

## Art Investor by D. Stephen Pepper

### Tradition and the 20th century

Remarks during the columnist's August tour of Detroit, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Dallas, and Houston.

**T**he article below by John Brandenburg appeared in the Aug. 23 issue of the Sunday Oklahoman, published under the headline "Italian Baroque Art Period Enjoys Revival."

An authority on 17th-century Italian art emphasized the importance of unlocking "not only the excellence but the appropriateness" of the Old Masters tradition in art to present-day life during a visit to Oklahoma City last week.

An expert on Bolognese painter Guido Reni, Dr. D. Stephen Pepper said the Italian Baroque period was often neglected during the late fifties because it was considered sentimental or even decadent.

But the former art history teacher, who writes a column on art investing for the conservative *Executive Intelligence Review*, said work of the period is currently enjoying a widespread re-evaluation as "great religious art."

"I like to think it's part of a re-evaluation of the importance of tradition in art that's going on worldwide," said the New York City resident, who addressed private groups in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

"You might say that I proselytize for the value of artistic tradition. I believe basically in the art of the Academy—which means learning to draw and building on traditions—but, above all, it means conveying ideas.

"Modernism believed that art

existed on its own, not to convey ideas. I think that's played out. It's a phenomenon of 20th-century art to pay too great a respect to ideas in a primitive stage, as if being primitive was being sincere.

"The notion of the Academy is that there is some high ideal that is the vantage point of the artist. This was not overthrown because it was decadent, but because people sponsored nihilism and pushed it as the outlook of the 20th century.

"We can build a 20th-century art that is more satisfying and valuable for humanity.

"If that makes me an idealist, then I'm an idealist.

"Museums are very important educational, as well as cultural, institutions, and I think they're going to have to do a lot more educating that is not limited to universities and schools.

"There needs to be an actual understanding of the intellectual origins of modern society. The commitment to develop the technology to go to the moon was really a commitment to fulfill ideas that began in Renaissance Florence.

"Artists who understand that are much better equipped for the modern world than someone who pursues 'art for art's sake,' or thinks that science is just technology. . . .

"I think it's very important for the artist to establish the first view, but there are very few artists today with the ambition or talent to undertake that task. The product must

be to create a viable contemporary art."

Associated with Pepper Fine Arts, Inc., which offers a New Collectors Series of 17th-century Italian paintings priced "in the range of \$10,000," Pepper says he feels Old Masters works are more accessible than many people think.

"Especially with the Reagan idea of private money replacing federal money in the arts, and the Southwest in the forefront of growth, we want to be among those who serve this region," he explained.

Pepper said it is appropriate to think of art as an asset which a buyer can "reasonably expect to appreciate over time" so that if he wants to give it to a cultural institution he can get a "legitimate tax advantage."

He cautioned, however, that "first of all" an art object should provide "beauty and stimulus" to the owner. "Without that, I don't think any private buyer should be involved," Pepper said.

Noting in regard to art forgeries that "the hardest thing to fake is the conceptual power of the master," Pepper said society is only as strong as its ability to be moved by that power.

"I think we've fallen to a dangerous level in our critical appreciation of the Old Masters tradition, which is based on the fundamental idea that natural form can be used to convey ideas of substance.

"In the late 19th and early 20th century there was a sudden reversal of the prevailing purposes of art. Reality, content and the fundamental skills that had served us so well were denied. But we have a right to ask what the results have been, and to what purpose?"