IN SPITE of the current emphasis on tolerance, one still tends to disagree with a point of view other than one's own. Since it is difficult for one painter to see another's painting, and since I do not see as Kenneth Adams sees, I cannot agree with him completely, nor do I always like his painting. Having been asked to do this critique ("analysis and appraisal") of his work, I intend to appraise rather than praise it. I shall try to explain why I think that Adams' work is essentially "against the dominant taste" of its time. The reason his work is not owned by those supposed arbiters of today's taste, the museums of Modern Art and of Non-Objective Painting in New York, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, is that they rarely purchase, in these days, anything but academic work of the non-objective school. Like most fashions, this condition is a temporary one as ephemeral as some of the cooked-up "painting" now in vogue.

I object to the predilection for defining art as "good" or "bad"
Kenneth M. Adams

according to its school, as if that were the test. Adams' work combines abstraction and representation, but beside the decorative pastiche of non-objective pictures a painting by Adams looks more representational than abstract. Actually, abstraction figures prominently in his plan, but without any intention to shock or provoke. If his paintings are too calm in effect, it is because of his use of straight painting, without resort to heavy brushwork or palette-knife scratching and scraping. There is no stimulation of exciting surface textures, such as the scraped-palette sensuousness of layer upon layer of manipulated paint. No accidental swirl of running paint drips from his canvas to betray the excitement of having been conceived in the white heat of emotional transport. Adams' work is not "amusing." Perhaps it is because he does not employ the latest tricks of the trade. He uses no colored paper cut-outs, nor does he paint around or stipple through a stencil. I do not believe he knows how to use an airbrush, or how to use that sensitized photographic paper, exposed to light in such a way that it produces effects unknown before. There are so many fascinating contrivances occupying painters today that the list would be too long to cite here, but Adams uses none; he simply paints. Because he paints in a businesslike manner, never capitalizing on "fortunate" mistakes, his paintings show deliberate analysis. The action they contain is abstracted from real movement and is based upon linear and spacial concepts, not necessarily upon actuality. Taking a motif from a subject, Adams frequently uses and re-uses the same subject, exploring its possibilities in lithography, oil, and watercolor over a period of years. Each version has all the finality necessary to make it complete, because he is continually arranging and rearranging the elements to that end.

The inability of critics to classify Adams' work is the least of his concern. The academic critic has called his work, derogatively, "abstract," while the "modernist," just as derogatively,
has called it "academic." The latter complains because his forms are recognizable, and the former because his forms are not three-dimensional but two-dimensional! The confusion is caused by his being in neither one camp nor the other. Adams complains that the profession into which he fell, naturally, is sometimes a barrier to close contact with other people, because people often regard the artist as different and consciously set him apart. Adams feels that his work should not set him apart. He desires to share life with all men. He has a very realistic attitude toward life. To him, the place and date of his birth are of less importance than the fact that he is living now, living to his full capacity, which includes painting and drawing and the teaching of painting and drawing. Art is by no means, however, the most important thing in his life. He lives each day and works each day and looks neither to his past accomplishments nor to the storing up of a precious heritage of his work for future generations. This does not mean that workmanlike consideration for permanent techniques does not interest him. He practices them as a matter of course, but he is not painting to leave his work as a memorial. This is consistent with the fact that he is not the classic, misunderstood "genius" whose production goes begging until after he dies. Permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Library of Congress, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and many others own Adams' work. Allegiance to his own standards of life, which are not "precious" is reflected in his standards of art, equally nonprecious. His work suggests a credo of art, but he prefers not being limited to the pronouncement of one. If his work does not reflect his life, it is not his fault.

Kenneth Adams studied at the Art Students' League of New York, and later in Paris. That my own schooling followed this same pattern is coincidence and has nothing to do with seeing as Adams sees. The first painting of his that I saw compelled me to find out who painted it. This was the portrait of the New
NEW MEXICO LANDSCAPE. Oil on canvas 36" x 40". Painted 1934. Collection of Albert G. Simms, Albuquerque, N. M.
PORTRAIT OF A CHILD. Oil on canvas 24" x 30". Painted 1938.

Courtesy of The Kansas Magazine.
Benedita Tafoya. Oil on canvas 24" x 32". Painted 1936. From the permanent collection of the Fine Arts Department, International Business Machines Corporation.
THE SPRING. Oil on canvas 24" x 30". Painted 1946. Collection of L. V. Broadbent, Cedar City, Utah.Courtesy of the Southwest Review.
Kenneth M. Adams

Mexico Spanish-American woman, "Benarisa Tafoya," owned and exhibited by the International Business Machines Corporation during the 1940 New York World's Fair. This compelling composition showed more than a haunting face of long-suffering, more than literary content, even more than sensitive painting. Indeed, these may have been the immediate bridge of interest, but what held me was the presence of the strong, basic, abstract design. (If this design is not already evident, the reader may see it more clearly by turning the reproduction upside down. Such an unfamiliar aspect should reveal it.) This painting and the others reproduced here cover a period in production from 1930 to 1948. An increasing emphasis on abstract design is seen, particularly in the latest—and most abstract—"The Spring." This emphasis is a gradual development. There are no sudden departures in style or in ways of painting. In each of these compositions the way seems to be through tried methods with calculated results, rather than by the means-to-an-end or the result a surprise. A comparison might be drawn to the use of eugenics as contrasted with indiscriminate mating. Actually, except for portraits, subject matter plays a minor role in Adams' work. His real interest is in what he calls a "living experience" of his own. If his subjects suggest the Southwest, it is because he lives and works here. He does not exploit the region and is not interested in regionalism in art.

In fairness, if I do not agree with him in all things, neither do I disagree with him entirely. His drawing, by no means facile, has won Adams more acclaim in lithography than in painting. I concur in his conception that drawing and painting are inseparable. In reviewing Adams' entire production, I find his loyalty to himself to be at once a fault and a virtue, and may prove to be his saving grace. I doubt that he will ever switch to the newest academy, that of non-objective painting. His own loyalties would not permit him to do so, unless he felt that that school would best express his feeling. The last few years
have shown a change in the man. For instance, Adams used to feel that teaching was a "job" and "boring" and now finds it one of his "greatest interests." In his latest painting changes occur: movement is more unified through a stronger kinesthetic control, and color is used more richly and more solidly. He has discontinued the use of the earlier broken-patches of color in the manner of Cézanne, who his "greatest teacher," as Adams calls Andrew Dasburg, taught him to appreciate. Even his feeling for the master, Cézanne, has undergone a change as Adams has come to understand him better through recently published letters and papers.

My clearest point of agreement with Adams is in regard to his position on Mexican art. I agree (but I am a "Mexiphile") when he says that he believes the work of the present-day Mexican artists will remain the most socially significant art of the Twentieth Century. The School of Paris, which dominates art in the United States is faint, indeed, in Mexico. Mexican candor negates that seductive influence. Mexico already has an indigenous tradition of fine abstraction from pre-Columbian culture. Their esthetic tradition did not have to be imported. They carry on the abstracted, but recognizable, symbol as naturally as it is understood, readily, by their people. Our own part in the history of art and of mankind is very much an appendage. This we are apt to forget and also that painting did not begin with this century and in France. There is nothing "modern" about it. From the first communication, the cave drawings of the cavemen, through the primitives to recent times man has tried to say in various pigments what he feels. Abstraction has always existed, but regardless of the degree of abstraction used, the legible symbol, the communicable image bridges the ages. Today, when too many artists are concerned with "originality" and with what I choose to call "myself-expression," floundering in the seductive bypaths of improvisation and the sloppy legerdemain they call painting, Adams holds to his own disposition for
candor. Whether we agree with what he says, the fact remains that his way of saying it is not improvised, nor accidental. Neither is it mechanistic nor based on formula. If he improvises it is not for its sake alone, but to the end that it aids him in discovering a better way of putting across his experience.

Time alone can judge whether he, or any of us, makes a real contribution. Kenneth Adams is well aware of this and accepts it as a reality of life. Like the Mexicans, he wants to reach his fellowman whether through murals, such as the one in the Library of the University of New Mexico, or through easel paintings or lithographic drawings. This no more means painting for popular taste than it does painting for fashionable taste, or for other artists. Living, to him, is important and people are an important part of life. Painting is one way of reaching people, but it is only one way; teaching is another. He believes that painting and drawing are two of man's natural instincts and that teaching is more than the preparation of professional artists only. Adams wants to help students enrich their own lives through learning to broaden their vision, and by doing so he is keeping his own study vital.