

*Bonnet* *120 copies*  
*Advocate - Selected Essays*  
 The Studio of Realist Art *1945-1988*  
 —1945—

In the art chronicle of the last issue of *Meanjin* Herbert McClintock, with some aptness, pointed out that in New South Wales the stale argument between the modern and the academic painter had become of less importance than the basic opposition of two schools of contemporary painting, the romantic revivalists and the contemporary realists. To state the position as simply as it may be stated, the centre of gravity of art controversy has shifted from representation versus formalism and abstraction, to aestheticism versus realism.

Unfortunately a great many modernists have adopted a wave-theory aesthetic and have decided with a sublime disregard of the facts that we live in an 'architectural' age, and that plastic art must therefore be abstract or 'architectural' to be modern. The academization of the abstract is almost within view. I shall not be surprised if it is from the ranks of the post-impressionist moderns of the 1920s that the chief heresy hunters of the vital artists of the 1940s and 1950s will arise. And the apparent impersonality of abstract art should make of it as safe an occupation as any academician would desire.

Paintings that treated social themes and portrayed aspects of contemporary life in Australia with no small measure of passion and significance were to be found in the odd corners of exhibitions of the Contemporary Art Society as early as 1939. But their accent was not always the best Parisian, and they were soon suspected of certain ecumenical divergencies from the central dogmas of non-representation.

This difference of opinion and practice resulted, as opinions usually do, in the creation of a new group. The Studio of Realist

Art was formed in Sydney in March this year to promote an art which has been at the best of times regarded as a sort of heresy by the majority of post-impressionist moderns.

The studio has been a success since its inception. Regular art classes in advanced and elementary drawing and in painting are well attended. A series of fortnightly lectures has been most successful. With its well-stocked art library and the regular monthly bulletin *Sora* it is fast becoming the most vigorous art centre in Sydney. The studio was founded by James Cant, who studied in Sydney, London and Paris, and worked as a painter in Spain in 1934, Hal Missingham, who is at present awaiting appointment as director of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Roy Dalgarno, widely known as the first artist to be commissioned by trade unions in this country to paint industrial life and activity, Dora Chapman, formerly of the Adelaide School of Arts and Crafts, and Roderick Shaw, painter, designer and book illustrator.

What is most impressive about the studio is the vigour of its activity and production, and the tolerance of its principles. These qualities are the marks of its contemporaneity. There have been many attempts to produce a national art but it is likely that the contemporary realists will be the first to produce it. If they do it will come as a by-product of their realism; not by a preoccupation with *plein-air* landscape, nor by archaistic myth-making, but by a passionate portrayal of the Australian people of their own time, as they live, think, work and play, by an understanding of their problems and ideals, and, above all by a firm belief that their own people are at least worthy to be the subject of art.