

# The Domestic Cat in Art

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THROUGHOUT history the domestic cat has been prominent in art. Beginning with the religious statues of the cat in Egypt and progressing through the centuries to contemporary American paintings, the artists of each succeeding period have ascribed distinction to the cat. It may also be said that the artist has given a clear record of the cat's status in each particular age. What other animal has been worshipped as a goddess or has been burned as the companion of witches within a brief span of time? Whether her station in life has been on the highest or lowest level, the cat has seldom been ignored.



## CAT WORSHIP IN EGYPT

That worship of the cat was an important phase of Egyptian religion is revealed in legend and art. Probably the physical appearance of the cat's eye drew the attention of the Egyptian. In the increasing and decreasing size of the eye's pupil, he pictured the waxing and waning of the moon. However, a greater attraction was the luminous glow of the cat's eyes at night. "The Egyptians believed that the cat's phosphorescent eyes mirrored the sun's rays when it was hidden from man, and so cats were the attendants of Bast, the goddess of the moon, the Sun-god's eye at night."<sup>1</sup>

Though Egyptians respected all cats, the fact remains that all cats were not sacred. At Budastis and Stahl Antar, each cat was considered an incarnation of the goddess, but elsewhere in Egypt only cats in the moon temples were revered. Here they were present in great multitudes. The fact that certain Egyptian ladies made the worship of Bubastis their special orthodoxy is revealed by funeral statues which bear the inscription **Techau**, a word signifying "tabby."<sup>2</sup>

Because of the high esteem in which cats were held and because the Egyptians strongly believed in a ghostly life hereafter, the remains of the cat were treated with great care. It is true that the sacred cat received greater homage and was buried with more detailed concern; yet it is also true that the common cat's dead body was treated with respect. For several thousand years the cat mummies lay undisturbed. The inevitable occurred, however, when an Egyptian peasant began digging in the floor of the desert at Beni Hasan. Cats were resurrected by the hundreds of thousands. The mummies of

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the common cats were pitiful to look upon. The head alone was exposed, and the fur was matted, brittle and dry. The rest of the cat's thin body was closely wrapped with cloth or plaited straw. However, the sacred cat endured the centuries with less disintegration for she was preserved with extreme care and often protected by a mummy case. A few of the cases were crude and archaic while others were highly decorated. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art there is a coffin for a mummified cat, Ptolemaic Period, surmounting which is a seated cat. An even more finished receptacle is the bronze mummy case for a kitten which is now in the British Museum. Two cats rest upon the top of this case; one is in a semi-reclining position, while the cat toward the rear sits upright. The number of mummies, sacred or otherwise, found at Beni Hasan was unbelievable. But Beni Hasan was not the lone cemetery for cats. Bubastic and Stahl Antar were also her sacred abodes.

The discovery of these cat mummies was important not only because they picture a phase of Egyptian religion, but also, and of greater concern here, it indicates the beginning of the domestic cat in art.

#### THE CAT IN EGYPTIAN ART

Figure sculpture arose as an art in Egypt to provide a material abode for the ghost if, perchance, the body of the deceased wasted away.<sup>3</sup>

Besides whole cat figures and heads there are groups of mother cats and their offspring, all of which demonstrate the enthusiasm of the Egyptian for the feline form. Several examples of the sculptures exhibit the precision of the Egyptian craftsman which gives his work an appearance of coldness and severity. These figures seem to be an abstraction of all cats rather than a sculptured portrait of one particular animal. One such example is a bronze cat, Saite Period, which sits upright, forelimbs straight in front, head erect and whose tail surrounds the hind legs, stretching straight ahead to the right forelimb. The erect ears, more or less, resemble the ears of a dog rather than those of a cat. The thickness of the paws and limbs do not show a great exactness of sculptural detail. However, the overall appearance of the figure is not unfeline.

The sculpture just described above may be taken as a typical example of an Egyptian cat figure. However, not all figures are as lacking in detail or as severe as the example cited. Another bronze cat of the same period rests in almost an identical position as that of the previous figure. Yet in appearance and in sculptural technique the two examples are quite different. The second cat



Fig. 1

figure is much more elaborate not only in ornamental detail but also in the study of feline proportions. (See Fig. 1.) The ears are more correctly shaped, and there is a decided attempt to represent hair on its inner edge. Besides representing hair on the rear, the pupil of the eye is designated—two details not present in the first figure. Of ornamental interest is the ring piercing the left ear and the chain around the neck which bears a religious figure.

There is, however, a bronze cat of the Ptolemaic Period which combines the better qualities of the first two figures described. Not only has this bronze cat the desirable abstraction of the first Saite bronze, but it also has the more feline proportions of the second bronze cat. Feline characteristics are not sacrificed to detail nor is there such an insufficiency of exactness as to make the cat uninteresting.



Fig. 2

The last bronze cat figure of the Ptolemaic Period, (Fig. 2), to be considered is certainly more archaic than any other example cited. Despite the crudity of proportions, this bronze cat is interesting because of the stylized decorations on its body. Perhaps the artist wished to represent a tabby cat; the striped pattern on the tail and the decorative markings on the chest are indicative of this variety. The base upon which the cat sits also bears a design, an innovation to the other figure described. Although this bronze cat has ears which are too large and eyes which are too small, the figure as a whole resembles a cat, archaic as it may be, and gives another view of this animal in Egyptian figure sculpture. Another example of this period is seen in Fig. 3.

Besides the many single figures of Egyptian cats, there are several group sculptures which show the mother cat in relation to her offspring. In the British Museum is such a group of cat figures resting on a base. The positions of the mother cat is much the same as that of the previous single figures, but seated directly in front of her are two small kittens.

A bronze group of mother cat and kitten, Saite Period, is sculpturally crude. Yet, the relaxed naturalness of the pose makes this work the most refreshing of all those previously encountered. Reclining the full length of the heavy rectangular base is a mother cat; her neck and head



Fig. 3

are raised and her forelimbs are stretched in the direction in which she faces. The cat's single offspring is between her widely spread forelegs, resting the upper portion of its body against the mother cat's neck and chest. The kitten is in a playful mood, no doubt, attempting to explore its mother's face with an upraised paw. The mother cat's obvious pleasure in her young was as charming in ancient Egypt as it is throughout the world today. In spite of the fact that this work is not as refined as it might be, the lack of severity, the spontaneity of the scene makes this cat and kitten sculpture one of the finest in Egyptian art.

A more finished sculpture of cat and kittens is to be found in yet another bronze group of the Saite Period. In this example the mother cat and three kittens rest on a rectangular foundation which, in turn, is mounted on an urn shaped case. The lower portion of the case seems to be of stone and might very well be a receptacle for the cat's mummy. Surmounting the stone is the cat and above the head is a considerable amount of ornamentation that spreads out to receive the base upon which the figures rest. The mother cat's position in much the same as that in the last group described. The artist has had her assume an almost identical pose, and one of the kittens reaches toward her face as did the kitten in the former group. Other kittens are present, one of which suckles while the other rests at its mother's hind feet.

In addition to single cat figures and groups of figures there are heads extant which may represent all that is left of a figure. There is an excellent example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, which is a beautiful simplification or abstraction of a cat's head in bronze. Although there is no representation of detail in the eye, the cheeks and jowls show careful study. Majestically feline is the only possible description for this sculpture.

The single figures, groups, and heads of cats described are only a few examples of the multitude of cat sculptures in Egyptian art. The important fact which should be kept in mind, however, is that the majority of cat sculptures represented sacred cats.

Although primitive religion provided a beginning for the sacred cat in art, it was the Egyptian love of sport that brought about the artistic appearance of the common cat. Because of the cat's participation in hunting, sporting scenes included her. The Egyptian cat, therefore, appears not only in religious sculpture and ornaments, but also in painting, metalcraft and ceramics. While the Egyptian sculptor heaped glory upon the sacred cat, it remained to the painter to uphold the common cat's reputation. Hunting scenes, for the most part, form a background for the cat in Egyptian painting. Still, other paintings show the cat in the role of a pet.

At the tomb of Nakht, at Thebes, the pet cat of Nakht is shown devouring a fish. This painting of the XVIII Dynasty pictures a house cat rather than the usual hunting type. "It has a coat of reddish yellow with black stripes, and yellow and white on its belly. The litheness of the feline species is well caught, especially in the



Fig. 4

sweep of line of the back," says an old description.

Another painting of a pet cat was found on a wall of the tomb of Maku, brother of Queen Tiy. The wall painting, a **Fight Among Pets** of the XVIII Dynasty, includes a large cat, goose and a monkey. Unfortunately, the greater portion of the cat's face has been lost; only the tip of an ear, a part of her nose and her whiskers indicate where the head had been. Sitting in an erect position, the cat has one paw around the body of the goose, who seems quite unruffled by the situation. Interestingly enough the cat's tail is raised straight behind her instead of curling around the body as is usually seen. The obvious tabby markings of the cat are beautifully represented. Although the cat and goose are relatively calm for a scene entitled **Fight Among Pets**, a monkey flying above the two justifies the painting's name.

The naturalness of pose observed in the two previously described paintings can be more fully appreciated after viewing the caricature **Cat Waiting on a Rat**. It is true that a caricature of any theme sacrifices the natural aspect of the subject in one way or another. However, the surrender of all recognizable characteristics does not

constitute the art in its truest form. Although **Cat Waiting on a Rat** exhibits crude draughtsmanship, it is certainly not without humor, a trait seldom associated with the Egyptians. A clothed rat, enthroned, holding what would seem to be the remains of a fish in one paw and a vessel of some type in the other is approached by a cat walking erectly on its hind legs.

Although the far reaching effect of the humorous Egyptian caricature is a matter for conjecture, no one can doubt that it was the hunting cat which claimed the greater attention of the Egyptian, for there are many paintings of cats hunting for game with their masters. Hunting cats more generally occur in the paintings of the XVIII and XX Dynasties or about 1638 to 1440 B. C. There is a painting on a tomb at Thebes which shows the cat in the role of retriever. She points like a hunting dog beside her master who stands in a boat. Another painting, also on a tomb of Thebes, exhibits the ability of the cat to seize game.<sup>4</sup> This "well-known fresco of a man



Fig. 5

fowling in a papyrus swamp is an interesting combination of convention and naturalism. (See Fig. 4.) The principal personage is gigantic as compared with the two accessory figures, and his attitude though spirited is conventional. The naturalistic feeling is shown in the birds, in the cat with birds in its mouth and claws and above all in the butterflies."<sup>6</sup> Other than the paintings mentioned, there is a well known hunting cat shown sitting on a papyrus stem awaiting prey. The Egyptians not only used the cat as a retriever but also they used her to startle game and flush it from the thickets in the swamp. And it is in this capacity that the above mentioned cat was

being used. According to Swindler, "the colors are green for the papyrus, which forms a very graceful background for the design with the stems. Black, yellow, and brown are the colors employed for the red at the base of the umbel, and black outlining the green edges of cat, with touches of white and red here and there."<sup>6</sup> A more stylized cat is seen in a wall painting of the XIX Dynasty from the tomb of Apuy. (Fig. 5)

The figure of the cat was not limited to sculpture and painting in Egyptian Art but was also to be found in book illustration, medalcraft and the other so-called minor arts. The **Book of the Dead** refers to the cat in many instances. Probably the most ancient part of the collection is the 17th Chapter in which there is one of the rare allusions to a male cat-deity.

“I am that cat who cleft the persea tree at his side in Heliopolis that night of exterminating the enemies of Neb-er-zer (Osiris). Who then is this? He, that male cat, is Ra himself.”<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 6

From *The Book of the Dead, Facsimiles* by Wallis Budge, there is an illustration of a tree, and a cat that is in the process of decapitating a serpent (Fig. 6). The explanation is that ‘a cat in front of a Persea-tree cutting off the head of the serpent, symbolizes the slaying of the dragon of darkness by the rising sun-god Ra.’<sup>8</sup>

It would be monotonous and of no practical value to enumerate further all the various appearances of the cat in Egyptian art. It has been pointed out sufficiently that the cat emerged in art via primitive religion. Since they were for the most part sacred beings, the cats of Egypt were considered good fortune. In order to avoid the dangers of the sea, traders carried her as a good luck charm to ports all over the world. In the course of time, however, the cat made peoples of the world value her for herself rather than for a walking “lucky piece”.

#### THE CAT IN INDIAN ART

Although a great dissimilarity of peoples and language and customs is present in India, unity is not lacking. But this unity is of a deeper quality than that exhibited in political, dialectic or traditional divergence. This is evident in the religions as well as the cultural life of India. It is seen in the art, the sacred literature and in the various faiths of this country.

The artist, a pious craftsman, believed first, “that every deed in this life plays its part in determining the next life; for, second, individual souls pass at death from one body to another (the doctrine known as the transmigration of souls). Good deeds reward the soul by reincarnating it in a higher form of life; evil deeds bring it into a lower, so that existence is one continuous succession of rebirths, the goal of which is Nirvana, that is, freedom from existence by absorption into Brahma, the ultimate, the only reality.”<sup>9</sup> The art of India, therefore, was an integral part of its religion and was expressed in the decoration of religious structures and in the paintings and sculptures of religious scenes.

The fact that animals were important in Indian religion is exhibited in the numerous figures on early Buddhist structures. The intricate and unending rhythmic movement so characteristic of Indian ornament is seen in the numerous animal figures which decorate the gates and temples and assembly halls.<sup>10</sup>

There is "an open-air rock-cyt **Tirtgan** commonly known as **-Arjuna's Penance**". Here a great rock wall with a median fissure has been covered on both sides with sculptural figures of deities, human beings, Negas, and animals of all kinds, approaching or facing towards the fissure, and for the most part with hands joined in adoration."<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested that the whole scene represents the Descent of the Ganges. Evidence for this suggestion is found "in the figure of the ascetic cat standing erect as a **tapasvi** in **urdhvabahu** pose, while trustful mice p'lay at his feet"; stories of false ascetic cats deluding innocent mice on the banks of the Ganges are also to be found.

Although examples of cats are present in Indian Art, they are not too commonly known. But the presence of ascetic cats in sculptural decoration indicates the continuous religious atmosphere which surrounded Oriental cats at that time. This same respectful feeling for the animal was known in Egypt to a much greater extent and this affinity for sacred cats continues in practically all countries of the Orient.

#### THE CAT IN CHINESE ART

That a cat god was not singular to Egypt is certain. For the first reference to a cat in China is made in the Book of Rites and tells that in ancient times farmers sacrificed to the Chinese cat-god Li Shou; and in their prayers they asked protection against the ravages of gophers. The cat was also included in the Eight Shen, "Harvest Gods or Spirits" to which even the Emperor sacrificed in the twelfth moon.<sup>12</sup> There is little evidence, however, that the cat had as great a religious following in China as she did in Egypt; nor did the cat make so great an impression in Chinese art as she did in Egyptian, Persian or Japanese art for that matter.

But the Chinese paintings in which the cat appears often include the peony. This combination of cat and peony is said to have originated in an episode which occurred while the Chinese Emperor Ming Huang of the T'ang Dynasty was walking in the palace gardens with his favourite concubine. At one point in their stroll, a cat jumped out from some peony bushes in pursuit of a butterfly. The emperor was sufficiently impressed to compose a poem which immortalized the event and which eventually became a subject for paintings.<sup>13</sup>

The Sung Dynasty, often called the second golden age of Chinese art, is graced with a painting entitled **Child with A Dog and A Cat Playing Among Flowers**. The association of cat and flowers is apparent here; and the scene is quite calm probably because of the exclusion of butterflies.

Despite the fact that she makes a somewhat limited appearance in Chinese painting, the cat's presence is more apparent in Chinese



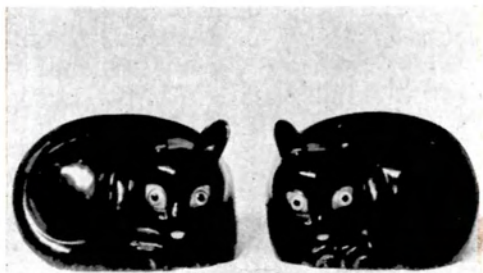


Fig. 7

ceramics. Noteworthy figures (Fig. 7) are the two separate curled up kittens of the K'ang'hsi Period. (1662-1722). The cats, identical in size and position, are of biscuit porcelain covered by black enamel. Although the pose of the animals is realistic, the large eyes and protruding tongues which the artist add-

do not alter the conventional design.

Two even less naturalistic and certainly more oriental appearing figures are those of a mother cat and the small kitten which rests upon her back. Belonging to the Ch'ien Lung Period (1736-1795) the two cats are of white nephrite. Unlike the earlier figures, mother and her offspring have no additions of glass eyes or protruding tongues. But rather they are carved directly out of the nephrite.

From the few examples noted here of the cat in Chinese art, it would seem that the animal was not as popular in China as she was in the other oriental countries. Or perhaps it was that the Chinese used the domestic cat as a model for their numerous larger cats, the lions and tigers, of which they were fond. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that Chinese cats are not as artistically happy as their Persian and Japanese sisters.

#### THE CAT IN JAPANESE ART

The cat is more prominent in Japanese art than in the art of any other oriental country. However, unlike the Persian and Chinese, the Japanese cat is represented more frequently in painting than in textiles and ceramics. But the trait which the Japanese and Chinese have in common in relation to the cat is that both countries considered the animal sacred. The sacred cat of the Chinese was one of the eight Harvest Gods, who protected the crops of the farmer; but the sacred cats of the Japanese were far greater in number and were revered because they were reincarnations of an honourable ancestor. Any Japanese cat, and there were and still are many, born with a black marking resembling a kimono on its back, falls into the above category. The kimono cats each identify an ancestor who has returned to earth, for the orientals are more astute than occidentals when considering cats. They feel that this animal "wavers on the borderland between the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and the subconscious."<sup>14</sup> The ghosts which the orientals allow cats to have may return to earth.

Perhaps this fact is sufficient reason for a statue in Japan that is dedicated to cats. Surprisingly enough, however, the statue is not dedicated to the sacred kimono cats, but rather to the common cats "that are sacrificed to make catgut for the samesen."<sup>15</sup>

The orientals perhaps rank as the greatest interpreters of the cat in art. Although the artists of the peasant paintings were, for the most part, unknown, other Japanese artists have achieved recognition for their outstanding representations of the cat. As long ago as 1127 Toba Sojo was establishing a reputation as one of the greatest animal draughtsmen of Japan or any other country for that matter. "Of the four rolls of the Kojanji cartoons attributed to Toba Sojo, two contain drawings of animals and birds. The drawings in Scroll II are also continuous, and . . . besides hares, monkeys, and frogs, other animals such as deer, wild boar, foxes, cats, rats, and an owl are represented in this scroll. The drawing in this scroll is more masterful than those in the other three."<sup>16</sup>

The cat, in not so cheerful a form, appears in other illustrations of myths, legends and fables. "In one illustration by Kuniyoshi, a Nekomata is being slain by Kamata Matahachi of Matsuzaka, Ise., who was noted for his extraordinary strength and courage. In another, by the same artist, a similar cat goblin is shown in the act of terrorizing a young woman."<sup>17</sup>

Another unpleasant, but extremely interesting rendition of the cat form is seen in the print *A Japanese Fantasy*, an illustration from Champfleury's *Les Chats*. The fantasy is a grotesque cat face, the parts of which are made up of cat bodies.

Strangely enough, whether she is represented in grotesque or in an agreeable form, the cat has, for the most part, been associated with the female of the species from the days of her origin. In Egypt, she was the incarnation of the female moon goddess; in Europe and America she was the familiar of witches; and in Japan, the cat frequently is associated with the Geisha, or singing girl. Perhaps the Geisha was selected for this distinction because of the "witchery she exercises over the opposite sex."<sup>18</sup> A Japanese painting on silk, Joran, eighteenth century, shows the Geisha caressing a cat and illustrates their association.

In most Japanese paintings the cat appears with women. Utamaro has portrayed two extremely similar cats, one of which appears in *Japanese Women and Cat*, while the other distracts a *Young Woman Dressmaking*. The two cats are not only in almost identical positions, but they also have the same physical markings. It may be added that in both paintings the position of the main figures' heads are in such the same attitude and because of this fact, the center of attraction becomes the cat. Another playful kitten amuses her audience in *Two Ladies and A Child at Seashore* by Yeishi. Two more cats frolic on Japanese Pillar-Prints by Koriusai, while a rather buxom animal struts impressively in Kiyonobu I's *The Princess and the Cat*. In the last four prints mentioned it is interesting to note that all the animals are similarly marked with black and white spotting.

The cat is seen in full advantage in a XIX century painting by Kiosai. This painting, entitled *Cat playing with a frog* (See Fig. 8.), shows an exquisitely detailed and beautifully drawn tabby seizing a frog. There is the feeling of power in this animal. And although coat pattern and hair are delicately drawn there is no loss of anatomical detail. This painting by Kiosai is an example of perhaps the finest cat in art.

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Two other Japanese cats of a later period may be contrasted. In each painting the cat is the central figure. The first of these examples is almost an abstraction of the form. This painting by Gyokusko is broadly brushed in, with



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

little detail indicated. The rear of the seated cat is seen, and the subject is poorly represented. This type of technique is one of the best for painting cats; however, there is little accuracy in anatomic detail in this particular painting, (See Fig. 9.).

Contrasted to Gyokusko's work, a more detailed example of the Japanese cat is seen in another painting of the same Meiji Period (1868-1911). This painting by Toko, (See Fig. 10.), shows the curious cat enjoying the stroll of a spider. The body of the cat is again brushed in; but in contrast to the other painting, the feeling of form, the awareness of muscle and bone beneath a furry exterior is readily sensed. It is interesting to note that considerable attention is given the bows around the necks of each cat.



Fig. 10

That the Japanese held the cat in affection is obvious, but to a great extent the form of the cat is obscured when she becomes relegated to the more important human figures in artistic representations. Only when she is associated with other animals does the cat appear to greater advantage.

Obviously, from the Japanese paintings shown the cat is the center of attention although she may be overshadowed in size by other figures present. Certainly, however, greater justice is done to the cat's beauty and grace when she appears as the chief subject. But whether the Japanese artists has given the cat the place of honour in a painting or print, the artists of no other country have depicted the cat with so much grace or beauty or sensitivity.

#### THE CAT IN PERSIAN ART

Persia was an infiltration point of many influences. Beginning with the third century A. D. this country felt the power of the Sassanids, who carried on the customs and religion of their people in a remote section of Southern Persia. Since these rulers were patrons of the arts, they assisted their own craftsmen. And when the Christian Justinian closed the pagan schools at Athens, the fleeing artists and craftsmen were welcomed to the Sassanian Court. In this manner classical tradition was brought to Persia.

But because of the unconquerable Moslems, who sped eastward and made their power known, the Sassanian Kingdom was vanquished in the seventh century A. D. The Moslems established Baghdad as the seat of their caliphate in 762.

Shortly after that, however, in 1258, the Mongols, or Tatars, under Jenghiz Khan captured Baghdad and brought the traditions of China to Persia. Thus, Persia was the melting pot for the many traditions assembled there by the conquering armies.

Founded by Timur in 1396 and lasting until 1500, the Dynasty of the Timurids was the golden age of Persian art. This period produced the finest books in the true Persian style. Since the shahs fervently revered books, they gathered to their court the most skilled artists.

The Persian book illustrations, the greatest of this country's art, showed the many influences which it had felt in the combination of Sassanian conventionality and Chinese naturalism.<sup>19</sup>

The literature, which the Persian miniatures illustrated and with which they were intimately connected, abounds in animal fables. And it is in the fable illustrations that the cat is represented.

In the Persian **Fables of Bidpai**, Baghdad, 1280, there is a painting which shows a large spotted cat in the process of strangling not only a partridge but also a hare at the same time. According to the story, the hare and the partridge had quarrelled about a terrier, and unwisely invited the cat to judge between them. Considering the patterning of the tree foliage, the stylization of plant life as well as the markings and attitudes of the animals, this painting shows the conventional Sassanian influences.

Taking into account the various forces which have influenced Persian art, it is not surprising to find a copy of a Chinese painting which depicts a Taoist bonze playing with a kitten. This painting was made at Ispahan about 1620. Finding that the Chinese painting was not brilliant enough, the artist of the school of Riza-i' Abassi strengthened the colour tone of his copy.

However, one of the finest examples, and certainly the most natural, of Persian cats is represented in an early seventeenth century painting of Delhi. This painting in the Pozzi Collection, Paris, shows "two children playing with beautiful Persian cat before the door of a dervish's hermitage; the dervish gently scolds them; in the background, a mountain in a style which recalls those painted in China in the thirteenth century by Chao Mengn-fu is seen. Behind the mountain the Indo-Persian artist has painted a little Swiss village."<sup>20</sup>

In the field of ceramics, only one specimen of the cat is commonly known. This glazed earthenware bottle in the form of a cat, of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in England.<sup>21</sup>

The artists delighted in the animal form as a decorative element, and although only a few illustrations of Persian cats have been described here, the decorative pattern of the animal shows the changing influences that were felt in Persia.

The cat thus far has been under oriental influence. Her appearance in Egyptian art has been paid special attention in order not only to lay a strong foundation for her future travels, but also, and more in point, to convey the oriental attitude toward the cat. Perhaps, her appearance in the art of India, China, Persia and Japan has been only superficially touched upon. But in Egyptian art the foundation had been laid and the attitude revealed. To show completely the cat's part in the art of any one oriental country would encompass a lifetime of study. Such a minute recording of the oriental cat's activities would defeat the purpose of this brief survey. Before attempting to cross the wide span between the Orient and the Occident, however, it is necessary to establish a point of view.

"An appreciation of . . . all Oriental Art presupposes an acceptance of the principle that great art is not necessarily an imitation or illusion of nature, but that a generalized, conventional, or symbolic representation of men and of nature can express both the form and the spiritual forces that dominate it. Western, that is, European, art on the whole has followed the canon of the representation of nature, yet has produced great art wherever the artists have been able to be selective and to reproduce nature, in its universal aspects as expressive of a controlling spirit within."<sup>22</sup>

#### THE CAT IN CLASSICAL ART

The domestic cat appeared with great rarity in the classical period of art. Animals were present in the art of Greece and Rome, but those represented were more often the animals associated with the games, tournaments and festivities of these countries. Animals

were eclipsed by the greater attention paid the human form. Therefore, the cat that was the object of adoration in Egypt became obscurity itself in Greece. Only in the smaller medals, rings and reliefs which represented some of the greatest art of Greece was the cat depicted.

At the National Museum of Athens a grave relief of a man and boy includes a small cat. In the Capitoline Museum another of the few examples of the cat in classic art appears. This is a bas-relief which pictures a young woman attempting to train her cat to dance. Unfortunately the cat is not dancing but is shown snapping at a duck. According to Van Vechten, the cat is present also on a Greek urn of the best period.<sup>23</sup> She is also represented on Athenian red-figured vases; one of these, a well known hydria in the British Museum shows a scene of a music lesson in which the cat is seated on the pupil's stool. In the fifth century a cat reclines on top of a stele in Athens, and on certain coins of Taras of the late fifth century the cat plays with a youth. On another of these coins she is represented jumping at a bird or hunting. In the fourth century, about the time of the cat's last appearance in Greek Art, she is noted on several Apulian vases together with birds or youths or young girls.

The cat made more frequent appearances in Roman art because she was a favourite in royal and aristocratic households. However, the frequency of her appearance in Roman art still does not equal her Egyptian record.

From Pompeii came mosaics which pictured the cat as a marauder. Two of these representations were found in the House of the Faun. The mosaic of the cat devouring a bird is worthy of note because it may have served as an illustration of the epigrams of the Anthologia.

In Rome the cat symbolized freedom and is seen at the feet of the Goddess of Liberty at the temple built by Tiberius Gracchus. The freedom loving cat was likewise engraved upon the shields of Roman soldiers.<sup>24</sup> And probably her presence on the shields indicated not only a symbol for freedom but also a token of good fortune.

Additional effigies of the Roman cat appear in bronze and in marble. Fortunately, the obscurity in which the Greek and Roman cat found herself was not forced upon her elsewhere.

#### THE CAT IN ART OF THE 14TH TO 19TH CENTURIES

After an almost complete absence in classical art the domestic re-emerged to prominence in the art of Italy, Flanders, Germany and Holland as well as in the art of Spain, England and France.

In Italy the cat returned to an affiliation with religion. While the cat most often appears in paintings of Adam and Eve, the Birth of the Blessed Virgin, the Marriage Feast at Cana, the Last Supper and in other well known religious episodes, it is also included in canvases of a non-religious character.

Of the few examples of the cat in classical art there was a bas-relief in which a woman attempted to instruct her cat in the

art of dancing. Centuries later, the Italian Tintoretto, born Jacopo Robusti, rose to high reputation as a Venetian historical painter. And "amid the gloom of his gigantic canvases" there occasionally is "a black cat lurking in the densest shadows, its rounded back a mere patch of darkness against the deeper darkness beyond."<sup>25</sup>

The cat is seen more distinctly and is more conspicuous in the works of Bassano, Baroccio, Zuccherò, Ghirlandajo, and da Vinci. These painters, for the most part, showed the cat in scenes of religious significance.

Bassano, for instance, "profited by the Deluge all his life. He painted the beasts entering their asylum; he painted them scattered upon Mount Ararat, . . . and always he painted a cat, filling the most conspicuous place, supercilious, combative and alert."<sup>26</sup>

Benozzo Gozzoli likewise took advantage of the flood. On the walls of the Camp Santo at Pisa one of Gozzoli's frescoes shows the group leaving the ark, and facing the other animals is a large cat.

In the choir of the Orvieto Cathedral two frescoes by Puccio illustrate the vision of Saint Ann and the birth of the Blessed Virgin. The former painting shows a white cat who drives "a meek intruding dog" from the saint's presence.<sup>27</sup> This painting would also seem to indicate the dog's place in Italian art. An identical cat is present in the second painting, i.e., the birth of the Blessed Virgin. However, in this canvas she steals food from a table while the other occupants of the room concentrate on the new born infant. A black cat appears in a painting of the same subject in the Oratorio of Saint Bernardino at Sienna.

Luca Giordano painted **The Birth of the Blessed Virgin** in which the cat sleeps in a chair while everyone else, with the exception of Saint Ann, stands or kneels.<sup>28</sup>

Hanging in the Vatican Gallery is an **Annunciation** by Baroccio. In the painting an angel makes obeisance to the kneeling Virgin while a splendid gray cat sleeps obliviously on the Virgin's work. In another canvas Baroccio painted a cat "looking with half-shut, indifferent eyes at the angelic visitor. Indifference is, in fact, her role in art."<sup>29</sup> **La Madonna Del Gatto**, the famous altarpiece also by Baroccio has naturally, the cat as the center of interest.

Italian art abounds with cats, cats by Guilo Romano, cats by Salvator Rosa and by Antonello de Mesina. The paintings of Andrea Schavone and the Florentine Cenacolas likewise have sleek fine cats in them.

But the most "splendid, pampered, luxurious, quarrelsome" cats appear in the canvases of Veronese. These paintings are of bountiful Venetian feasts and "out of courteous deference to the demands of the Church" are entitled **Last Supper** or **Marriage at Cana**.

There is a **Last Supper** by Ghirlandajo in the Refectory of San Marco in Florence which includes a small but obvious cat. Sitting toward the lower right portion of the scene and staring out at the observer, she is seemingly unaware of the activity behind her.

Many people know Leonardo's **Mona Lisa**, but how many are familiar with this master's animal studies; and particularly what number recall his excellent cat studies? To most people da Vinci created an ideal beauty with a mysterious smile; or he artistically fathered cherubic infants. However, in **Studies for Madonna, Child and Cat** Leonardo combined three subjects which he depicted with great skill. The first sketches appear to be only compositional devices, for the cat is merely a few lines hastily considered. The other studies show only a slight improvement since da Vinci's attention is still focused on the main figures. The fact that this master realized the importance of careful observation of every form in the picture is evidenced by his studies of cats.

Although she figured prominently in Italian painting, the cat was not entirely absent from the sculpture and minor arts of that country. She makes an appearance in the choir stalls of San Giorgio Maggiore which were carved by the Flemish sculptor, Albert de Brule, toward the close of the sixteenth century. The carvings represent scenes from the life of Saint Benedict, and the convent cat presents herself on several occasions. Saint Benedict was not alone in receiving the attention of a cat, for the oak panellings surrounding the altar in the upper sala of Scuolo de San Rocco show the cat regarding Saint Roch with "thoughtful indifference."

In the art of medalcraft the cat is represented through the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. A bas-relief by Cellini shows the cat at the feet of Judas. And at Pitti Palace there is the blessing of Jacob shown in relief on a silver dish. A cat at the feet of Isaac regards the father and son disdainfully. On another of Cellini's dishes a cat is prominently displayed. The scene is that of Orpheus playing to the beasts; and the cat rests on a large portion of the border away from the common herd.<sup>30</sup>

Through her distinction in medal work, sculpture, drawing and chiefly in the painting of Italy, the cat was redeemed from her austere exclusion from the art of Greece and Rome. Fortunately the cat's prominence did not cease with Italian art but continued on into the art of Flanders.

That the cat is present in Flemish painting is a certainty, however, for the artists of Flanders continued the practice of including the cat in their paintings of religious episodes just as their Italian colleagues had one. Hieronymus Bosch painted the birth of Eve in which picture a cat is represented in the act of devouring a tadpole. This painting hangs in the gallery of Madrid. Jan Breughel's **Paradise Lost** shows Puss sleeping, completely unaware that Adam and Eve are being driven from the Garden; and she lies between the feet of Adam and Eve in Franz Floris' **Garden of Eden**. A large white cat dozes by the side of the Blessed Virgin in Hendrick met de Bles' **Annunciation**.

Heretofore, the cat has appeared chiefly in art of religious significance. Consider the sacred cats of Egypt, the cats in religious



paintings of the Italian and Sienese schools and the cats in the religious paintings of Flanders. For although religious paintings of Flanders did include the cat, she appears for the most part in genre scenes. Flanders did not follow the great classical tradition of Italy, for the native tradition insisted upon realism. And for the most part this realism depicted genre scenes.

At this point in history the cat finally settles into the position in life with which she is normally associated. The genre scenes of Flanders provided a setting which was not only harmonious to the cat but which was also familiar to peoples of most countries. The cat was now a part of the family.

"Two splendid, greedy, thievish cats," painted by Jan Fyt, "creep with cautious steps and gleaming eyes about heaped up game."<sup>31</sup> That Fyt understood and admired cats is felt in the skillful manner in which he portrayed these animals. A less animated example of the Flemish cat is the gentle and unconcerned one in Jordaens' **Twelfth Night**.

An interesting composition was painted by Peter Breughel when he showed about a dozen cats gathered around a music-stand. The *Solfege d'Italie* is open on the music stand. And curiously enough, "rats represent the notes, their tails forming the quavers and semi-quavers." Teniers painted the same subject as did other artists.<sup>32</sup>

Now that she was seemingly released from artistic work of a religious character the cat pursued life in a genre capacity in German as well as in Dutch art. Only one painting of a religious type, **Adam and Eve** by Durer, includes a distinguished grey cat.



Fig. 11

There is a sixteenth century painting by Hans von Kulmbach called **A Girl Making a Garland** (Fig. 11) in which a cat is present. This painting demonstrates the combination of technical ability and love of decoration which is common to German art. Von Kulmbach's canvas has as a main subject a girl seated at her casement. A partially completed garland which she is fashioning rests in her lap, and a single flower adorns the side of the window which is close to her. Sitting erectly on the right side of the opening is a magnificent white cat.

Almost immediately after the sixteenth century, the period of von Kulmbach's painting, "Germany was plunged into a series of disastrous religious wars which so drained its energy and its resources that it was unable to make any notable contribution to the arts of Europe."<sup>33</sup> Not until the nineteenth century did Germany return to distinction in fine arts.

From the nineteenth century there is a painting by Ludwig Knaus of **Cats with Old Women** which is quite different in mood and quality of scene from the earlier "garland" canvas. Comparatively speaking, the "old woman" painting has an overall feeling of realism and dejection while the "garland" painting has an air of detachment as well as complacency. Knaus' painting represents a portion of an old hovel which forms the setting for nine cats and their mistress. Naturalism permeates this canvas from the wood in the stove to the whiskers on the cats. The "garland" cat seems to be of stone when contrasted with the animated felines in the later painting. One contented animal rests on the old woman's lap; another is at her side while the mother cat watches over her off-spring capering on the floor. The cats are realistically painted; and even the quiet ones exhibit more life than the white cat of **A Girl Making a Garland**. At last the cat is really at ease in artistic representation.

In the past religion has been chiefly a factor concerning the cat in art. For it has been seen that in the Orient religion brought acclaim to this animal; and when one considers Italian painting and certain aspects of Flemish and German art, it is evident that the cat remained in religious art even in the Occident. The tendency for the cat to be seen more often in genre scenes is noted at this point, and this tendency may also be considered a sign of future developments. But in Spanish art there is a return from the genre transition. Again the cat succumbs to religious influence; but at this time the influence is not as happy as it has been in previous eras. For in Spain the church seemingly discouraged the cat's appearance in art. Since the church in Spain was conservative, it often lacked sympathy with the sacrilegious. The church dominated the country's fine arts, and there was apparently no place for the pagan cat in paintings of saints and popes and cathedrals.

Because of the church, "Spanish painting in its highest expression . . . seems more like sporadic outbursts in the hands of strong individuals, often working in alien traditions rather than normally evolving national expression."<sup>34</sup>

Two of these strong individuals were Diego Velasquez and Francisco Goya. It would seem impossible for so small an animal as the cat to find its way into the magnificent paintings of these two artists. And the great religious oppression of the Spanish would seem to render any but religious works impossible. Therefore, it is not surprising to find the appearance of the domestic cat in Spanish art truly rare. The few known examples are worthy of attention.

The painting by Velasquez entitled **The Tapestry Weavers** demonstrates the Spanish baroque temperament. A great restlessness exists in practically all areas of the canvas. In the foreground, a group of women busily spin and card thread; and their appearance denotes that of the working class. A tension of activity pervades the canvas. However, in one small area of the painting, activity

is completely lacking. Here a large tortoise-shell cat sleeps wholly unaware of the animated scene.

Francisco Goya by way of his notable portraits of the royal family became a favorite of the Spanish court and remained in favor the greater part of his life. One of Goya's portraits, that of Don Manuel Osorio de Zuniga, (Fig. 12), includes three cats. Although the canvas is vividly colored, the chief figure has a stiff, doll-like quality. The artificiality which Goya so often purposely introduced to his portraits of the Spanish aristocracy seems to be present here. But in spite of the exquisitely painted lace and red velvet and silk of the child's costume, the animals dominate the scene. The three cats, one a tabby, another brown and white tortoise-shell and the third, black in color, are placed in the background and toward the right side of Don Manuel. Also present, are a bird cage to the left of the child and a larger bird in the foreground, that pecks at an object before the watchful eyes of the cat. Neither the cats nor the birds are accurately painted, but are merely brushed over in comparison to the figure. Pervading the animals is the taint of artificiality; but the cats seem more natural because of the typical and ageless interest of a cat in a bird.



Fig. 12

foregoing, that pecks at an object before the watchful eyes of the cat. Neither the cats nor the birds are accurately painted, but are merely brushed over in comparison to the figure. Pervading the animals is the taint of artificiality; but the cats seem more natural because of the typical and ageless interest of a cat in a bird.

The cat makes an equally uncommon appearance in Spanish sculpture. The only widely known example is in the cathedral of Tarragona. "On the opposite side of the abacus of a column are sculptures of what Mussner (Herring's Archiv. 1xv. 214) calls the burial of the cat, but which would seem rather to represent the carrying of the cat to execution. Tabby lies on a litter, which might be mistaken for a bier, but is really a stretcher used instead of a hangman's coat, borne by rats and mice, and preceded by a long procession of these rodents with, banners, vessels of holy water, aspergills, crosiers, censers. The executioner, a rat bearing an axe, marches with the full consciousness of his official dignity under the litter. This stately pageant is followed by a more lively spectacle: the cat springs up and catches a rat, while the rest of the solemn assembly disperse in all directions, leaving the panic-stricken procession scattered on the ground."<sup>35</sup>

Although she was infrequently seen in Spanish sculpture and painting, the cat appears to greater advantage in Dutch painting. For the Dutch Protestants banned classical and Italian art and brought greater meaning to genre painting. And in so doing, the

**Dutch** artists, like the Flemish, created a sympathetic setting for the cat.

Hanging in the National Gallery of London is the painting **Painter's Shop** in which the artist, van Mieris, represented a soft furred tortoise-shell cat. Wistfully, the cat regards the duck which hangs well out of her reach. The Flemish painter, Jan Fyt, created a scene of the same type; but Fyt's cats are greedy and lawless in the pursuit of the dead game. Van Mieris' cat is more comfortable than greedy.

However, a more typical Dutch genre painting is **Kitten Scene** by Gabriel Metsu. In this painting an extremely realistic tabby reaches toward its mistress for a share of her meal. The ever present dead game is toward the woman's left hand. And no doubt, the game has also claimed the animal's attention.

Another Dutch painting of a much later date lacks the refreshing informality of **Kitchen Scene**. This later canvas, **Girl with Cat** by Paul Hoecker, gives the impression of being an illustration rather than a painting. The work is superficial in regard to careful study of not only the cat but also the child.

As has occurred before, the cat crept into the ecclesiastical ornament of the most devout countries; and England has not proved the exception. In one English cathedral there were some carvings which caricatured "not a Protestant, but a Catholic rite, namely the burial of the fox as prescribed by the Roman ceremonial." According to a description by Evans, "first comes the bear with an aspergill and a vessel of holy water; the wolf carries a crucifix, and the hare holds a burning taper; the bier, on which lies the fox simulating death and plotting revenge, is borne by a sow and a he-goat. An ape is seated on the ground near the bier, apparently as spectator. A stage is chanting the office at the altar, while a cat serves as lectern to support the epistles, which are read by an ass . . ."36

It is interesting to note that these sculptures were caused to be removed in 1685.

However, there did remain in the stalls of Bristol Cathedral a series of grotesques, one of which relates the mousing adventure of Tybert, the cat in the house of the priest. In this portrayal "the artist has adhered quite closely to the description of the exciting incident given by the poet, so that his work bears a striking resemblance to Kaulback's well-known sketch. The cat in desperate self-defense, scratches the priests in a very sensitive part of his body to the great horror of his housekeeper, or, maybe, his wife (for at that time sacerdotal celibacy had not become imperative, and was by no means universal in the Catholic Church) who pulls the sacrilegious depredator violently by the tail, while the malicious instigator of all this trouble stands in the corner and laughs."37

It would seem, therefore, that although the cat appears in the sculptural decoration of English ecclesiastical architecture, she is somewhat lacking in the dignity bestowed upon her by other countries.

But before the monasteries were destroyed in England, manuscript illumination was considered an art that gained practically the repute bestowed upon architecture. Just as she had been repre-

Thomas Gainsborough's portrait of *A Child With a Cat* (Fig. 13) is another example of this animal in English art. The artificial expressions, the foliage and the distant landscape, all typical of Gainsborough's work are present here. But to add to the general misery, Gainsborough includes a cat, which seems to have come straight from the taxidermist's shop. The animal, without a doubt, comes close to being the poorest cat in the history of art.



Fig. 13

sented unfavorably in ecclesiastical sculpture, the cat continued to feel sacerdotal displeasure in manuscript illumination.

For "in the illuminated manuscript known as Queen Mary's Psalter (1553) there is a picture of the Fall of Man, in which there is a modification of the idea which gained wide currency during the middle ages that it was the serpent-woman, Lilith, who had tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. In this picture, while the beautiful grace and ample hair of Lilith are shown, instead of the usual female breast she has the body of a cat."<sup>38</sup>

After the sixteenth century and the coming of Protestantism, which deprived England of skilled ecclesiastical artists, a long period elapsed before a new school of painters arose. Finally in the eighteenth century, Hogarth, Gainsborough and Reynolds made their worth known.

Cats appeared in the works of the three artists mentioned but for entirely different reasons. Hogarth was the reformer, the satirist of middle class morals, but more in point Hogarth was a disbeliever in classicism. Usually to show his contempt for the classics, the artist included a cat or some other domestic animal in his painting. The cat in Hogarth's painting of **The Graham Children** is only one proof of this statement.

On the other hand, Gainsborough and Reynolds painted fashionable portraits in the sentimental Italian style complete with foliage and distant landscape.<sup>39</sup> Although Hogarth used the cat to show his contempt for classicism, Gainsborough and Reynolds included the animals as fashionable play things.



Fig. 14

Keeping pace with England was France. Among her artists Fragonard included the cat in one or two of his paintings. Watteau painted . . . "*Chat Malade* rolled up like a baby in the arms of his little mistress, who is weeping. An Italian comedy doctor, with skull-cap and eye-glasses, attends the invalid with a majestic air, while the cat himself makes a face like a spoiled child at the smell of the medicine."<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 16



Fig. 15

It is obvious that there are few fine examples of the cat in the art of France and England of this period. In the majority of instances the cat is an accessory to the composition and is portrayed badly. There are exceptions to such a statement, of course. However, it is only necessary to recall the careful rendering of the cat in all the Egyptian wall paintings in which she appears to appreciate the fact that the cat was an integral part of the painting and not an after-thought.

Cats in modern European art form a lengthy and impressive list to which nearly all the chief countries have contributed.

Of the contemporary Spaniards Joan Miro and Pablo Picasso have strengthened the cause. Picasso has made an aquatint of a cat which is an illustration for Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*. He is also credited with the painting *Woman With Cats*. Joan Miro's painting, *The Farmers Wife*, done in 1922 includes an excellent example of a modern cat.

The Swiss were not to be excluded from contributing to the artistic praise of the cat. For the Swiss had Gottfried Mind who was, perhaps, the only man who ever consecrated his life to drawing cats. Because of his intense devotion to this animal and because he would tolerate no other companionship than cats, Mind was considered slightly more than mad. Born of Hungarian origin in Berne in 1768, Mind became known as the "Raphael of the Cats" and the "sullen recluse of Berne." In spite of his ignominious titles, Mind's drawings of cats have never been equalled. Depping says of him in *Biographie Universelle*: "His pictures were, one might almost say, cat-portraits; he gave every shade of meaning to their soft and cunning faces; he lent infinite variety to the graceful attitude of kittens playing with their mother; he depicted the silky coat of the cat perfectly; in short the cats painted by Mind seemed to be alive." Considering the few examples of Mind's work that are known perhaps Depping's praise of Mind is extreme. But it is only necessary to study the drawing, *Minette Washes*, to understand why Depping's praise is justified.<sup>41</sup> Mind has received little commendation, indeed, when the acclaim given Henriette Ronner is heeded.

Although born in Holland, Belgium claims Henriette Ronner who also painted cats for the better part of a lifetime. Each cat of Madame Ronner is like the next one; and they are all saccharine and superficial. Her story pictures, usually of a mother cat and kittens, are for people who consider these intelligent animals sweet and cunning little things.

It is not too broad a jump from Belgium to France; and after the Revolution, the cat flourished in France. Beginning with the nineteenth century French painters who skillfully portraying the cat, have received outstanding recognition from cat fanciers throughout the world. Now it can be said that the cat brought distinction to the artist when he brought distinction to her.

It was Grandville who produced some of the most satisfying cat drawings of this period.

Jean-Ignace-Isadore Gerard was born at Nancy, September 15, 1803. During his professional life as an illustrator, Gerard called himself "Grandville"; and it is by that name he is recognized today.

Grandville not only drew cats well but he also drew them as individuals rather than sentimental balls of fluff. He made use of a device which is more familiar in Sir John Tenniel's illustrations for

**Alice in Wonderland.** The Frenchman dressed his cats as human beings and placed them in extraordinary situations. One of Grandville's drawings **The Entrance of the Respectable Puff** affords the opportunity to study his characteristics.

But Grandville did not receive all the honours of catdom because later Frenchmen who drew and painted this animal are numerous. Honore Daumier satirized Paris for forty years with his lithographs, many of which contain cats.

Another painter who admitted the cat in his work was Edouard Manet. His fascinating poster **Rendez-Vous de Chats** shows a large black cat being attentive to a white queen "among the chimney tops, while their tails are flaunted in the face of the rising moon . . ." Manet also placed a black cat upon the bed of the nude **Olympia**. For a while this animal was known as "the cat of Monsieur Manet and enjoyed a success de scandals."<sup>42</sup>

Renoir showed his awareness of the resemblance between young people and animals. As Sir Joshua Reynolds had done previously in one of his canvases, Renoir painted a young boy and a cat, the faces of which show an obvious resemblance. This painting is **Le Garçon Au Chat**.

Louis Eugene Lambert became a celebrated painter of cats. Lambert's **Study of Cats** is a classic of its kind and now hangs in the Luxembourg Gallery, Paris.

In the contemporary field Steinlen may be considered one of the greatest of the cat artists of all time. For Steinlen was the only artist who had been capable of drawing cats in action. **The Cat and the Ball of Thread**, one of his most famous drawings, exhibits his ability to depict the cat in action. Although Steinlen was not as good a draughtsman as Grandville, and although his cats are not as individualistic, he has captured feline characteristics in action, as never before. Actional drawings were done in series, each new sketch showing a change in movement from the previous stage. Because of this unique type of drawing, it may be that Steinlen was one of the first animators, the predecessor of Disney and the mouse.

For sheer ingenuity, Steinlen ranks among the great artists of the cat. His actional drawings are excellent, and for these drawings Steinlen deserved the acclaim which he received. But actional drawings are often deceptive. His ability to depict feline characteristics in action is outstanding, yet the studies of cats in quiet attitudes exhibit little skill in draughtsmanship if they are compared with any of Mind's drawings.

Born in Lausanne in 1859, Theophile Alexandre Zeichner Steinlen occupied the greater portion of his life drawing cartoons of social significance. But the work for which he is best remembered is a lithograph poster **Lait Sterilise** (Fig. 17). His book, **Des Chats (dessins sans paroles)**, is also well known. It is this volume that bears testimony to Steinlen's ability to draw in action.



Fig. 17  
(see previous page)

Comparable to the cat drawings of Grandville, is the work of a contemporary, Franco-Japanese, Foujita. His drawings, in the oriental manner, however, also exhibit the soft fur as well as the internal structure of the cat. Unfortunately, the cats of Foujita are little known today. His drawings are excellent and, in many respects, are superior to those of Mind and Grandville.



#### THE CAT IN MODERN AMERICAN ART

There have been many cats in American art, but there have been few really fine drawings, paintings or sculptures of this animal. And thus far, America has produced no artist comparable to Steinlen or Mind or Foujita.

Of America's modern artists in this field, however, Wanda Gag is well known. Her first impression upon the art world was made in 1928 when the book, **Millions of Cats**, which she wrote and illustrated was published. Since then, the book has become a children's classic and the cat lover's delight. It is obvious from these illustrations that, although Miss Gag's cats are usually well drawn, they are completely stylized. With the exception of differences in color markings, one cat might easily be mistaken for another. Always incorporated as a part of the composition, these cats are never so much extraneous matter stuck on paper. Assuming a natural pose, they are generally the chief element of each composition.

Perhaps the best known American artist who has devoted great energy to the study of cats is Clare Turlay Newbury. There is one small book, **Drawing a Cat**, which contains a number of her most popular studies and which shows Miss Newbury's skill in this direction.

The cat also appears occasionally in American sculpture. Although John Flanagan has several examples to his credit, Zorach's

sculptures are more widely known. *Child With a Cat* and *Cat* are perhaps the best known of his work.

With the possible exception of Clare Turlay Newbury's work, contemporary American cats are hardly outstanding. It is to be hoped that in the not too distant future an American artist can achieve the distinction brought by the cat whom he has understandingly depicted.

No matter how she was portrayed, certainly the cat has seldom been ignored since she mysteriously walked upon the scene in 1600 B.C. Whether she was worshipped in Egypt, China and Japan, or was burned as a demon in France and England, or was honored in the German and Dutch kitchens, the cat has always claimed attention. Although she has been represented in the art of practically every country and in every period, it has been evident from this survey that the cat has been most prominent in the art of Egypt and Persia and Japan. She was barely noticed in Chinese and Greek art and practically banished from ecclesiastical French art. But what does this prominence or lack of prominence (in certain instances) indicate of the people and cultures throughout history? This is the important question.

A writer in *The Nation* has the answer when he says,

"To respect the cat is the beginning of the aesthetic sense. At a stage of culture when utility governs all of its judgements, mankind prefers the dog; to the cultivated mind the cat has the charm of completeness, the satisfaction which makes a sonnet more than an epic . . . the ancients figured eternity as a serpent biting its own tail. There will yet arise a philosopher who will conceive the Absolute as a gigantic and self-satisfied cat, purring as it clasps in comfortable round its own perfection, and uttering as it purrs, that line of Edmund Spencer's about the cosmos—'It loved itself because itself was fair.' A cat blinking at midnight among your papers and books declares with more eloquence than any skull the vanity of knowledge and the uselessness of striving . . . The cat enjoys the march of the seasons, spins through space with the stars, and shares in her quietism the inevitable life of the universe. In all our hurrying can we do more?"<sup>43</sup>

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#### FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35.
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- <sup>14</sup>Van Vechten, C. *The Tiger in the House*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1920, p. 93.
- <sup>15</sup>Simons, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
- <sup>16</sup>*Japanese Scroll Painting*, Chicago, The University Press, 1935, p. 54.
- <sup>17</sup>Ball, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 154.
- <sup>19</sup>Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 263, pp. 266-268.
- <sup>20</sup>Bloch, E. *Musulman Painting XIIIth-XVIIIth Century*, translated by C. M. Binyon, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1929.
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- <sup>22</sup>Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 603.
- <sup>23</sup>Van Vechten, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
- <sup>24</sup>Marks, A. *The Cat in History. Legend and Art*, London, Elliot Stock, 1909, p. 74.
- <sup>25</sup>Repplier, A. *The Fireside Sphinx*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1901, p. 115.
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.
- <sup>27</sup>Van Vechten, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.
- <sup>29</sup>Repplier, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 107.
- <sup>32</sup>Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
- <sup>33</sup>Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 454.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 469.
- <sup>35</sup>Evans, E. P. *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1896, pp. 206-208.
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- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.
- <sup>38</sup>Van Vechten, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- <sup>39</sup>Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 499-501.
- <sup>40</sup>Van Vechten, *op. cit.*, p. 217.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 219.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 222.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

#### ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Figure 1. Egyptian, Saite period. Bronze cat. British Museum. Figure 2. Egyptian, Late Dynastic period. Figure of a cat. Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1944. Figure 3. Egyptian, Late Dynastic period.

Figure of a cat. Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Darius Ogden Mills, 1904. Figure 4. Egyptian, Fowling in the Marshes, Theban tomb painting. XVIIIthe Dynasty. British Museum. Figure 5. Egyptian, XIX Dynasty. Wall painting. Cat From Thebes, Tomb of Apuy. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Figure 6. Egyptian, Dynasy XIX-XX. Wall painting. Cat and Serpent. From Thebes: Tomb of Sen-nuden. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Figure 7. Chinese K'ang-hsi period. Figures of cats: black enamel on bisquit. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael Friedsam Collection, 1931. Figure 8. Japanese XIX Century. Kiosai. Cat playing with a frog. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914. Figure 9. Japanese, Meji period. Gyokusho, Kawabata. Cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914. Figure 10. Japanese Miji period. Toko, Cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914. Figure 11. German, about 1505; Kulmbach, Hans von. A girl Making a Garland. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. Figure 12. Spanish. Goya, Francisco de. Don Manuel Osorio de Zuniga. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules S. Bache Collection, 1949. Figure 13. British. Gainsborough, Thomas. A child with a cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889. Figure 14. English, XVII century. Pottery cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Russell S. Carter, 1945. Figure 15. English, XVIII century. Cat. Staffordshire: Astbury Type. Lead-glazed earthenware. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Russell S. Carter, 1944. Figure 16. English, XVIII century. Cat. Staffordshire: Whieldon Type. Lead-glazed earthenware. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. Russell S. Carter, 1944. Figure 17. Switzerland, 1859. Lait Sterilize Poster.

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