

# Alexander Kulesh's Sketches of Philippine Mountain Folk

By Carl Werntz

(Mr. Werntz is the founding-director of the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. - Ed.)



Philippine Magazine Engraving

An Alexander Kulesh Sketch: Hagao Girls Dancing at a Bohagour Festival

When asked by the *JOURNAL* to say something of the drawings of Mr. Kulesh, the answer seemed, "Why ring me in?" However, since modesty forbids the young artist from praising his own work, perhaps my appreciation and words of explanation may not be offensive.

Alexander Kulesh's drawings frankly express his delight with the mountain peoples of Luzon—the tribute of a feeling, seeing, searching Russian artist to other oriental artists; for these mountain folk are beyond all question sincere artists, in their own way, with world appreciation indicated by the avidity with which travelers buy their products, and brave the discomforts, even dangers, of the trip beyond Hagao to see them in their homes. On foot, with an extra shirt, a roll of rough paper, a box of pencils—possibly a tooth brush—all in a pack on his back, Kulesh strolled alone into the life of these folk; lived with them; ate their food (which he asserts agrees with him better than that of a Manila hostelry); and sketched them at work on their terraces, in the fields, at the mines, along the roads, around their cooking fires, in their long restings, in their pagan ceremonies, in their love affairs—sketched the young and the old, the children and the babies.

Then, instead of being satisfied with those means of ethnological facts, as many artists might have been, he remembered his academic composition formulae. He superimposed his sketches upon the educational skeleton, created a spare design to express purest best in a composition of some picturesque incident that had impressed itself on his emotions. Behold! These saga-like creations of strange and characteristic life have resulted!

Of course, the National Art Academy of Petrograd (Leningrad now, I think) furnished the skeleton and method, as it did that of Jacobel, internationally famed for his masterly portraits and decorations evolving from months in Africa and Asia, which he crossed as official artist of the Citroen Motor Car Expositions. But it is a similar intimate association with those singular peoples of the mountains and valleys of the Bontoc region, broadly termed Igorots, that brought Kulesh's academic background to a full characteristic flower in a style

derived as an artist's style should be, i. e., from his subjects.

Yes, you who are in Manila are in at the start of an artistic career of unusual promise.

The few short years of this young Russian have been filled with surprises. I am inclined to feel pretty sure he is the most surprised person of all, to find the primitive peoples of your islands—where many phases of art have lived, died and been reborn in new forms—giving him a characterful method of expression which, it seems probable, he will follow for some time—perhaps always.

Chosen because it suits his convenience and temperament at this period, the million-lined pencil technique of these artistic creations is that which his audiences generally speak of first; whereas, it is the wonderful way in which he has interpreted the primitive subjects of his pieces, in new and characterful patterns exactly suited to their individuality, that impresses me. How the wheels are made to go round is really no affair of an audience whose mission is, after all, to see, feel and enjoy. Certainly the less you hear about Kulesh's art and the more you see of it, the more correct and appropriate the approach to enjoying the elaborate technique and the solid compositional structure that distinguish his work.

## "The Index" Indicators

The latest copy of *The Index*, economic review of the New York Trust Company, reports to the close of February, 220,000 more cars loaded during the first 13 weeks of the year than during the same period in 1932, and 1,250,000 more than during the same period in 1933. Pigiron production 3 times as much as during the same period last year, 1-2 3/4 as much as during the same period in 1932. Steel shipments more than double the same period in 1933, 1-2 3/4 times what they were in 1932. Business failures half as many as during the same period in 1933, 1-3 1/4 as many as in 1932. Shares traded on the New York stock exchange 2-2 3/4 times as many as during the same period

last year, 1-1 2 times as many as in 1932. Bank clearings nearly equal those of the same period in 1932, well above the same period last year, both in New York and throughout the country. Exports and imports up 50%. Department stores sales within 4 points of 1932's same period, factory employment 7 points more, 12 points more than during the same period last year, industrial production 12 points more, 18 more than during the same period last year, building contracts awarded 20%, more, 2-2 3/4 times the same period in 1933.

This was a consistent upping of all indexes



—Cut and comment from *Judge*

**She.**—There goes Al Smith all alone!

**He.**—Since he built the *Empire State* he's used to being alone.

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