Histories of art, like all histories, have to be selective. They cannot include everyone who ever held a brush or chisel in his hand and have, as a rule, excluded those artists who are called modern primitives, Sunday painters, self-taught artists, and popular masters. One reason for this may be that their works of art have a high degree of similarity. Another may be that by definition they are amateurs not professionals and have been recognized as of equal aesthetic interest only in recent years, that is, from about 1915. If they painted in the eighteenth century, their status is different and antiquarianism alone gives them a page or so in the standardized histories of painting. The same is true of the Italian painters of the early fourteenth century; they were first recognized as historically important, though aesthetically uninteresting. At a time when evolution in all fields of culture was accepted as a dogma, they were the germs of modern, that is, Renaissance and post-Renaissance art.

The case of the French and American self-taught painters is different. Anything American, as distinguished from European, was highly prized. Emerson's American Scholar was an American scholar, independent of the traditions of the Old World and contriving a new kind of learning. The truth is that no one has ever been entirely independent of anything. The problems that faced the American scholar were the same problems that had faced all scholars, and when a serious American university was founded in Baltimore in 1876, it took over the methods and problems of German universities. Similarly, the American painters of the eighteenth century followed the methods of the European painters, and two of them, Copley and West, returned to Europe
England in this case—and adjusted with ease to the demands of the European world of art. The limners who hawked their skills from village to village carried canvases already decorated with handsome gowns upon which they fitted the heads of the sitters. The poses and the gowns were all in the tradition of the English portraitists; and when one comes to the landscape painters of the nineteenth century, Thomas Cole and Frederick E. Church follow the tradition of Claude, and the self-taught painters follow the tradition of Cole and Church.

It is doubtful that a person who had never seen a painting or a reproduction of a painting would ever develop the idea of making one. In the academies copying was recommended as an early step in instruction, and many an artist has spent fruitful hours in a museum copying the masters. A man like Manet may have been more assiduous in copying Velázquez and Goya than Monet was in copying anyone. But the way to become an artist was first of all to enter someone's studio, in which case one copied the master, and then to go to the Louvre or Uffizi and copy the better-known painters, the celebrities. The self-taught painters were not ignorant of other painters. If they had not seen originals, they had seen various types of reproductions. Almost any house in the United States had a lithograph or chromolithograph or steel engraving on its walls. If there was nothing better, there was a Currier and Ives print. So today the households which would be those of peasants in Europe hang at least a calendar-picture on their walls.

The vogue for the works of the autodidacts belongs to the history of taste rather than to the history of painting, though the distinction is artificial. It is artificial because the interaction between taste and works of art is reciprocal. What the critics praise or dispraise will determine to some extent what artists will paint, but critics obviously would have nothing to praise if artists were not there to turn over works of art for comment. Since we are dealing with the history of an idea, we are forced to turn to
the reasons that critics have given for praising the works of the maitres populaires. The main reason, to put it very briefly, is that such painters express the spirit of their people, or of The People. Now it is clearly much more difficult, if indeed possible, to imagine that the collective People could paint a picture than it is to imagine their writing a poem. A picture may be copied or imitated, but the original remains unchanged except insofar as chemical or physical deterioration have changed it or as our manner of looking at and interpreting visual objects shifts. Words, on the other hand, as they pass from mouth to ear to mouth again, leave no trace except on the memory of those who hear them. The best, then, that one could do in order to make pictures the product of the collective soul was to switch from the word “creation” to the word “expression.” Whereas there could be no Folk-picture as there could be a Folk-song, there might be a picture which expressed the Volksseele, the collective soul, though it was painted by an individual artist.¹

As in Herder, the idea of the People’s art might sometimes mean art created for the People rather than by them. In 1860 Henry Ward Beecher made a speech in Philadelphia to the effect that until modern times all paintings had been made not for the People but for the nobility, the priesthood, or the government. It was the Puritan who rebelled against this custom. But as his speech is hard to find and contains most of the reasons which later appeared in praise of the self-taught painters, I give it in full.

They [the Puritans] are charged with indifference to beauty, and wanton destruction of art. But what was the art which they beheld? Not harmonious lines and wealth of color. Art is a language. It came to them speaking all the abominable doctrines of oppression. The more beautiful, the more dangerous. It was a siren. Its beauty was a lure. Did not the Puritans tread in the very steps of the Primitive Christians? Was not Art, in the early day, but heathenism

¹. An exception might be the “exquisite corpse” of the early Surrealists, but each part was drawn by an individual.
in its most potent and attractive form? The legend might be forgotten; the perilous mythology, let alone by one generation, would perish. But Art stood aloft, gleaming in the tempest, radiant from thousands of pictures, silently fascinating and poisoning the soul through its most potent faculty—the imagination! And when the early Christian turned away from art, it was not because it was beautiful, but wicked. It embalmed corruption—it enshrined lies!

And the Puritan lived in an age when the priest, the aristocrat, the king, had long and long been served by art. I doubt if in Cromwell’s day there was a picture on the globe that had in it anything for the common people! The world’s victories had all been king’s victories—warrior’s victories. Art was busy crowning monarchs, robing priests, or giving to the passions a garment of light in which to walk forth for mischief! Will any man point me to the picture of the wonderful number that Raphael painted or designed that had in it a sympathy for the common people? They are all hierarchic or monarchic. But Michael Angelo was at heart a Republican. He loved the people’s liberty, and hated oppression. Yet what single work records these sentiments? The gentle Correggio filled Church, Convent, and Cathedral dome with wondrous riches of graceful forms. But common life found no sign of love, no help, no champion in him. The Venetian school, illustrious and marvelous, has left in art few signs of liberty, and yet where might we expect some recognition of the simple dignity of human life, if not in this Republic? But her rich men had artists, her priests had artists, her common people had none. In all the Italian schools not a picture had ever probably been painted that carried a welcome to the common people. To be sure, there were angels endless, and Madonnas and Holy Families without number; there were monkish liquids turned into color. Then there were heathen divinities enough to bring back the court of Olympia and put Jupiter again in place of Jehovah. But in this immense fertility—in this prodigious wealth of pictures, statues, canvas, and fresco—I know of nothing that served the common people. In Art, as in Literature, Government, Government, GOVERNMENT was all, and people nothing! [Applause.] I know not that the Romantic World of Art ever produced a democratic picture.

The Germanic World, from whence came all our personal and popular liberties, had a strong development in their schools of Art of popular subjects. Their pictures teem with natural objects, with birds and cattle, with husbandry, with personals, and their life with domestic scenes and interiors.

What had an Englishman, if a commoner, to thank art for? Not a painter in England, from 1500 to 1700, until the days of Hogarth,
ever expressed an idea which was not inspired by the aristocracy or the monarchy!

While, then, the Puritan stood forth under the inspiration of a new life in the State—the life of the common people—he had no thanks to render to art in the past. On the contrary, it stood against him. It plead for the oppressor. It deified the hierarchy, it clothed vice in radiant glory. It left homely industry, sterling integrity and democratic ethics without a line or hue. Every cathedral was a door to Rome. Every carved statue beckoned the superstitious soul to some pernicious error. Every altar piece was a golden lie. Every window suborned the sun, and sent his rays to bear on a painted lie or a legendary superstition. With few exceptions, at that time of little influence, the art of all the world was the minion of monarchy, the servant of corrupted religion or the mistress of lust. It had brought nothing to the common people and much to their oppressors. [Applause.] When the Puritan broke the altar, it was not the carving that he hated, but the idea carved. It was not the window that he shattered, but the lie which it held in its gorgeous blazonries. [Applause.]

If I read this speech correctly, Beecher was thinking exclusively of subject matter when he spoke of art for the common people. I base this opinion on his contrast between the genre painting of the Germanic peoples and the religious and mythological paintings of the Italians. But when it is a question of art made by, rather than for, the People, one finds very few genre paintings. The People as a whole prefer, as the ballads and folksongs show, intimations of the life of the Great, illustrations to the Bible, portraits of national heroes, or the customary emotional pictures like Sacred Hearts and Martyrs. It was the traditionalistic painters, Eastman Johnson, for instance, or Mount, who painted scenes of everyday life, not the autodidacts. The miraculous, the strange, the heroic have always appealed to popular taste, not the explicable, the ordinary, the commonplace.

In fact, the assumption that art should be made for that section of the population known as the People may not have been an original thought in 1860; it was relatively novel outside of the United States. The tradition within the States had been

twofold: there had always been professional painters who did portraits of the rich in the European manner, and there had also been journeyman itinerant limners. Until recent times such portraits were thought of as merely quaint. Very few critics would have taken them seriously. But they were incontestably paintings made for the People, in the sense of the working class, both rural and urban, and were made usually, though not always, by persons who were self-taught. The “self-taught artist” would be a much more accurate label for such painters than adjectives like “primitive” or “folk.” In fact, when the Museum of Art of the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh held an exhibition of the works of Hicks, Kane, and Pippin in 1966, they called it “Three Self-taught Pennsylvania Artists,” and made no attempt in the catalogue to identify their spirit with that of America, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, or the working class. They treated the artists as self-representative, as individuals, each with his own program.

The tradition in the United States has been that the self-made man or the self-taught man is to be admired. The reason for admiration is probably simple enough: it is harder to learn something by oneself than through instruction. But in the case of the self-taught artist, it was not his dogged Spartan persistence that brought him renown, but certain aesthetic achievements that were absent in the work of the professionals. Such traits were “lost,” in the sense that they were supposed to be inherent in primitive art, both in the art of men who lived in caves millennia ago and in that of some men living in modern times, like the Polynesians and the African Negroes, who were assumed to remain in what was qualitatively a culture less developed than our own. Thus we find Holger Cahill praising the folk-artist for his simplicity, lack of affectation, and childlike quality (p. 5); Leon Anthony Arkus praising his three Pennsylvanians for their “poetical

3. Holger Cahill says that there were 400 known portraits of people born in the colonies before 1701. See American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750–1900, p. 4.
sensitivity,” “vitality,” and the creation of “a personal imagery rather than a stereotyped academic rendering”; Jean Lipman speaking of the folk-artists as having a “unique freedom from realism,” of the “purely aesthetic qualities of abstract design” to be seen in their paintings; and Raymond Escholier in a book by Maximilien Gauthier, who calls the French equivalent of our self-taught painters les maîtres populaires de la réalité, saying that their outstanding quality is a combination of naïvete, sincerity, and candor (franchise). Gauthier himself, in his introduction to this brochure, writes a paragraph which is an essential document in the history of this idea.

True artists [he says], are so endowed that they remain a bit pastoral in spite of all the knowledge that can be acquired, of all the vain conquests of intelligence. If this were not so, art would have died out long ago. . . . The pastoral spirit, which can neither be learned nor taught, is the antithesis of the academic spirit. Having no knowledge or rather . . . believing that it has none, it is its task to question everything. And questioning everything amounts to opposing to fixed theory the moving reality, to open to liberated art all life’s possibilities.5

No one would be likely to deny the charm of such works of art. They do indeed have the charm of children’s drawings, but by no stretch of the imagination can they be likened to the highly skillful work of the African or Oceanic sculptor or the men

5. “Les vrais artistes sont ainsi doués, pour demeurer un peu bergers en dépit de tout le savoir qui s’acquiert, de toutes les vaines conquêtes de l’intelligence. Simon, il y a longtemps que l’art serait mort . . . L’esprit berger, qui ne s’apprend ni s’enseigne, est le contraire de l’esprit académique. Ne sachant rien, ou plutôt . . . croyant ne rien savoir, il est celui qui remet tout en question. Et remettre tout en question, c’est, spontanément, opposer à la théorie fixée le réel en mouvement, ouvrir à l’art libéré toutes les possibilités de la vie.” From the catalogue of Les Maîtres Populaires de la Réalité, an exhibition held in Paris in 1937. The echoes of Bergsonian epistemology are clear. The shepherd is again used as a symbol of the innocent childlike rustic who has no “intelligence” but plenty of “insight.”
who made the rock-paintings of North Africa or the cave paintings in the Valley of the Vézère. This latter group of works of art, when they are “realistic,” as the paintings of animals in the caves, are as lifelike and unschematic as the animals of Pisanello’s sketchbooks or those of Dürer. In fact, that is what excited the admiration of the critics when they were discovered. It seemed almost impossible that savages living twenty-five thousand years ago, without benefit of an art school, could achieve such extraordinary truth to life. It should also be pointed out in a parenthesis that more of their admirers had seen them in reproductions than in situ where they are overlapped with numerous other drawings and give no evidence of any general composition. But even when they are seen in the caves themselves, they take on a character of vitality which is startling.

The African and Oceanic sculpture seldom goes in for that kind of realism, but it has a sense of form which gives it a perfect unity. This is not true of it all, and sometimes feathers, hair, shells, and other extraneous bits and pieces are stuck to the figures for reasons which the Occidental usually does not understand. But no one with an eye for sculptural form would deny the excellence of a Benin head or Gabon mask. We cannot see these things as members of the tribe would see them; we cannot read into them whatever symbolism may be there, for even if we are ethnologists, we have to bring an outsider’s knowledge to their interpretation. They are not, so to speak, written in our mother tongue. But that in itself liberates us, so that we can, if we wish, look at them as if they were plastic objects and nothing more.

It is precisely this which transforms American folk-art in the eyes of some critics. Mrs. Lipman is frank enough to say that the American primitive is to be praised because his “technical liabilities made way for a compensating emphasis on pure design” (p. 6). But the African sculptor had no technical liabilities. His control of his carving tool was masterly, his surfaces subtly rhythmical, the passage from plane to plane anything but obvious.
Simply running one's palm over the surface of an imitation will show the great difference between the old original and the modern fake made for the tourist trade. If the sculptor had a sense of pure design which his work was an attempt to gratify, he was working within a tradition and not in rebellion to it. His knowledge, pace Gauthier, was precisely the kind that is acquired. The general similarity of style that is to be seen in the arts of the various sections of Africa is seen also in the sculptures of India, China, and Japan, not to mention Egypt and Greece. Yet within each of these regions there are also variation and individuality enough. And though, to take an obvious example, a seated Buddha from Grandhara must have the same pose as one from China, there is no difficulty in telling which is which. In certain places, in Siam, for instance, the purpose of the sculptor has been to reproduce as faithfully as possible an earlier work; what is now known as self-expression was not highly esteemed there. In fact, self-expression is a modern value, dating roughly from the end of the eighteenth century and emphasized during the Romantic period. But if one's aim is to speak for the Tribe as a whole, or for the Race or Nation or Folk, then clearly individual differences must be eliminated. If, to take another interpretation of "Folk-art," it is art for the People, rather than by them, then again to please a whole group will necessitate the erasing of any artist's idiosyncrasies. For the history of taste is enough to show that even today outstanding peculiarities are not tolerated by the general public. The most popular painter in the United States at the time of writing is Andrew Wyeth and he is the most faithful to traditional realism. And when a very individualistic stylist, like Van Gogh, is admired, his paintings become "Van Goghs."

7. Not that the Romantics were willing to let anyone express himself in any way he pleased. They had their own rules of deportment and, though the latitude they offered was extensive, Classicists were excluded from the school, however sincere.
The individuality of the artist takes the place of the individuality of the work of art.

When then Mr. Cahill writes of “the art of the Common Man,” as “an honest and straightforward expression of the spirit of the people” (p. 3), the question of just what is meant by the phrase cannot be avoided as pedantry. He lists in the same paragraph the trades of the artists with whom he is concerned as those of house painter, sign painter, portrait limner, carpenter, cabinetmaker, shipwright, woodcarver, stonecutter, metalworker, blacksmith, and the like, and such men could in some lexicons be identified with the Ppeople. But when one looks at their works of art, one finds, as was true of the popular poets also, that they all aspire to the condition of the traditional painters. The portraits, though stiff and angular and without depth, are nevertheless posed in the traditional manner with drapery or landscape in the background, emblems of the sitter’s occupation nearby, and, in the case of the limners, settings all prepared beforehand regardless of the subject’s status in life. The still lifes are baskets of fruit or vases of flowers, in some instances painted from stencils. The landscapes differ from traditional landscapes only in the absence of perspective—the space is flat. It would be thought Philistine of me to insist that it is the inadequacy of their technical skill that gives the pictures a genuine charm, a charm which almost all critics have called childlike. When Mr. Cahill says that such works are “folk art because [they are] the expression of the common people, made by them and intended for their use and enjoyment” (p. 6), it is of course historically true that these works were made by the common people, if common people are the artisan class, but it must also be remembered that when they could get good reproductions of the famous academic pictures they bought them too. Engravings of Raphael and Rubens were advertised and presumably found a market, just as in the latter part of the nineteenth century Millet’s Angelus or Holman Hunt’s Light of the World
were purchased by the thousands. Schools at the time when the folk-artist was painting may not have acquired the habit of hanging carbon prints of famous pictures on the class-room walls, and it is also possible that the artists in question had never seen any reproductions of more well-known artists' works. But they certainly derived from somewhere or other not only the idea that pictures existed and that they could make them as well as anyone else but also the idea of what a "real" painting looked like.

M. René Huyghe is quoted by Gauthier as saying that "Popular painting" comes from the "most lasting depths of human nature" (du fond le plus permanent de l'homme). This in a sense might be true of all painting whatsoever, for it is as permanent a trait of human nature to copy the work of others as to project one's dreams and fantasies out of oneself. In fact the latter has to be learned as much as the former, for what is in dreams is usually what one has learned to suppress. I may be doing an injustice to M. Huyghe in insisting on a clearer statement of his meaning, but the pathos of the permanent is so compelling that one accepts the word and presumably its denotation without stopping to think of whether the permanent is really any better than the temporary. Any general trait is often thought to be better than one which is limited to an individual or a small group, and yet there is also the point of view that the rare is more valuable than the common. How to reconcile these attitudes, while maintaining that value is correlated with frequency, is be-

8. Though this is no place for autobiography, the house in which I was born and grew up was decorated by an enormous steel engraving of The Death of Webster at Marshfield, another of Landseer's The Stag at Bay, another reproduction, probably lithographic, of something by Thomas Cole which remains vague in my memory, a colored lithograph of a still life of fruits, flowers, wine, glassware, napery, and there is perhaps no need to say, an enlarged photograph of Burne-Jones's Angels Descending a Staircase and The Pot of Basil by John Alexander. There was not to the best of my knowledge a single original oil in the house.
yond the power of logic. They show as a matter of fact that the assignment of value should be based on a decision that has nothing to do with frequency. One cannot insist that the universal is better than the particular and also insist that crime or some other evil predominates in a society. It would seem more reasonable to define good and evil by some other means. Or perhaps it would be better to follow an alternative course and maintain their indefinability. Even if we adopt a simple hedonism and identify good with pleasure and evil with pain, we have at least something detectable as the token of our sins and virtues.

If, then, we hold that the untutored mind is inherently wiser than the trained mind we should also hold that its pronouncements are likely to be sounder than those of scholars, including psychologists, sociologists, and aestheticians. But “likely” is a weasel word, and when one uses it one can always squirm out of the cases which on their face refute our assumptions, by saying (1) that they are rare exceptions or (2) that “in a deeper sense” they are “really” corroborative rather than the antithesis. Thus if we come upon a picture made by a self-taught artist that we find downright ugly or trivial or otherwise inadequate, we can say that it is not really representative of his work, or that it is the exception which proves the rule (overlooking what “proves” means in this context), or that the artist has surreptitiously been influenced by some academic critic to modify his normal style. If Hicks, Kane, and Pippin do express the common soul of the American People, then whatever they make ought logically to be a form of such expression. The American People’s soul may slip from rectitude to an occasional misdemeanor. But if we praise an artist for expressing his nation’s soul, then we have to stick to our guns and praise whatever he turns out. In cold fact, that is about what happened in the case of Grand’ma Moses. The rules of academic drawing were abandoned as rules, once she was praised. Her colors were flat and their combination lacked any degree of subtlety. There were no criteria for appraising her work
other than the feelings of the men and women who saw them. They apparently pleased some people and, though one can theoretically explain the causes for pleasure, one cannot give reasons for it. I mean by this the banality that one may admire something because it exhibits certain principles of design, correct perspective, invention, imagination, and still not find any pleasure in looking at it. Contrariwise, one may find great pleasure in the enjoyment of a work of art without "understanding" anything about it—an experience common in the enjoyment of music. But it is as relevant to our appreciation of people as it is to our appreciation of works of art. The Lord Chesterfield may be perfectly correct, like Castiglione's Courtier, and yet we may find him unpleasant—indeed, the "yet" might well be replaced by "therefore." But though the paintings of the self-taught artist may be incorrect according to all the rules we can find in the history of criticism, the combination of all the forms of incorrection may strike us pleasantly. We do not like the picture in spite of its crudities but because in combination they hit us with the delightful feeling that we have when we listen to a child's account of something that happened in school.

A cultural primitivist is almost honor bound to admire the naïve. Usually he will substitute "childlike" for the adjective "naïve." If he admires the childlike, it is usually because he is repelled by the mature, though this is not inevitable. In the United States this state of mind is almost endemic. We have taken the word "cute" as an all-purpose term of praise and anything cute will have overtones of the childlike. I find in the examples of the use of this word as given in the dictionary that little girls are cute and so are little bungalows. I imagine that the doll's house would be a perfect example of cute architecture. There is, however, something here which on the surface is paradoxical. We are a large nation and should like to use our power only for noble ends. We are also a rich nation and willing to spend our money on schemes that would be unimaginable if they
did not exist. No other population has so many murderers, and once a particularly revolting crime is reported in the newspapers, we find that it is immediately emulated here and there. If a man in Chicago strangles nine student nurses, a man in Austin feels that he must shoot five beauty-parlor attendants. When asked why, his answer is that he wants his name to be remembered. All this is childlike. And so is the desire to build up great collections of shaving mugs, matchboxes, and other inherently worthless objects. To admire such activity on the ground that it is naïve and that its aims are cute is cultural primitivism with a vengeance. But it should be remembered that there was once a belief, shared by few but voiced by none other than Clement of Alexandria, that Adam before the Fall skipped about the Garden like a child. This, it must be recognized, was far from being the usual patristic point of view. The child as such is held to be innocent, free from all personal sin, though incapable of some sins for obvious reasons. Yet even the newborn baby is tainted by inherited guilt, and it is not an inherent part of the Christian tradition to hold up the child as anything more than pure. A blind man can see no evil and a man whose arms are amputated cannot play a false note on the violin.

The combination of brutality and naiveté which is so characteristic of us may indicate a form of compensation, the one balancing the other. As to that I am unable to judge. But those who believe in the homogeneity of ages, times, cultures, and so on, might wonder whether it would not be expected that a great nation whose triumphs are of a technological order would be more likely to admirable technically excellent works of art than those that are admittedly inadequate technically. When Mr. Cahill speaks of the paintings of his artisans and craftsmen as expressing the spirit of a people in an honest and straightforward way, the most he can mean is that the People consists of artisans

and craftsmen. But one cannot help asking how pictures without academic perspective, combined with flat areas of color, are any more expressive of artisans and craftsmen than the pictures of Trumbull or Copley. Craftsmen and artisans are bound to measure accurately if nothing more. Copley and Trumbull conform more closely to the rules of the academy than Kane and Hicks do, but surely they are as honest and straightforward. It is, to be sure, questionable how relevant such ethical terms are to painting. Is Raphael more or less honest and straightforward than Ingres? Rubens in some of his paintings might be said not to be straightforward, in the sense that much is allegorical, but that would not imply dishonesty. Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Pilgrim's Progress are not straightforward, for that matter, nor can any allegory exist without tortuous evasions of fact. The probability is that these so-called primitives did the best they could to approximate the manner and subject matter of the traditional masters and failed to come very close to their goal. But their failure turned out to be a success in an unanticipated way: they produced pictures that were aesthetically charming while technically childlike. That is what Jean Lipman means when she speaks of their technical liabilities making for compensating emphasis on pure design.

Among these self-taught painters is one who is strangely alien to the prevailing mode. I refer to Patrick J. Sullivan. In the exhibition "Masters of Popular Painting" he showed three oils. The titles alone, with his comments on them, are enough to set him apart from his fellow autodidacts. One called "Man's Procrastinating Pastime" shows three more or less human beings in a wood, with the head of a corpse barely showing above his grave. One of the anthropoids has large splay feet which seem to grow out of his knees. Sullivan said of this painting, "The forest is the subconscious mind of man. . . . The man kneeling over the grave symbolizes mankind in general burying the evil part of himself deep in the mind. The tall formidable-looking man is urging mankind to get out into the conscious or clear light of day. . . .
The grotesque creature to the right is my personification of sin. . . . Man is always procrastinating, trying to hide his evil self instead of courageously showing his good part and performing good deeds—hence the title.” 10 The second of these paintings is called “An Historical Event.” The canvas is divided in two by a flag pole on which is flying a flag which has a heart pierced by an arrow and a bow and arrow. To the observer’s left is a flowerlike structure in which is a full face portrait of the then Mrs. Simpson. To the observer’s right is a lion with a man’s head, bearing a royal crown on its back. In front of it stands Cupid pointing off the frame. In Sullivan’s own words, “The picture as a whole is the heart of the ex-king . . .” from which “Cupid is ordering the lion with its empire representation.” Actually this is a throwback to Renaissance allegorical painting. The technique is crude from the academic point of view, but the details, had they been depicted in the correct manner, would have thrown the picture into line with those canvases which the members of the Warburg Institute have done so much to interpret. There is nothing expressive of the spirit of America or of any other country. What is expressed is a set of ideas originating in the artist himself. Not even the most articulate of the self-taught painters, except possibly Hicks, expressed himself in this way, and all Hicks did was to repeat over and over again the biblical idea of the Peaceable Kingdom, as given in Isaiah. That was hardly specially American.11 That the lion will lie down with the lamb needs no


11. A collection of animals similar to that of Hicks will be found in the drinking trough of Giovanni da Bologna in the gardens of the Villa Medici, Città di Castello, dating from the middle of the sixteenth century. Cf. also Velvet Bruegel’s La Terre in the Louvre. As a matter of fact Julius S. Held has shown in “Edward Hicks and the Tradition” (Art Quarterly, 1951, Vol. 14) how Hicks copied “the typical products” of the “academic tradition.” As he puts it; ‘His method of work seems to have been the assembling, in ever new variations, of certain stock figures and poses. He repeated them over and over again and it seems probable that he took them from a pattern book
exegesis here, unless, and this is highly improbable, the former stands for Judah and the latter for Christendom. With the exception of Mr. Sullivan, then, most popular paintings have been extremely literal. They may not have represented what their makers saw—though that was the aim—but the outcome was a flat landscape, a stiff portrait, a bowl of flowers or fruits, all derivative from the tradition. It may be that the divergence from the academic in the painting of academic subjects is precisely the detail that gives some of these pictures their attraction.

The illustrations to this chapter will do more than argument to show how unoriginal most autodidacts have been. Their works have frequently been compared to those of children. And the child usually has an idea that there is a standardized way of representing people and things. “How do you draw a man?” “How do you make a tree?” Such questions arise from the assumption that there is one correct way of drawing a man or a tree. The picture is a hieroglyph. This is approximately true of the pictures made by savages or, if one prefers, of preliterate man. It is even true up to a point of Egyptian frescoes. The Egyptian profile with the eyes and shoulders in a frontal position is typical. Each primitive tribe in Africa represents things in so standardized a fashion that students can identify the locality from which the work emanates by its appearance. As a matter of fact, it is true, though to a smaller degree, of all art, even that of today. The styles of the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Rococo, the Neoclassic period, are too well known to need more than passing reference. Nor would anyone date a painting by Kline or Rothko or Mondriaan before the twentieth century. It was during and after the Romantic movement that individual styles became pronounced, though it goes which he had made for himself as the typical craftsman that he was” (p. 126). I owe this reference to Held’s article to E. H. Gombrich. It shows that at least one folk-painter did exactly what the folk-poets did—imitate the tradition.

without saying that artists of all times, whether deliberately or not, had what the Germans call their own handwriting. But there is a great difference between the unavoidable individual style of a man and the style that is cultivated consciously as a mark of individuality. One may lump together the styles of Rubens, Fragonard, and Delacroix as similar in their brushwork, for example, but no one, to the best of my knowledge, ever mistook a Delacroix for a Rubens. No one ever confused a Manet with a Velázquez in spite of their obvious similarities. But the similarities between children’s drawings and those of the self-taught artists on the one hand and of real primitives on the other in most cases arise from the same assumption that painting is a ritual. I cannot pretend to prove this in any scientific manner, for the simple reason that I cannot question primitives and that there are too many children and self-taught artists whom I have never been able to talk to. But I have followed children’s work with some assiduity and have tried to answer their questions when they were troubled over some technical problem, and I am fairly convinced of what I am asserting. It is only lately that anyone, whether trained in an art school or not, whether a child or not, has produced works which run from doodles to carefully planned and prepared compositions and which are all treated equally as serious works of art. The person who sits before three or four cans of paint and pours them on a canvas letting accident take over at this point may unquestionably turn out a painting that has beauty. So a stone which has been weathered by sand and wind and rain may have as beautiful a shape as anything carved in a studio. A human being may be beautiful without any artificial aids. But neither the stone nor the beautiful human being is supposed to be a work of art. And a painter who abdicates and lets gravity or accident carry on is not painting in the same manner or with the same purpose, to say nothing of the same results, as Botticelli, Montegna, Poussin, Rubens, Ingres, Delacroix, Matisse, or Picasso. I am not saying that his works of art are not more
beautiful, for that has nothing to do with the question. A mocking-bird's song may be more beautiful than a flute sonata by Bach. A polished slab of calcareous metamorphic rock may be more beautiful than a fresco by Piero della Francesca. But is that because one is a work of nature and the other a work of art? Does one express something which the other fails to express?

A more important question is why in a time of great technological advances, scientific victories over tough problems, sophistication in psychology, the public should want a return to autodidacticism. Cultural primitivism of one or another species has been a frequent enough attitude in the history of the Occident to cause no surprise when it recurs. The "return to Nature," the "simple life," the "reliance on instinct," or intuition, rather than reason, the need for some unexamined, unanalyzed, uncriticized way of living that seems to spring from "the heart of things" is probably justified psychologically, however unjustified it may be logically. A man simply cannot question the springs of every one of his daily acts. He has to develop certain habits on which he can rely to give him time to think over problems which are not those of daily life. Habits, whether of muscular behavior or of thinking, are compulsive and are not always recognized as habits. That which is compulsive will be called right by the person who is its victim.

Now we have learned in the last fifty years that most of our behavior emerges from unconscious motivation, and because it is unconscious it seems more natural than the motivation of which we are aware. In view of the sanctity with which the adjective "natural" is invested, we tend to appraise what it qualifies more highly than we do the unnatural, that is, the artificial or learned. Yet, as some of the Greek Cynics saw, in one sense of that multivalent word "unnatural," eating cooked food rather than raw, wearing clothes, living in houses, all are unnatural. Adam was not created fully clothed, and what he devised as his first raiment was a sign of his Fall. There are dozens of examples that a historian
could exhibit to show how we always return to Nature, instinct, faith, when we want to do something that we cannot justify rationally. But though we know that this happens, we do not know why. For, if we were to speak in teleological terms, we would say that evidence exists for the sake of answering questions. And in the long run evidence consists in what always occurs as a cause of the problematic effect. We do reverence causes; we even speak of God as the First Cause. But though causes are instructive, are necessary as adjuncts to explanation, and though their discovery is a great delight, in themselves they are important only as a means to prediction and control. Hydrochloric acid is the main agent in digesting food, but we do not write hymns to HCl; we do not swallow it in large doses to aid digestion; we do not give up food and drink it instead. Analogously, though all sorts of childhood repressions may be the causes of action, we need not behave like children for that reason.

None of this is an argument against admiring anything that seems admirable. If a child’s painting or a dribble over a canvas is beautiful, by all means let us admire it. But if we then say, “It is beautiful because it expresses the soul of a child,” or, “It is beautiful because it proves the liberation of the painter,” we are in a state of confusion. Instead of admiring the effect (the picture), we are admiring its cause. One cannot see the soul of a child or the liberation of a painter; they are not visible objects. They are inferred as the source of what is visible. All that is on the paper or canvas is colors and shapes. The rest is read out of them. But this cannot be avoided if we are to say anything about a picture other than to announce our feelings of pleasure or dis-

13. I should prefer to write, “that is admirable,” but that would involve us in disputes about the status and origin of value-judgments.
14. See E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion. Until one knows clearly what “express” means, it might even be argued that to express nature is to copy her as exactly as possible. A trompe-l’oeil would then be the most perfect expression in question. But that obviously is not what the admirers of “popular painting” do mean.
pleasure at the sight of what we see. We do not see a tree on a canvas; we see a picture of a tree. The two things are not only existentially two but qualitatively different. Some aestheticians would say that we do not even see a picture of a tree; we see a colored shape which we interpret to be a picture of a tree. But omitting that as an unnecessary complication, let us suppose that we have before us the pictures of two trees, one in full leaf, the other withered, as they appear in Piero della Francesca's "Resurrection." Are they just trees, or are they symbols of the Old Law and the New? If they are the latter, then we have moved far from the simple visual pattern with which we were primarily confronted. Should we have remained in our primordial state of mind or should we have allowed all that we happen to know to enter into our interpretation of the picture? The answer to this brings us back to the question with which we started, that of the value of cultural primitivism.

Cultural primitivism is an easy way of solving many of our puzzles. Just as in Spinoza's words, "The will of God is the refuge of the ignorant," so we can say, "Instinct is the refuge of the lazy." When you cannot solve a problem, you can always conclude that it is not worth solving: the grapes are sour... ignorance is bliss... "Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,/That's a' the learning I desire..." "Follow your animal instincts..." There are scores of proverbs and well-known quotations which tend in this direction. When all is said and done, in a body they are the foundation of that attitude which abhors machines, science, and any form of efficiency. It is very simple to ridicule this attitude, to point out that if we adopted it we would still be living in caves, eating raw meat, and all the rest. But when a philosophy of life has been accepted by great numbers of people, and they no less intelligent than we are, it is wiser to infer that it gives them some deep satisfaction. There happen to be occasions when one's emotional reactions, if that phrase means anything, to a problem are better than one's reasoning. Why, after all, should anyone love anyone
else? Why for that matter should anyone bother to stay alive? Why not, as Lawrence said, follow your animal instincts and live like beasts? I doubt that anyone could give convincing answers to these questions if he relied on reasoning alone. Nobody ever fell in love with a woman because of reasons, though one might make a *mariage de raison* and give the world the illusion of seeing a loving couple. Similarly, no one ever had a religious experience because of reasons, though he might believe in God's existence because he was convinced of it from the various proofs given by Saint Thomas Aquinas. But the belief that your grandmother existed is not the experience of knowing your grandmother by direct association. Do we require direct experience or can we get along on purely rational proofs? The truth is that we cannot dispense with either. We cannot live without some anticipation of the future or belief in the real existence of the past as a minimum. Consequently, it is not a matter of choosing between instinct and reason but of harmonizing the two. And that is not easy.

The notion that any work of art expresses the spirit of the People may be true, but even if it is true it is not a proof of the work's value. This is as relevant to judging the paintings of Daumier, for example, in which the subject matter is popular, as it is in judging the works of Kane, the Douanier Rousseau, or Bauchant. The aesthetic values may be intensified by our knowledge of technical problems adequately met, of traditions of representation clearly perceived, of truth to Nature exemplified, and the like, but one cannot substitute such knowledge for the immediate impact of a work of art. If now only the canvases of the autodidact or the primitive painter express the spirit of the People, then two inferences may be made: (1) that the People are limited

15. It might, however, be the impetus to search for photographs, diaries, letters, and so on, in order to approximate a direct acquaintance with your grandmother. Cf. Pascal, *Pensees* (ed. Pétiaud, p. 1215): "C'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyaient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes," etc.
to what the unschooled part of the population says about them; and (2) that a spectator must restrict himself to the enjoyment of their works if he wishes to have the purest appreciation of the aesthetic. But both of these inferences seem unwarranted when tested by fact. The learned members of the population are just as much part of the People as the uneducated, and what they say has as much validity. There is no reason why one should not feel the beauty of Eakins’ portraits because he studied under Gérôme and Bonnat. Works of art have many aspects and one may deeply appreciate one or more of them without being sensitive to them all. Or again, some rare connoisseurs may be able to be affected by them all welded together into a unity. A master like Rubens has nothing childlike or naïve about him; a master like Henri Rousseau has all the charm and candor of young innocence. It would appear more reasonable to grant this even if it lands one in eclecticism—a bad word for catholicity of taste.\textsuperscript{16}

16. To round out this essay there should be some discussion of the decorative arts of the peasant, which in the United States usually means the Pennsylvania Dutch; also of early American pewter, silver, iron weathervanes, pine furniture, earthenware plates, jugs, and platters, blown glass and pressed glass, hooked rugs, ships’ figureheads. The whole Arts and Crafts Movement should be introduced, since the important thing about it was the supposed beauty contributed by the human hands as contrasted with things made by machinery, though the machine caters to masses of people, not to the individual, and might therefore seem more “democratic.” Lately—i.e., in the sixties—there has been a cult of objets trouvés and of three-dimensional objects which are assembled from bits and pieces of old furniture, machinery, junk, which may or may not resemble animals and other natural objects, as they do in Picasso’s work of this type. The relevance of all this to our subject is that of the art of the autodidact: It is not tainted by academicism. This does not imply that it is more popular than traditional art, though there was a touch of demophilia in William Morris’ plea to return to the crafts of the guilds. The People’s contribution comes out more clearly in the fad for modern folk-songs. For where a picture or a piece of sculpture is seldom made cooperatively, this is not true of songs, dances, and music, which are performed before an audience and presumably with an audience in mind. For this see my next essay.

For a full discussion of Folk Art in all its complexity, see the Encyclopedia of World Art, s.v. “Folk Art.” This article has a very extensive bibliography.