EVA FRANKFURTHER

1930-1959

RETROSPECTIVE

EXHIBITION

February 14 — March 9 1962

BEN URI ART GALLERY

14 Berners Street
London W1

Introduction

No one, excepting the artist, has succeeded in resolving the conflict of good and evil, love and hate, and in the process, distilled a compassionate vision of mankind which is at once simple and childlike, tender and saintly, noble and dignified. For Eva Frankfurther the study of people was the overwhelming preoccupation of her life. She felt intensely, loving people with sympathy, devotion and humanity. But if her view was basically compassionate, it was tempered with a keen practical sense. She was anxious to do things for people, to help them in practical ways. In no sense was her compassion sentimental; indeed, she would have deplored any such suggestion, just as she would have disliked any implication that there was pathos in her work. That she was a person of certain sadness is in no doubt, but she was also a girl of gaiety with a fine sense of humour. She thought of painting primarily as a means of establishing contact with people, and not as an end in itself. Nor was she in any way interested in the commercial side or possibilities of painting. She would far sooner have given her work away—as indeed she often did—than to have sold it.

The artist, who came to England as a refugee from Germany in 1939, when she was nine years old, was always deeply concerned for the well-being of her fellow-men. Often she gave away some portion of her small earnings to help to alleviate the hardship of others. She was passionately interested in the humanitarian possibilities attaching to the role of a social worker, and shortly before her death had made an application for admittance to the London School of Economics, where she hoped to train for this field of work. Indeed, so great was Eva Frankfurther's interest in her fellow-men, so keen her affection to them, that after leaving St. Martin's School of Art in 1952, she moved to the East End of London, where she lived in the most simple fashion among the people who provided the heart-beat of her inspiration. A table, a chair, a bed, an oil-stove, a few books and her painting gear were all she needed. As a counter-hand with Lyons and as a factory worker in a sugar refinery, she was brought into close and intimate contact with the struggle for existence. The paintings at this exhibition are a record of this period.

I found my way to the heart of Eva Frankfurther's work as an art critic. I have now been able to consolidate my admiration for her great artistic gifts with facts that only serve to throw still more light on the brilliance of her interpretation of human character. She herself had found the way to the heart of this mystery by the road of renunciation. She turned her back upon the comforts of a bourgeois home to seek in personal poverty and her contact with poor people that state of spiritual grace which is so often the condition of those whose material possessions are few.

She was greatly perturbed also by the predicament of the modern refugee, the politically displaced ones, homeless and stateless, who comprise one of the most profoundly tragic phenomenon of our time. This exhibition contains an oil painting, called "Stateless Person" (No. 34), in which the artist has crystallized her vision of the lost ones of the world. The beauty of this conception, immersed in the depths of a haunting sadness, strikes to the heart. The delicate shades of smoky blue, the fragile violet overtones of the exposed and unprotected head, evoke a mood of overwhelming poignancy. It is a remarkable and tragic symbol of the age of shifting populations.

But apart from the message of her work, Eva Frankfurther was a draughtswoman of immense sensitivity. The significance of drawing as the fundamental prerequisite of the artist's equipment is clearly displayed in all her work (see the two frames with studies, Nos. 44,43).

Perhaps the most significant quality of the artist's work is its power to speak for itself. Fundamentally it needs no introduction from me or anyone else. It is an immensely articulate art, perfectly explicit and rounded. Her paintings and drawings not only delineate the physical form of man, they describe the innermost recesses of his spiritual being. They are dedicated to the love of man, and there is not a line of her work which does not contribute to the revelation of the soul. To this extent she was, even at the time of her self-inflicted death at the age of twenty-eight, far more than an artist of promise; she was an artist of real and distinctive achievement.

I have no doubt that the fulfilment of her dream lies in the inspiration her work will kindle in the hearts of others.

MERVYN LEVY.

Catalogue

Oil Paintings on Paper

1. Girl with dove
2. Israeli girl
3. Israeli boy I
4. Israeli boy II
5. Market woman, Jerusalem
6. Young girl, Israel
7. Young woman, Israel
8. Fisherman, Mykonos, Greece
9. Priest, Mykonos, Greece
10. Orthodox boy, Jerusalem
11. East End mother and child
12. Yemenite worker, Israel
13. Rabbinical scholar, East End
14. East End landlady
15. East End bride and groom
16. Jewish woman, East End
17. East End docker
18. Transport worker
19. The bride
20. Lunch hour

21. Mother with children, East End
22. Bird seller, Club Row, East End
23. Old woman
24. The judge
25. Negro woman and child
26. Young girl with coffee mill
27. Kitchen hand
28. Modern Youth
29. Praying woman
30. Newspaper seller
31. In the cafe
32. Girl with rose
33. Two kitchen hands
34. Stateless person
35. Woman with auburn hair
36. Seated woman
37. East End couple
38. Old woman with rose
39. The chef
40. Orthodox Jew, East End
41. The two friends

Drawings

42. Drawings I
43. Drawings II

Lithographs

44. Cloth salesman, East End market
45. East End tailor
46. Head
47. Head of a man
48. Boxers
49. Demonstrators
50. Head of an old man
51. Woman with earring
52. Barrow boy
53. Young woman
54. Old age
55. East End Jew
56. Worker
57. Old man
58. Catering worker
59. Old couple
60. Charwoman
61. Street market

Some of the works are for sale. Prices on application.