

THE NEW YORKER

THE ART GALLERIES

Look at All Those Roses



WELL, this week we're again confronted with a group of big shows. One of these, the Vuillard retrospective, at the Museum of Modern Art, is a really massive undertaking, with some hundred and fifty oils, water colors, drawings, and other items; and the others—a loan showing of paintings of flowers, for the benefit of the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association, at the Wildenstein, and a selection of oils from the Brooklyn Museum's American collection, at Knoedler—though not in this impressive category, are still sizable. I found the Wildenstein affair, to begin with it, a little disappointing. An exhibition of flower paintings seemed just the thing for the cajoling spring weather we were having the day I went up to the gallery, and I'm not entirely sure why the show didn't live up to my expectations. I think the size is one factor, however. An array of no less than eighty-five pictures all on one subject, and that a restricted one, can easily become monotonous, and the effect is heightened in this case by the fact that the selection is unimaginative, or at least circumscribed. With a seriousness that is at times almost grim, it's held to flowers and nothing else—no figures, not even subsidiary ones, and little background relief of any other kind; in short, just flowers. And as these are capable of only a limited variety of arrangements, in vases, in jugs, on tables, on shelves, against a wall, against a window—well, you see what I'm getting at.

The range in time is wide, however, from a tiny, immaculate "Vase of Flowers," by the sixteenth-century German artist Ladger Tom Ring, to a group by Derain, Dali, Rouault, and other contemporaries, and if one skips, or flits, about one can find plenty of appetizing pieces. I was charmed by Gauguin's large, calm "Flowers of Tahiti," Cézanne's "Vase of Flowers," Monet's blue "Nymphaeas," and, going farther back, the Abraham Breughel "Spring Flowers" and the Adriaen Van der Spelt "Flowerpiece," both of the seven-

teenth century. I was also, I must admit, delighted by some of the big set pieces that have thoughtfully been included. I'll cite only two, the early-eighteenth-century "Flowers in Vase," by Gaspar Verbruggen—a riot of blooms, tendrils, sprigs, fallen petals, and whatnot—and the even more luxurious "Vase of Flowers in a Niche," by a follower of the seventeenth-century Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer. There's a whole roomful of these wonderful creations for your enjoyment.

THE Brooklyn Museum, in its quiet way, has been steadily amassing one of the finest all-round collections of American painting, and I've occasionally wondered how many people in the rest of the city know about it. The Museum has apparently been wondering, too, and—possibly on the theory that if Manhattan won't come to the Museum, then the Museum must go to Manhattan—it has generously decided to give us a kind of home demonstration at Knoedler. It's a fairly large sampling, too, of seventy-odd pieces, and as these represent the cream of a notable collection, the result is an extraordinarily handsome showing. Familiar as the course of American painting is, this new survey casts a fresh glow on it by the very excellence of its selection. How better could one see the Hudson River School highlighted than by the brilliantly panoramic Thomas Cole "A View of the Two Lakes and Mountain House, Catskill Mountains, Morning," the Henry Inman "Picnic in the Catskills," and, for contrast, Martin J. Heade's small, bland "Summer Showers," or the genre painters be summarized than by George Caleb Bingham's cheerful "Shooting for the Beef" and William Sidney Mount's lively, sly "Boys Caught Napping in a Field"? Among the realists, there are two fine Eakinses—"Home Scene" (of a young girl watching a child playing on the floor) and the well-known "William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River"—in addition to an outstanding study of a Victorian walking party called "In the White Mountains," by Winslow Homer. And the other phases of our artistic development, both early and late, are recorded with an equal economy and clarity. It may be that the show is a bit too "refined," for there's a lusty, grandiloquent strain in our art that—except for such pieces as John Quidor's Hogarthian "Wolfert's Will" and the quirky "Art Versus Law," by David G. Blythe—goes unnoticed in it. But apart from that