The following article is an essay reprinted in the recently published Realism in Revolution: The Art of the Boston Painters. Stories about art works by three generations of painters from the Boston School: R.H. ines Canna mel, 1800-1881, Cann mel’s student Richard Luck 1828-1902, and Luck’s student William Gar hissen 1894-1916.

In the turbulent period marking the outbreak of the Second World War, an American artist painter named R.H. ines Cann mel, found increasingly alienated from an artistic world dominated by modernism, wrote a book poignantly entitled The Twilight of Painting. Cann mel had been his formal study of painting in 1911 at the Boston Museum School, whose faculty included Edmon Tarbell and William McGregor Paxton. Nearly two decades later, believing that his drawing skills were not sufficiently developed to accomplish his artistic goals, Cann mel interrupted his active painting career to spend two more years of study with Paxton, relearning the fundamentals of drawing—a move that dramatically under-scored the difference between Cann mel and the modernist art establishment, which had virtually eliminated the teaching of drawing from schools of art.

As the older painters began to die, and with them the craft of painting that had been cultivated for more than five centuries, Cann mel’s growing sense of isolation prompted him to write his artistic testament, published in 1846. In his view, the condition of painting had so declined that there was no longer anyone alive in the world capable of teaching art. A student had to know to become a thoroughly proficient painter.

By comparing the art of painting of his youth with that of past eras, Cann mel hoped “to hasten the day when some young artist, marked with the seal of great talent,” would “dapple the twilight which has descended upon the atelier painting” and would lay the foundation for a genuine renaissance. “Surely the time has come,” he concluded, “to give some consideration to the little band of young people who, against the strain of fashion and apart from all reward, [are] still striving to become honest and competent practitioners of an extraordinarily difficult art.”

R.H. ines Cann mel spent the rest of his life giving more than mere consideration to just such a “little band of young people” through his teaching and writing, while he himself continued to paint pictures in the traditional manner. He died on March 26, 1922, unknown except to a small circle of admirers and to his students. To whom he had bequeathed his craft and his spirit.

One would like to think he seconded at the end that the spark of inspiration and enlightenment he had passed on would, in the not-so-distant future, catch fire to “dapple the twilight” and usher in a new dawn of painting. He would undoubtedly be pleased to know that forty years after the publication of his artistic testament, and only four years after his death, his students and their students have banded together to issue their own testament, in a volume boldly entitled Realism in Revolution: The Art of the Boston Painters.

(continued on page 41)
A Classical Realist Manifesto

Realism in Revolution was conceived and edited by Gammell's principal artistic and intellectual heir, Richard Lack. As a painter, teacher, author, and editor championing the cause of classical realism in painting, Lack (who is also painting advisor to Artists) has exhibited an undaunted vision and a zealous energy worthy of his mentor. This volume is a logical outgrowth of his activity as the acknowledged "Dean" of the Boston School of painters.

Though handsomely produced and profusely illustrated, Realism in Revolution is no mere coffee-table art book. It is the culmination of the first of this school of American realist painters, presenting their compelling analysis of the crisis confronting the contemporary realist painter and their exhortation that painting return to representation of the natural world. The text of Realism in Revolution comprises twelve essays by painters trained in the tradition of the Boston School and their masters, a collection of their profoundest and most moving images. The second section of the book contains sixty photographs of the work of the Boston painters, and of the old masters from whom they draw inspiration. In addition to providing a visual basis for their arguments, the photographs make the book a valuable companion to the essay.

The Essays

Spanning three generations, the essays in Realism in Revolution differ widely in temperament, taste, judgment, and, consequently, in their choice of subject matter, theme, style, and technique. It is tempting to look for a common voice in the essays, and indeed, many of the authors find a unifying voice that finds its expression in the art of their school.

In the lead essay, "Radical Currents of Classical Realism in Contemporary American Painting," art historian Mark Steven Walker (who studied painting with Richard Lack) briefly characterizes "classical realism" as a style concerned with "classical proportions, informed by rooket perceptions," and goes on to quote a wonderfully eloquent statement by Kenyon Cox on the classical spirit: "Art says, in a general way, the same thing as the Bible does. It asks of a work of art, not that it be novel or effective, but that it be fine and noble. . . . It does not deny originality and individuality. . . . But it desires that every new presentation of truth and beauty shall show us the old truth and beauty, seen only from a different angle and colored by a different light. It wishes to add link by link to the chain of tradition, but it does not wish to break the chain."

Walker devotes much of his essay to the traditions of imaginative painting cultivated by Gammell and Lack. Most interesting in that regard are the lengthy passages Walker includes by Bouguereau, Gammell, and other artists. However, a concluding quote expressing Gammell's deep reverence for the future of traditional painting sounds an appropriately glowing note at the outset of an otherwise optimistic manifesto.

The Heritage of Pastel Painting

One of the finest chapters in the volume is Leesa Hoffman's unpretentious yet informative essay, "The Heritage of Pastel Painting," a manifesto within a manifesto—in defense of pastel painting as a serious artistic medium. At the outset, Hoffman quickly darts two common misconceptions about pastels. The first is that pastels are less permanent than oils; they are not, she tells us, explaining why in a succinct elucidation of the nature of pigments and binders. The second is that pastels are excuses for serious artists. To rebut this widely held view, Hoffman argues that it is the artist's talent, vision, and sensibility—not the medium per se—that establish the "credibility" of a painting and enable the artist to make a meaningful and lasting statement. In a brief history of pastel painting from the early eighteenth century through the twenties, she touches upon such well-known artists as Edouard Manet and Mary Cassatt, as well as Gammell. With respect to the choice of color medium, she emphasizes that it "must be compatible with the artist's temperament and allow him the freedom to make a personal statement," but she regretfully does not elaborate on the specific qualities of temperaments that attract artists to pastels. Nor does she accord any special status to the majority of pastel paintings (or other paintings) by major artists, as, in fact, in oil.

Hoffman is clearly inspired by the work of Rosalba Carriera, an eighteenth-century Venetian miniaturist. "Carriera's portraits," she writes, "show a special quality of luminosity and are well characterized. After reading her portrait, you feel as though you have retained a startling vitality and freshness." A fine reproduction of Carriera's sensitive Portrait of a Gentilese confirms Hoffman's judgment.

Leesa Hoffman's own contribution to the rich tradition of pastel painting is evidenced by the range and quality of her paintings, six of which are reproduced with her essay (see fig. 3).

Landscape Painting

In one of the most engaging and authentic essays, "Landscape Painting: The Artist's Perspec-
tive," Don Koertner draws upon his long experience to shed light on the craft and mechanics of the genre. In addition to being one of the most interesting landscape painters whose work is represented as Realism in Revolution, Koertner is an insightful portrait painter, as exemplified by his gentle, wistful portrait of a young girl, Loretta, and the beautifully lit Sunday Afternoon (fig. 4).

Koertner's essay is an absorbing biographical narrative and an informative exposition of his craft. "Having come from a working class background and having spent my childhood in the depression years of the 1930s," he reveals, "I know nothing of the rich history of pastel art. But not, in fact, know even the names of the old masters other then Rembrandt. Yet I began sketching landscape elements in my adolescent years."

The painter skillfully guides the willing reader into his working environment. "The landscape country," as he puts it, "rightfully claiming spiritual ownership of the land he loves, the region.
around Lake Superior and the headwaters of the Mississippi River. "For the artist interested in landscape painting, working outside is that time of wild delight," Koesten argues, borrowing a phrase from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay Nature. The reader senses some of what the novelist means as he describes the challenge of nature: "The artist's key is a large canvas like a sail; the creeping, crawling, and flying peels; the bending light; and the sub-zero weather he often works in. Bringing us back into the studio, Koesten explains the work that goes on there and the reasons why artists sometimes forget direct work and turn to producing landscapes indoors, or sometimes begin painting in the studio and then continue working outdoors.

Lamenting that modern art establishment has had a devastating effect on traditional painters, Koesten concludes his essay by asserting that these painters (rather than academicians or critics) must once again be recognized by the general public as authorities on the artistic aspects of painting.

The Necessity of Excellence

The longest and most substantial essay in Reaction in Revolution is Stephen Crichton's "The Necessity of Excellence."

The Artist's Search for an Ideal. It is a candid commentary on recent painting prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, the reasons for its recent eclipse in the twentieth, and the conditions required for its revival as we approach the next century. In an often brilliant (if sometimes disconcerting) discourse, Crichton—whose thought and writing match the high order of his paintings—demonstrates an intimate insight into fundamental issues of art history. "For a work to be a great work," he writes, "there must be a generally recognized and authoritative standard by which it can be evaluated—a standard that has been reached or conceived and that expertise which has been surpassed...a master of the art..." Crichton describes the modern view that "art has been essentially a form of life and art." Crichton makes it clear that "art has been essentially non-conventional in which it is impossible to have absolute." The collapse of traditional values in art, he says, was based on the impression that there is no other way. The "extreme of this trend is abstraction."

Attesting to the openness of the Boston painters on the issue of individual style, Crichton maintains that the representation of nature "varies with each individual and, for the same individual, varies from time to time according to his purpose...Each method proceeds from the individual painter's "eye and form," and upon the basis of these forms on the eye became the reality. (The end result of this trend, he says, is that art is "artistic".)"

Attest to the openness of the Boston painters on the issue of individual style, Crichton maintains that the representation of nature varies with each individual and, for the same individual, varies from time to time according to his purpose. Each method proceeds from the individual painter's "eye and form," and upon the basis of these forms on the eye became the reality. (The end result of this trend, he says, is that art is "artistic".)

Crichton rightly determines that before we can differentiate between good and bad painting, based on rational criteria, we must return to a "philosophical foundation which assures us that such criteria can and do exist." For him that philosophical foundation is rooted, in turn, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in the faith that God exists. His pronouncement that this aspect is somewhat surprising, given his emphasis throughout his essay, on the power of man's reason. What is most intriguing, however, is that Crichton's deep religious convictions lead him to precisely the same artistic conclusions and values as are shared by many like himself for whom the "philosophical foundation of art is rooted in reality—without recourse to religious faith.

The Other Essays

The remaining essays, albeit uneven in quality, contain much of value, though there is no space to do more than briefly summarize them here. In "The Visual Image," Charles Cecil persuasively argues that "the only law of the art of painting is nature," and that both abstract art and "photorealism have abandoned the connection to nature. Kurt Anderson's highly personal essay, "The Experience of a Young Painter," expresses his frustrations as a young painter seeking traditional training today, but projects confidence in the future of his chosen craft.

In a related essay, "The Art Student's Dilemma," Kirk Richards reflects on his experience as an art student in college prior to his years of training at the Ladd studio. He gives the general reader a rare glimpse into the essential ingredients of studio training: drawing from life, cast drawing, and mastering the craft of painting.

Richard Ladd's essay, "Painting: Understanding the Craft," is valuable for its insights into the "impressionist vision," and even more so for its discussion of the "impressionist vision," in which the painter initiates the "form and the psyche," rather than exclusively and directed upon nature.

In "Ethics and Aesthetics," Lisa Bormann presents a richly nuanced analysis of the meaning of abstraction in painting and the idea of originality, or "new forms," in art. Despite the promise of her title, however, she says nothing about ethics.

In his brief "Thoughts on American Impressionism," Harry Potterman (whose appealing Michael's letter was published in the February 1984 Arts) traces the roots of the style to Velasquez and Vermeer in the seventeenth century. Charles Chardin in the eighteenth—painters whom he describes as "paragons of impressionist vision."

Jim Proffitt's essay, "Still Life: The Tradition Continues," an expanded version of the article which appeared in the February 1984 Arts, adds welcome insights into this genre as important to the Boston painters.

Finally, there is Richard W. Whitney's "An Approach to Painting." Whitney—a highly accomplished landscape and portrait painter—has much of interest to say about craftsmanship and artistic expression, and about how she solves problems of composition, form, and style in her work. (An illustrated article about Whitney, including excerpts from his essay, will appear in the next issue of Arts.

The Paintings

As one might expect from the essays, the paintings in Reaction in Revolution are highly individual expressions. They vary markedly, not only in subject matter and style but also in depth.
The New Dawn of Painting

(reprinted from page 9)

of conception and quality of execution. Though the best achieve great beauty, and many have delightful and appealing qualities, a few struck me as usual or inspired—a reminder of just how "extraordinarily difficult" the art of painting is.

In selecting the illustrations for this article, I focused on my own personal preferences, giving weight not only to the overall quality of the work but also to well it would translate to a much-reduced black-and-white reproduction (a consideration which eliminated all the impressionistic landscapes).

Most memorable for me among the many fine portraits is Mark Balma's Mirages Creations (fig. 2), which quite effectively evokes the unconventional old-world beauty and poise of his subject. In originality of design, depth of insight, and sensitivity of rendering, it is a mature achievement—though painted when the artist was only twenty-four years old.

Sue Cotton's work, encompassing every major genre, is well represented in the book and is consistently impressive. Particularly striking are her luminous double portrait of a woman and child (Memento, fig. 1), a powerfully dramatic depiction of Christ, Sailing the Waters (Poesia, Be Still, fig. 10), and the jewel-like still lifes.

In view of the importance of the nude in the tradition of Western art, it is surprising that Richard Lack's Nude with Red Rose (see cover) is the only painting of this genre in the volume. It is an effective reinterpretation of this traditional subject, with echoes of Rembrandt's Bartholomeus and Ingres' Repose de Voleuse, but with its own stamp of originality.

Other works, not reproduced here, deserve at least to be mentioned: the stills: necessarily incomplete: portraits by Allan Banks (Girl in White, Sun and Emerald Rose), Kirk Richards (Timothy Trees), Susan Stokes (Robert), Richard Lack (Girl in Blue: Homage to Picasso, and his series of musical portraits), and Kurt Anderson (The Shit-Putter). Jim Probst still life Lemons and Oranges; landscapes by Robert Moore (River with Expansive View) and Anna Van Tilborgh (Glen Grind) and Allan Banks' outdoor figure painting The Rascugrande. Finally, there are Robert Douglas Hunter's beautifully arranged and subtly illuminated still lifes (fig. 11).

A Landmark Publication

Realism in Revolution: a major artistic and cultural statement in defense and celebration of traditional values in painting. As it is unlikely in today's climate that the project would have been undertaken by an established art book publisher, the Taylor Publishing Company is to be doubly congratulated for venturing onto unfamiliar ter-


Realism in Revolution


The Heritage Art Gallery

Located in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, the Heritage Art Gallery of Classical Realism opened last November. The Gallery will feature works by Boston School painters. Heritage Art Gallery, 228 South Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.