

WHEELER can't

and that representational painters, like yourself, might be more accurately described as "painters" than "artists". What is your reaction to that?

Russell: It would be very, very dull if everybody had the same thing—if all art were representational or all abstract. To me, art is such a very personal thing. What is good and bad is a matter of opinion. There are a great many artists who would just jump up and down at that, but that's the way I feel about any of the fine arts. For example, Picasso—I've heard many people say he's the greatest artist of this century, and others who are just as knowledgeable in art will say his work is terrible. Who is right? Rembrandt was not looked upon with as much favor in his latter days as he is today. Standards change. Tastes change, and what one person is looking for in art, another person won't like. I think as long as it represents a genuine feeling, it is acceptable.

Bill: Do you have a set definition of art?

Russell: Perhaps the best thing I've heard on the subject was someone's comment that the laborer works with his hands, the craftsman works with his hands and head and an artist works with his hands, his head, and his heart.

Bill: How does the potential marketability affect your choice of subjects?

Russell: I think there's always a market for this type of representational art, whether it be landscape, portraits, or western art. I like so many different subjects, but people tend to want paintings

done in their locale—ones that they are used to seeing and can associate with. I think the majority of the people like representational art.

Bill: Do you work on commission? Russell: Yes, from time to time. It is frequently rather unsatisfying. If the person just says, "Paint a picture", and gives a vague idea of what he wants, it's very difficult. Usually he has a picture in mind, and he doesn't even realize it, or he has asked for something very unusual and, when it's finished, he doesn't like it, you've got a painting on your hands you can't sell to anybody else.

Bill: Have you ever done any non-representational work?

Russell: I've never had any desire to do so. I can express myself better in this manner. When I give the non-representational it doesn't mean anything to me personally. So I just go the way that means something to me, where my emotions lead me.

Bill: Do you see any advantage that part-time painters have over someone like you?

Russell: Most likely they don't have to agonize so about sales. Painting is one of the very rewarding professions. It is also a most stressful one. I don't know if it's the emotional drain or what. As a hobby, it is very exhilarating, but if you go to make a living at it, it is like anything else. You've got to work and work hard.

Bill: Do you try to work regular hours?

Russell: I usually get to the studio

about 8 or 8:30 and leave about 5, but I don't try to make myself work every minute. For instance, with painting being an emotional thing, there are times when I just won't go. I don't mean by that that I wait for inspiration, because you just can't do that.

Bill: As you indicated, there are a lot of people who turn to painting as a diversion. What do you do for a diversion?

Russell: I have no hobbies. Painting is my avocation as well as my vocation. The thing that I like to do most besides paint is just get out in nature and recharge myself, so to speak. Painting drains you, and you have to go out and sit and listen to the splashing—the wind and smell the flowers. Just really getting close to nature is very rewarding.

Bill: Do you use photography as a means of assisting with your paintings?

Russell: Yes, I sure do. I take a great many slides and use them as a point of departure. Viewing a slide will give me an idea or help me remember how I felt about the place when I took the photograph.

Bill: For someone just starting out

who thinks they'd enjoy being a full-time painter, what kind of suggestions would you have?

Russell: Once they have a good marketable product, their best bet is with a gallery or a number of galleries. First of all, this is primarily the place people go when they want to buy a painting. The galleries promote their artists and do the selling job. Most artists are poor salesmen.

Bill: The first test is to make sure they have a marketable product?

Russell: Right. I would say to seek the criticism of someone who is in the position to know, such as some gallery operators. This is just from the practical standpoint because these are the people who sell it, and they usually have a pretty good idea of what they will be able to sell. This doesn't necessarily mean that they can say with authority what is good or bad art work, but they can say with some degree of accuracy whether or not they can sell it. And, if you're going to make a living, this is the primary way to do so.

Bill: Thank you.

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