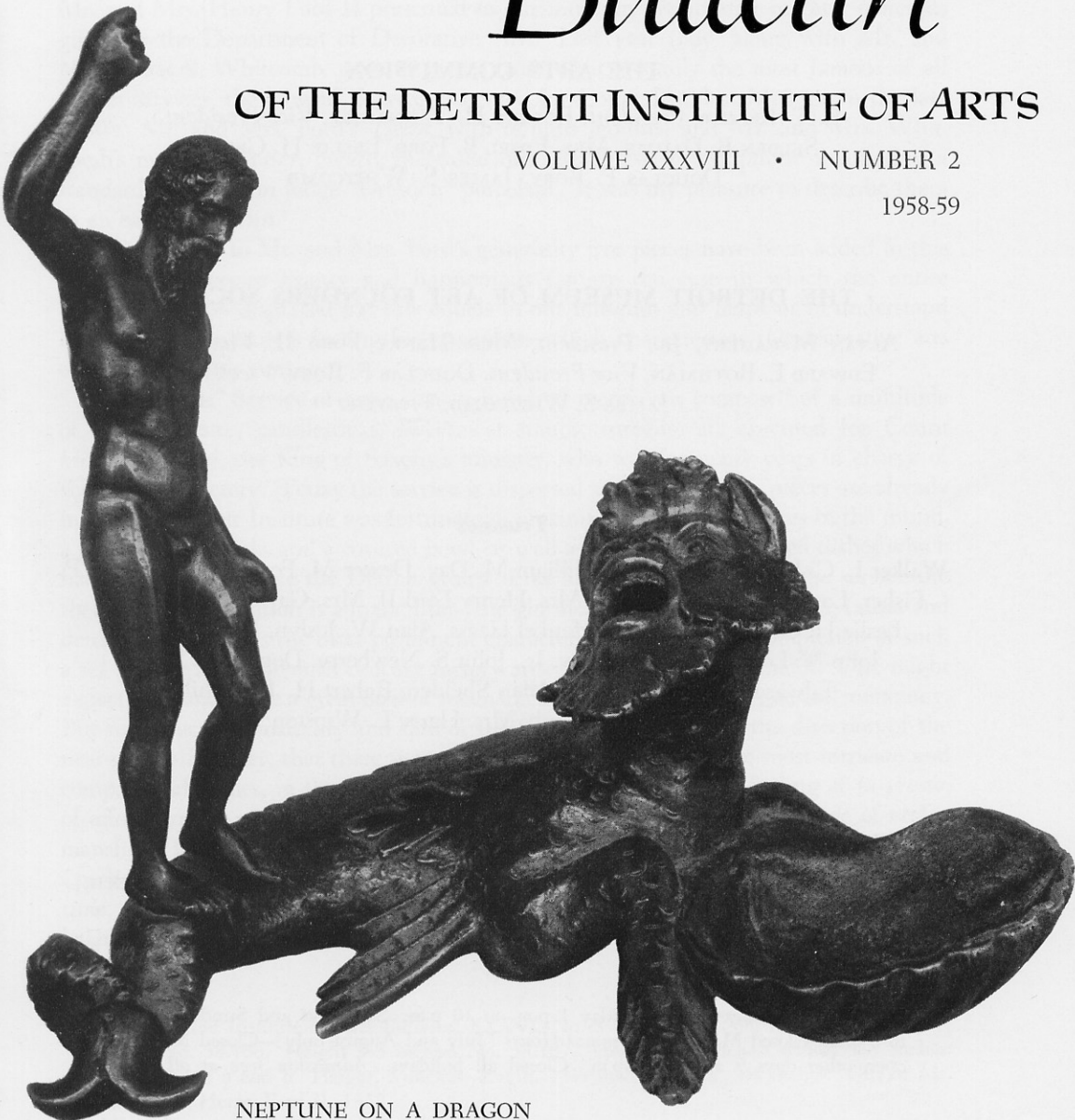


Bulletin

OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

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1958-59



NEPTUNE ON A DRAGON
by SEVERO DA RAVENNA, Italian (ca. 1500)

*Gift of the Founders Society,
General Endowment Fund, 1958*

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"This Exquisite Art of Porcelain" Again

IN ART, and in particular in the arts of decoration, it often happens that the sum is greater than its parts; and this was proven once more to us a few months ago when Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II presented to our museum yet another of their generous gifts, for the Department of Decorative Arts. Last year they, along with Mr. and Mrs. James S. Whitcomb, gave us pieces from what is surely the most famous of all dinner services, the "Swan" Service, executed for Count Brühl at Meissen in the late 1730's. Mr. and Mrs. Ford's *Tazza*, with ormolu mounts, and Mr. and Mrs. Whitcomb's majestic *Platter*, greatly increased our usefulness to our public in offering a standard by which to judge "Dresden" porcelain. It was my pleasure to describe them in an earlier *Bulletin*.¹

Now thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Ford's generosity five pieces have been added to this group.² For precise beauty and harmonious fantasy the case in which the entire collection is now displayed has few equals in our museum and helps us to understand better that unconscious feeling for ensembles which characterizes the decorative arts of the eighteenth century.

The "Swan" Service of some sixteen hundred pieces was composed of a multitude of vessels, plates, candlesticks, sweetmeat stands, tureens, all executed for Count Heinrich Brühl, the King of Saxony's minister, who was for many years in charge of the Meissen factory. Today the service is dispersed and many of the pieces are already in museums. Our Institute was fortunate in obtaining three of the pieces in the round, a pair of candlesticks and a covered bowl, as well as a pair of two-handed dishes which harmoniously complete the Detroit group. Like all the other pieces of the service the theme of the decoration is aquatic life: "the glorification of the sea, its flora, fauna and deities,"³ with swans the most prominent characters. Obviously the completion of such a set was for an eighteenth century factory an extraordinary achievement. One might expect here and there a great deal of mechanical repetition, some fatigue and monotony. But such was the sensibility and skill of the factory workers under the direction of the near-genius Kändler, that there is nothing of the sort. Even in the most intricate and compact arabesques, in the most complex Rococo forms, there is a feeling of *fa presto*, of effortlessness, which is peculiar to the eighteenth century, the golden age of craftsmanship. Then the craftsman could not be wrong, and even the pair of candlesticks (perhaps copied from silver originals),⁴ which in any other hands and at any other time, could easily have been monstrous, become, in an art of subtle harmony and balance, the evocation of the gaiety and supreme taste of the *dix-huitième*.

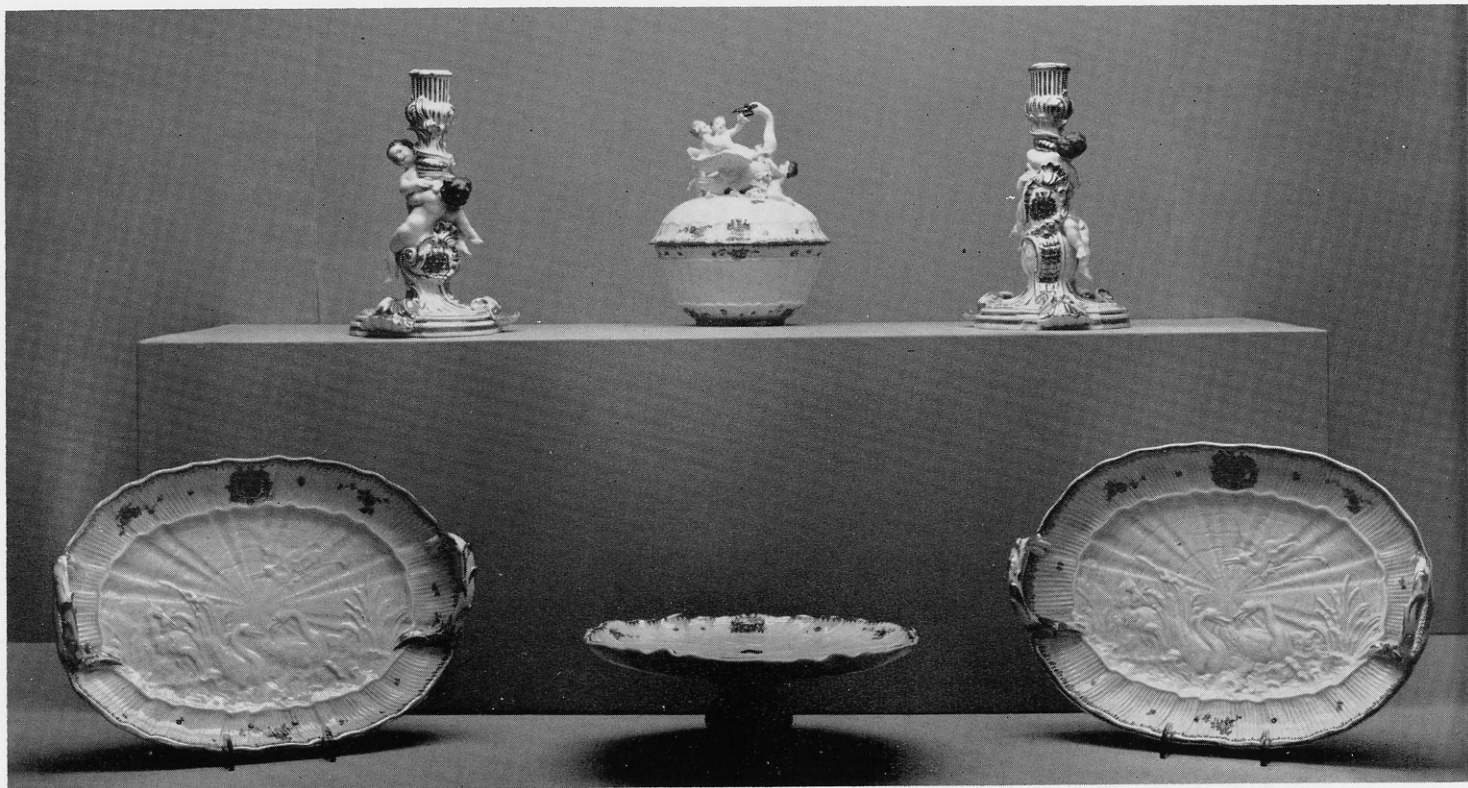
PAUL L. GRIGAUT

¹ The Detroit Institute of Arts *Bulletin*, XXXVI, No. 3 (1956-57), (66, repr.).

² Acc. No. 58.166. Height 9½ inches; No. 58.167. Height, 8½ inches; width, 5½ inches. No. 58.168 a and b. Height, 3 inches; length, 13½ inches; width, 9¾ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1958.

³ Emil Hannover, *Poetry and Porcelain*, III, 68.

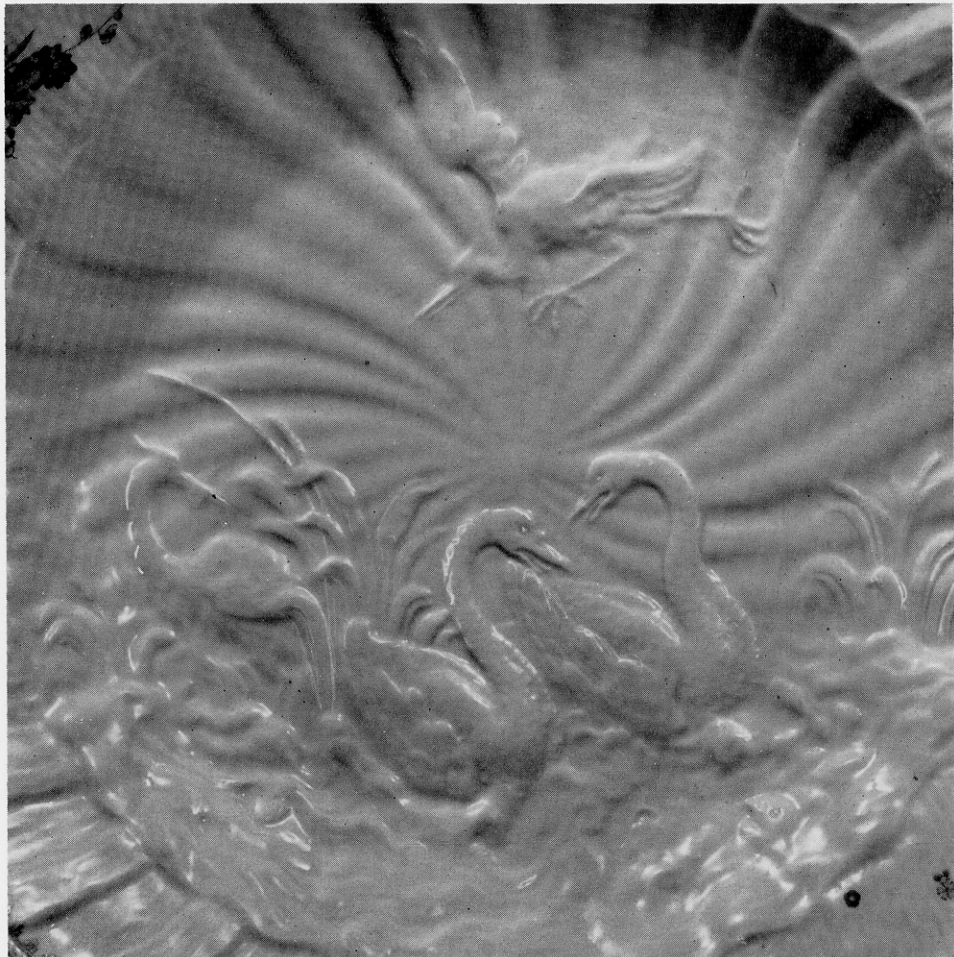
⁴ Hannover states that some of the candlesticks were in fact shaped after a famous engraving by Desplaces from a sketch by the great Rococo *ornemaniste* Jules-Aurèle Meissonier.



GROUP OF OBJECTS from the "SWAN SERVICE"

German (Meissen) 1737/41

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1958



DETAIL OF THE SWAN MOTIF
from the "SWAN SERVICE"
German (Meissen) 1737/41

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1958

A Quiet Interior

TODAY, amid the shrill clamor and strident voices of many contemporary painters, the voice of Edouard Vuillard is only a whisper in a minor key. His muted relationships of color and tone, of the animate and inanimate, blend into a low-keyed harmony which at times approaches the precious.

Unpretentious interiors of French homes, with their occupants quietly pursuing their various literary or household tasks, gave Vuillard a dual opportunity to paint a distillation of life concentrated within a small space, and to present a highly personal imagery in a rather new conception of form. Such a painting, *An Interior — the Home of Mrs. Tristan Bernard*¹ was acquired by the Museum late in 1957, as the gift of Mr. Abraham L. Bienstock of New York City.

When, in 1954, the Museum of Modern Art collaborated with the Cleveland Museum in a Vuillard show, the variety of output came as somewhat of a surprise to many, especially the large decorative panels (sixty-four by ninety-one inches) from private collections. Whether Vuillard was painting one of his large wall panels or a small picture, he restricted himself to the same "intimate" subject matter, a woman sewing indoors or reading in the garden, an art dealer in his office, a child playing in the park, figures conversing or merely resting. Andrew Ritchie² refers to Vuillard's "fusion of person and thing until both become one, and every shape, every color, every accent merges into a sustained, tapestry-like rhythm comparable to the continuum of sound in a passage of Wagner or Debussy."

Born in Cuiseaux, Saône-et-Loire in 1868, Vuillard soon moved with his family to Paris. There his widowed mother's love of textiles and command of the dressmaking craft by which she supported the family, had a considerable influence upon Vuillard's development. The poet Mallarmé influenced him, as did the painters Maurice Denis, Redon and Roussel. For a time, Vuillard was part of the group of young rebel art students who called themselves the Nabis (from the Hebrew word for prophet). The Nabi-symbolist group attempted to counter the documentary realism current in literature and the literal transcription of visual sensations by the impressionist painters. From the group credo, Vuillard drew only some of Gauguin's technical discoveries in color. Like Bonnard, he eschewed the anecdotal subject matter favored by some of the other members, for the narrow world bounded by his mother's work room, his home, and the neighboring parks and boulevards.

Explorations within this circumscribed world absorbed Vuillard throughout his life. Possessing not the slightest interest in portraying the majestic interplay of the forces of nature, Vuillard chose to compress and distil the essence from the familiar, the intimate scene. He brings to such an *Interior* as ours, perception of a new picturesqueness in ordinary sights.

The loose brushwork and fairly strong color of our painting are in line with changes in Vuillard's life and art occurring around the turn of the century. The restrained color and meticulous rendering of patterned fabrics in his paintings of the 1890's coincided with the artist's rather restricted social life. After 1900, a new dealer connection led to an expanded circle of more elegant friends and clients. In painting this *Interior of Mrs. Tristan Bernard's Home* around 1905, Vuillard moved from the

AN INTERIOR —
THE HOME OF
MRS. TRISTAN BERNARD
by EDOUARD VUILLARD
French, 1868-1940
Gift of Mr. Abraham L.
Bienstock
New York, 1957



smaller, compressed picture of his earlier period to a larger, more loosely organized composition. Space flows around the three absorbed figures in an elusive manner. The clear yellow of the paper on the desk, the pale green and gentian-blue worn by the women are gay, almost vivid, enlivening the muted harmony of beige, raspberry and brown.

Mrs. Tristan Bernard was the wife of the novelist and playwright. Although much of Vuillard's work designed for the theatre has been destroyed (lithographs for theatre programs, stage sets for Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*), his great decorations created for the foyer of the Comédie des Champs-Élysées in 1913 still remain. One of the largest panels illustrates scenes from Bernard's comedy *Le Petit Café*. The panels suggest the lighting and atmosphere of the stage to an amazing degree, but are completely lacking in movement.

It is in such modestly scaled works as the *Interior* that one feels the artist is happier. The bold avant-garde movements of the early 20th century must have filled Vuillard with antipathy. His extremely personal imagery, low-keyed and understated, merely suggests, never defines. His friend André Gide wrote of Vuillard's work,³ "I do not know what I like most here. Perhaps, M. Vuillard himself. I know few works where one is brought more directly into communion with the painter. This is due, I suspect, to his emotion never losing its hold on the brush . . . It is due to his speaking in a low tone, suitable to confidences, and to one's leaning over to listen to him . . ."

ELIZABETH H. PAYNE

¹ Cat. No. 1286. Oil on canvas. Height 19¾ inches; width 22 inches. Signed lower right *E. Vuillard*. Ex-collection of Ed. Loeb and of Galerie André Weil, Paris. Gift of Abraham L. Bienstock, New York, 1957.

² A. Ritchie *Edouard Vuillard*, Museum of Modern Art, 1954, p. 22.

³ André Gide. "Promenade au Salon d'Automne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Dec. 1905, quoted from Claude Roger-Marx, *Vuillard*, New York, 1946, p. 125.

NEPTUNE ON A DRAGON

by Severo da Ravenna,

The "Master of the Dragons"

THE *Neptune on a Dragon*¹ belongs to a group of small bronzes made in the fantastic-naturalistic style characteristic of Padua at the end of the *Quattrocento*. The group, lacking an artist's name and dominated by the figure of the fantastic, quasi-human faced dragon, was ascribed stylistically by Leo Planiscig to an unknown "Master of the Dragons." In the collection of Robert Mayer, Vienna, Planiscig found an extremely fine example of these dragons in 1935, which resembles our own, except that it lacks the Neptune figure and the shell between the frog-like forepaws. In place of the Neptune it bore on its back near the curling fish tail a large sea shell, probably intended as an ink well. This shell was screwed to the back and beneath it was

inscribed the name of the artist: .O.SEVERI.RA., or Severo da Ravenna. The unknown "Master of the Dragons" had been identified.²

Very little is known about Severo; the bronzes associated with him as the newly identified "Master of the Dragons" are the only known works by his hand aside from a marble sculpture in the round, set in a niche of the Basilica del Santo in Padua. This is a figure of *John the Baptist* which is signed by the artist on the base. The face of the *Baptist* reveals the same high cheek bones and heavily ridged eyebrows with deep-sunken eyes that are the markings of the dragons' faces in the small bronzes, and also of the faces of the Neptune figures associated with some of them. The Mayer Collection *Dragon* and the marble *Baptist* are the only signed works by the artist.

Severo was a member of the circle of Humanists in Padua that was led by a neapolitan Humanist, Pomponius Gauricus. Pomponius knew the artist personally and mentions him in a tract called *De sculptura* first published in 1504. In this publication we find the artist highly praised as a leading artist of his city and are informed that he was a sculptor in stone, clay and wood, a bronzecaster and a painter. By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, he seems to have been forgotten, and his work remained anonymous (except for the *Baptist*) until our own time. He was, nevertheless, a link between the older generation of artists in Padua, such as Bartolomeo Bellano, and the younger generation, such as Andrea Briosco called Riccio.

Padua in Severo's time was much concerned with the new discoveries of the antique world in Italy and fascinated by the naturalistic studies of the early Renaissance investigators. We need only think of the workshop of Squarcione and his young pupil and adopted son, Andrea Mantegna, which placed its emphasis upon Squarcione's antique bronze and sculpture collection in combination with study of the living model, to be reminded of this atmosphere.

Our bronze combines these interests with certain medieval carryovers and in an essentially antique revival idea, we see a dragon from a more fantastic medieval imagination surmounted by an early Renaissance figure that is slim and wiry, carefully studied from reality, but displaying something of a classical pose in the "hip-shot" stance. Both figures have developed the coppery, red-brown patina characteristic of Severo's small bronzes, but the figure of Neptune appears to have been cast separately and perhaps at a slightly later date than the dragon. It does, however, bear the features which delineate Severo's sculptured human figures. The modelling of the back, face and hair reveal his conception. This small bronze is an excellent addition to the Museum's large collection of bronzes, and will prove an interesting and informative link between the early and high Renaissance bronzes already in the collections.

CHARLES E. MEYER

¹ Acc. No. 58.36. Bronze. Height, 8¼ inches; length, 8½ inches. Signed .O.Severi.Ra. Gift of the Founders Society, General Endowment Fund, 1958.

² Planiscig, Leo, *Severo da Ravenna (Der "Meister des Drachens")*, in "Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien," N. F., IX, Vienna, 1935, pp. 75-86. See this reference for the most complete information on Severo.

1908.

83

National Arts Club.

(seud Dec. 30) (oil)

1. Spanish Dance, Music Hall. 300.
2. Outdoor stage, France. 250.

Exhibition of The Eight,
Macbeth's - Feb. 3 to 18.

1. Suite Montparnasse. 300
2. Rehearsal of The Ballet 400.
3. White Ballet. 400.
4. Leader of the Orchestra. 450.
5. The Singibread Man, 400
6. ~~Orchestra Pit (Prose Artist)~~ 400
7. Seal in Blue. 300. Sold Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney.
8. Hippocrome, London. 500.

Exhibition of The Eight,
Phila. Penna Academy,
March 7 to 28.

1. Suite Montparnasse. 300.
2. Rehearsal of The Ballet. 400

An extensive file of Everett Shinn material has recently been purchased by the Archives. Included are several notebooks covering the period 1899-1912. Among these is Shinn's own notation, with prices, of the pictures he submitted to the historic exhibition of the Eight at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908

THE ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART take pleasure in announcing the appointment of Mrs. Frederick M. Alger, Jr., as Women's Chairman of the National Board of Trustees. Mrs. Alger is well known in Detroit for her activities as Chairman of the Committee for the Friends of Modern Art, a group functioning within the Founders Society of The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Earlier in the year, Jean Lipman turned over to the Archives the complete files and working papers for her book, *Primitive Painters in America*, in addition to the files and correspondence for *Art in America*, of which she is editor, for the years 1937-1956. The latter include letters from artists, critics, scholars and dealers, and give a good backstage view of the art world in America over the past twenty years.

The Archives are always particularly grateful for gifts relating to our own Michigan area. The latest of these has come from Mrs. Myron B. Chapin, the wife of the late Professor Chapin of Ann Arbor who has generously given us material from her husband's files at the University of Michigan. Included is a handbook for the study of art, *Visual Understanding*, illustrated by Professor Chapin, and published for the use of his students. There are also examples of the work of Mrs. Chapin and of their two daughters, whose work is known in the Ann Arbor area through frequent exhibitions.

Mrs. Sara Rockefeller Currie recently presented us with a group of documents, correspondence, clippings, photographs, and exhibition catalogues pertaining to Alfred David Lenz (1872-1926) sculptor and medallist. Lenz, a regular exhibitor at the National Academy of Design and a member of the Explorers' Club, was perhaps best known for the seal, that he designed for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and his statue of Anna Pavlova in the Metropolitan Museum. Two other items of unusual interest given by Mrs. Currie consist of a small bust of Lenz himself designed and executed by Mrs. Currie, and the plaster cast for a gold pendant designed by Lenz, which was recently acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts.

MIRIAM LESLEY

An Early Kandinsky

IN 1911 Wassily Kandinsky established a landmark of modern art when he created his first abstract picture. Our newly acquired *Composition: Painting with a White Shape*¹ was painted in 1913 and belongs, then, among those pioneer works in which Kandinsky used the generally abstract and non-imitative principles of musical composition. He meant, in this way, to make his painting more spiritual in its release from subject-matter, a freer expression of his emotional and lyrical nature.

The years 1911 to about 1920 have been described as Kandinsky's "dramatic" period because, during this time, his paintings were brilliant in color and full of sweeping, sometimes explosive, movement. *Painting with a White Shape* embodies these dramatic



COMPOSITION: PAINTING WITH A WHITE SHAPE

by WASSILY KANDINSKY, Russian, 1866-1944

Gift of Mrs. Ferdinand Moeller, Germany, 1957

elements, with all the primitive force that usually lies behind the origin of a new form. Kandinsky's first abstractions are especially convincing because they seem to be completely genuine and unselfconscious expressions, preserving, in spite of their subjectivity, relations to the pictorial problems of space and form. By comparison, his later work is more arbitrary and deliberate in its design and rhythm, perhaps reflecting more of an intellectual attitude than a spontaneous creative urge.

Beyond his importance in the beginning of abstract painting, Kandinsky was a

founder of the "Blue Rider" group in 1912, extending the wonderful world of German Expressionism; he was one of the most influential teachers at the Bauhaus in Germany and an associate of Katherine Dreier after her founding of the "Société Anonyme" in America. In a retrospective look at the past fifty years, Kandinsky stands out as one of this generation's most significant figures.

A. F. PAGE

¹ Cat. No. 1258. Canvas. Height 39¼ inches; width 34¾ inches. Gift of Mrs. Ferdinand Moeller, Cologne, Germany, 1957.

An English Bible from the Thirteenth Century

IN 1956, Mrs. William E. Scripps gave the Research Library a valuable gift of books and manuscripts from her husband's private library. Of the manuscripts, one of the most charming is a small Latin Bible written in England, probably between 1280 and 1290. It is quarto size, written on silky vellum, and ornamented with seventy-five miniatures and sixty-four illuminated capitals. It is bound in a 17th century brown calf binding, and fits into a red morocco slip case.

This little volume is almost a case-history demonstration of thirteenth century developments in English Bible writing. First of all, its size is interesting. Bibles in the twelfth century had been very large, but about 1200, there seems to have been a growing demand for small, one-volume editions, as a number of these still exist. J. A. Herbert, in his book *Illuminated Manuscripts* (London, 1912) believes that this points to the efforts of the University of Paris to purify the Vulgate texts, and also to the activities of wandering friars, who wished to carry their libraries with them. It points also to a refinement of writing equipment, for the lettering has become miniscule, while retaining its exquisite clarity and neatness. In the Scripps Bible, the outside dimensions of the pages are seven inches high by five inches wide. The pages have wide margins, and the actual area covered by the writing is three and a half inches by five, divided into two columns about one and a half inches wide. There are about fifty lines in each column per page, and of the tiny letters of the text, the tall letters which are not capitals measure about one-sixteenth of an inch high, while the small letters are about one-thirty-second of an inch. These are handwritten, shaded in Gothic fashion and perfectly clear.

The initial letters also point to changes in manuscript writing. This book contains no full page miniatures, but seventy-five of the initials contain story-telling groups of human beings and buildings. The rest are ornamented with scroll work, leaf, plant and bird forms, and sometimes fantastic animals. The letter "S," against a burnished gold background, takes the form of a winged creature with an animal's head. It is in rose color with green and blue scroll work and tiny leaves of carmine, the whole outlined with a fine line of white and black. This initial occurs toward the end of Kings II, Chapter 25.

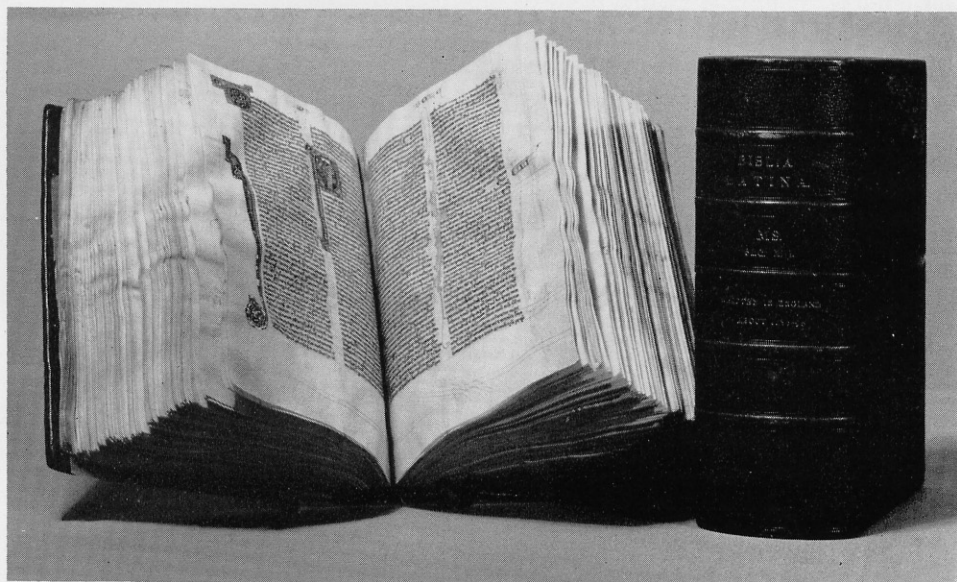
The initial "A" beginning chapter 1 of Chronicles I, is the first letter of the word

“Adam,” and begins an account of Adam’s lineage to Noah. Therefore the people shown may well be Adam and his descendants. Burnished gold again forms the background; and the colors are rose, blue, green and a touch of carmine, with lines of white and black. These initials are fairly typical of those in the Bible, the “S” being three quarters of an inch square in the upper section and two and a half inches long including the tail that extends from it. The “A” is one and an eighth inches square and three and thirteen sixteenths inches long with the scroll. Some are even smaller and daintier.

The tails or scrolls depending from the letters were also a development of this century. At first, they merely extended a little way down the page, ending in a bud or a leaf as these do, but in later manuscripts, they were elaborated into the flowing arabesques and borders filled with flowers and animals and fruit of the fourteenth century manuscripts.

In addition to the scattering of colorful, gold-illuminated initials, nearly every page contains one or more modest initial in red or blue. These are much simpler in concept, being usually about one fourth of an inch high. From them flow arabesques, scrolls leafy vines and tiny animal heads in the thinnest of red and blue calligraphic lines, as fine and exquisite as hairs.

CAROL SELBY



A thirteenth-century Latin Bible written in England probably between 1280 and 1290, given to the Detroit Institute of Arts Research Library from the William E. Scripps collection by Mrs. Scripps

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