

A Mural Painting of Walt Whitman for Hotel

Winner of One Thousand Dollar Prize is
a Jersey Resident

Some months ago the directors of the Community Hotel Corp. arranged with the Philadelphia Art Alliance for a competition among mural painters for a suitable painting over lounge fire place in the Walt Whitman Hotel. The prize offered was one thousand dollars. Judges representing the Alliance and the Hotel corporation met some weeks ago and selected the winning sketch and awarded the prize to Robert E. Johnston of Leonia, N. j. It was wholly fortuitous that the winner should turn out to be a resident of this state.

A few days after this decision Mr. Johnston came to Camden in response to a telegraphed invitation by President Goodwin.

The 52 artists who submitted sketches in the competition for a prize of \$1,000, and the honor of putting their conceptions of Whitman into a permanent form in the city where the poet made his home, included leading painters in all parts of the United States. One sketch came from as far away as Los Angeles.

The winning artist is a Canadian, born in Toronto, September 14, 1885. He studied painting with Harvey Dunn of Philadelphia, and with Walter Sickert in London, England. He is a member of the Society of Illustrators and of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto.

His interests and sympathy for the works of the "Good Gray Poet" are attested by the graphic panorama he managed to depict with bold strokes in an oil sketch seventeen inches long and thirteen inches high, and which won for him the award. The finished work will be five feet eight inches long and four feet three and one half inches high.

The charm and force of the artistic conception in rich coloring baffles any hurried description in words. The illustration on this page is a poor presentation of the anticipated finished product when such is unveiled as it will be during the opening week of the Walt Whitman.

On the shore of what might be one of the "broad rivers of America," are gathered a varied group of harvesters', workers, lovers, laborers, men, women and children. On the water glimpsed behind them a ship is sailing by. The vari-colored garments of these humans blend luxuriantly into the green of trees flanking a central eminence on which a little above them stands the poet whose love of democracy they typify.

Rising above the green of the trees, the patriarchal head

and venerable white beard of Whitman and his black robed shoulders are sharply silhouetted against the sun-gilded towers of what might be his own visioned "city invincible," rising in sublime splendor against the sky in the distant background.

"I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America."

That was one of the lines by Walt Whitman that was in the mind of artist Johnston when he conceived the allegorical vision. The artist had some thought of using the above

quotation as a suitable word expression for the mural, but later changed his mind in favor of another quotation by Walt Whitman—"In a dream I saw a city invincible."

The handsome mantelpiece of French Colonial design is to be finished in a shade of color that will throw into clear relief in the light of the three main windows on the Broadway side of the hotel the Walt Whitman picture. Under this panel there have been carved on the lower base the words quoted above.

The artist made a personal inspection of the panel prepared for his work and has given the execution

of the picture those artistic touches that a fine appreciation of position, light and shade call for. The mural has been received at the hotel and only awaits unveiling and dedication evening of Wednesday September 16th, at which time stockholders and citizen salesman will be given their first viewing of the Hotel Walt Whitman. By instructions of President Goodwin the picture will not be unboxed until that afternoon preparatory to its being unveiled.

CAMDEN FIRST would have liked to show a better and truer half-tone presentation of the mural, but this is obviously impossible without access to the finished product. We should also have liked to have been able to produce a picture of the artist. It is said all artists are more or less temperamental. The only peculiarity that we could find in artist Johnston was his reluctance to having his picture taken. As a matter of fact, he eluded the photographer the day we had the pleasure of talking with him. All admirers of the poet, as well as the hotel owners will have an opportunity of meeting this rising young painter during the hotel opening week. At several of the functions in connection with the opening, Mr. Johnston will be guest of the Community Hotel Corporation.



"In a dream I saw a City Invincible"