

WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, *Admiral Duquesne, Dieppe*, 1900, oil on canvas, 14½" x 17¾". Felton Bequest 1947.

PAINTINGS BY WALTER RICHARD SICKERT IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY COLLECTION

In May, 1910, W. R. Sickert attempted to plot his position as an artist for the benefit of the readers of the "New Age", for which he was then art critic. "I am a pupil of Whistler," he wrote, "that is to say, at one remove of Courbet, and at two removes of Corot. About six or seven years ago, under the influence in France of Pissarro, himself a pupil of Corot, aided in England by Lucien Pissarro and by Gore (the latter a pupil of Steer, who in turn learned much from Monet) I have tried to recast my painting entirely and to observe colour in the shadows."

Apart from showing Sickert's attachment to tradition, this passage is of interest in that three of the four paintings which represent him in our collection were painted before 1904 — that is before the time which, he claimed, had seen a radical change in his work. These three paintings, "*Admiral Duquesne, Dieppe*," "*Resting*" and "*Grand Canal, Venice*" are clearly all by the pupil of Whistler and the artistic descendant of Courbet and Corot. "*Resting*" also shows another influence which Sickert did not mention, and that is of Degas, whose use of the "key-hole" viewpoint he was able to assimilate during a friendship of over 30 years.

Involvement in matrimonial difficulties, Sickert left England in 1899 and went to Dieppe, then a common meeting ground for artists and intellectuals from England and France. As in other places where he lived, Sickert seized on one or two subjects which he painted over and over again. He was not gifted with great natural facility, but by repeated assaults on a problem and considerable intelligence he was able to extract the utmost from his talent. In Dieppe, the church of St. Jacques and the statue of Admiral Duquesne in the Place Nationale fascinated him, and were each painted from various angles and in a variety of ways. The Melbourne Duquesne is comparatively small ($14\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$), and is dated 1900, and therefore would seem to be one of the first attempts made on the subject. This same motif appears in one of a series of panels which were commissioned but refused by a Dieppe cafe owner, and this, much increased in size to $51\frac{1}{2} \times 39\frac{3}{4}$ and now in Manchester, would seem to be the final working out of the theme.

Sickert first visited Venice in 1896, and was obviously fascinated by its sea-reflected light as well as its accumulation of art treasures. So it was natural that, still avoiding England, he should make his way there again. He was now a mature painter, and he soon set down the usual repertoire of subjects. In landscape, St. Mark's offered the complexity of structure and the burnished surfaces which he loved, and for figure painting he found an ideal model

WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, *Resting*, about 1903, oil on canvas, $14\frac{1}{2}'' \times 18''$. Felton Bequest 1948.





WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, *The Raising of Lazarus*, 1928/9, oil on canvas, 26" x 36". Felton Bequest 1947.



WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, *Figure*, black chalk and indian ink drawing, 15½" x 9½". Felton Bequest 1948.

This is the only example of Sickert's Camden Town period in our collection.

During his stay in Venice "La Giuseppina" and her mother became the leading characters in a series of working class domestic dramas which were to reach their climax in the darker regions of Camden Town when Sickert returned to London. In our painting, "Resting," La Giuseppina serves Sickert for an exercise in colour and lighting. Pale lemon, maroon, black and white make up the whole scheme, and in it one may see hints taken from Tintoretto, but the lighting comes from the stage, and the illumination under the eyebrows and on the lower plane of the cheek were such as Sickert had seen many times in the theatre. "The Grand Canal," while lacking the obvious virtuoso effects which La Giuseppina inspired, is a small masterpiece in its economy of statement. But perhaps the quality which takes Sickert out of the class of English followers of the Barbizon School is the unhesitating and yet apparently artless movement of the surface of the water from our feet to the distant buildings. These two Venetian



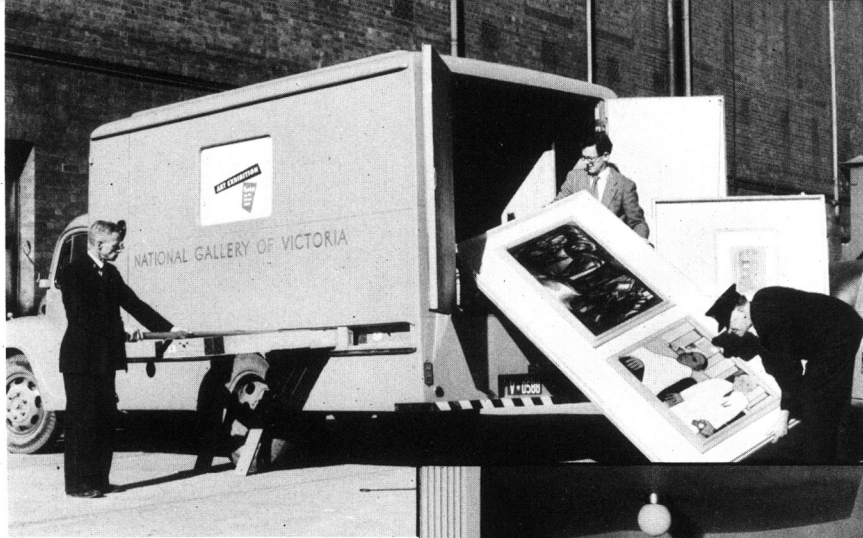
WALTER RICHARD SICKERT, Grand Canal, Venice, about 1903, oil on canvas, 17" x 24". Felton Bequest 1953.

works cannot be later than 1903, and so, in our Collection, we must take a stride of twenty-five years to reach the period of "The Raising of Lazarus," painted in 1928.

In his "New Age" article, Sickert asserted that Impressionism had seized him via Lucien Pissarro and Spencer Gore, but it was in fact via Harold Gilman. Post-Impressionism, and even Cubism, were also to seize him in spite of his statements to the contrary. It is unfortunate that, at present, what happened to Sickert during those twenty-five years cannot be illustrated in the Gallery. We can see nothing of the Camden Town period between 1905 and 1910; nor of the theatre subjects taking a hint from Degas, but made into something entirely his own; and we have nothing of 1912 to 1914, the period of "Ennui." But the "Lazarus" is a great picture, and one which was close to Sickert's heart. The first impulse for it came from a joke — a lay-figure given to him by his brother-in-law and carried with difficulty to the upstairs studio in Highbury Place. But then Sickert's dramatic sense took over and the whole situation was given power and dignity. It is worth noting that this was the picture which Sickert chose to pay off in some way his life-long debt to the theatre. He offered it to Sadler's Wells when that theatre, at which he had at one time been a small-part actor, was in need of funds. But we in Melbourne are also the gainers, for, without the appeal from the theatre, the painter nearing the age of seventy might never have transferred it to canvas from the wall paper of the studio.

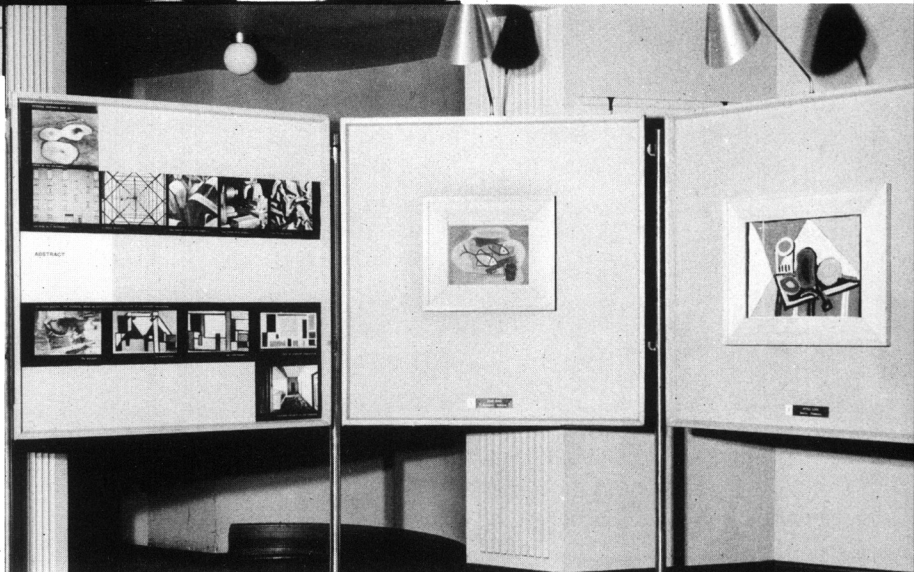
But perhaps I have under estimated this amazing man's energy, for he lived until 1942 and, in those last years, was able to open up a new vein of painting. In the so-called "Echoes" he recreated the 19th century engravings which he admired so much and made them into paintings which sparkle with brilliant colour and sly fun. Like the earlier periods mentioned above, this last phase has, until recently, been unrepresented here, but a fine "Echo" is on its way and will, I hope, help the next generation to know better the greatest English painter of the first half of this century.

Eric Westbrook.



1. Loading the 1955 Travelling Exhibition in its new van.
2. An Art Interpretation Panel; Lithographs by Braque and Picasso.
3. Factory workers studying a print at lunchtime.

Among the extension services of the National Gallery of Victoria, the Travelling Art Exhibition has now won recognition as an essential service to rural communities. This service, in making the collection known to a wider public, also demonstrates that the Gallery is, in fact, the National Gallery of Victoria and not merely of Melbourne. With the interests of the Gallery and the country people in mind, the Director and Trustees initiated the first art tour of five provincial towns in 1948. The Council of Adult Education had already established a country group service and offered to supply the organising framework. Added impetus to the rapid development of the enterprise was given on the secondment of an officer from the Education Department to supervise Gallery extension services. In a matter of a few years the annual tour expanded from five to over thirty towns, and up to the present nearly 400 pictures from the Gallery collection have been displayed in eight successive exhibitions.



The travelling exhibition is designed for extreme flexibility and mobility. A specially designed van carries the screens on which the paintings are already fixed. These screens can

be arranged according to the floor area available; lighting units are fitted to the top of each. Everything is designed for safety and speed of handling. Lectures are given and art films are shown to encourage wider understanding and appreciation of the exhibitions, questions are frequently addressed to the lecturers and opportunities arise to interpret art problems. Many school classes visit the display. Thousands of children see original paintings they could not see otherwise. A catalogue with introductory and biographical notes is now supplemented by documentary and explanatory features on special screens.

Local municipal authorities now regard travelling exhibitions as an essential community service. They provide hall space, send out invitations to residents and arrange official opening ceremonies. Recently introduced lunch time showings in factory canteens have greatly increased the potential value of the exhibition to a wider audience. The Travelling Exhibitions have become a central factor in educating and enlivening the taste of a very wide section of the public. They have also proved their value in relation to the C.A.E. discussion groups, the painting group's Summer School, and the Art from the Country Exhibition now held annually in Melbourne.

Gilbert Docking



Picasso certainly did not linger as he incised the figure contours in the clay of this "VASE". Nor yet when he took up his brushes. He makes statements, and that is that. Let those who are not satisfied seek elsewhere.

Some fleeting suggestion of primitive Ceramic Art comes from the simple shape, colour scheme and method, but there is nothing primitive in the dominant effect. Sophistication rather.

Could figures be used to decorate a vase with a closer or more witty relation to the body of the vase itself?

They and it are completely integrated. A striking, sometimes graceful, effect ensues when the vase outline coincides with that of a figure. Samuel Pepys would have chuckled mightily. So will many others. Then, however, they might realise Picasso's power of line, his skilful and subtle implication of volume structure in straight and curved sequence.

The figures represent Maenads, votaries of Bacchus, wearing leopard skins. Hence the spots which puzzle somewhat in the general impression. Picasso has produced hundreds of ceramic pieces. This vase is one of a particular series, commenced about 1950, showing variations of the same subject.

Arnold Shore.

PICASSO, Vase with figures of Maenads by Picasso, unglazed pottery, height 24½".

RECENT ACQUISITIONS TO THE ART GALLERY INCLUDE:

OIL PAINTINGS:

Collins Street, 5 p.m.	John Brack	Purchased
Lobby, Parliament House	Noel Counihan	Purchased
Boat	Charles Blackman	Purchased

GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY AND ART MUSEUM INCLUDE:

Three drawings by Arthur Esam	Presented by Miss M. E. Mott
Eight prints and drawings by Australian Artists	Presented by Sir Daryl Lindsay
Figure Study, wash drawing by Barse Millar	Presented by Sir Daryl Lindsay
Three oil paintings by Rupert Bunny	Presented by Miss Christina Armstrong
Portrait drawing of Percy Grainger by John Singer Sargent	Presented by Percy Grainger
Portrait drawing of Jacques Emile Blanche by Augustus John	Presented by Percy Grainger
Fair Rosamond, by Arthur Hughes, oil painting	Presented by Miss Eva Gilchrist
in memory of her uncle, P. A. Daniel, a close friend of Arthur Hughes	

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The following publications and reproductions are on sale at the Swanston Street entrance:

Catalogue of the Gallery (5/-); Catalogue of Selected Masterpieces, with 30 illustrations (1/6); Thirteen large reproductions (25/- each). A selection of small reproductions, including Christmas cards.

THEATRETTE:

ART FILMS: on the third Tuesday of each month.

DOCUMENTARY FILMS: on Tuesdays, excepting each third Tuesday.

MUSICAL RECORDINGS: on the second and fourth Thursday.

All these activities are held at 1.15 p.m.

The cover design in this issue is a Plate, designed by Jean Lurcat, made at St. Vincens Potteries in Southern France. Diameter: 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ ".