MEDICAL ART SOCIETY'S EXHIBITION

BY

MERVYN LEVY, A.R.C.A., M.R.S.L.

The Medical Art Society's sixteenth annual exhibition opened on February 13 at Walker's Galleries, 118, New Bond Street, where it will remain until March 5.*

Colour Galore

Many of the exhibitors seem to have spent their holidays at places abroad where there are abundant sunshine and colour—or so it would appear, superficially. But Mediterranean "colour" in particular is a pitfall. Here, where the brilliant sun burnishes the ultramarine and emerald waters of Cannes and Monte Carlo—here, cry the doctors, is colour: dazzling, joyous colour with a vengeance. And so there is—of a kind. But even Raoul Dufy, who perhaps more than any other painter of modern times soaked up the colour of the Mediterranean scene, even he had to reconstitute this riotous blaze. Too often the human additions to it clash with Nature's chromatic scheme. The red roofs, the shimmering pink and yellow façades of the buildings, and the many other points of pure colour with which humanity seeks to enliven the natural scene inevitably appear at times discordant since they are not planned as an intrinsic part of the total result. What seems at first a colourful scene may be in fact a natural harmony disrupted by a number of crude, out-of-key colour notes; and when the artist tries to lock it up in some permanent form his picture fails miserably to make aesthetic sense. There is no integration, no harmony, only discord. Once the whole is committed to canvas, the bright flashes of man-made red and yellow that seemed so exciting in the living scene look as cheap as the colours in a trashy Christmas card.

Dufy made peace out of this conflict by toning down the brilliance of *all* the colours involved. Very often, too, he turned the vehemence of natural and human colour into a delicate harmony of pastel shades. What he *never* did was to accept the scene as it stood. He always re-created it through his own selective, painter's eye. Doctor painters might well consider Barnsley or Wigan for their next painting holiday—preferably when it is raining. At present the Continental scene seems a little too rich for the eyes of those accustomed to the drab but co-ordinated harmonies of the British landscape.

Pick of the Show

This year perhaps it is the sculpture section that steals the show. Outstanding are two pieces by G. Konstam. His "Fallen Horse" is superbly conceived and he has brilliantly co-ordinated the anatomical features of an extremely tricky posture. So also has he in his torso "Air Borne" (Fig. 1). I have never seen the dynamic rhythms of a torso in flight—as at the climax of a particularly energetic and graceful ballet dancer's leap—better expressed. The anatomical and aesthetic aspects of this splendid conception are blended with great knowledge and restraint. It is so easy to over-anatomize the male torso in action—a trap into which even Michelangelo often fell. Jakub Rostowski is another sculptor whose work it is always exciting to see. His subject matter, drawn straight from the whirlpool of mental illness, displays a feeling of profound identification and sympathy with the tragedy of the sufferer. This is especially so in his study "Depression." A gaunt, bowed figure, with long bony hands, appears to be playing a piano; but the hands, I imagine, are simply wandering in melancholy agitation over the keyboard of a depressive psychosis. The emacia-

tion of the figure is symbolic perhaps of the devouring nature of such an affliction, and the whole conception suggests that gradually the flesh and bones will fall away, leaving only the malady itself.

Of the oil paintings, I thought B. N. Brooke's "Calvary" quite the best. Unfortunately it does not lend itself to photographic reproduction. In this picture Brooke has used symbolism to express an idea of the meaning of the Crucifixion. The scene, I suppose, is after the Crucifixion, since it shows an empty, glowering landscape with three bare crosses on a distant hillside. In the foreground there are two huge, beautifully painted plants. One is floating gently upwards, with its roots exposed, while the other is firmly implanted. The symbolism surely indicates both the transfigurative and ascendant qualities of the Christian faith, and the strength of its message in the temporality of the world.

B. Lux contributes a luxuriant "Spring in Surrey"; G. E. Loxton a tiny painting, "Flowers," executed with a rich, fleshy impasto; Harold Hewitt a strangely disquieting "Day Before Demolition"; Sir Harold Gillies a curious conception of "Agra From the Taj Mahal," in rich plums and sugar-icing whites and grey; and Phoebus Tuttnauer three paintings in his own inimitable manner, of which "The Lonely Robin" (Fig. 2) is perhaps the most satisfying. In

FIG. 1.—"Air Borne" by G. Konstam.

FIG. 2.—"The Lonely Robin" by Phoebus Tuttnauer.

the water-colour section T. Anderson's "Orchard—Impington" and "November Foreshore" are notable for the sheer exuberance of the artist's technique, while Sir Philip Manson-Bahr's "Polegate—Sussex" is a most charming and delicate portrayal of a typically English scene.

The photographs are by Photo Studios Ltd.

*Hours of admission are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.