

John sloane's societal criticism

Experience, Human Nature



Art often serves as a criticism of society of a specific time period. A prime example of this premise is John Sloan's *Sixth Avenue & 30th Street*, New York City. This piece depicts the intersection of these two streets in early 20th century New York. In the foreground stands a drunken woman holding her pale of beer. To the right, two prostitutes stare at her and further to the right, a group of gentlemen stare at them. This kind of scene was common among the seedier streets of New York at the time though many did not understand how common it was.

Sloan, as part of the Ashcan School made it his goal to realistically depict scenes of urban life. He did, however hold sympathy towards the poor who would have inhabited these kinds of streets. He sympathized with them and believed that their poor state was caused by a society that had abandoned them. This idea of his is clearly represented in *Sixth Avenue & 30th Street*. The group in the foreground of the painting, including the drunkard and the prostitutes, would often be seen as negative by most members of society.

Sloan, however, takes exception to this. He depicts them sympathetically, giving them a certain level of dignity that other painters wouldn't have. He believed that these individuals had been abandoned and exploited by society, and forced to take up such low roles. As Sloan was a member of the Socialist party, this came as no surprise. The gentleman to the right of this group serve as Sloan's societal criticism. These men represent the well-off of society.

They stare at the unfortunate individuals in the foreground, feeling no sympathy but only amused at their state. This represented the overall attitude held by these kinds of people, which, Sloan felt, was a certain

unwillingness to assist the worse-off members of society. On the surface, this piece depicts a standard realist scene of a New York. However, on a deeper level, the piece is a criticism of what he felt was an unfair, exploitative society, which has been a common theme in art throughout history and especially of the time.