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107 Works of Six Geniuses at Memorial

By MARGARET FISH

"I . . . READ BOOKS in order to discover the artist who made them," Vincent Van Gogh wrote in one of his brave letters to a sister in 1889, not many months before the madness he feared prompted him to suicide. And, in another letter, ". . . I think that what is alive in art, and eternally alive, is first of all the painter, and, second, the picture."

One hundred and seven works of art that bring six geniuses of art "alive" for Milwaukee have been assembled by Edward H. Dwight, director, in the important Inaugural Exhibition which opened the War Memorial Art Center on Thursday evening. He has chosen selections of work by each of the six — El Greco, Rembrandt, Goya, Cezanne, Van Gogh and Picasso — that will enable viewers "to discover" the artist who made them.

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Van Gogh himself is represented by eight works, any one of which proclaims the psyche of the artist—overwhelmed by passions, impetuous, self-absorbed, intuitive, violent in convictions and yet reverent and tender. Most moving are two late oils, both done in 1889, "Olive Trees" (loaned by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts) and "Olive Grove" (from the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City).

They present similar scenes. In the former, the gnarled trees are seen under a brilliant sun which assaults the world with sulphurous yellows and in the latter they are visualized in a blue spring light—the blue as intense as the yellows in the other.

The furious pace of his brush work appears in both —everything must be hurriedly brought to completion, even his life. But every brush stroke is deliberate and perfect in its place.

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Likewise, any of the 11 paintings by El Greco (1584-1614) would enable us to gain an insight into this artist of Byzantine origins of whom his contemporary and friend, the poet-monk Pallavinciono wrote: "Crete gave him life; and Toledo, his brushes." El Greco lived in the Spain of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross and like them he was a mystic who saw and judged the world and himself in spiritual terms.

The subjects of his paintings — Christ, St. Francis, the Apostles, the Virgin Mary, most often—are incorporeal in body and elongated to stretch heavenward. Everywhere, he saw God's love and judgment. In his oil, "Crucifixion with View of Toledo" (loaned by the Cincinnati Art Museum), he depicts his adopted city rather than Jerusalem at the base of Golgotha, the hill whereon Christ was nailed to the cross. Toledo, like Jerusalem in the Bible narration, is darkened and lightning rents the sky and ghostly presences are felt everywhere.

El Greco always dealt most lovingly with the Blessed Virgin, as in "The Adoration of the Shepherds" (from the Metropolitan, New York), in which the Virgin-Mother is a wisp of a girl and the Baby she is cradling appears as the essence of helpless and innocent infanthood. The vaporous effects of his colors — the pinks, ambers, blues, lavenders and greens—are best seen here.

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Rembrandt (1606-1669) is represented by 32 works — paintings, etchings and drawings—the largest single group in the collection. Fourteen of these are etchings from the Art Center's own Gertrude Nunnemacher Schuchardt Collection. Rembrandt in his work grew steadily in wisdom and in knowledge. This is illustrated by two studies of the visage of Christ. In the earlier (loaned by the Detroit Institute of Arts) his Christ is rather sentimental, with His eyes averted from the world. In the later work (from Duveen Brothers, Inc., New York), the face is purposeful and masculine and the compassionate eyes look deeply into mankind.

One work after another in this magnificent Rembrandt group exemplifies Rembrandt's profound insight into the human condition and individual character, and especially his portraits of a "Rabbi" (loaned by the Legion of Honor, San Francisco); "An old Man Wearing a Cap" (Dr. and Mrs. G. H. A. Clowes, Indianapolis, the lenders); "A Lady, Saskia," (from the John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis); "An Elderly Woman" (sent by The Taft Museum, Cincinnati).

His genius with light appears in everything; color floats in a golden atmosphere. Even in the shadowed depths of the scene depicting "The Deposition of Christ," (from the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Fla.), there is the gleam of gold-brown atoms of pigment. The same magic of light illumines his etchings and drawings, and never was a form limned with greater solidity than in his pen study of a "Man in Hat and Heavy Cloak" (from the University of Saskatchewan).

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Goya (1746-1828) said, "My only masters have been nature, Velasquez and Rembrandt," and his debt to the latter is acknowledged in the draughtsmanship of his etchings and the shimmer of color in his paintings. There are 14 works by Goya in the exhibition, including two revelatory self-portraits, one done in youth (from the City Art Museum of St. Louis) and the other during his 60s (loaned by the Smith College Museum of Art). In both, he is merciless in depicting his own heavy-featured, sensuous countenance. But in the latter, there is more than a hint of suffering in the bold dark eyes.

He also said, although he was court painter to three monarchs during his long lifetime in Spain, "I refused to dance attendance in the antechambers of the great," and nowhere is this refusal more clearly proved than in his portrait of "Queen Maria Luisa" (loaned by the Taft Museum). The airy lightness and luxurious brilliance of her gossamer gown are a deadly contrast to the stupidity and cruelty of the royal dame's red face, depicted so ruthlessly by the court painter.

"Queen Maria Luisa" of Spain is the subject of this ruthlessly honest portrait by Francisco Goya (1746-1828). It is among 107 masterpieces by six geniuses of European art in the Inaugural Exhibition which opened the Art Center of the War Memorial last week and which will continue to Oct. 20. (Loaned by the Taft Museum.)

Several of Goya's blasts, in oils and in etching-aquatint, against the shams, hypocrisies and frightfulness he saw everywhere are included. His oil, "Hanging of the Monk" (from the Art Institue of Chicago) damns the horrors of war, as in his famous prints on "The Disasters of War."

The wars he saw were the Napoleonic invasions of Spain and the brutalities he witnessed, recorded and raged against were perpetrated by both sides in the conflict. But always his sympathy was with the victim. In the "Hanging," the monk's limp body is luminous in white, the symbol of innocence.

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There are watercolors, oils, drawings and lithographs among the 16 items by Cezanne (1839-1906) in the exhibition, none of which, it seems to me, especially illustrate his dictum, "All nature must be modeled after the sphere, cone and cylinder," which is quoted always when he is cited as the father of cubism in art.

There is tremendous solidity in his work when he wishes it, as in his early still lifes (of which there are none in the Art Center group) and in his portraits (of which there are three, including two self-studies) and in his earlier landscapes. In "La Route Tournante," an oil (from the Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.), this penchant for solidity is evident, but generally his preoccupation seems to be with presenting forms in planes of subtly interrelated colors that are quite kaleidescopic in effect. This may especially be seen in the watercolor, "The Bridge of Trois Sautels," (from the Cincinnati Art Museum) which was painted in 1906, the year he died.

There is a classicism about Cezanne's work. The designs he imposed on his works (his admirer and pupil Emile Bernard said, "His optique was more in his brain than in his eye") are almost formal.

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Actually, cubism was invented by Picasso, acknowledged everywhere as the greatest of living artists and in whose works all the ramifications and tendencies of modern art may be seen. He is represented by 26 works, only a few of which are related to one another. There has been no attempt to form a progressive series, illustrating the so-called "periods" of the artist's life and work. This "archwizard" and "Proteus," as he has been called, has said, "I do not search; I find."

Evidently, he considers his states of mind as fleeting

Picasso Show Set In Chicago

THOSE WHOSE appetites for Picasso's work are whetted by the selection in the Inaugural Exhibition at the War Memorial Art Center may see the most comprehensive selection of the French artist's work ever shown in the U.S. at the Chicago Art Institute, Oct. 29-Dec. 8.

There will be 300 oil paintings, watercolors, drawings and sculptures, covering 58 years of the 75-year-old artist's lifetime. Included will be 31 paintings lent by the artist himself, most of them seldom seen and some never even reproduced.

When the event, first presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, closed there, more than 2½ million visitors had seen it. It was planned to celebrate the artist's 75th birthday.

The Friends of Art in Milwaukee will travel to Chicago by bus on Thursday, Oct. 30, to see the collection. They will be given a special tour, have luncheon at the Institute and be entertained at tea in the afternoon by the Arts Club of Chicago. To be eligible for the trip, it is necessary to be a member of the Friends of Art. Membership costs only $2. Fee for the entire Chicago jaunt will be $10.

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