



Artist Marcelo Grassmann shows one of his works to Brazilian Ambassador to the OAS and Mrs. Fernando Lobo at opening of show

A Word With MARCELO GRASSMANN

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"There are great artists, there is no abstract or representational art."

AT THE BEGINNING OF JULY, under the auspices of the Brazilian Ambassador to the OAS, Fernando Lobo, a show of drawings and engravings by Marcelo Grassmann opened at the Pan American Union; within three days, nearly half of the works had been sold. Grassmann is an accomplished artist, well known both in his own country and abroad, who has received a number of important awards. He exhibited for the first time in 1947, and his career since then has been marked by one success after another. In 1951 he won a prize at the First São Paulo Biennial. In 1952, at the First National Salon of Modern Brazilian Art, he was awarded a two-year trip to Europe. There he looked in at the engraving workshop of the Vienna Academy of Arts and visited the museums of many countries, but he was able to keep himself free of all academic influence. For him, the only thing to be learned from academic study of art is technique, because he thinks that form and composition should be free and individual. "Art cannot be taught," he says, "because if there were no artists, there would be no school or theory that could create them."

Grassmann is a calm man, with a gentle manner and a tranquil expression. He was born in São Paulo in 1925. Self-taught, he never had a lesson in painting. At the beginning of his career he used oils and color, but soon turned to engraving, drawing, lithography, and etching.

He engraves on copper, and particularly enjoys making woodcuts, because he finds this technique similar to sculpture, which he admires very much. He never abandons the human figure or living creatures because, as he says, they are the most important elements for doing creative work. He is firmly convinced that it is in man that the artist must seek his means of expression "because art is the expression of man." His works are reminiscent of the fantastic creations of the Flamenco artists of the sixteenth century. They also recall the macabre hallucinations found in the drawings of Goya. He draws beetles and human skeletons, witches and strange beasts, an orgy of incredible creatures created—unlike the intellectual conceptions that are characteristic of surrealism—by the inventive power of his own imagination. It is all done in black, or a single color, and white, and it does not need more, because he can produce dramatic contrast, depth, shadows, and movement through his mastery of his instrument, whether it is a burin, an etching needle, or a pen.

His theory that "there are great artists, there is no abstract or representational art," is supported by his idea that impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism came into being because those who painted in these ways were great artists. "The isms would have fallen into oblivion, had there been no Renoir, no Cezanne, no Van Gogh or Gauguin," he says. The artist expresses himself through what he personally feels, and for this reason it is much more important that the individual feel deeply than that



The Rider

he experiment, trying to find something new.

The occasion of this show is the first time Grassmann has had an opportunity to visit the United States. When we asked him his impression of the present state of painting in this country, he told us: "I find more enthusiasm and more life here than in Europe, and there are more works of modern art in the museums here than there." He spoke also of the progress that has been made, and of the great number of artists who are working in engraving, in Mexico and Brazil. The Biennials held in the latter country have stimulated artists to continue working in this field. So much so that in the plastic arts in those countries engraving has become the final step, not merely the preliminary route, for precise and faultless expression. For this reason, many people have succeeded in acquiring the mastery and strength that are necessary to manage such a difficult instrument as the burin.

The life of any artist is interesting, and when one sees Marcelo Grassmann, so calm and peaceful, as if there were for him no world other than his art, no dialogue other than the one he constantly holds with the creatures he creates from his imagination and brings into being on copper, wood, or paper, one wants to ask him what he does when he's not working. His answer reveals the human, sensitive part of his personality. He lives in a distant suburb of São Paulo, surrounded by turtles, dogs, cats, chickens, and turkeys. Alone? No. With Ana Maria, his wife. She shares all his interests, has the same tastes, and both are equally interested in their domestic animals. When he is not painting he likes to take long walks, by sunlight or by moonlight, in order to be close to nature. He is sociable, likes people, and enjoys his friends. For him the most important human contacts are with artists who express themselves in the language of their calling. He finds this helps his art more than any other form of apprenticeship or experimentation. Marcelo Grassmann communicates readily with others and does not miss an opportunity to do so. In São Paulo he is one of a group who meet regularly in the building of the Associated Newspapers, on Rua Sete de Abril, where there is always an art exhibit. Here he exchanges ideas with Lima Barreto, a movie director, or with Francisco Matarazzo, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, or with artists from Rio de Janeiro or abroad who drop in. São Paulo has become a great cultural center, especially



The Performers

for the plastic arts, and Marcelo Grassmann takes advantage of his surroundings.

Suddenly we hear "Sonia" mentioned. Who is Sonia? She is his wife, the Ana Maria we spoke of. Sonia was her former professional name when, with some other Austrian girls, she first came to Brazil to appear in wrestling matches. She decided not to return home after the tour and gave up her profession because she liked Brazil and São Paulo so much. Then she met and liked Marcelo Grassmann, too.

To visit this exhibition of thirty-five works by Marcelo Grassmann is like going through the pages of a book of macabre tales. In them he has written a message that it would take a writer several volumes to express. Nature, beings, animals, plants, and minerals are blended together, and in his pictures they may become a "man-animal" or an "animal-man." He mixes beings and gives the subjective an external form. His roughly drawn lines, traced in ink, outline a siren surrounded by coleopterans, beetles with human extremities riding on a giant monster, or a couple who, with animal smiles, attend the grand ball in rich clothes, under which their bare bones can be seen. Half life, half death. Being and not being, this is what gives Grassmann impetus in his art. ☞

Mermaid

