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SUMMER SCHOOL OF ART AT DARBY – Well-Known Painters Preside Over Its Destinies – Promising Results Attained

Just outside of Darby, on the shady banks of the creek, along which the Darby ram of song and story was formerly wont to roam at large, a class of fifty odd earnest young men and women are busily engaged daily in digging from the heart of nature her hidden secrets and transferring the, reeking with paint, to an equal number of canvases and sketch blocks.

Vacation is not for them. While the college man lounges at the shore, and the Bryn Mawr girl listens to his athletic chatter, these color-bearers pursue the fleeting shade and shadow, and in chrome yellow, pink and green, transfix the landscape with unerring brush.

When the sun peeps over the Darby hills in the early summer morn, he finds them hard at work; and as the lowing hard winds slowly o'er the lea at twilight, the members thereof are staggered by the counterfeit presentments of themselves which stand out on the canvases of the Anshuts Summer School of Art, hung in the face of the evening breeze to dry.

This is the second year of the summer school at Darby, Thomas P. Anshuts, the well-known portrait painter, and Hugh H. Breckenridge, an artist equally well known, preside over its destinies. Beginning in May, the season runs through the late spring, summer and the early fall, closing in October with an exhibition of the work of the students at the Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, of whose faculty both Mr. Anshuts and Mr. Breckenridge are members.

INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PAINTING – Hidden away in one of the ideal pastoral nooks which abound in the suburbs of Philadelphia, the school has escaped notice entirely, save from art patrons and students. The latter, of whom there are about fifty, who have been attracted by the fame of Mr. Breckenridge and Mr. Anshuts, both as artists and as instructors in art, are drawn from the most widely scattered points.

The work is divided into two general classes, indoor and outdoor work. The indoor work is done in the morning. IN an old barn, half a mile from the terminals of the Darby trolley, a studio has been set up through the windows of which overlooking Darby creek, an abundance of light enters, and affords excellent grounds for operations. There, while a quaint old windmill drives out a rustic plaint of rust and neglect, the students work in oil, pastel, water color and charcoal.

No more ideal locality for the cultivation of art could be imagined. Nor could any of the embryo artists picture a more captivating group than they themselves make, as, seated around the fellow artist, who is taking his turn at posing, they vigorously ply their brushes.

At the feet of the model sits a dignified-looking young woman wearing a Mother Hubbard apron to keep the paint from her gown. To the left is a long-legged young man enveloped in a linen duster; back of him a lady in severe black, and beside her a bright-eyed girl with black, curly and tussled locks topped with a Rough Rider hat, and wearing a gown literally covered with paint. A maiden in bicycle costume and spectacles sits on the other side of the studio, and a blonde girl in a white pinafore and with a far-away look in her eyes, off in the far corner, lags spitefully at a color study before her.

THE SCENE IS CHARACTERISTIC – The bust of a Greek god mounts guard over the casement, and littered about the place are the thousand odds and ends which make the artistic heart happy. Papa Anshuts glides noiselessly about, his watchful eye encompassing all, and a few stray hens from the barnyard look in and out, surveying the scene in wonderment.

The morning class, it is easily seen, is only a preliminary in the main labors of the day. The class lunches on crackers and milk at noon, feeds the chickens, sketches the ducks, and digs some of the paint out of its eyes and ears. In the afternoon, at a given signal, it goes afield with Papa Anshuts.

The procession is worth going miles to see. The little lady who has bathed in paint falls in after Mr. Anshuts, kit in one hand, canvas in the other; follows Mother Hubbard, canvas held high to protect

her from the sun; the gentleman of the linen duster next; then the lady in the pinafore, the lady in severe black, and a score more armed capable and ready for the fray.

Across the field they go down by the brook over the plank bridge and so on through the wild flowers and meadow grass to a huge shade tree, where Papa Anshuts rises his standard, and camp is pitched for an afternoon of sketching.

VERY BUSINESSLIKE ACTIVITY – There is no nonsense about the work of the class. They have given up their summer vacations to study, and as soon as the student who is to pose has been placed in position, all easels are leveled at him, and for the next three hours nothing is heard but the lowing of the kine, the crackling of the hens and the soft voice of Papa Anshuts, paternally criticizing the work of the students.

The majority of the class are young women.

“What becomes of all the girls who study art?” Mr. Anshuts was asked.

“Some of them become artists,” he replied. “Many more fall in love and marry.”

He is enthusiastic over the work of his class. Pure love of art is at the bottom of the school, for the tuition fees are nominal. A favorite theory is also being put to the test.

“I believe,” said Mr. Anshuts, “that the great landscape work of the future will be done in the studio. Not as we speak of studio work now, but after the method which is practiced in a small way here. It is practically impossible in the open air to get a sustained shade or light for any considerable time and the artist is tortured by this and his eagerness to fill in every detail of the picture that he sees. The result of this striving under the frequent changes of light and shade is pretty generally a picture that is characterless. To obviate this, I believe that after one distinct impression is reached and hastily sketched in, the picture may be completed with much better results in the studio, away from the torturing influences of these frequent changes of light, each of which you know, produces a new impression on the mind of the artist.”

On this theory the class works. And it is surprising to see with what earnestness it labors, and what promising results it attains. The old barn and large studio across the road are filled with sketches and finished pictures of more than usual merit, all the work of the two summer classes which the two artists have conducted.

The lady who was covered with paint paused in her work a minute and exclaimed:

“I believe I forgot to eat my dinner!”

“That little woman,” said Mr. Anshuts, “is the most promising in the class. She will make an artist if some man doesn’t carry her off and marry her.”

Someone was bold enough to repeat this remark to the paint-covered girl a few minutes later.

She laid down her palette, carefully brushed the hair from her face, and disclosing a patch of yellow on her cheek, and a dot of green on the tip of her nose and replied:

“I want to go to Paris. And if I should get married I’d make him take me there.”