Why Municipal Art?

Observations and Comment by John Quincy Adams

A FEW nights ago while walking on one of the best residence streets in Philadelphia, I put my cane up and gave a light tap against the porch pillars of a large and pretentious house. I was startled to find that they were only tin or thin galvanized iron and gave forth a very hollow sound. Last winter I went into some houses that were being built. In the bay-window of a small sitting-room were two great columns, fully ten inches in diameter, apparently supporting some decorative woodwork above. Upon examination I found them to be made of quarter-inch pine curved to form a column, stained to imitate mahogany, and when struck with the knuckles they gave forth a sound like a wooden drum. Now in both cases these sets of pillars were put up to deceive. They are made to resemble classic columns and the casual observer takes them for things of substance as long as they remain undented or unwarped. Our ideas of a pillar are that it is to support a weight, but these would not support their own weight unless held in place by nails and screws. Can human actions be more deceitful? Can boys and girls playing about these "hollow mockeries" of columns escape their corrupting influence? What parents are willing that their children shall associate with lying, deceitful and vicious playmates? They firmly believe and act upon Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Evil communications corrupt good manners!" They know if a child plays with one who steals, lies, and uses obscure language that no amount of ethical instruction given line upon line and precept upon precept can save him from contamination. But they forget that objects have characters which are dividedly good or bad, virtuous or vicious. In fact, all good and bad human qualities are to be found in the concrete things around us which have been made by man.

Let us go out into our streets with this criterion. Let us examine the concrete evidence of our municipal life. We find many streets in most of our cities ill-paved. We find most of them dirty, filthy, papers flying about, garbage boxes and ash barrels lining the sidewalks. Ashes and dust flying in all directions when the garbage wagon is being loaded, and few people with good clothes have the temerity to pass a gang of street sweepers. Keeping in mind young people and the effect of surroundings upon them. If they ride in the street cars of most cities they see signs posted up: "Spitting on the Floor of This Car is Positively Prohibited," nevertheless they see this prohibition violated daily and no effort made to enforce the law. Not only this, the car is jammed to overflowing and everybody takes it as a matter of course. If they turn the water spigot there comes forth at some seasons water unfit to bathe in and they are forbidden to drink it at any season of the year until it is filtered or boiled. Some may think that these things do not concern art. But the basis of all municipal art is cleanliness and wholesomeness. It is vain to talk of grand boulevards if they are to be kept dirty and unsightly. And when all of the common streets of a city are neglected, a system of grand boulevards is merely vain boasting, and not true art.

We take great pains to teach the youth to understand the government under which they live and of which they are a part. We use not only text books but we organize them into legislative bodies and "School Cities," hoping in this way to arouse an interest in municipal affairs; to give them high political ideals and a strong sense of civic duty. But set over against all didactic instruction is this tremendous, persistent and ever-present influence of concrete municipal surroundings which flatly contradict all of our precepts and forces upon the youth these low standards of civic life. Vain and futile will instruction remain when universally belied by concrete and everyday surroundings. The young people of our cities are daily taking into their systems the prints of a city government which is negligent, pretentious, insincere, vulgar and dishonest.

But there is a more subtle though equally important influence exerted by municipal surroundings. We know that the nervous system is like a delicate stringed instrument. Sense impressions are the fingers which produce upon it discord or harmony. Every sense impression sets its strings in vibration throughout the whole nervous system. It is commonly thought that the character of the sense impressions is a matter of indifference. But it has been recently shown that one kind of sense impressions is like oil to the nervous system. Keeping it in working order; toning it up, while others are like acid corroding it and wearing it out. Beautiful and harmonious sense impressions sweep over the nerves, relieving their tension, integrating and giving them health and vigor, while ugly and discordant ones have a disintegrating and debilitating effect. The sense-impressions from a work of art, like strains of music, fall upon the sensarium in rythmical cadence, thus binding all of the nerve centers into a harmonious unity.

By a work of art I do not mean merely a statue, painting or melody. These, but much more than these. Art is no respector of persons, but clothes alike the Parthenon and the humblest object of daily use with dignity and beauty. Hence, not only the school building both within and without, but every municipal object, such as lamp-posts, hydrants, and all objects paid for by public taxes. Every one of these is an impersonal teacher. It is for us to choose whether they shall teach deceit, pretense, vulgarity or whether they shall teach sincerity, nobility and refinement. Teach they will, and from their influence there is no escape for boys and girls who pass through the streets.

Then again take the effects of color upon persons. Dr. Fere of Paris has experimented upon several hundred persons to test the effect of color upon the physical strength. He found that if a person's strength with ordinary white light in the eyes was twenty-three as measured by the dynamometer, with blue light his strength was raised several points, or to about twenty-five; with green light it was twenty-eight; with orange, thirty-five, and with red forty-two. The results were the same with those who were color blind. Colored rooms are now used in many asylums as a treatment for some kinds of insanity with marvelous success. And recent journals have spread broadcast the remarkable discovery of Dr. Finsen that certain organic diseases can be cured simply by the use of colored lights.

Not only are colors and farms sources of health and strength, or of debility and weakness, but they are as well powerful influences for elevating or debasing character. Ugly telegraph poles, overhead wires, unseemly public buildings, lamp-posts, hydrants makes for low civic ideals and an utter indifference to civic duties.

Philadelphia, Pa.

The Myriad Spooks of the Animal World

A NEGRO, shrieking with terror and trembling in every limb, ran on to the veranda of a planter's house in Trinidad one evening and flung himself at the planter's feet in a dead faint.

"What's the matter, Bob?" asked the planter, after he had brought the man to and given him a stiff drink of whisky. "John Awful Man put obeah 'pon you, eh?" alluding to a famous witch doctor of the neighborhood.

"No, massa," was the reply. "Wusser dan dat! I see de rollin' calf in de oush jus' now. Him eyes shine like fiah and him chain go clank-a-clank-clank. De blessed Lord hab mercy 'pon me. I die soon, fo' sure."

Nothing could persuade the man that he was not doomed or that he had only seen a harmless and perfectly natural white calf. He fell in a state of hopeless melancholy and soon afterward died of a slight attack of malarial fever—"from pure funk," as the doctor said.

The "rolling calf" is the most famous of the many animal ghosts firmly believed in by the colored people in the West Indies. Indeed, throughout the world there is no animal ghost which causes people greater uneasiness.

It is a white calf of enormous size—as big as an elephant, if some accounts may be trusted. Its eyes blaze like two live coals and roll fearsomely from side to side; hence its name. A heavy chain encircles its body and drags behind on the ground for many yards, clanking weirdly in the stillness of the tropical night.

The apparition is supposed to presage death, or, at the least, some terrible misfortune. And, of course, nearly every negro who meets a white calf straying at night in the jungle or on a lonely mountain road imagines that he has seen the dreaded "rolling calf."

There is only one way to render the phantom harmless. When it appears, a knife or a machete must instantly be stuck in the ground, with the edge towards the calf. Then, like Mephistopheles held back by the sign of the cross, it cannot approach or do any evil. On this account a West Indian negro will seldom go out at night without his machete.

The belief in animal ghosts is common to most savage and barbarian races, as well as to many civilized people. It is natural that this should be so, because most savages credit animals with souls and a future existence equally with men. They think that after death,

"The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer a shade."

Therefore, if they believe that the ghosts of men revisit these "pale glimpses of the moon," they must believe, in order to be logical, that the ghosts of animals do the same. This is the true explanation of the numerous stories of ghostly animals which the traveler hears in all parts of the world.

The Red Indians' belief that the souls of slain animals went to the happy hunting grounds, as well as the souls of slain warriors, is well known. But it is not so well known that among certain tribes it was the custom to beg pardon of an animal before killing it, and even to stick the pipe of peace in its mouth if there was time to do so before its spirit fled. This was to prevent the animal from coming back in ghostly form to haunt its slayer.

The same superstition may be met with in many other parts of the world—in India, in Assam, in New Guinea, among the Ewe-speaking negro tribes of the West Coast of Africa, among the Wafoingoma Indians of Venezuela, and in the interior of Madagascar.

The people of Assam firmly believe that if a man takes care to beg pardon with due form and ceremony the ghosts of all the birds and beasts he slays in this life will become his property in the next world. It is rather annoying to an English planter in that country to wait for his dinner while his servant goes through elaborate propitiatory rites before he kills a chicken.

No animal ghost has been more firmly believed in for many centuries by many millions of people than the "Pale Horse." It dates back to the days of Icelandic sages and Norse legends. Today it is an article of faith with the peasants of Iceland, of the northern part of Norway and Sweden, Russia, and even with some of the Scottish Highlanders.

When a man is about to die the "Pale Horse"—white, shadowy, ghostly—comes out of the dark night and halts before the door of his house. Then he must arise from his deathbed, drink life's stirrup-cup, mount the spectral and ride off to that "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

In the days when he wrote poetry instead of guiding America's foreign policy, John Hay took this curious myth for the theme of one of his best poems, "The Stirrup Cup."

"My short and happy day is done,
The long and dreary night comes on;
And at my door the Pale Horse stands,
To carry me to unknown lands.

"His whinny shrill, his pawing hoof,
Sound dreadful as a gathering storm;
And I must leave this sheltering roof,
And joys of life so safe and warm.

"Tender and warm the joys of life—
Good friends, the faithful and the true;
My rosy children and my wife,
So sweet to kiss, so fair to view.

"So sweet to kiss, so fair to view—
The night comes down, the lights burn blue;
And at my door the Pale Horse stands,
To bear me forth to unknown lands."

India is full of animal ghosts, from the Himalayas to Cape Cormorin. Ghost tigers, ghost jackals and ghost elephants haunt half the jungles of that vast country, if the natives may be believed. Here is a typical story:

"By the beard of my father, Sahib, I speak straight words," said an old Mahomedan hamout. "One evening we were hunting wild elephants in the jungle for our lord, the maharaja of Gidhaur. I saw a large tusker alone by a pool. His color was grayish-white, and my heart beat fast, for I thought Allah had been gracious to me and had placed in my hands that greatest of all prizes—a Lord White Elephant. Cautiously I edged my own tame elephant toward him, hoping that while they made friends I could bind him fast to a tree by the heel-rope.

"My beast trumpeted in terror and trembled violently, but I goaded him on. And then, when I put my hand on the white elephant I felt nothing but air. It was a ghost elephant—one of those elephants which come back after death to walk the earth because in this life they 'went musth' and murdered men.

"I fled from the spot as if Shaitan himself were at my heels, and soon afterward I made a pilgrimage to Mecca to avert the curse. But my elephant fell sick and died."

The Jains, a powerful religious sect in India, who devote themselves to caring for animals, teach that any animal which is ill-treated during its earthly life will return in spirit form after death to haunt its oppressor. It will inflict upon him all the torments it has endured—and worse. His crops will fail, his children die, his wife prove unfaithful, his enemies triumph over him and his body be racked with all manner of aches and pains. Naturally, this doctrine does more to promote kindness to dumb creatures than any society for the prevention of cruelty to animals could do.

Chinese folklore abounds with stories of the ill-used pet monkey who returns after death to worry the people who tormented him in the flesh. This monkey is never seen—only felt and heard. He sits on his former master's bed at night, gibbering at him and pulling his pigtail, or he appears at meal times and snatches away the food as it is being conveyed to the mouth. Madness and death are said to be the inevitable doom of anybody haunted by this most uncomfortable specter.

Travelers in the remoter parts of Germany are pretty sure to come across stories of animal ghosts. Indeed, Germany has a finer crop of all sorts and conditions of ghosts than any other country in the world. The most famous of these stories is that of the "Wild Troop of Rodenstein."

Before it "passed over," as spiritualists say, this troop was a band of robbers who owned the castle of Rodenstein and committed many frightful crimes. To this day, it is said, the troop may be heard dashing madly along the road to the castle. Nothing is seen, but the hoof beats and neighing of horses, the curses of the troopers and the barking of hounds make the peasant shudder as they pass by him on the lonely road.

Ghostly flocks of sheep are also frequently seen by the peasants of some parts of Germany, if their word may be accepted. It is supported by several tourists, including an English clergyman. The latter declares that the driver of his carriage "got down and found himself in the midst of the animals, the size and beauty of which astonished him. They passed him at an unusual rate, whilst he made his way through them to find the shepherd, when, on getting to the end of the flock, they suddenly disappeared. He then first learned that his fellow travelers had not seen them at all."

Another clergyman who met the spectral muttons declares that he "saw a large flock of sheep which stretched quite across the road and was accompanied by a shepherd and a long-haired black dog." As he gazed at the flock it vanished.

The ghost lore of England and Scotland abounds in tales of animal specters, but they are generally deceased humans who for some reason are compelled to revisit earth in the form of an animal.

For example, the Dog of Mause, "a grayish beast," wandered about Scotland until quite recently, telling everyone it met that it was the ghost of David Soutar, who had murdered a man by means of a dog and was therefore doomed to walk the earth in the guise of a dog. It used to ask people, of their Christian charity, to go to the scene of the murder and bury the bones of the victim, so that it might be released from its canine shape. Eventually, somebody was obliging enough to do this, and the phantom dog appeared no more.

The old farm laborers of Shropshire firmly believe that human ghosts take the form of bulls, and in Cornwall—that stronghold of quaint legends and strange superstitions—the people say that spirits of the departed return in the shape of a moth to watch over the welfare of those whom they hold most dear. Many a Cornish woman has been seen to weep bitterly at the sight of a moth and heard to declare that it was the spirit of her dead baby.

A. T. Quiller Couch, himself a Cornishman, has written a pathetic poem on this superstition. A young lover, whose sweetheart had just died, is sitting in his study, thinking sadly of her. A moth flies in through the open window and flutters around him, trying to attract his attention. At last it kisses him on the lips, and, irritated by the interruption to his sweetly bitter thoughts, he crushes it to death. Then, too late, he realizes that it was the spirit of his sweetheart come back to comfort him. He has destroyed its earthly tabernacle and condemned it to wander houseless though the void of space to the end of time.

A well-known English naval officer, who is quoted by Andrew Lang, used to tell a story of a real animal ghost—that is to say, the ghost of a real animal, not a human ghost in animal shape. He says that he was sitting in a room in his country house with a friend when they heard a well-known bark on the stairs outside.

"Why, that's old Peter!" said the friend, referring to a favorite dog which had belonged to his host.

"Peter died since you were here last," said the naval officer.

A fox terrier in the room whined and trembled violently. Presently the door of the room was pushed open and they heard the "pad-pad" of a dog's feet on the polished floor. No dog could be seen, but the invisible ghost of one walked over to the hearthrug, shook itself violently, and then flung itself down heavily on the rug. The jingle of the collar could be distinctly heard.

A hard-headed Scottish planter, who is now living in Jamaica, declares that he met a ghostly mare three nights in succession at the same spot when riding home from his banana fields. Each time his horse stopped dead, quivering with fear, and could only be made to pass the mare by the liberal use of whip and spur. On the second night the planter tried to flog the mare out of the way, but as his whip curled over her back it only cut the air.

The planter's two sons, not to be outdone, swear that their horses were once raced for a mile by a spectral mule, which suddenly vanished under their very eyes.

But the queerest Jamaican ghost is one which haunts a plantation called "Tulloch." It is a spectral horse and buggy, and appears with oppressive regularity two or

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