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NOTES ON READINGS

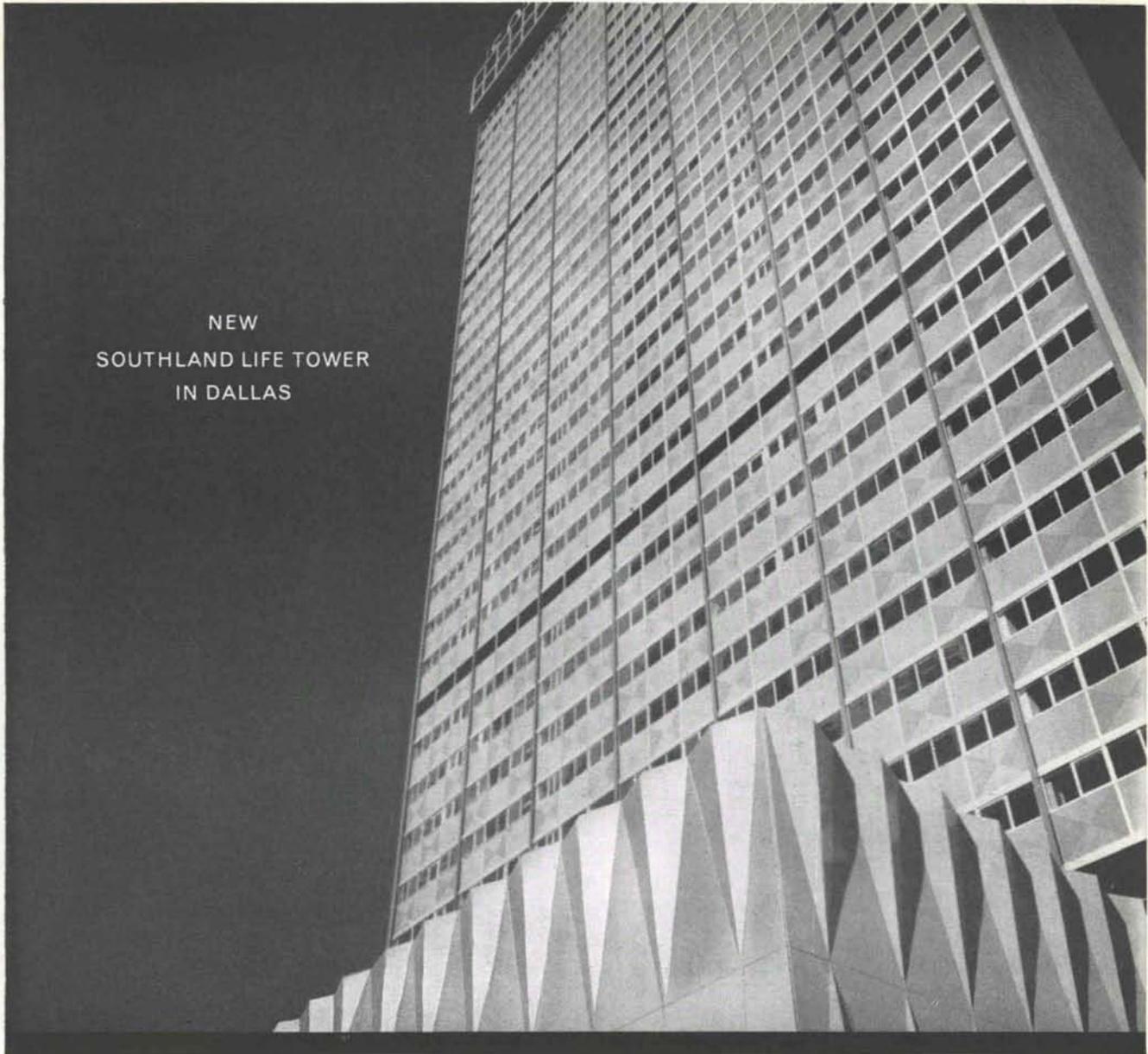
Herbert Read A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN PAINTING. Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1959. \$7.50

There has long been a need for a book which would present the growth and development of painting through the first half of the twentieth century. Few if any contemporary writers are better equipped to write such a book than the English critic and historian Sir Herbert Read. From his wide background in the arts and literature Read has been able to provide the reader with a coherent picture of the various elements which comprise one of the most diversified periods in the history of art. The author has been able to accomplish this difficult task because of his perceptive facility to discern the broad pattern of ideas which underly the vast myriads of individual paintings and movements characteristic of the period. Because of his ability to discern the precepts and ideas which have formed the foundation of twentieth century painting he has been able to present the philosophical and psychological bases which have served to motivate and to condition the many movements and schools of our times.

There are seven chapters in this book: the first of which is entitled, "The Origins of Modern Art", in which he discusses the work of Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Seurat. In the final chapter, labelled "The Origins and Development of an Art of Internal Necessity," he discusses post-World War II painting and the contributions of the American and European abstract-expressionists; men such as Jackson Pollack, Sam Francis, Nicolaes De Stael and others. His chapter on cubism constitutes one of the most meaningful analysis which this reviewer has so far encountered. Other equally penetrating sections of this book are concerned with several of the major figures of twentieth century painting, Picasso, Matisse, Klee, and Kandinsky and with movements such as Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism. In the sixth chapter he offers a really perceptive comparison between intellectual and emotional art. Of these two forms he says "We have therefore two distinct movements, one reaching towards an ideal of clarity, formality, and precision; the other towards the opposite idea; obscurity, informality and imprecision—" (p. 188) In the concluding sections of his book Read forceably disposes of the popular idea that contemporary art has been a corrupting and decadent influence in twentieth century life. On the other hand he shows that the art of our times, "must be conceived as an immense effort to rid the mind of that corruption which, whether it has taken the form of fantasy-building or repression, sentimentality or dogmatism, constitutes a false witness to sensation or experience." (p. 287)

Due to the limitation of space in the book and also one suspects because of the author's basic concern with the mainstreams of twentieth cen-

continued—page 20 readings



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— continued from page 10 readings

tury painting, he has excluded those "naive" painters who have consciously sought to present certain elements of folk tradition in their work, and he also has omitted any reference to realistic painters of this century, although in regard to the latter group he does, "not deny the great accomplishment and permanent value" (p. 7) of the works of many men who have and are working in this tradition.

In the matter of printing and design, this book is well conceived and of convenient size. The color and black and white illustrations are well integrated into the text and adequately serve the purpose for which they were intended. In addition to a brief, but well selected bibliography, there is a valuable thumb-nail "Pictorial Survey of Modern Painting," comprising over 300 small black and white photographs. This reviewer would certainly recommend that this book should be read and reread by anyone who is seriously interested in the arts and in the modes of visual expression of the twentieth century.

David Gebhard

Rosalie Doolittle, in collaboration with Harriet Tiedebohl. *SOUTHWEST GARDENING. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque. \$5.00.*

For many years residents of the Southwest area of the United States who desired information and advice on gardening problems were fully dependent on opinions of neighbors and a few Department of Agriculture bulletins which were usually concerned with specific problems. A real need was felt for a publication aimed at the novice gardener and dealing, in particular, with an area where home gardening problems were very nearly unique to that area.

In 1953, The University of New Mexico Press published the first edition of *Southwest Gardening*, co-authored by Rosalie Doolittle and Harriet Tiedebohl. The book was well received and in a short time was a complete sell-out.

1959 marks the publication of the Revised Edition of *Southwest Gardening*, by Rosalie Doolittle, in collaboration with Harriet Tiedebohl. The new edition contains an abundance of the old, gardening truths, as well as new trends, new plant varieties, and most important, an index. Particularly noteworthy is the amount of thought and space devoted to Plot Plans, a sphere curiously neglected by most gardening publications. A genuine effort seems to have been made to create some harmony between architectural and gardening styles.

Mrs. Doolittle's book has little to offer the specialist or the more experienced gardener, but can prove of great value to the beginner, especially the new resident of the area with which the book is concerned. Terms and language could scarcely be more simple and straightforward. Proper emphasis has been placed on most important factors and a minimum of unnecessary repetition has been maintained. These qualities, together with its one-of-a-kind position, should insure the book a good reception.

Martha Gillespie