

**CONSIDERATIONS ON PAINTING;  
LECTURES GIVEN IN THE YEAR  
1893 AT THE METROPOLITAN  
MUSEUM OF NEW YORK. [NEW  
YORK-1895]**

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Considerations on Painting; Lectures Given in the Year 1893 at the Metropolitan Museum of New York. [New York-1895] by John La Farge

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**JOHN LA FARGE**

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# CONSIDERATIONS ON PAINTING

*LECTURES*

*GIVEN IN THE YEAR 1893*

*AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM*

*OF NEW YORK*

BY

JOHN LA FARGE

New York

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## PREFACE.

I FEEL that the printing of my lectures brings with it a certain difficulty. Lectures intended to be read within the Museum, with a continual reference, implied and often expressed, to the place, the objects gathered within it and their associations, must have had a certain fitness which will be more or less diminished when they come to be read under different conditions. Moreover, they were written and spoken with an idea always present in my mind: that I had a class of students whom I was addressing, and that my other auditors stood in a more remote relation to me. Certain appeals to my teaching, certain allusions to the practice of the students and to their position of relative dependence and inferiority of age or acquaintance with the world, of little or no significance to my readers, are thus explained.

I have not seen any way of so modifying these lectures as to suit my feelings and wishes in the present; nor could I have found the time to do so had I seen my way clearly to that end. Even the time that I gave to their preparation for the Museum course had to be taken out of the

hours of personal teaching; and they bear the mark of a more temporary consideration on my part than would suit me had I from the first thought of publishing them.

At the same time, there is always something in work done for a special practical purpose which through its very contexture makes a practical answer to many questions; and I have hoped that with some slight modifications and explanations I may manage to make my readers feel that these lectures are for them. I need not add, I think, that there is little in these pages that pretends to be novel. Indeed, I should like to appeal to the memories stored in the consciousness of my readers, and ask if their own observation does not bear me out in mine.

J. L. F.

PARIS, 1896.

LECTURE I

ESSENTIAL DIVISIONS OF THE WORK OF ART

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## SYNOPSIS OF LECTURE I.

Proposed plan of the lectures. — Consideration of what museums of art offer for study. — Classification of the kinds of lessons to be derived from their contents. — Difference between such a course of study and the usual practical studies which must have preceded. — Why more specially painting and sculpture are called art. — The artist expresses what is in reality himself. — Personality impossible to conceal in the work of art. — The thought that makes the work of art not reflection or reflective thought. — Deficiencies of the thought which analyzes; genius as the power of co-ordinating innumerable memories. — The record of memories even in the superficial appearance of the work of art. — Many essential characteristics inseparable from the work of art must be lost to us in certain cases. — Style is living form. — Certain forms consequently impossible to imitate. — Ruysdael and Millet. — What happens when methods are separated from sentiment. — What happens to imitators. — Loss of the meaning and influence of the work of art when it has been made to appeal especially to momentary interests. — Rules exist for art, not art for rules. — But art is a language and has a grammar which varies only as language varies. — Preparation of the artist for the free world that he creates. — We help him to make it: and taste may be a form of genius. — Possibility of living in the work of others. — In what true originality consists. — What we learn to know is men.

## LECTURE I.

### ESSENTIAL DIVISIONS OF THE WORK OF ART.

It is my intention, in the lectures which I begin to-day, to supplement and to accentuate, in a more fixed and reasoned form, the teachings which I give to my students in a practical way. Whether they be written out in literary shape, or abandoned to the chance form of an ordinary talk, they will be meant to explain the philosophy of usual teaching. Sometimes what I shall have to say may seem rather formal, somewhat abstract, perhaps thereby a little tiresome. At other times I shall be forced into details which are best given in the least conventional manner; and thereby I may seem to be stepping down from a high plane. But these difficulties are inherent in the nature of the case, and in the unaccustomed position which the

artist takes when he attempts to give explanations in words of what he thinks without words.

I shall begin by some reference to the differences between such a course of study as this one which we have undertaken in connection with the collections of a museum, and the usual practical studies which must have preceded ours.

I should then like to consider what museums of art offer for study, and to analyze and classify the kinds of lessons to be derived from their contents ;

Also to consider how the artist has expressed his view of the world, how he has seen it, with what body and senses, what hereditary memories, what memories of acquired liking, what development of memory through study, and what personal combination of all these factors ;

To consider next how museums are collections of works by such men of all periods, who fully made use of all these means ; how they contain, moreover, things left by imitators of such works, who only used part of these means of memory.

In such an analysis I should try to explain