



Robert Strong Woodward Has Exhibition of Paintings Here

Thirty-six Latest Pictures by This Connecticut Valley Artist Feature Rare One-Man Show Now Open.

By JEANNETTE C. MATTHEWS

An exhibit of oil paintings and crayon drawings by Robert Strong Woodward opened yesterday at the J. H. Miller Company Galleries and will be open to the public until May 8.

In a city where one-man shows are as rare as they are in Springfield a chance to see 36 of Robert Strong Woodward's latest pictures is a treat indeed. Most of the three dozen are new and shown here for the first time. 'The Trumpeting Angel' is one that was shown in Boston a few months ago and has since been lent through the Circulating Picture Club to Springfield College, but not more than one or two of the others has ever been seen here before.

Here is nothing, I think, but is indigenous to New England, indeed most of the subject matter may be even more closely localized than that, yet in every canvas, is that quality that is universal, a fine power of reality. That is a dangerous word to use, for it is so easily confused with realism and there is too much high imaginative quality in Mr. Woodward's interpretation and too much beauty in even his barnyards to make that word realism at all acceptable in the modern sense.

Because it has the place of honor, because it treats of a theme that has also been done in crayon and because it really is the most moving canvas in the show, 'Near the Sky' ought to be considered first. I have remarked before that Mr. Woodward shows more gift for naming his pictures than is usual among artists. This is a particularly felicitous title. It is a bare winter scene in the hills where one looks across the buildings of a farm, buildings set end to end so that they make a straight line across the picture parallel with the cold hills behind them. Such immensity of sky it would seem impossible to get into even a big canvas like

this. It is stark and cold and bare that picture, but it leaves you tingling because it is 'near the sky.' The crayon from the same theme is softer, just a shade softer in the blue of its hills, a hint less compelling, more to be lived with when one's courage is not quite at top notch and that one Mr. Woodward calls 'New England Winter.'

There are several fine, winter canvases in this collection, possibly the feel of the air outside makes me consider them first. If I had the audacity to prophesy, I should say that the very limited group of first rank American 'snow' artists is about to welcome a new member. 'Winter,' a bare slope which aside from its technique merits comment for the simplicity of its line structure. 'Into the Winter Woods' and 'At Sugaring Time' are all good winter pictures. The power of suggested activity in 'At Sugaring Time' illustrates one of the things Mr. Woodward does best. 'Winter Slope' is one of the loveliest canvases in this show. It is just a bit of winter woods with a blue in the pines and shadows that is all but magic. 'Stark New England' is the most poignant, a barn seen through a snow storm with the figure of a man bent against the wind. For the almost instant suggestion the picture made, it might have been titled 'Ethan Frome.'

Of the warmer things there are some interiors that are heartening, 'A Country Interior' and 'A Country Sitting Room' takes one inside the Keach's Farm. I believe, and 'April at Keach's' suggests what it is like outside either of these rooms quite as much as anything Henry Ford could recreate of the period of my great-great. The crazy cupboards, the row of books over the door; 'No one reads those books' one gallery visitor remarked.

Then in contrast one may have either a barn interior or a glimpse of Mr. Woodward's own studio, 'The South Window,' he calls the latter, but the nicest barn, a dark, sweet-smelling barn with hens scratching 'round, was an after thought and has no name. Barn Interior we will not call it but since every visitor may choose his own name I think I should like to call it 'Sanctuary.'

Mr. Woodward has an unusual gift for making a close and vivid picture of distant views seen from high vantage points. April at Keach's is such an one as 'Above the Valley' --well here is a woven pattern of colors on the hills of such beauty as most of us never get in full until it is set down for us to dream about. And it is rarely set down in this manner. You must see the lacelike delicacy of this web of color to carry a new joy into your hill climbing this summer.

The crayons are something comparatively new for Mr. Woodward. The most satisfying one strangely enough is the least colorful. 'The Patient Angel,' and surely it is the same angel that trumpets in 'The Trumpeting Angel,' which I have commented on before in these columns, but this angel has found a new barn and a new barnyard to watch over, and he no longer trumpets. You feel that he is just what his name says, and the soft restfulness of his patience creeps into your very bones. It is the way the strokes are laid on that does it. There is a man in Belgium, Delaunoy, who has been doing crayons longer than Mr. Woodward and who gets that brushed quality in his crayon strokes, making cathedral interiors that were meant for prayer. It is a new idea to find them in a barnyard.

'High in the Hills' is another of the drawings that should give pause. It has a melodramatic quality due to the sunset and windswept height. It might have been drawn for 'The

Deluge," said one, 'it has an apocalyptic quality.' But to redeem it there is the neatest picnic fire beneath the ledge of rock and beside it brews the coffee. There it seems to me, is illustrated one of the surest test of art in any medium; that it can give you a glimpse of the high places in life without ever losing touch with the warm human element, that it can wrap you in a breath of clean New England air and yet drop no tears over either the tender bloom or the relentless rigor of a stern country.