

Beauty Of Athens Enhanced By Series Of Mural Decorations

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Of late years the beauty of Athens has been enhanced by a series of mural decorations. Some may have already attracted the attention of Athenians, such as the fresco on the exterior wall of the Fine Arts Building, but others may have escaped notice, as they are inside buildings that many persons may have no practical reason to enter, and some, even, can be found in darkened basements.

This notice is written with the hope that the curiosity of the average citizen may be aroused sufficiently to cause him to come and enjoy the murals with which he is not yet familiar, as mural painting unlike easel painting, is made to be enjoyed, not by one collector, but by the community.

Reuben Gambrell, now turning his artistic gifts to the Army's advantage as a practitioner of aerial photography, has painted a mural in the staircase of the former Demonstration School building, now Baldwin Hall. It represents the "Activities of the Modern School" and depicts students in a world at peace; studying books, sawing wood, cutting fabrics, making experiments in chemistry.

In the center of the panel appears a geographic globe with its shores and seas acquiring, for us today, a dramatic meaning that the painter could not have been conscious of in the peaceful year 1940, when the mural was painted.

The building where those quite studious persons are to be seen is now full of the dynamic activities of Navy men which make more evident, by contrast, the quiet, contemplative character of the painter that has been successfully projected in his work. The technique is oil on canvas, the canvas being glued directly on the wall.

Has Two Murals

The Commerce-Journalism building has two murals in the staircase, painted in oils directly on the walls, in pastel tonalities and light values, which come close to the texture and appearance of true fresco. Dorothy Douglas Greene represents the activities connected with newspapers, making, selling and reading. She obtained the original data for her press-room, featuring busy editors, proof-readers, type-setters, and a linotype, in the offices of the Banner Herald where she was invited to come at any time and sketch.

The subject has an every day flavor, with the men in shirt sleeves and eye-shades; the other half of the fresco represents, against a background of Corinthian columns, characteristic of the Academic building, groups of students in a moment of relaxation, reading, talking, or resting. The famous campus arch has also been integrated into the composition. Though the characters are quite natural, the eight columns and precise geometric balance gives to the groups a definite architectural feeling.

The mural facing this one is by Edith Hodgson. It employs the same technique and fresco-like effect to great advantage. We see a newspaper stand, a small boy pointing to a magazine he wishes to buy, and a newsboy shouting his wares. The different activities of radio are also shown—the dispatch of a message, its diffusion and reception all over the world; a political speaker, his arm forcefully raised to accent his words, declaiming from a stand adorned with bunting; and a newspaper man informally seated with his feet atop his desk who relays the news of the day to his listeners.

Though color scheme and composition match perfectly the panel that it faces, this mural shows the personality of the artist in a greater quota of naturalistic details, and the drawing of strongly characterized figures from unusual angles which results in forceful spatial arrangement.

We now come to painting in true fresco. This difficult technique is a legacy of the middle ages when frescoes lavishly adorned churches and palaces. Drawing on wet plaster does not admit of retouchings once the plaster is dry, and thus a problem is added to the many that make a painter's lot difficult.

First Local Fresco

The first fresco painted in Athens is by Stanton Forbes, in the first quarters built for the Salvation Army. Small in size, this pioneer fresco is nevertheless possessed of a true monumental feeling and is impeccable in technique.

The fresco on the facade of the Fine Arts Building has already been described in detail in this newspaper, and is easy of access as it can be seen, as in fact it cannot fail to be seen, from the street.

A third fresco has been added to these this summer by Lou Tilley, in the basement of the Fine Arts Building. Far from being disheartened by the bleakness of the gray brick, corridors and the dim lighting, Lou Tilley has known how to extract from such deficiencies a maximum of effect. This brick wall is realistically painted into his mural so that a deceived eye can think that the persons, too, are real, being also an actor (we saw him last year in two presentations of "Ladies in Retirement") Tilley represents a subject he knows well, a group of students preparing sets for one of their plays. The striking chiaroscuro modeling is perfectly adapted to the light in the basement and problems of perspective and scale are also well handled.

There is a probability that more

murals will be painted this season, and if this becomes a habit, Athens may soon look in its physical appearance much like the Athens of Greece that boasted of many murals by Apelles, Teuxis and other masters.