

THE TAPESTRY

Leonard French describes his mural in these words:

"The central panel suggests a tree of knowledge growing out of a jewelled fish (a spiritual accompaniment is intended), and from the tree birds rise, spreading out through the cloud shapes of the other panels. Hands and figures rise from the earth, reaching for the birds. "The left hand depicts the journey of figures in a boat, the seeking after or journeying to the source of knowledge. The far right hand panel is the garden, figures in a primitive state, a sort of evolution of figures from a primitive garden (the first garden.)"

Originally the mural was planned as five panels and French entitled them, reading from left to right, "The Journey," "Man," "The Tree," "The Earth," "The Garden." The finished mural is now reduced to four panels, the central tree being incorporated into the panels, "Earth" and "Man."

Visualization, verbalization, music and dance are tools we have to express a concept. The analysis of an art work is a delicate and sensitive task and great harm can be done in an attempt to become verbal about a form which relies upon elements peculiar to itself for intrinsic meaning.

Fortunately, French provides us with a theme for his mural. He refers to the warp and weft of man's many-sided development, with particular reference to intellectual and spiritual achievements. A literal approach to such a theme could only present an objective fragment or two, whereas one should offer all the aspects of growth from the first fertilized cell to our present status. The solution of such a problem demands a synthesis and French attempts this with a symbolic rendering. Although seemingly destructive to the three-dimensional image of reality, this symbolism is necessary for that expression of sensory and emotional experiences which defy interpretation in the conventional story-telling devices.

To unravel the sign language, the spectator must bring to bear all the associations which the symbol may evoke, be they emotional or intellectual, arising from the visual elements (line, colour, shape, etc.), or from the semi-literal symbols. He must

see and feel them. Once this is achieved he is liberated from reading the mural in a traditional way as the symbols become many-sided in meaning.

Arranging this multitude of impressions into a structure becomes a vital experience: sensations arise from many sources and a large majority are not capable of verbalization, whereas others may be biological and independent of conventional reference. These patterns expand into a multi-dimensional fold involving time and space, thus profoundly affecting any attempt to communicate in a conventional "logical" sense. This is the process of re-creation that French intends. He aims at evoking emotional flashes, opening doors of simultaneous thinking and feeling. To accomplish this he juxtaposes the threads of conscious and unconscious images, thus affecting a tapestry that allows many points of reference to converge upon his singular images.

Whether the colours offer meta-physical sensations or convey a literal meaning will depend upon the breadth and depth of the viewer's experience. Similarly with the bird — we might well ask: is it a defiance of gravity, a metaphysical ascension or the elusive winged knowledge? Again the answer could well be that these three associations have a singular purpose.

Apart from the subtle union of psycho-physical aspects, French has preserved aesthetic meaning. It is held by many that the relationship between visual elements transcends subject matter in painting. I agree wholeheartedly with this as any topic that contradicts the direct visual process is damaging.

Intrinsicly, painting communicates with visual elements regardless of how much or how little is said; but as the modern writer finds the conventional language limiting to this complexity of associations, so does the painter withdraw from the conventional three-dimensional illusion. Both search for permanent tools for their constructions — verbalization and visualization.

"For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice."—T. S. Eliot.
—A. Cuthbertson.