away from our world and yet so precious to it, are the best parallel to Tiepolo's painted counterpoint of floating forms and sunlit clouds, of graceful gesture and gentle looks, all worked together into a harmony of form and light, color and air. In the end, the meaning of his painting remains therefore indescribable; it is the pictorial expression of a spirit which one can only call Tiepolo's felicity.

E. P. RICHARDSON.

1) Canvas: H. 74 inches; W. 57 inches. Accession number 38.56. The edges have been pieced at three of the corners, apparently in the eighteenth century.
Described: A. Morassi, *Burlington Magazine,* LXVII (1935), 144; G. Fiocco, *Art in America,* XXVI (1938), p. 155.
2) Ettore Modigliani, *Dedalo,* XIII (1933), p. 129 ff.
3) A. Morassi, *Burlington Magazine,* LXX (1937), p. 53.
4) A. Morassi, *Burlington Magazine,* LXIV (1934), p. 90.

A SAINT GEORGE OF THE SCHOOL OF NOVGOROD

At Lydda in Palestine in the 3rd century A. D. there was born to a family of noble Christians a son who was to be revered as one of the principal saints in the Christian calendar. This Georgios entered the Roman army under Diocletian, and shortly attained high rank. But when the emperor, in 303, instituted a savage campaign of persecution against the Christians, the young soldier made his way to the imperial throne and, professing his faith, denounced Caesar and demanded that the persecution be brought to an end. Such a rash act had quick and frightful consequences: the young man was condemned for blasphemy and tortured to death in the city of Nicomedia on April 23rd, 303.

It was not long before he became a saint and the protagonist in countless legends. He was called "reverenced among men" in the fifth century, and it is to the next hundred years that the story of his combat with the dragon can be traced.

There was a city in Libya called Selena, which was harried by a dragon who made his lair in a nearby marsh. The townspeople had managed to keep the monster appeased by feeding it two sheep a day, but when the supply was exhausted they were forced to cast lots among themselves to determine a victim. The unlucky chance fell to the king's daughter, and though her father tried to buy off the sacrifice, the people had stipulated that no substitutes were to be made, and so she was tied near the creature's lair. St. George came riding past; on learning of her fate, he stayed until the dragon appeared, and then pierced it with his lance. With the maiden's girdle he made a halter for the beast, and she led it peacefully — "like a lamb"— back to the city, where its head was cut off, to the rejoicing of the people. St. George, instead of remaining to marry the princess and inherit the kingdom, converted the inhabitants, founded a bishopric, and rode on.

This naive story is not a Christian invention. It demonstrates, rather, how the mantle of pagan worship fell upon the early saints of a new religion. For it was near Lydda, (Pausanius[1] says it was "in the land of the Hebrews, near Joppa"), according to tradition, that Perseus slew the sea-monster and rescued Andromeda. It was at Lydda that the first shrine of St. George was built, and it was only natural that the ancient lore of the region should attach itself to a figure admired, like Perseus, for his chivalry and noble origin.

St. George, having lived and died in the focus of Christianity, from whence many of the earliest preachers started out, and at a time just previous to the triumph of the faith, was one of the greatest saints of the East Christian church, where he is called "The Great Martyr." To him the Emperor Constantine dedicated one of the first churches erected after his conversion to Christianity, that is, only some thirty years after the saint's death. For eight centuries St. George was one of the mightiest figures in Eastern hagiology; his popularity in the West (particularly as patron saint of England) dates from the times of Richard Coeur de Lion, who placed himself and his crusaders under the saint's protection.

The museum has recently added to its collection as the gift of the Founders Society an early 14th century

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON
RUSSIAN—SCHOOL OF NOVGOROD
EARLY XIVTH CENTURY
GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

Russian panel-painting of St. George[2], of the School of Novgorod, a rare work of exceedingly high quality. The painting, with its figure of the gallant saint clad in the costume of a Roman soldier, was executed in one of richest cities of medieval Russia. Novgorod, on the River Volkhov, near Lake Ilmen, was for five centuries, from 997 to 1475, a semi-independent self-governing city, growing wealthy on its trade with the Hanseatic League and Byzantium, deposing its rulers when they threatened the civic rights. Goods from the Orient came up the Dnieper and down the Lovat, merchandise from the West was brought by boat through the Gulf of Finland. The trading stations of its merchant princes stood on the shores of the White Sea and in farthest Siberia. Most of the city's wealth derived from furs, but the surrounding plains were utilized also for the rearing of fine horses. In the 14th century the population numbered 400,000, and the strength of the city was so great that the saying, "Who can contend against God and the Great Novgorod?" became proverbial for any incomprehensible happening.

The art that flourished there was of a kind with the inhabitants, individual and self-reliant, the first in Russia to leave Byzantine traditions behind and progress toward an independent national style. Its treatment of form holds to flat representation, the use of sharp angles, straight lines, and an unconcern with visual appearances. Rather than carefully modulated tones, the artists used pure pigments, particularly red, yellow and green. Red was especially popular in the north: the bright shade seen in St. George's cloak is a distinguishing feature of the Novgorod School. It was the color of the peasant dress, and also, used in cloaks such as St. George wears, the sign of royalty. When one reflects that this same bright color was used by both peasant and aristocrat alike, it is small wonder that it should play such an important part in the art of a democratic city.

The figure of St. George on his prancing steed belongs to a type of which there are several examples illustrated[3]. In all these icons the saint rides rapidly over a landscape, his cloak billowing out behind him, slaying or trampling the dragon almost flippantly. There is a great diversity of type in all these paintings: some seem unconscionably primitive for such a flourishing city; others (such as ours) are remarkable for finesse and composition. The explanation of this lies in the artistic position of Novgorod in the 14th century: the Tartar invasions had driven the painters from Kiev and Vladimir to the protection of "Sovreign Great Novgorod", and the respective schools of these cities mingled with the native style.

The exceedingly formalized rocks (called in Russian *pyatochki* or "little heels") are typical of the Novgorod School's native artists, as are also the hood-like center folds of St. George's cloak. Such a composition cannot be judged on grounds of naturalism. The horse rides upon air, the cloak — which floats so grandly in the wind behind — hangs undisturbed in front, and the rocky landscape resembles nothing the eye can see in nature. Herein lies the difference between Russian and Byzantine religious art. The latter, with its carefully documented history and Hellenic traditions, though formalized, is still closely allied to nature. But in the scenes of Russian icon-painting there is no such respect for nature: this is a world, not of history, but of miracles, where anything is within the realm of pos-

sibility. Consequently, the artists could fill their panels with compositions of objects and figures which ignore entirely the dictates of rationality. Their power lies in the control of areas and silhouettes, in the beauty of the color, and the coördination of form and mood, in just the factors, happily enough, in which this important addition excels.

PARKER LESLEY

1) Pausanius, *Description of Greece,* IV, 35.
2) Wood panel. H. 25⅝ inches; W. 19⅜ inches. Acc. No. 38.69.
3) Cf. N. Kondakov, *The Russian Icon,* Prague, 1938 (*Seminarium Kondakovianum*), Vol. I, plates V, V VI, XL; Vol. II, plate 90.

THE PROCESSES OF PRINT-MAKING

A substantial and long-needed addition has recently been made to the Print Department in the form of eight wall-cases, containing material gathered to illustrate all of the principal methods and schools of print-making from the 15th Century to the present day. Visitors to the Print Room will find the sets hung along the wall of the outer gallery, where they have been placed on permanent view with the idea of acting partly as a supplementary accompaniment to demonstrate the techniques entailed in the various print exhibitions, which change constantly in the surrounding galleries during the course of a year. Another motive, too, which prompted the introduction of these displays, has been to encourage a better understanding of the real value of prints themselves, for unless one is familiar with the technical mechanics of graphic art — relatively far more complicated than the direct methods of painting, drawing, or sculpture — it is difficult to enjoy and appreciate to the full extent this form of artistic expression, surely one of the most intricate yet fascinating.

It is unnecessary to elaborate in much detail upon the eight sets, which on examination explain themselves, except primarily to mention the divisions into which they are separated. Of the three main classes of prints, the first is Relief Printing, described in the case devoted to Woodcut and Wood-Engraving. The Intaglio Method, that is the process of printing from plates into which the line has been incised, is covered in the five sets given over one each to Line-Engraving, Dry-Point, Etching, Mezzotint, and Aquatint, whereas a Lithographic display illustrates the third principal class, or Surface Printing. An eighth case of the series deals with Color Printing, a separate yet most important process, which falls outside of these headings, although in some aspects it is related to all three.

The eight sets, which were prepared for the Museum by Mrs. David Keppel of New York, are so assembled that they afford an excellent means of acquiring, with only the minimum expenditure of effort, a first-hand knowledge of the preliminary steps involved in the making of prints in all categories. Each set, attractively designed and mounted, is composed of actual examples of implements, chemical materials, plates, and other essential equipment employed by the graphic artist, and as far as possible, original prints, reproductions of rare impressions too costly to include, as well as photographs of artists engaged in work. Concise running commentaries and descriptive labels are combined into each demonstration to provide a complete explanation, so that anyone may follow with ease the fundamental procedures and thereby enrich his understanding and enhance his appreciatio of the graphic arts.

JOHN S. NEWBERRY

THE ART QUARTERLY, VOLUME I

With the Autumn issue of THE ART QUARTERLY, published in November, the Institute brings to completion Volume One of its new publication and believes that friends of the Museum will be pleased to know that the magazine has met with a most gratifying response. Among its subscribers it already counts nearly one hundred of the leading libraries and museums in Europe and America. Volume One contains 330 pages and 207 illustrations. Its nineteen articles by American and European scholars discuss Dutch, Flemish, Italian, Spanish, French, German, American, Chinese, and Ostrogothic art. Six of the articles are devoted to objects in the Institute's collections; the others deal with artists represented in public and private collections in America and Europe, with what the editors feel to be fitting emphasis on works of art in this country.

Dr. Valentiner's article attributing to Michangelo a sculpture in the Morgan Library in New York (an attribution since supported by Dr. H. Wölfflin and many other authorities) may be taken as typical of the editorial aim of THE ART QUARTERLY. Equally typical of the magazine's broad scope is Mr. Richardson's article on the two portraits by the 19th century American painter, William Page, which were acquired by the Institute during the past year. In eight pages Mr. Richardson presents a vivid picture of the artist and his work, outlined against a historical background made lively and intimate by quotations from the Brownings and references to other leading figures of the times.

But although the new magazine has received a gratifying reception from fellow institutions, and has already a considerable list of private subscribers, to maintain itself and further its aims it must have more subscriptions. Publication of the first volume was largely made possible by the generosity of Mr. Edsel B. Ford. Sample copies of various issues are now being mailed to about one thousand art patrons and collectors throughout the country, and it is our hope that friends of the Museum will give us their support not only by subscribing themselves, but by giving subscriptions to any of their acquaintances who might be interested. THE ART QUARTERLY is edited not only for the scholar but also for the amateur and lover of art, and it is only by your assistance that we can achieve the circulation among this latter class which we must have if the magazine is to make the contribution to the knowledge and enjoyment of art in America which we hope it will make.

JOHN D. MORSE

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER

EXHIBITIONS

Nov. 15—Dec. 15: Michigan Artists Exhibition.
Alger House: Nov. 6—Dec. 18: English Art of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in coöperation with the Archæological Society of Detroit, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall.

Dec. 6: *The Imaginative Quality of Italian Art,* by E. P. Richardson.
Dec. 13: *The Greek Revival in American Architecture,* by Perry T. Rathbone.

LECTURES IN THE GALLERIES

(chairs provided)

A SURVEY OF THE COLLECTIONS, Thursday afternoons at 3:00; Sunday afternoons at 2:30.

Dec. 1 and 4: *The Art of the Roman Empire*
Dec. 8 and 11: *Early Christian Art*
Dec. 15 and 18: *The Gothic Style in Northern Europe*

SPECIAL TALKS BY THE CURATORS

Friday afternoons at 3:00.

Dec. 2: *Romanticism and Realism in American Painting,* by Parker Lesley.
Dec. 9: *The Collection of Drawings,* by Ernst Scheyer.

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