

“Fine Arts,” *New York Evening Post* October 16, 1862, p. 2

....Three pictures by Edwin May [Edward Harrison May], our countryman in Paris, attract attention. Mr. May is a pupil of Couture, and has been a resident in Paris for many years. His works show that he is imbued with the French feeling for art. Two of these pictures are historical. The “Death of Admiral Coligny” [16th century French Huguenot] is the most important, but even this is not in his best manner....

The third picture is called “Bacchante.” One could easily believe that this enervated, dreamy, devotee to the wine-god had been suggested by that wondrously painted central figure in Couture’s “Decadence.” In color and sentiment it is the same, but it lacks the great moral teaching of that masterpiece. The painting of pictures of this genre seems to us sadly out of place in this generation, so crowded with incidents and great action. Mr. May is in Paris, but we have a host of artists at home, and what are they doing? We are not surprised, in the midst of the confusions and throes of war, that the fine arts languish; the war and its pre-occupations distract the minds of all from the gentle arts of peace. Yet there is much more to be said. It reflects little credit on our figure painters that they do not identify themselves with the great revolutions which, with its contrasts of lurid lights and mournful depth of shadow, is passing before us. Let them in eloquent lines and vivid colors paint the history of to-day. Let them put aside their Topseys with platter and dust-pan, their Sambos with castinet and banjo. The black man to-day means liberty. Let the Bacchantes, Venuses, the Colignys, the imaginary and real horrors of the past rest where they belong—in the past. By the fireside, in the street, on the battle-field, there are being enacted scenes of earnest import, outpourings of the grandest emotions of the soul. Here is material to incite and inspire the genius of Michelangelo, of Decamps, of Vernet. Our artists should show themselves equal to the grandeur, the pathos and the ennobling sentiment of the times.

One at least of our artists has not overlooked these greater opportunities which lie at hand—John Rogers, who is already well known, though less than he deserves to be, for a series of excellent little statuettes in clay, representing various incidents in our war.

These statuettes are not only truthful and natural, but poetical and full of sentiment. They are, as a rule, artistically grouped, and skillfully executed. They deal with the events of the present time, and if viewed simply as memorials of the war, will hereafter possess an historical value which at this moment can scarcely be appreciated. “The Picket Guard,” one of the first of the series descriptive of camp life, is full of vigor and strength, and wonderfully expresses the cautiousness of movement and quiet determination of the veteran.

But they have merit besides being memorials of the great war. They show genuine genius in the artist. Each tells wonderfully the story he had in mind. They illustrate real life, come home to the hearts and feelings of the multitude. The least imaginative person who may stop to look at any of Rogers’s little groups in clay, displayed in the printsellers’ windows on Broadway, does not require an explanation of it. The figures tell their own story, and tell it eloquently. Who, for instance, requires an interpretation of the story conveyed by the “Sharpshooters”? Hidden behind a stone wall are two soldiers; one has raised his cap and coat, placed ingeniously on his rifle, above the coping of the wall, while the other, with loaded gun, watches his chance to pick off his enemy, whose fire they seek to draw. So, too, with “Making Friends with the Cook,” the “Card Players,” and the “Slave Auction”; the moral in each, as well as the story itself, is clearly expressed.