

MURALS AND DRAWINGS BY CORRADO CAGLI (1910-)

The M. H. de Young Memorial Museum is showing murals from the Day Room at Camp San Luis Obispo, and seventy drawings of camp life by Corrado Cagli.

Cagli was born in Ancona, Italy. He was successful as a muralist in Rome and other cities of his native land before coming to America. His first exhibition in this country was in the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, 1936. Cagli has since exhibited at the Julian Levy Gallery, New York; Zeitlin Gallery, Los Angeles, and the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

When, in the spring of 1941, Cagli was inducted into the United States Army, he was persuaded by a number of officers and men of Battery B of the 143rd Field Artillery to paint these mural panels for their Day Room. The Day Room is the recreational or social hall of a battery. As suggested in this exhibition the buildings at Camp San Luis Obispo were built in simple frame construction of unfinished lumber but with a definite architectural emphasis created by the intersecting vertical and horizontal studs. In order to preserve the architectural feeling of the framework and at the same time to enhance the structural design the artist worked out a system of panels in geometric forms — circle, lunette, triangle, rectangle — that would architecturally and decoratively function within the space they occupied.

The subject matter of the paintings is martial throughout and ingeniously combines phases of ancient combat with present-day life. Some symbolize the spirit of victory or allegorically express the idea of battle. All heroically convey the theme of military life, its ancient heritage, its spirit, interests and modern activities.

Apart from their technical and artistic significance, the most fundamental and worthwhile aspect of Cagli's murals is the social circumstances under which they were created. Although the pictorial scheme and execution of the panels were the artist's, the need and desire for them were the soldiers. Other battery units were enthusiastic about the project and there is little doubt that if the war had not suddenly uprooted the 143rd Field Artillery, other camps would have sought to emulate the art of Battery B. As it is, these panels set an example, which, when they are restored to permanent quarters cannot help but have fruitful results both socially and artistically.

Inasmuch as these panels are of considerable artistic significance as well as being representative of an important phase of American military life, arrangements were made with the artist and with Dr. Walter Heil, Director of the de Young Museum, for the exhibition of these murals together with seventy of Cagli's drawings of camp life.

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