THOMAS M. MESSER

[00:01:00] Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I trust that you can hear me in the back. Yes? Thank you. This is the first of a number of lectures, which will be given in connection with our present exhibition, The [Finology?] exhibition, [00:02:00] a series of lectures, which is given under the overall title of "Léger and Cubism." They are arranged in such a way that they begin from the most specific and in a sense from the most limited aspect and gradually expand toward the more general and more speculative aspect of the subject under consideration. My lecture today, will be one which primarily deals with the exhibition. It will a gallery talk transferred into this lecture hall with slides, unfortunately, instead of paintings and will be followed in two week spaces by three other lecturers, who will speak on March 25 on the stylistic evolution of Léger's painting. [00:03:00]

This lecture will be given by Dr. Henry Hope, on the realism of cubism by Dr. Robert Goldwater, and, finally, on the nationalities of cubism by Professor Robert Rosenblum.

The exhibition — the lecture today, as I said before, deals with the exhibition proper. And therefore, I should say a word, perhaps, about the exhibition itself and why we decided to hold it at the Guggenheim museum at this time. There are a number of reasons which occurred to us. The first, because no museum exhibition of Léger's was held in New York since 1953. At that time, the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Art Institute in Chicago gave a retrospective of Léger's work. But even then, there was no particular [00:04:00] emphasis upon Léger's late work. Léger died in 1955. The exhibition was given in 1953, still in Léger's lifetime. So this is the first time that we have an exhibition specializing as it were on the late and in our minds most important achievement of Léger.

Then too, there is a point about which I hope to speak briefly later in the lecture. There is a intriguing and admittedly speculative relationship between Léger's art and some of the young painters working in New York today.

And finally, there's one more reason for the exhibition. For some reason, Léger still needs to be defended. It's unusual that it should be so with an old master [00:05:00] of the modern movement, but it is.

So, that I hope to conclude the lecture with a few words about Léger's importance and his significance in the twentieth century. I said already that we are dealing now at the exhibition (inaudible) with Léger's work in the last 10-15 years of his life, roughly between 1914 — between 1940, when he arrived in the United States during the war, and 1955, when after having returned after the war, he died in France. The exhibition itself, which I trust all of you have seen, consists of about 111 works executed in all media, in all in gouaches, watercolors, drawing. They are grouped [00:06:00] according to themes, five themes to be exact, each of which has a so-called *état definitif*, a final version, which is surrounded by scores of preparatory versions, fragments, post-scripts, works relating in one way or another to this one statement that in Léger's own mind was definitive. The themes themselves in chronological order are the divers, the cyclists, the constructors, the country outing, and the great parade. These are not the only themes that Léger dealt with in his late period, but they seem to us to be the most conspicuous, the most

telling ones. The reason for organizing the exhibition in this fashion is twofold. First of all, we felt that [00:07:00] the comparison of these works with one another and the comparison of one theme with another theme is visually rewarding, is a didactic presentation, which tells us a great deal without having to mince too many words, tells us a great deal about Léger's manner of working. But, of course, it is a presentation, which could not be easily repeated with just any artist. It is true that many artists have worked in themes, have at one time or another dedicated a number of their work to a particular concept. But it is Léger's particular manner of thinking and working that enables us to follow a whole series of works carefully prepared, carefully balanced, checking and cancelling, [00:08:00] exchanging and modifying until this final version, that *état definitif* in which everything is just right is achieved, so that as we look at Léger's work and as we are about now to compare one theme with the other and then the various versions within any given theme, we must remember that Léger is not as, let us say, clear. Even Picasso would be primarily interested in the spontaneous expression that attaches itself to one given work, one given painting, but that he's groping through a great number of tentative attempts toward a final statement, which to him has ultimate meaning and which, I think, to most of us will seem to be extraordinary, beautiful, and important. [00:09:00]

May I have the first slide now and present these themes in chronological order? The first, and I'm showing you the so—called final states now, the first are *The Divers*, a series, which began just about at the time that Léger arrived in the United State in 1940. It is followed by *The Cyclists*, a often humorously treated subject, which had its approximate beginning in 1944, and I'm showing you here the final state called *Homage à Louis David*. We'll return to it later on. *The Constructors* or *The Builders*, which was conceived and accomplished around 1950, [00:10:00] and which is more rigid, more geometric than most of the others. *The Country Outing*, which has its beginnings in earlier times, which in a sense calls back upon *The Cyclists* and many other previously developed themes, and which was accomplished in 1943 to 1954. And finally and most importantly, *The Great Parade*, the monumental painting, which is hung in our high gallery and which in many ways is Léger's culminating final masterpiece, which was firmly worked on for about two years, but which actually summarizes Léger's thinking and artistic striving throughout his entire life. [00:11:00]

I'd like to show first in juxtaposition the earliest and a very late work in our exhibition, *The Acrobats* on the left, a painting completed in the '30s, as a matter of fact, and a version of the *Gros Parade, The Great Parade*, on the right, which in its relationship spans the distance that Léger traveled. And I'm showing these two particular slides, because it is evident that the same subjects had a continuity stretching over decades and in a sense never left Léger's mind. He improved upon it, he modified it, he changed it. But this position of [00:12:00] the two personages, one on top of the other, is one that Léger called upon in one of his late works. Similarly, when we take a detail on the left of *The Divers* and compare it with a detail in the same painting that I showed previously, a project for *The Great Parade*. We see how the experience that Léger gained in developing these plunging bodies, developing these volumes, seeing in space, how this same idea came to his aid when in his late canvas, he established a grouping of acrobats with a somewhat similar thematic concept. Also, the themes, which I separated [00:13:00] a moment ago, lead into one another.

The Cyclists to the left found an echo in *The Constructors* on the right, where you see a group of six builders under the scaffolding with their bicycles put aside just as if the same group had transferred itself somewhat later into a new environment. And again, *The Constructors* on the left seem to be taking to the county, seem to be having a Sunday picnic as they move from their work to their leisure from the example on the left to the example to the right. Would you leave the left slide on, please, always?

And even in [00:14:00] detail motivations, we see how the same personage, the man at the bottom of *The Constructors* to the left with his back turned toward us and his hand lifted, how the exact posture is taken over in a different theme and a different period of Léger's work. So far, we have been talking about content, but there are also connections and bridges from one of these periods into the other in Léger's formal treatment in the way primarily in which he separates color and form or, more precisely, in which he accords an independence to the movements of color from the outline that determines the appearance of personages in scenes.

We have *The Divers* again on the left [00:15:00] side and *The Country Outing* to the right. In both instances overlaid as it were with strong, abstract features, which are independent from the depiction of personages and scenes. This incidentally is a idea that came to Léger during his visit to the United States. And he himself writes that he remembers a man standing on Broadway. "The lights kept changing and he seemed lit up as he seemed lit up by the reflections of the neon lights. He would suddenly turn from red to green. There the idea of color outside of the drawn image came to me."

But it is time, ladies and gentlemen, to take a look at Léger's culminating work, at *The Great Parade*, [00:16:00] and see whether we can profitably analyze it, see whether a consideration of the subject and of the form of this painting adds to our enjoyment and understanding of the work. I shall stay for a moment with a total view on the left and describe it briefly. You see that Léger was motivated in this case by the circus theme. The circus appeared to Léger and he presents to us groupings of professional riders, of trapezists, of musicians, and of acrobats as they enter circus parade fashion [00:17:00] into our awareness.

Each one of these is separately worked out and while we leave the overall picture at the left, I will ask for a few details to illuminate the personages that are part of *The Great Parade.* The horse, the same grouping of acrobats that I pointed out before in a previous section and which intrigued Léger for many years is indicated in the work on the right and a grouping, which I pointed out at the beginning, a grouping of a musician and of dancing acrobats on a makeshift platform on the left. All of [00:18:00] these figures are surrounded by the circus paraphernalia, by the makeshift platform, by dumbbells and boxes and ropes and the usual little knickknacks that circus folk assorts [sic] around itself. Léger himself spoke of this grand parade and thought of it in terms of the box office. He was impressed by the importance of the economic proposition and said that it depends on this parade, "The box office namely, depends on this parade and it is this that makes it powerful and dynamic. It hits you right into the face, right into the chest. It's like a magic spell." So much for the outward appearance. Let us see what Léger actually did with it, how he constructed the canvas, how he arranged it artistically, formally. [00:19:00] The first thing that we may observe are the organization of the surface. And we see that Léger in this canvas gave preeminence to the horizontal and to the vertical accent. There are

relatively few diagonals and the construction of the entire canvas depends on a perpendicular, on a rectangular concept. There are two canvas halves, which you may observe, a elliptic half to the right, a more or less rectangular half to the left. And the two are held together by this letter C, which acts as a hinge between the two and which is all that remains from the word *cirque*, "circus," which Léger introduced in earlier versions. The horizontal and the vertical, [00:20:00] incidentally, the rectangular arrangement in Renaissance painting usually indicated a certain calm, a certain serenity, a certain peacefulness as opposed to the diagonal, which is identified emotionally with turbulence, with motion, with a much less peaceful general concept. But then again, if you take a closer view, we see that it isn't as horizontal and as vertical as all that. The broad, loose type that goes from one end to the other is tilted upward. The orange perpendicular is not straight down but moves slightly from one end to the other and we ask ourselves why. The answer probably is because intuitively Léger recognized that a strict rectangular assortment [00:21:00] would make this whole thing rather precise, rather rigid, rather artificial and that he had need of the alleviating semi-diagonals, which added movement, which added fluidity, and in a sense humanity to the entire concept.

Now, if we remove ourselves from the surface and look at this whole thing in depth, we are attempting a much more difficult thing. Because unlike the Renaissance canvas, where you usually can distinguish between a foreground, a middle ground, and a background, Léger's space, the depth which he uses to indicate distances within the work, is ambiguous. We must look at it as it were with two different sets of eyes. One set retains the [00:22:00] the surface as such. The other allows us to glimpse a depth without making it too obvious. The question is, as a matter of a fact, the question is how does Léger indicate depth at all, because all seems flat? All seems restricted to the surface alone. And it is only after we look preferably at the original work that we see the careful shading that indicates volume along the edges of the outlines. We see these receding diagonal lines on the platform that seem to give a sense of space. We see quasi-perspective memes that Léger applies carefully without ever allowing them to impose themselves upon the canvas as a whole. And finally and importantly, of course, it is color [00:23:00] that adds to this sense of an animated space that is at the same time surface bound and full of depth implication. We know that certain colors by their nature are projecting themselves and other colors by their nature are receding. Reds come forward. Blues go backward. Orange and yellow go forward. Green goes backward. In general, the cool colors recede, the warm colors advance. But Léger uses these things with such trickery, with such sophistication that one and the other cancel and enhance one another according to need so that it is in the last analysis up to us as viewers to determine where we stand, whether we are looking at a surface which Léger means to preserve or whether we allow ourselves to advance into this animated space that Léger conjures up conjures [00:24:00] up before our eyes.

And lastly and very importantly is, of course, the separation of colors from the outlines, which I already mentioned in an introductory fashion, which gives this whole thing the appearance of being more than one painting. It is as if two or three paintings were painted at the same time, one realistically conceived, the other abstractly conceived, so that the whole thing is summed up just as a *kontrapunkt* or composition would be into different parts, each independent, each fully developed, and eventually returning to a final chord that allows us to enjoy the work in its totality. [00:25:00]

Léger writes as follows. He said that "I worked for two years on *La Grande Parade*. I studied everything very carefully. I'm extremely slow in my work. I do not know how to improvise. The more I examine myself, the more I realize that I am a classic artist. I do long preparatory work. First of all, I make a quantity of drawings, then gouaches. And finally, I move to the canvas. But when I attack, I'm 80 percent sure of myself. I know where I'm going."

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the meaning of these many versions in which he tried out, as I pointed out before, the best, the ideal solution that ultimately would stand in the *état definitif*. We are seeing [00:26:00] an earlier drawing. Same general idea, you recognize the group of acrobats on top. You recognize other constellations, some of them not incorporated in the final version. A few details on the right will give you a quick sense of the sequence of the works. Particularly important is the grouping of the three musicians, which did not get into the final canvas, but which made itself independent and became a glorious canvas of its own, a canvas, which is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art here in New York. As a matter of fact, the three musicians obsessed Léger for a long time as Daniel Robbins, our assistant curator, points out in the catalogue, [00:27:00] which I recommend to you very emphatically, these three musicians take a long time for Léger to part with. And even in a late drawing shortly before the final work, we see them this time on the right side of the canvas as if he were determined to hold onto them.

But finally, the group of the musician and the dancers and the platform occupies the place of the street musicians and, again, is a result of a whole sequence of laboriously developed themes, which is independently shown in a number of gouaches and particularly in a oil painting of which I don't have a slide, but which is close to the gouache on the right side. Léger writes about it saying that "From behind and from in front [00:28:00], from all sides figures appear and disappear. Dancers, clowns, arms and legs, scarlet face, pink limbs, an (inaudible), who eats fire, and an acrobat, who walks on his hands."

In the end, it is only the two dancers and the musician that are rescued for the final version of *The Great Parade*. There are one or two things, which I like to point out separately. The question of the acrobats is interesting and appears in Léger's early preparatory drawing. You see how the same subject that eventually becomes the crowning constellation, the acrobat holding a woman in his hand, how the same subject is explored in a drawing [00:29:00] in a rather earthy and a rather sturdy fashion. The acrobat there stands on the ground seems heavy and sturdy as he holds the full weight of his charge. Later on, the same idea is expressed a little more lightly when the acrobat, the standing acrobat, is changed into a trapezist in which the idea of weightlessness is already indicated. Here the same notion, a gouache on display, which (inaudible) the sense of height. We feel that these people are actually swinging above our heads lightly and airily.

And then, the remarkable thing happens in the end. In the final work, there is, of course, no place for the trapeze, for any of the paraphernalia of circus. So, how can Léger indicate in it the weightlessness [00:30:00] and the airiness of this grouping? Well, he does it simply by finishing the group at their waist. There is no indication they are standing anywhere. They seem to be suspended in midair and suspended without any outward indication of floating.

There are other things about *The Great Parade*. Léger is fond of and interested in horses. He speaks of the horse as "the most beautiful conquest of man. It turns without being aware of the numerous events taking place on its back. He is mobile and warm springboard upon which feet take hold, rich and joyous, a sort of carpet of luxury. How beautiful the horse is."

But more important even in this is the notion of roundness, [00:31:00] the notion of roundness, which was linked to the idea of the circus. I don't quite know. I haven't quite figured out what exactly that circle is that surrounds the acrobat and the horse. Is it a ring? Is it an extension of the clown's dress? We do not know. But it is a motif of roundness, which repeats itself in subsequent versions and which, of course, finally finds its place in this circle, a totally abstract, but most telling way in which the circus and roundness are equated with another. Léger writes saying, "Nothing is as round as the circus. It's an enormous basin in which certain forms develop. The ring dominates, commands, absorbs. Go to the circus. You leave your rectangles, your geometric [00:32:00] windows and you go to the land of the circle in action." And later he adds, "The circle is free. It is without beginning and without end."

We will spend more time with *The Great Parade* than we shall with any of the others, but I hope to cover at least one or two of the other themes, in this case *The Country Outing*, the one finished immediately before *The Great Parade*. It is in some ways comparable to *The Great Parade*, but you see that the diagonal in this case still dominates rather than the horizontal and the vertical, although the circular form on the right side of *The Great Parade* is an outgrowth of this earlier invention. As many others of Léger's themes, [00:33:00] it began with a drawing, which you see to the right, a drawing, which is quite explicit, quite literal, easily read and which then is transferred still without too much concern with its abstract — with abstract means transferred into a rather handsome, rather explicit drawing of a Sunday picnic in the country. The central piece in this previous drawing, which is caught here in a lithograph, is separately called *Les Amoureux*, "the lovers." And it is to me interesting to see how a theme that for one moment threatened to be sentimental, for one moment threatened to touch us humanly, is gradually reduced in the final version and [00:34:00] presented in such a way that that hand, the woman's hand upon the man's shoulder, becomes ambiguous to the point that you do not recognize anymore the emotional connotation. Typically enough, Léger has desentimentalized a earlier motif for fear that it may be too expressive, that it may extend beyond the bounds of his deliberate classicism.

The Constructors, as I already mentioned, rigid and firm, workers on the scaffolding, metal, the materials of building, which have their own beauty for Léger, their own justification. In fact, comparing a detail to the right with a painting by Mondrian [00:35:00] on the left, one wonders why Léger has withheld from the final consequence, why he did not go one step further to do away with any reference to the human, to the realistic, and why he did not express what he had to express in purely abstract forms. *The Constructors* also are the one series that is most clearly propagandistic in intent, most clearly related to his own Marxist view, to his idealization of the working man in our society. A sketch of the so-called metallic workers indicated Léger might have become freer, more fluid had he pursued this line, but there is no indication that he has. [00:36:00]

The Cyclists, like other examples shown before, again, begin rather photographically with a group of men on bicycles each facing us as if they were posing for a photograph. A juxtaposition between two works shows that Léger is able more or less at the same time to cope with a literal, an objective, a realistic image and the same time to utilize his favorite abstract device, the separation of color and form.

And I'm leading you directly to the *Homage à David*, Léger's latest cyclist theme, which is humorous in many ways and [00:37:00] perhaps recalls more than any other work Rousseau, Henri Rousseau, who also had a inclination toward the primitive, toward the slightly absurd, toward the non-deliberate humor that in this case both Rousseau and Léger express. In fact, the comparison between the men throwing up what is referred to as a football there and the man with the little girl and her arm around his neck is so strong that the suggestion is difficult to avoid that Léger was thinking of this particular canvas when he created his *Homage à David*. But it is a *Homage à David* rather than a *Homage à Rousseau*, as you [00:38:00] can see in this work of the nineteenth-century French painter. And it expresses Léger's affinity with a completely classic outlook on life, an affinity with a work that restrains itself emotionally, that is impassive, that suppresses any outward action, any emotion, even from a richness in favor of a deliberate order that must speak by itself and directly.

And the last series, which we shall cover quickly are *The Divers*. And, again, I'm merely showing you the original sketch followed by a small watercolor pursuing the same theme and then the various ways in which Léger understood the divers. [00:39:00] He understood them flatly as if they were cut out with scissors. He perfected the thing in three-dimensional volume as he did in the polychrome divers. And he finally used the same theme abstractly separating color and form. He even in the end developed a theme that is not strictly speaking related. It has nothing to do with *The Divers*. It is called *The Roots* in which, however, the same idea of the plunging bodies are abstractly dealt with. I'm not suggesting, incidentally, that these things follow each other in exact chronological order, but it is interesting to see how varied Léger's concepts of the divers could be. Léger writes about *The Divers* and points out that [00:40:00] it is an ideal. "The idea of bodies hurling through space came to me," Léger writes, "on a crowded American beach, where I saw 60 or 80 people simultaneously diving and jumping."

Now, ladies and gentlemen, having covered the theme itself, I would like to take a minute or so for an aside, an aside, which is troublesome in some ways, but which nevertheless I don't wish to suppress. I mentioned at the beginning that the exhibition coincides with the emergence in New York of a number of painters, who seem to be dedicated to comparable ideals. [00:41:00] I'm thinking and I shall show in a moment a few slides of the painters Dine, Rosenquist, and Lichtenstein not as if they were the only ones, who could be related to Léger's work, but because I have seen the exhibitions and know them better than others. The question that arises, if you make such a daring connection is first of all, what do these painters have to do with one another? And if they do have anything with one another, what do they have to do with Léger? I should say at the outset that the notion that these painters are a group is already wrong. They are not a group to the best of my information. These are painters, who worked independently, following certain pictorial ideas [00:42:00] of their own and arriving perhaps accidentally and yet symptomatically, it seems to me, at results that can be combined, that can be sort of in terms of a grouping.

Let's see what they look like, what the content and what the form is. In all instances that we are going to observe here, and there will be only a few, the object is there in an obvious fashion. It is visual reality, in this case the necktie that recommends itself as a proper subject to the artist. The rendition is literal. You might say that it is, that the subject is common, even perhaps banal. [00:43:00] The work that is shown is presented in what might be called an advertising vernacular. It is as if it were taken over from posters, from ads, from various commercial purposes and translated into a work of art. The outline is sharp, is streamlined, and smooth. It is the perfect ideal of a mechanical of an advertising page. More than that, we are reminded of the funny papers, of all sorts of humble sources, of the graphic of a typographic order with an appearance that is often harsh, that has an antiseptic exterior.

I should not like to suggest that [00:44:00] these three painters look alike. They affect us, I think, very differently. And I shall speak about the way in which they touch me without suggesting that what I'm saying is a value judgment. I don't — what I'm saying is not meant to be taken in terms of good or bad, but just in terms of what it does to a fairly unprepared viewer. In the case of Dine, I find myself reacting with delight and with amusement. Dine, in this and in other cases, of course, is engaged in this old game between reality and illusion. Rosenquist is more severe and forbidding. His vision is often simultaneous. It is often fragmented and more directly traceable to sign painting and to the commercial background. [00:45:00] Lichtenstein, perhaps the most radical of the three, is also, as far as I'm concerned, visually the least engaging. He is often disagreeable to my mind, partly because he chooses the funny papers as the point of departure, a motif that to me couldn't be more disagreeable, so that we have nevertheless here a common denominator.

Even though these artists are different from one another, if we compared it with any conventional example of abstract expressionism, we would see how much they do have in common and how it seems to me legitimate it is to conceive of them as linked to one another, even though they do not know it. It seems to me that they are employing a new visual jargon that may or may not become [00:46:00] common usage and that is somehow linked to the French term *réclame,* advertising the graphic type that has imposed itself upon our page.

Now, next question. What do they do with Léger? What do they have in common with him? I made a few points and I'll just rattle them off. Both the *réclame* artists and Léger are concerned with a literal recognizable reality. They are presenting subjects that are visually unambiguous. Both Léger and they are reemphasizing realism. They reject, both of them, the nonobjective solution. Léger. And the *réclame* artists have an affinity [00:47:00] with the humble, with the ordinary, with the popular, even with the banal and they attempt, whether deliberately or not, whether successfully or not, they attempt to raise this ordinary development to the level of an artistic validity through the perfection of form. They both use slang, a vernacular. Léger in his own time was still new and unaccepted forms of the machine age, the younger group, the advertising jargon that I mentioned before. And in general, I think you may say tht they all reject and ridicule every form of overt expression, every form of romanticism in favor of a deliberate, a formal, and a lean classicism. [00:48:00] In making odious comparisons of this type, it is difficult to avoid two dangers. One is the assumption that, because they are being compared, the two are in fact identical. The other is that, because they are being compared, the older artist has

invented everything that they are showing today. Both assumptions are unintended and I hope we are not — I hope that the result of my comparison will not lead to these assumptions, because, first of all, they are not Léger. They are living in a different type, in a different world, and are not even repeating Léger. What they are doing, it seems to me, is that they are rededicating themselves to Léger's ideals. [00:49:00] They are rededicating themselves simply by painting as they do, by embracing ideals analogous to those that Léger embraced without, of course, having the outer appearance that Léger has himself. It seems to me in the end that Rosenquist or Lichtenstein may one day paint an *Homage à Léger*, which will then have the same relationship to Léger as Léger's *Homage à David* had to the historic painter.

But enough for the aside and two minutes return to the question of Léger himself. I said at the outset that curious enough, Léger a old, a classical artist, needs to be defended. And I think this is so. [00:50:00] I think that there is only partial acceptance of Léger and of his ideals. The exhibition that was held in Chicago and in New York almost ten years ago was not a great popular success. People came, looked, but commented in general that it was not their dish. The reviews of the exhibition held at this museum, while overwhelmingly favorable, nevertheless give the idea of the restraint that critics feel and perhaps of the difficulty, which many of them have with the work of Léger. John Canady in the *New York Times*, who wrote a highly sympathetic appraisal of Léger's art and eventually ranks Léger very importantly, nevertheless admits that Ferdinand Léger [00:51:00] to him seemed to be the most inflated artist and the one most likely to be deflated fast. He came to a affirmative conclusion after this exhibition. Emily Genauer in *The Herald Tribune* feels that "for all the endless and dedicated effort, the unfaltering control and discipline, the uniquely personal statement, which this exhibition witnesses, Léger remained essentially a brilliant designer and decorator." In other words, to Emily Genauer, even today, Léger cannot be ranked importantly. The difficulty is understandable and has to do with Léger's classicism. There are many words that are hurled in his direction. Stark, rigid, styleless, literal, propagandistic, mechanistic, cerebral, and inhuman. [00:52:00] I should say that this is no attempt to claim that Léger is always right, no attempt to gloss over the fact that Léger is an uneven artist, that only his masterpieces really touch us deeply, and that the preparatory version, so many of which you have seen, may or may not come off. But any artist is entitled to be judged by his best and most accomplished work.

Had we more time, I would go into these terms individually, but I shall close by speaking only of one, which seem seems to be most basic. And that is the charge of Léger's cerebral and inhuman art. The inhumanity in art is one of these words [00:53:00], one of these terms with which it is difficult to cope. Actually, humanity and inhumanity are not particularly operative concepts for a painter. A painter makes a painting and that's it. He doesn't paint humanity or inhumanity. A awareness of human issues nevertheless may be reflected in the form, in the concept, which he carries through, so that we are back there, essentially, at Léger's classic affiliation. A affinity, which makes him communicate with us not directly, but indirectly. It is perhaps the most basic distinction, between the expressive and the romantic artist, on the one hand, and the constructive and classic artist, [00:54:00] on the other hand, that the romantic speaks directly from him to us as public, where the classicist speaks indirectly. He puts everything there is, everything that he has, into the surface of the work and charges that service on its own behalf to forward this message to us, so that when that happens, expression is curbed, action is relegated to a secondary position. Léger puts it himself in the following terms. He says that "expression has always been

something too sentimental for me. In the *Cirque*, that is *The Great Parade*, I think that laughing faces — but this is not to be misunderstood. The laughing face of a clown is not an expression. It is a vocation." So that it is through this indirect [00:55:00] communication, which avoiding the pitfalls of dryness and sterility, is in Léger's great work the most moving and the most human. This, of course, is a general statement about classicism, one which, if you have any doubts about its validity, I refer you to the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and to that of Johann Sebastian Bach. Thank you very much. (applause)

END OF AUDIO FILE
615214T12_01.mp3

Leger and Cubism / Thomas M. Messer. 1962/3/11. Reel-to-Reel collection. A0004. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, New York

