

The Talk of the Town

The New Yorker (New York, N.Y., USA)

06.11.1943, Seite 18–21 [zu EMR die Seiten 19–20; Untertitel »Collector«]

Original:

Signatur: R-A 7.12.003

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[...]

Collector

NOT only has a collection of nineteenth-century French art belonging to Erich Maria Remarque, the author of »All Quiet on the Western Front,« turned up on exhibition at the Knoedler Galleries here in town, but Mr. Remarque himself has turned up at the Ambassador Hotel. He's been living out in Beverly Hills for the past few years but figures on staying in New York now more or less permanently. He has never written for the movies and went out to the Coast in the first place only because he had friends there and had heard that the scenery was like the scenery to be found around his house in Switzerland, on Lake Maggiore. The Hollywood countryside suited him all right, but he says there were too many cameramen hanging around photographing it.

We interviewed Mr. Remarque in his suite at the Ambassador, where we found him relaxed in a sport shirt and a collarless jacket. A number of his own Oriental rugs were scattered on the floor, and there were two paintings, one by Degas and one by Daumier, on the walls. He said that the rest of his collection would still be stored in Los Angeles if Knoedler hadn't offered to have it shipped here in exchange for the loan of it for exhibition. »I was too lazy to do it myself, so I said, ›Go ahead,« he told us. We soon gathered that this was merely a sample of the agreeable way events work out for Remarque, who is given to letting them take their course. His collection might not have been in Los Angeles if it hadn't been shipped from Switzerland to London before the war, which it wouldn't have been if Rosa, his maid in Switzerland, hadn't done it on her own responsibility. In 1939, he was packing for a trip to America and Rosa asked if he didn't think she should send some of his things to a safer place in case of war. He believed, because France hadn't prepared, that there wouldn't be a war, but Rosa pointed out that the prophet Nostradamus had predicted one at just about that time. Remarque told her that if it would make her feel better, she could send whatever she liked to a friend of his in London. She sent about everything she could wrap up, while he embarked on what turned out to be the Queen Mary's last prewar voyage.

As for things working out for Mr. Remarque, that's not the half of it, though. He was in Germany in January, 1933, when his agent called him up to remind him that the American magazine *Cosmopolitan* was expecting the manuscript of »Three Comrades,« his third novel, in February. He hadn't even started it, so he jumped in his car and drove to Switzerland to concentrate. That was a good thing, because a couple of weeks later, Hitler, who considers »All Quiet on the Western Front« to be on the decadent side, became chancellor. »I escaped

the Nazis through a belated sense of duty,« he explained. Incidentally, »All Quiet,« which was published in 1929, sold 1,200,000 copies in Germany after having been turned down by the first publisher it was offered to. »You know, one the *those* things,« Remarque says. He wrote it in five weeks, another one of *those* things. He told us that it was not, as many people think, a diary he had kept during the war; he was able to write it quickly because it had to do with something he and his friends talked about every day.

Remarque was born in Osnabrück, in the north of Germany, in 1898. His father and two sisters may or may not be there still. After the last war, he became a test driver for a tire company and drifted by easy stages to the editorship of a sports magazine called *Sport im Bild*. After this came »that book,« as he tends to call it, and then, also in easy stages, his three other novels. Now he's finishing the first draft of a novel about Paris in the two years before this war. At the moment, he's a bachelor, but he's been married twice, to the same woman. He has taken out his first citizenship papers and doesn't plan to go back to Germany, except maybe for a visit. He told us that the old country was a place he had pretty well put behind him and he had no notion whatever of what things might be like there now. »I don't know whether everybody's a Nazi or three-quarters of them are Nazis or what,« he said, »and I doubt if anybody else does.« He talks a little like Charles Boyer, only his accent is better.

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