



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

A FRIEND of ours who works in the Library of Congress has just forwarded us a partial list of the international organizations that send re-



ports of their meetings to Washington, and that drive him daft. Here we go:

- International Association of Seed Crushers
- Association of Inner Wheel Clubs
- Friends of the Pleistocene
- International Committee for Silent Games
- Little Europeans Club of Paris
- Hot Laboratories and Equipment Conference
- Third Way Movement
- International Symposium on Passivity
- Society for the Abolition of Blasphemy Laws
- International Union for Protecting Public Morality
- The Independent Order
- International Initiative Committee
- Symposium on Responsibility
- International Scientific and Technical Organization of Gliding
- International Union for the Study of Social Insects
- Scrap Metal Users' Joint Bureau
- Conferences on Present Status and Future of Darwinian Evolution
- International Association of Crafts and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
- Congrès International pour le Latin Vivant
- Amies de la Jeune Fille
- International Congress of Surface Activity
- Permanent International Committee of Underground Town Planning

We could keep right on, but enough is enough.

Abstraction

WE have had a talk with Robert Kobayashi, a stocky, shy, dark-haired thirty-three-year-old nisei, who

works from nine to five-thirty as a gardener at the Museum of Modern Art and spends as much of his free time as possible painting abstractions. And thereby hangs a tale. On the day of the fire at the Museum, April 15th, Kobayashi loafed around his apartment, at 106th Street and Madison Avenue, for a while, playing with his three-year-old daughter, Lola, and chatting with his wife, Nanac, who was pregnant. In the middle of the morning, he drifted down to the Museum, picked up his pay check (the fire was on a Tuesday, and Tuesday, besides being a day off for him, is payday at the Museum), went across the street to the Donnell Library Center to look up something about flowering shrubs that was bothering him, and then walked around the midtown area, window-shopping. He was faintly aware that a good many fire trucks were whizzing past him, their bells clanging and their sirens screeching. He got back home sometime during the afternoon, and was playing with Lola when his phone rang. It was a friend, who told him that there had been a terrible fire at the Museum, and that two large paintings by Kobayashi had last been seen in the garden—along with the Seurats that had been on exhibit—about to be hoisted on a truck. Kobayashi lay down on his bed, and did not return to the Museum until Friday. "I was afraid they would scold me," he said. "I'd never told them I kept my pictures there."

Kobayashi came to the Museum about four years ago, to help with the installation of the Japanese house in the garden, and stayed on as a gardener. A Samaritan who lived on West Sixty-fifth Street lent him the hall outside her apartment for use as a studio. It was on the top floor and had a skylight, which made it a good place for painting. There he painted four abstractions, the first of which he called "Through Fumi's Eyes." (He has a sister named Fumi.) Two of the others have titles that he doesn't remember, and the fourth was never named at all. He gave two of

them away and entered the other two in the 1957 John Hay Whitney Foundation Competition. They did not win a prize, but last fall he entered five small paintings in the Foundation's 1958 contest, and he won twenty-five hundred dollars with them. "The prize comes in three installments and is tax-free," he said. "The winners are economy-size pictures."

Well, to return to the Samaritan, she eventually told Kobayashi that he could no longer make use of the hallway for painting, and he was stuck with two abstractions, six feet wide and five feet high. He brought them down from Sixty-fifth Street and began, squirrel-like, to store them in various spots around the Museum, leaving them in hideaways for a few weeks at a time—sometimes in a tool shed in the garden, sometimes in a basement paint shop, and finally near



a fire door opening on the garden. Meanwhile, he kept asking his friends to give the paintings a home, but none of his friends had a place large enough. At the time the fire broke out, his pictures were scooped up, along with the Seurats, and removed to a safe place. When Kobayashi had the courage to return to the Museum, he was not scolded. "A nice lady there told me that my pictures were not damaged," he said. "Nobody was angry at me."

When we talked with Mr. Kobayashi, he was wearing blue work pants and a white T shirt, and was admiring some Japanese cryptomerias in the garden. "Even after the fire, I had trouble finding a place for those two pictures," he said. "I hid them on the mezzanine for a while, but they were discovered, and at last a friend with a place in the Village took them away for me. He cut the stretchers behind them, folded the can-



vas back very carefully, and took them downtown by truck. I haven't had the courage to go see them. I have found a place to paint now on Fourteenth Street. My wife paints, too. Her paintings are Oriental; mine are not. She was born in Tokyo, and her maiden name was Momiyama. We have had another child, Anne, since the fire, and my wife talks Japanese to the children. I can't speak Japanese, but she talks English with me. My father was a postman, born in Honolulu, and my mother was born in Japan. I've never been there; I'd like to see the place—'sayonara' and all that stuff. I was born in Hawaii, loafed around poolrooms in Honolulu, and on the beach, and went into the Army, and to Germany. I started in the infantry and ended in the tank corps. I've studied art at the Honolulu School of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. I have fun with paint. I don't plan ahead. I'll put on some red and I'll put on some black, and people, who always think painters are profound, will say, 'Ah! It's Oriental! It's symbolic!' I don't dig that. I just put on as much paint as I can afford, and when I run out, I'm through. I'm beginning to wonder, with so many people seeing symbols in my work, maybe I'm sick inside, but I don't dig that.

"I don't know too much about gardening. It was a fluke, taking me on here. Every once in a while, I run over to the library and do some research on tulips, and feeding, and insecticides. The Museum will be closed all summer, but I keep the garden going, watch over the white birch, and handle new plants as they arrive. Those crypto-

merias look mangy now, because the snow knocked off many branches in the winter, but they are beautiful trees, beautiful trees. Nanae and I can't paint in the same place. And now we have two kids, and it's the same thing—baby up all night, and all that. But all I want to do is paint and raise my kids. Lots of artists fail with the kids. They go hard after the fantasy and the dream, and they fail with the kids. I don't dig that."

OVERHEARD at Fifty-ninth and Madison, on a midsummer Sunday morning, frail young lady to newsstand man: "Why don't they sell the *Times* the way they do chicken parts?"

Arthropod

OH, the resources of this prodigious city! Museums of this, libraries of that! Name the unlikeliest subject you can think of and the odds are that somewhere in New York there's a quiet corner devoted entirely to its study. One of the unlikeliest subjects we can think of is barnacles; needless to say, we've discovered that there's a Barnacle Library here. Consisting not of mere books but of the barnacles themselves, it occupies a rather dusty high-ceilinged room in the plant of the C. A. Woolsey Paint & Color Co., in Brooklyn, and the next time you're strolling about in the Red Hook section and feel an urge to examine pernicious crustaceans, stop in there and browse. That's what we did a few days ago, under the expert guidance of the curator, Mr. Richard J. Eckart, a Yale man

and Woolsey vice-president, whose family has been in the paint business for three generations and who knows as much about barnacles as any other man living—maybe more.

Why does the Woolsey Company maintain a Barnacle Library? Because barnacles are the natural enemies of marine paint, and the more the Woolsey people find out about them the easier it will be to outwit them. At first glance, a barnacle might seem an unworthy adversary for a grown man, especially a grown Yale man, but we learned from Eckart that the human race has been battling barnacles for thousands of years and that the wily little fellows have yet to show signs of being winded, much less hurt. They've been successfully fouling ships for as long as ships have been built, and the amount of damage

they do to American ships alone comes to millions of dollars a year. "We set up this library in 1940 in order to procure a complete record of the devilish things barnacles do to anti-fouling paint," Mr. Eckart said, not without bitterness. "Barnacles on the bottom of a ship can cut down its speed by as much as fifty per cent, at the same time increasing fuel consumption and causing the ship's machinery to wear out faster. They lead to a huge loss of time and money by making it necessary for ships to be periodically hauled out of the water for scraping and repainting. There are plenty of marine plants and animals that foul hulls, but barnacles are by far the worst, because they pull off the protective paint and, in the case of wooden hulls, give the teredo a chance to eat its way into the wood, or, in the case of steel hulls, encourage corrosion. Furthermore, all sorts of fouling accumulates on barnacles that wouldn't get a purchase on clean hulls."

What is a barnacle? Well, it's an aquatic arthropod, succinctly described by Thomas Huxley as "a crustacean fixed by its head and kicking the food into its mouth with its legs." In its larval stage, it resembles a crab; after a month of floating about underwater, it matures and gets a hankering to settle down, which it does on the first firm object it encounters—a rock, a piling, or, with luck, a hull. It fastens its head to the object with a cement of its own devising, and the food it kicks into its mouth consists of plankton and other minute morsels. Thriving in tropical waters, the barnacle is rare in the arctic and the antarctic, and is nonexistent in