

Rubin, Palestine's Painter, Declares New and Hopeful Jewish Art is Being Created

By Julian L. Meltzer

VERY few people who come to Palestine fail to see Rubin. Everyone certainly hears of him. No one knows his first name; he himself may have forgotten it. He is just Rubin to intimates and strangers alike. His fame has spread beyond the confines of the country in which he has made his home, following upon many years spent in France, Italy and America, acquiring and as assiduously discarding different trends of art that have finally given way before that new fashion which, at a glance, is wholly "Rubin."

By saying, "That is a Rubin canvas," you stamp its origin and locale just as effectively as though you were to call it an El Greco, a Goya, a Gauguin, or a Franz Hals, in the case of other countries. For Rubin's work expresses and depicts the great Hebrew traditions which are distinct from the ritual-Judaistic manner of Pillchowsky or Boris Schatz. It was Bialik, poet laureate of the Jewish people, who declared, "Rubin's concepts are rooted in Hebrew tradition."

It is the tradition of the simple folk types of the Yishub and also of the vital urge of the Palestinian landscape—dominantly influenced by the great Hebrew revival that goes on unceasingly.

Rubin has been brought up in this traditionalism—he says he was a Yeshiva-bochur once—but he has travelled a long way to adjust it to his own version. His is a mystic enthusiasm for the simple as well as for the macabre—a joyousness that is shown in his trio of sombre Safed musicians, throwing out the whole aura of Chassidism, in his inimitable landscapes of Galilee or Judea, in his still paintings of flowers, massed hues, and birds, in his study of grotesqueries at a merry festival-making.

His art is not static; it changes with the mutations of his ideas, the fluctuation of his conceptions. But he manages to hold on to something essential, inimitable, in all his canvasses, and that is "Rubin." One of the best known critics in England has written that Rubin paints landscapes of Palestine as no one else does, that his canvasses have a rhythmic, ordered turbulence. There is in his work a characteristic sincerity and vigor, an unforgettable originality that has singled him out to be

the leading exponent of the new Palestinian art, to which an earnest band of young Jewish artists are devoting themselves.

SITTING with Rubin in his spacious studio on the top floor of a beautiful Tel-Aviv villa, overlooking the sparkling blue Mediterranean and the shining, golden strand of the picturesque foreshore, we talked about his recent paintings and about Jewish internationalism in art and about his proposal that an exhibition of living Jewish painters be held at the Levant Fair in order to crystalize the world conceptions of Jewish art and make clear what our people are doing for the advancement of culture.

The artist is a tall, lanky man with a shock of upstanding black hair shot through with grey. To all who know him familiarly he is a creature abounding in youthful vitality. Call him a young man at forty, and one will not be far wrong. He was born in Rumania in 1893, has studied art in the Bohemian quarters of leading European capitals, has been in America, and is the most exhibited artist abroad now living in Palestine, with a long record of

paintings hung in the principal galleries and academies of Europe and America.

"My proposal for an exhibition in Tel-Aviv of the works of famous living Jewish artists has an immense political and economic importance," he said, lounging on a sofa, the brocade covering of which has figured in at least one of his paintings. "The onslaught upon the Jewish genius in Germany has shown that we need an area of concentration so as to demonstrate, and perpetuate, the great power of living Jewish artists in modern art.

"The eyes of all Jewry are now turned to Eretz-Israel. We are going to have a medical centre, a music centre, a centre of the liberal professions here. Why not an art centre? It is essential that in present-day conceptions of Palestine, art should occupy a leading place. There are so many symbols to show the awakening of the Land of Israel—the settlements, the spirit of Chalutzuth, the revival of the Hebrew language and literature, the re-generation of a whole people. Art has its claims to adequate representation in that symbolism."

A NEW Palestinian Jewish art is now being created, asserted Rubin. The day of the traditionalist or religious-motive picture was passing into a more colourful time, and something less restricted to form, fresher, more vital, was evolving.

"Flowers, wide landscapes, trees, types, are linked with sky and sun and rolling countryside in the new Jewish art. It is an entirely new philosophy making for a unique Eretz-Israel art.

"Tel-Aviv must give the inspiration in the creation of the art centre. What greater influence over cosmopolitan, political and economic life at the moment is conceivable than this demonstration of Jewish talent? In their moments of relaxation, the statesmen, the politicians, the economists, the leaders of the world to-day turn to books, to paintings, to concerts, to the theatre, and it is natural that their general outlook should be swayed by what they see, read or hear.

"It is in this way that we can make our impression upon the 'Aryan' world, and create permanent Jewish values in universal art."

Rubin is not a painter alone; he has designed scenery for the celebrated "Habimah" Art Theatre. The settings of Moliere's "Tartuffe," of "Periphery," and of Harry Slackler's "Rahab" were his creation. He found himself closer to the spirit of "Rahab," he says, because it was a scriptural treatment performed by Jewish actors, Jewish musicians, Jewish artists, scene-shifters, electricians, dressers and ushers.



Artist at work on his own canvas.