

IMMIGRANT BOY FAILED AT PAINTING FENCES, BUT IN AMERICA HE CAPTURED PRIX DE ROME

Alfred Floegel, Who Says This Country Developed His Genius, Tells How He Hoarded Pennies to Complete Painting

"ART FOR ART'S SAKE" INFERIOR TO UNSELFISH ART FOR GOOD OF OTHERS

His Inherent Ability Was Brought Out in Long Hours of Study and Work in Garret Room in New York's East Side

TO BE evicted from an attic shelter—and then to have the gates of Rome opened to him!

To have worked since he was eleven as a fence painter, a house painter, a ship's painter, a calciminer, a stucco worker, and to have learned art under a sputtering gas jet after a long day's work!

To have failed at his first job of painting a fence, and then—to have his latest picture awarded the Prix de Rome!

That is the romantic story of Alfred Floegel, an immigrant, who was educated in New York's night schools and trained in her civic art institutes.

America, he declares, with her bigness, her freedom, her "newness," was his inspiration.

The competition which he entered was for the best composition in color on the theme "The Inspiration of Music."

The Prix de Rome carries \$1000 income for each of three years, residence in the American Academy in Rome, all living expenses and opportunities for travel over the Continent.

The prize is the annual scholarship offered by the American Academy in Rome, a philanthropic organization endowed by the late J. P. Morgan and others to enable talented American students to study art, sculpture and architecture in Rome.

The stipend is provided by the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a trustee of a fund established in the memory of Joseph H. Lazarus, of New York. Mr. Floegel is the ninth fellow of the Academy to receive this fellowship, which is awarded every three years.

A year ago Floegel, who was attending art school with the money he earned in the summertime by doing church decorating, decided to enter competition for the Prix de Rome.

He figured out to the last cent how he could live in his garret room by doing all his own cooking.

A delay in the preliminary competition extended the duration of the contest three weeks. Floegel's money gave out. His landlord was obdurate. Out into the street he must go. Friends who intervened and a Judge who yielded enabled him to complete his work, which a few weeks later was declared the prize winner.

In the midst of his friends' felicitations upon hearing of the award he did not forget to speak of this Judge and to thank him.

The day after the announcement of the award he was at work again; he didn't take a day off to celebrate his triumph.

His Home in Garret in Tenement District

Floegel lives and works in an apartment in New York's dingy East Side—a street overrun by noisy, pallid urchins and echoing the squalls of countless babies, the hoarse cries of vendors, the rumble of drays.

The world has not yet beaten a pathway to the painter's door. It was hard to find him, but at last he was found.

In the first room, first floor front, was the woman janitor. She opened her door, which revealed an all-important and all-prevailing huge kewpie doll, dressed in pink ruffles outlined with gaudy bright tinsel, which grinned away on the mantelpiece.

The lady herself, dressed in a florid pink gown, gave directions, as she munched an apple and wiped her hands on the apron which covered part of her huge person.

"Top floor—under the roof—farthest room." Thus her directions. Up dark stairways, past doorstep milk bottles, with several pauses to elicit gruff rebuffs from the tenement dwellers hidden behind their dirty, forbidding doors, and at last Floegel's room. Then came a burst of freedom, the exhilaration of throwing off the shackles of a mean existence.

The artist's tiny, poverty-stricken room, squeezed into narrow confines, reaches out and beyond into ages and lands and thoughts which have been and are the inspiration of man.

It offers the richness of color of the Renaissance, the fervid warmth of biblical scenes, the quiet of studies of nature in this and foreign lands.

Floegel sat at the table which is in the middle of this room—working on a water-color design for a new competition, a Beaux Arts prize, offered for a stained glass window design.

The award, which has already been given to him, means to him only further striving, more work and more

tion of greater, finer and more beautiful things.

Floegel is of slight stature and of quiet manner.

Brush in hand, he sat at his table, and listened and talked and painted.

He was born in Leipzig, Germany, twenty-seven years ago.

His father was a lithographer, and the boy wanted to imitate his father—to do things such as his father did.

As Boy in Leipzig, He Loved to Sketch Family

At night, when the family would be gathered together—the mother and father, the seven children—the lad would make sketches of them.

Then they would all laugh and say what a funny child he was.

"Something to make a living by"—that was what he was cautioned to learn, and so he was put to work painting fences.

His first attempt at painting a fence was a failure.

The man he worked for took him aside and explained to him how to mix paints.

"One never forgets such things," said Floegel. "One learns by making mistakes—but he should never become discouraged," he added, and his deep blue eyes shone with conviction.

"I try many things until I get a good result," he explained.

From painting fences he was promoted to washing porches and later to painting furniture.

Then he became a sailor and a painter. He mixed paints—the art which he had been so kindly shown—for the sailors and did higher class painting on the ships.

When he was off duty he made sketches in water-colors—because that was cheapest, he said.

As he told about this he took from a disordered heap of paintings many water-color pictures of immigrants with their bags and baggage and their usual three-cornered shawls, pictures which had delighted captains of ships and which had brought Floegel to their notice.

His work as a sailor took him to England, France and the United States. He made eighteen trips to America, with brief stops in Boston and New York.

"I saw America," he exclaimed, "and it opened my eyes."

"America is so big," he meditated. "America is so new—so true. Here every one has a chance—the rich and the poor. There is no class ruling. It is not autocracy. You know what I mean." He groped for English words.

America Developed Latent Genius of Floegel

And the significant thing about Floegel is that America made him.

The cloistered halls of foreign learning, the study of ancient masters and of long-founded rules of art, did not produce this artist. The inspiration of America—the opportunity to work and work and work—with the knowledge that if the work was good it would be rewarded—that is what brought forth the ideas and the creations that lay kernalled in this man.

When he arrived in New York he walked the streets looking for signs which he might be able to make out.

"All I could read," he tells, "was on a Second Avenue store. It read, 'DECORATOR.' But they told me there that there was no decorating to be done in America."

"Finally I got work with a small church-decorating firm.

"This was not really what I wanted to do; but I could not speak the language, and I was glad to have work."

As he learned to speak English he began to talk with people and to learn what work there was to be done. Finally he got a place with an interior decorating firm. This job took him all over the country, even to the Pacific Coast.

The opportunity to travel he relished. He believes in seeing as much as possible. He does not believe in staying in a sequestered nook. Realism is to him not the end, but the beginning of all things.

"My idea," he said, "is, as long as I am young, to eat and eat of the substance of life, because there will be plenty of time to digest it when I am old. Now is the time to receive knowledge."



Alfred Floegel, who came to this country as a penniless immigrant, studied art at night and staked all on the competition for the Academy of Rome Prize, which he won

things and comparing them make life much less cruel.

"To reproduce life and to try to help life one has to see how life is first."

This little man, you see, is not a mere idealist. He is very practical.

An Artist Who Is Devoid of Artistic Eccentricities

All the time it seemed that he should be showing some eccentricities, some peculiarities of manner or dress.

But he disclosed none—unless one would call a reddish blonde shock of hair, a reddish blonde mustache and an artist's coat eccentricities.

The coat, to be sure, had sufficient paint on it, and as he worked away he added more all the while.

"First of all the artist should see things," Floegel went on, "and then work them over in his mind."

"The artist re-creates a thing in his mind and gives back something true, but something in a form which will arrest people's attention and make them more appreciative of all things of the class to which this re-creation originally belonged."

As Floegel said this his eyes were fixed on a bit of painting, as if that would help him to draw out the sentence-forming words.

"I can't talk much," he remarked, and his eyes had a rather abashed expression, "so I have to do things. I express myself by painting. Paintings can educate."

The noise of the street below continued. The din and crash of vehicles, so apparently distracting, seemed as a whisper to Floegel as he talked of art and its powers.

The reek of fish crept in through the window on a gentle breeze. Floegel sniffed it, and did not seem disconcerted.

This surely did not seem like the temperamental, ethereal, traditional type of artist.

"A decorator," stated this exponent of the art, "must be familiar with everything, for he never knows what sort of a place he may be called to decorate."

And he speaks from experience. Restaurants, dingy side street eating places, gay cafes and plain whitewashed ones have all been part of his work.

"Art as decoration" is his conception of it.

That is Floegel's conception of it. He would not live in a garret, cook his own meals out of a daily meager apportionment, and spend his days and nights in painting and retouching for art "for art's sake."

That is foolishness to him. He paints, he says, because he believes that color and warmth should be put into the daily lives and habitats of the people.

Went to Night School and Won Recognition

While this church decorator was doing his regular work he attended night classes at the Industrial Art School and studied in the mural decoration class at the Beaux Arts studio Saturday and Sunday, and whenever he had a free night.

Here for the first time he made drawings from life. Before he had done them only from imagination and from sketches.

The paintings of the night school were



The painting "Music," which won the Prix de Rome, one of the most coveted prizes known to artists. While at work on it Floegel almost starved in his garret

brushed the thought into words, "are like two persons fighting for something; a third person comes along and takes what they are fighting for."

It was last season that Floegel heard of the Prix de Rome competition, and he decided to take part in it.

Floegel, like the 150 other entrants in the contest, first submitted with his application "some original drawings from the nude, designs and sketches of a decorative character, drawings of ornament and projects of decoration or photographs thereof indicating general ability, together with an explanatory personal letter."

The competition was narrowed down to five chosen ones who submitted "a drawing and painting from life, a problem in linear perspective, a problem in anatomy and a composition treated as a decorative detail in a specified number of hours and settings."

Three contestants were allowed to compete in the final work—"The Inspiration of Music," a composition in color.

The immigrant boy completed his conception of the subject assigned. Then

he set to work on other creations while he waited for the announcement of the winner.

Floegel as he explained this arose from his chair and walked over to a tapestry which covers one side of the wall, on which he is painting "The Last Supper."

There was a rare note of humility in the bearing of this diminutive person as he stood before these works of art—his own—but to him only the awesome evidence of the creative power in life.

Across from the biblical tapestry is a yellow satin screen on which are painted black butterflies. Above it are designs of acanthus leaves taken from a Corinthian capital.

Floegel believes in the harmony of colors. He dislikes futurism because, he says, in its color tries to kill the other. His favorite colors are the soft warm ones, though he says that the

purples are all to be used—but they must be harmonized.

"A decoration," he elucidated, "should not make a hole in the wall—it should be a flat pattern which decorates, which livens up the wall."

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Pots, Pans and Paintings Predominate in Kitchen

By this time he had walked out into his tiny kitchen, where one finds a litter of pots and pans and a stove amid paintings of historic tales and persons.

Above Floegel's two-by-four table are Knights of the Round Table.

And imagine cooking at a stove under a picture of Mary Magdalene!

Around the white wall is a border, a calcimined frieze of flying silhouettes. When Floegel painted the wall he left green spaces to form the silhouettes.

On his kitchen table is a day book, the kind in which little shopkeepers make their day's entries. In this Floegel keeps a daily account of everything he does and every cent he spends.

It was because of this little day book that he was able to figure out just how he could live during the months he took off for painting.

"A diary is the way to give system to life," he said. "It enables one to look back and to work out a future. 'Every one should keep a diary. 'I work out my tomorrow,' he explained, as he wrote something in the gray, cloth-backed book.

Then he went to his painting, and consented to discuss the picture which took the prize.

In it the Muse of Music sits accompanying and inspiring the Musician, who is playing on a violin. To the



Alfred Floegel at work on another of his compositions

left are Mirth and Pathos, with heads in hands.

A child, who is led by a woman's spirit, is bringing flowers to give the Musician renewed ambition.

Winning of Prix de Rome Gave Floegel New Hope

"That," Floegel said, introspectively, "is what the prize has done to me."

At the right is Humanity—a group of mother, father and child, looking on and listening.

"The opening" into the picture, as the artist called it, is the World, who asks for the music, and who is bringing a gift of laurels and hope to the Musician.

On both sides of the picture are Hope and Reward.

Floegel was asked how he could paint optimism when he himself was enduring such poverty to create it.

And he answered, quietly, "It is no matter if I should not be materially rewarded, if I should not receive anything that