



ART
&
EVOLUTION OF MODERN ART

by

PROFESSOR SILPA BHIRASRI

SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY

Published by the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture

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BIOGRAPHY

The late Professor Silpa Bhirasri (C. Feroci) was born in Florence, Italy and graduated from the Royal Academy of Art of Florence. He entered the Thai Government service (Fine Arts Department) in 1924. He has to his credit a multitude of outstanding works chiefly in bronze such as the statue of King Yodfah at the Memorial Bridge and that of King Vajiravudh at Lumbini Park. As Dean of the Faculty of Sculpture and Painting, Silpakorn University, he was the mainstay and livewire of art study in Thailand. Professor Bhirasri devoted himself for over thirty years to the study of Thai art and was universally acknowledged as an authority. He did much to introduce Thai art to the world by writing extensively and with an insight on the subject and by organizing a warmly received exhibition of Thai painting and sculpture in 1947. He also initiated the Bangkok annual art exhibitions. Professor Silpa Bhirasri was officially recognized as the founder of modern art in Thailand and was the first President of the National Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts (IAPA) in 1954.

He died in Bangkok on May 14, 1962 at the age of seventy. In honour of his accomplishment and his service to Thai art he has been awarded the Knight Grand Cross (First Class) of the most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand, and the Dusdhi Mala Medal. The late Professor Silpa Bhirasri will always retain an honour place in the affection of his many students, and his friends in Thailand.

ART

Art may be classified into two expressions: one aesthetico-optical, the other aesthetico-emotional. To delineate the boundary of these expressions is not possible because there are works of decorative art which move more than many works belonging to the fine arts for the fact that the latter represent only a professional production serving to satisfy the public's demand to see in sculpture or painting illustrated events of their common interest.

Works of great art are appreciated by a limited number of people, but their value is such as to engender in them a deep spiritual and transcendental sensation.

Decorative art is optical but by the means of fine lines and forms and harmonious colours it gives a strong aesthetic pleasure, the result of this pleasure is the refinement of our senses. Such kind of art stimulates in us a sense of inner contentment and tranquillizes our spirit from the fatigue of physical energies.

DECORATION AS A MEAN OF ART APPRECIATION

The term decoration in our days has a different meaning than in olden times. Up to the nineteenth century to decorate a building meant to enrich it with sculpture and painting. As a rule this art served to illustrate historical, mythical or religious literature, therefore it was an art eminently technical inasmuch it corresponded to the peculiarities of an individual people.

In modern time decoration means to embellish building or spaces, first with a harmonious colour-scheme of its architectural parts, second to match with the colour scheme furniture, tapestry, objects of applied art and eventually works of sculpture and painting. As we see, decoration means to beautify harmoniously and we can... building or a room.
pieces. Masterpieces

The advantage of modern decoration is that it has become a "universal" expression enjoyed by all classes of the population and which has a profound influence on the art-appreciation of the peoples.

We must not forget that in olden days magnificent palaces decorated with works of art by famous artists would be surrounded by miserable looking narrow streets flanked by miserable abodes, altogether giving a very depressive impression.

At present the general beauty of a modern town has profoundly influenced the citizens for the demand of ever nicer things and places. So much this good appreciation is developed that people would no more patronize a cinematograph, a bar, a hair-dressing shop etc., if not finely decorated. This examples shows how easy and how useful is to cultivate the love for art in the people.

MAN, NATURE AND CITIES

As principle, the more Man detouches himself from Nature and concentrates in large towns, the more he needs to surround himself with beautiful things. Therefore, the streets, buildings, shops, squares, gardens etc., of a town must be so beautiful as to replace in a certain extend the wonder of Nature. In fact it is by the means of such artificial harmony that the citizen is aesthetically educated. To understand the reason of the necessity to have fine cities, we have to think that amidst nature, man lives in an environment essentially harmonious. Mountains, plains, trees, rivers and streams, sky, change of season and climate, all together form the most magnificent spectacle imaginable.

Amidst such wonderful surrounding, serenity masters the man's spirit and as consequence, modern cities must be planned as harmonious unities which in a certain extent will replace the beauty of nature. Psychologically beauty acts over our senses as a refinement towards goodness.

How order or disorder affects human beings may be noticed in the numerous crimes committed in large towns, while people living in open countries rarely indulge in violence.

The enormous difference of the social classes of a large town is responsible of such crimes. People living in places where everything is ugly and repulsive become brute and eventually burst in terrible revolts. Thus, simple, but orderly planned building impose also to the poor class a self respect and a respect towards everything surrounding them. Therefore order and beauty are the principal factors of the moral and social science.

FINE ARTS OR PURE ARTS

What means fine art, and why man produce it? Man is a microcosm of the whole universal energy and as such is endowed with creative power and likewise Nature man too create beautiful things which for the same natural principle never repeat one another.

According to the grade of the intellectual and sensitive faculties of which man is endowed by nature, he may produce works giving only an optical pleasure or works imbued with the primordial essence which move both our physic and spirit.

For the same reason, through art, the cosmic force makes a cycle of emanation first and centralization after, that is to say art is made because the cosmic force moves the artist and by the means of the artists' work our soul joying again that primordial and eternal force.

When it is stated that religion and art give to man the same spiritual sensation, it is meant that while an ascet may communicate with the Eternal Infinite through his concentration of mind, the work of art is the medium to reach the same spiritual goal.

ARTISTS' CAPACITY

Of course artists differ greatly in their artistic value, but we could not discharge common works to preserve only masterpieces. Masterpieces are understood by a more limited number of

person than common works, but it is from the latter expressions that the mass of the people is educated in art appreciation. It is from these common expressions that common people is educated till eventually one is able to understand pure art.

ABSTRACTISM

It is quite true that art may be expressed by the means of real or unreal figures, but at the same time consciently or unconsciently man's conception are related with his own existence.

According to theoretical principles also works of the abstract art awake in us imagination. Indeed this theory is correct and in fact if we look at the sky without any clouds which may suggest figurative ideas, we prove at first a great joy for this immeasurable space and in a second time our imagination starts to concieve. Of course the conceptions are the reflex of our daily life. In front of the immense sky we may have philosophical ideas, have sentimental dreams, we may feel sorry or joyful according to our different human character or according to our momentary state of mind.

Thus, theoretically also an empty canvas should awake in us various sensations. But the sky is not empty, thousands of universes move in that space, it is vibrating of infinite magnetic currents, it is a mysterious living immensity from which our imagination has no limit of conceptions. Accordingly abstractism does not mean to cover a canvas with a colour or to paint on it some illegible signs, it means to awake, through unreal figures, an emotion capable of stimulating imaginations.

ILLUSION - TRANSITION - BEGINNING - END

Following the philosophical ideas, life is illusion and what we think or do is the reflex of the illusion of our transitory life. There is no doubt that also the mountains are transitory in relation to time and all varied forms, due to different chemical and biological combination, are bound to disintegrate, while the real force which give life to everything is One, invisible, unchangeable,

But although man understand the illusion of the visual world art has the mission to elevate Humanity towards higher spheres in order man may understand that besides the terrestrial illusions there is a reality which, if understood, is enjoyed boundlessly. It is art which lifts man into a world of spiritual reality and which gives him an unselfish an everlasting enjoyment. Thus the last goal of art is to support man in his difficult terrestrial passage, to renew in him the faith in a spiritual life.

ART AND ITS SOCIAL FUNCTION

There are a very limited number of people who being supersensitive prove emotions in looking at a rock, a nude, a tree or anything else which may be of a special interest. These people have the imagination as developed as that of the artists and logically better than anybody else they appreciate art in its highest expressions. But the appreciation of the great majority of the people must be formed by the means of an understandable art which in this case has a social function.

Therefore artists cannot disregard the aspiration of a class which want to enjoy art and in art find a means to escape from their daily miseries, consequently to spend a lifetime after experiments to find some morbid expression is not social.

One may object that if the artist has to please the middle class he becomes commercial. But it is just the duty of the artist, and we should add his real difficulty, to make an art understandable and not all commercial. The Ajanta cave paintings, the Chapel Systine, the Indian temples, the statues of Sukhothai etc., were not made for a peculiar class of people, they were made to be understood by the majority of this people and because representing great works of art everyone admired them as real art not as commercial one.

Many times beyond the screen of the so called pure art lies incapacity and in this case by saying that real art cannot have anything to do with functionalism is as to defend the artist's incapacity.

DISTORTIONS AND NOVELTIES IN MODERN ART

When intellectually cultures arrive to a "dead point", a thoroughly reaction is necessary: hence since about one hundred of years intellectual people strive for something new. In art we notice a sensible progress in the synthesis of the representation of the subject, while through the influence of science, colour has become a means to vivify life. But, as it happens in every revolutionary movement in its first period for the sake of novelty we accept strange incomprehensible expressions.

In many cases strange forms of art are uniquely made to meet the demand by rich people who want to enrich their art-collections with the most variety of styles, regardless of their intrinsic artistic values.

As instance we may take Picasso: One side of this great master corresponds to his sincere aspiration to find new artistic expressions, in the other side Picasso is a victim of the aforesaid class of buyers,

Of course, being Picasso a genius, everything he does has a real artistic value, but his imitators who think to make art through distortions are poor hopeless mannerists.

There are subjects in which distortions emphasize the expression, while there are subjects in which distortions have no sense.

As example, Picasso shows in "Guernica" the spasm of pain by emphasizing the distortions of human and animal figures, a distortion enhancing the emotion of the great tragedy. But to apply the same principle to a painting depicting a normal subject distortions would have no reasons to be.

The expressionists used to deform human figures and exaggerate their expression because after the German political and military collapse of the first world war people experienced suffering, despair and disillusion. The expressionistic art was a natural revolt against order and faith because all hopes and ideals had

turned in misery. Accordingly, distortions and exaggerations corresponded to the tragedy of that historical period. Once serenity is again sovereign of the human affairs, then the distortions are senseless. Hence artificial art.

SINCERITY

Sincerity is the most important factor to create art. Certainly, sincerity contrast with the practical result because in all styles to please the buyers' demand means to sell more. But as in our critic we take in consideration only art, so we say that art sincerely done stands the ordeal of time. The works made by imitators or insincere artists are bound to be forgotten.

For instance, El Greco shines because he is a great mystic. Anyone who thinks to imitate El Greco by painting elongated figures would be a poor copyist because lacking that spiritual power proper to the great Spanish painter.

Goya's painting "the execution of third. may" will remain for ever one of the greatest works of art because the subject was deeply felt by the artist. The picture, besides its wonderful composition and colour has such a strong pathos—appeal that any sensible person who look at it is impressed for all his life. Why so impressive?, just because done by a genius who had partaken the suffering of the Spaniards.

Works of great artists should be studied for the benefit of inspiration not for imitation.

Klee is an outstanding abstractist. In his works is not the form which compels our admiration, it is the artist's poetical and musical spirit. In fact to fill up spaces with points of different colours does not mean Klee's style. Without the invisible essence Klee endowed his paintings they would appear decorative patterns.

STYLES

From the abovementioned instances we understand that the emotion issuing from art is not proved because a peculiar

style, but uniquely on account to the grade of the spiritual value of the work of art.

To get inspiration from corroded rocks, from stalactite, from shells etc., like Moore, to magnify microscopic things like Miro, or to superpose an image over others according to various angles we may look at it like the reflex of that image over many mirrors, does not means to do modern art.

Art is to express what we feel, while the style is due to the grade of civilization which changes according to the ethnical and ethical character of each race and according to their cultural progress or regress. What the human being feels about the "essence" is not related to any peculiar race nor to any peculiar style, but is universal, thus masterpieces of Egypt, Greece, India, China, Africa and of many other peoples, are universally understood on account to that universal "essence".

The effort in art to do something new is due to two causes. One is the natural result of the life we live (surroundings), the other is the WILL of any new generation to express an individual art because its components feel that repetition means a lifeless stereotype.

In our days we live in a dynamic life, the material needs are so many and so urgent that also great artists have to yield in front of these material necessities.

For the same reason today more than ever, the proverb "time is money" has become forced reality for all peoples and accordingly modern art must be synthetic, done in a quick spontaneous way.

As curious as it may sound, modern art is born from a scientific age but at the same time artists strive to escape from the physical matter and reject the production of machinery. It is a clashing dualism of the matter and of the spirit. A new era must come for the human affairs an era in which art will have the leading place in Man's soul.

TRADITIONAL ART

The majority of the works of traditional art were the result of either religious conceptions or of forms of government. In the past art was appreciated by every individual group of people not because of its intrinsic value, but because art illustrated facts of common interest and understanding. This universal appreciation towards a definite style of art gave origin to tradition. A style is going on till its exhaustion as it occurred in Europe in the eighteenth and half of the nineteenth century, or on account of some excessive regress of civilization as it happened after the Fall of Rome. A third cause affecting traditional art of a country is a military conquest which politically and intellectually may give origin to a new kind of artistic expression which imposed at first but is afterwards accepted as a new form of traditional art.

In our days traditional arts have been affected for many causes: first, the philosophy of the nineteenth century, supported by science, attacked religious principles weakening the faith of the masses, particularly of the educated class. Hence the demand of religious art diminished sensibly; to worsen matters on account of economic reasons religious art in our time has become a mere commercial enterprise.

Second, old systems of government were either absolute monarchies or republics. With the advent of modern civilization all monarchies have been either abolished or changed in constitutional monarchies. In both cases artists have no more the chance to glorify the monarch's deeds with works of art. On the other hand, old republics were proud to decorate their governmental buildings with paintings and sculptures recording the major national events.

This latter kind of art could be made also in our time, but when a government wants to record important events it uses books, photographs, and cinematograph, a material apt to divulge all over the country and if necessary outside the country.

Accordingly from a 'practical point of view' modern governments do not need any more artists to embellish official buildings, but a building decorated with painting and sculpture is so much more impressive and dignified that the 'practical point of view' should be abandoned by all governments which want to cultivate the aesthetic side of the people and aesthetic education means a better citizen.

A third cause which has deeply affected all traditional arts was the world wars and the consequent cultural exchange among all nations. As a consequence of this blended culture a new style of art has arisen, a style stimulated also by our daily dynamism. The new formula in art is to express 'essence' more than the apparent forms and by a process of evolution we have arrived at an almost universal style which has the same detestable characteristics of the old 'academism'. This new academism may be traced in works of Japan as in those of America; in works of French artists as in those of the other European countries. But all this regrettable affair is just transitory. Once the fashion-like moment is over, then the racial individuality will differentiate the artistic production of one people from that of another. In the meantime we have the instance of Mexico and India which convey in art their own racial peculiarities.

IS APPRECIATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART DIFFICULT ?

In what concerns the judgement of the good or mediocre qualities of a work of art made in traditional styles, an expert has no serious difficulty because in the past art was related with the real world and as such faults of drawing, forms and colour could be easily discerned.

On the contrary, the aim of the many contemporary artists is to free themselves from the bounds of the visual world, either by distorting nature or building up new forms according to their imagination. Accordingly, lacking any relation with the real world a fair judgment of the artistic values 'seems' difficult.

I have used the word 'seems' because in fact a good work of art has to convey 'the essence', the 'cosmic force', the 'spirit', or spatial feeling, all terms so dear to the modern critic of art; but which indeed is the principal quality to be found in masterpieces of Greece, of India, of China, Japan, Thailand and every other country which in the past or at present produces great works of art.

Art is great because it has qualities which stand the ordeal of the time and not because of the good intention of the artist or because it is supported by a complicated literature.

ART JUDGEMENT

The judgement of works of art is almost always handicapped by influences exterior to the real artistic values of those works. The principal influences engendering our wrong appreciation are:

Racial, Historical, Religious, Political,
Financial, Personal, Periodical tastes.

RACIAL: Ethnical and ethical characteristics of one race give origin to a defined kind of art and as such difficult to be understood by people who are accustomed to appreciate only their own artistic expression. For this reason before to judge an exotic work of art is necessary to know the causes which have inspired it.

HISTORIC: Through history one may be inclined to like or dislike a work of art on account to historical recollections of the subject. For instance, a very good painting illustrating the victory of an army over its opponent will certainly displease the beholder of the picture belonging to the defeated people. Thus sentimentalism will prejudice the fair judgement of the work of art.

On the contrary, for the same sentimental reason, we may over evaluate the qualities of works of the past. As instance we may refer to the new-classic period which greatly admired works

of the antiquity because they were connected with some historical events of Greece and Rome, admiration which engendered "canons of beauty". Once the enthusiasm for classicism was over, then those idolized canons were found wrong.

RELIGIOUS: The influence of religious believes is very prejudicial in judging art. Religion teaches inflexible dogmas and theological principles which handicap very much indeed the appreciation of works belonging to a different religion. Hence the necessity to judge any work with a liberal mind, truly objective, and a fair knowledge of other peoples' creeds is indispensable.

POLITICAL: Politic is an idology which very much like religion influences in pro or against the appreciation of art. A masterpiece may be rejected by a political man, also very intelligent, for the simple reason that the subject of the work of art illustrates ideas opposed to his own.

The political influences in art may be still worse when a certain kind of art is imposed by the ruling government. Such kind of dictatorship has the detrimental effect to impose on the public the appreciation for an official art.

FINANCIAL: Financial influence in our days is the worst and the cutest of all because it covers such a vast field of propaganda from which is difficult to escape.

Financial influences were not known till the seventeenth century when dealers of art began selling pictures, but with the advent of modern press and a wide criticism the propaganda for the end of financial interests has become enormous. Articles on newspapers, magazines, books illustrated with colour plates, films and lectures, advertise the work of an artist like any other commercial or industrial product.

A subjective and interested critic has become so audacious that few people dare to contradict; the result being an imposed appreciation.

PERSONAL: Individual natural character and education have an important influence on art appreciation. A person having a sentimental romantic character will judge favourably romantic and delicate expressions, while others having strong, more practical character will prefer strong colour-schemes and massive sculpture. An educated man will understand also abstract expressions and on the contrary, a person of middle education understands better realistic, plain art.

PERIODICAL TASTES: Like any other human activity, art is liable of a fashionable preference which is felt by every class of people disregarding their higher or lower education. To quote two instances showing of how much the taste of a period may influence the right judgement of art, we may say that the artists of the Renaissance were so hostile towards the ogive style as to call it "Gothic" which they meant barbarian. In our days a gothic cathedral is judged as a sublime architectural monument awakening a profound sense of mysticism.

Again, before the advent of modern art, African sculpture was considered by the majority of the people as a primitive expression. Nowadays almost everyone renders justice and appreciate this art.

The few abovementioned instances suffice to understand how difficult is to judge art, and still more how difficult is for the average people to get rid of bias.

But such difficulty refers principally to the laymen because an artist or a critic of art has the duty to be as objective as possible. Of course, also artists belong to a defined ethnical group and this engender in them an "inconscientious subjectiveness", but what is essential for us is to know that human beings are subject to "prejudices" and through this knowledge chasten as much as possible our judgement.

Principally when we look at a work of art different to our own is necessary to avoid comparisons, that is to say forget other

styles and judge it as an "isolated production". In fact how we could compare and judge with the same mentality African and Greece art, or Chinese art with cubism?

Art gives always a new sensation because it expresses in innumerable styles and interpretation of the same subject. To fix art appreciation in respect to a kind of art alone means to have no appreciation at all.

FORM

Form is the result of a growth due to a misterious force called "life". Biology explains how a body grows and take defined forms: geology explains the formation of the Earth etc., but "life" remains a mistery. This vital energy transform everything visible and invisible to our eyes; nothing remains static and therefore it is not the apparent form which account for art. Such a theory is basic in many modern expressions of art: in fact there are contemporary styles which do not reproduce the visual world, but create new forms which according to theoretical principles represent the offspring of life conceived by the artist.

The theory that form is the surface of an eternal spirit is not new because many peoples of the past conceived unreal forms which for them were alive. But practically art cannot float in theoretical reasonments, it must have the power to hipnotize our senses just on account to that quality which cannot be explained and which is termed "spirit". All the masterpieces of the past moves us for that indefined quality, not because their real or unreal forms. Thus it is quite correct to say that forms are of a secondary importance provided these forms conveys the essence, the vital energy.

Vital energy must not be understood as movement of the figures in relation to space. In a blade of grass as well as in a mountain this energy is present, only it must be felt and such a feeling has two ways of reception and expression; one is religious,



the other is artistic. Contrary to a camera which reproduce faithfully the visual appearance of an object, the artist sees that object under such different aspects that no scientific apparatus may fathom. In looking at a human or animal figures, at a landscape, at a still life or anything else, the artist, through his sensitiveness, sees and feel the object in such a peculiar way as to realize a new creation. From this new creation people are illumined to understand and appreciate the real and unreal world.

COLOUR

With the exception of few people such as the Oceanic and the Old American, or periods of art decadence, colour was used as complementary to forms and composition. Chinese artists of the classic period disregarded altogether colours relying for their art expression only upon chiaroscuro. With the advent of modern age, colour has become of a principal importance on the life of the people. This difference of taste for colour is due to the tense life we live which deprives us of that leisure time enjoyed by our forefathers. Modern dynamism does not permit any more the contemplation of nature. We are almost imprisoned in towns and when we go up country the speed of the modern transportation is such as to render difficult to admire nature. Hence the necessity to adorn the towns with vivid tints which serve to counterbalance their usual gray monotoneous appearance. Bright colours on buildings, on cars, on posters, on dresses, on furniture etc., all serve as an unperceived chromatic rhythm going on around us.

Colours not only relieve the dullness of our metropolis, but in our days they are also used to give strong intellectual sensations and so they are as expressive as musical notes.

GESTURE & POSTURE IN ART AND IN THEATRE

Exageration of the posture of figures is almost invariably a sign of decadence or incapacity. May be, in the history of art, only Michelangelo was able to treat human figures under every aspect of posture and representing all ages of the human life without vulgar or theatrical result.

Indeed, while in classic periods the posture of the figures is chasted and dignified, in times of decadence it becomes treatrical and in many instances vulgar.

We have to think that if an actor exaggerates his action, the audience does not percieve it because that action has the duration of time such as the actual action. In sculpture and painting the gestures remain forever the same. Thus violent gestures and convulsed facial features awake a sense of repulsion instead of sympathy, or at least, they are informative of a fact, that is to say such art is illustrative, not ideal-inspiring. When an artist tries to impress the public by emphasizing common feelings he makes commercial art.

Sculpture and painting should not compete with music and literature; these latter arts moves us rapidly and very changeably, while plastic arts awake our imagination more subjectively, more intellectually, not suddenly.

In fact sculpture and painting cannot give an immediate emotion because it grows gradually through concentration of mind. Accordingly, to appreciate plastic arts is necessary strong intellectual and emotive power, or at least it requires a well developed education in art-appreciation.

NUDE IN ART

How many times we hear narrow minded people object about the representation of the nude in art. Those people do not realize that our body is one of the most perfect creation in the whole animal life. Thus for our understanding the human forms are to be admired and represented in art as much as any other perfect creation.

Besides, we have also to think that for the Westerner and for the Hindu, Man is the worthiest living creature on the Earth. Both philosophies of the Hindu and Westerner embody the idea that Man is an emanation of God and as such he reflects the very forms of the God himself. Therefore, by a reverse reason,

the Westerner and the Hindu represent Gods under anthropomorphic forms, and as logical consequence for reverence towards God, the human forms are sacred. Of course, the absolute purity of the nude in art representation is to be found only in specimens of great art such as the divine Greek statues which open to us an ideal paradise, or quite opposite, in the Hindu statuary which vivifies our life and engender in us a great admiration for the harmony of the human body.

It is only when art declines that nude becomes theatrical or even repulsively vulgar. This bad quality is still more noticeable in commercial production wherein the nude is treated in such a way as to stimulate low passions. Useless to say that such production has nothing to do with art.

LANDSCAPE

Landscape means space wherein nature dominates. Every part has to be related to others and the whole to space. To paint a landscape does not mean to reproduce it as a photographic appearance, but is to render it part of the universe, that is to say in beholding a painted landscape we have to be transported into a cosmic world. More than any other people, the Chinese understood since the sixth century the mysticism of the landscape creating most spiritual works.

This profound understanding of Nature was followed in Europe very late; the Flemish and Dutch schools first treated landscape as the principal subject in the 16th century. Corot, and in particular the modern school with Cezanne, Van Gogh, Vlaminck etc., parted from the western traditional idea that only through the representation of the human figure artists could express his feeling and gave origin to the contemporary school of paysagists and painters of still life.

MATERIALS

Materials used in art must be worked and treated according to their characteristics. Certainly the artist feels the attraction of each material and rightly tries to get the finest effect from

their peculiarities, but by abusing technique concerning material one may become only a virtuous, a skilled man. Indeed a virtuous does not mean artist, on the contrary very often this quality conceal artistic mediocrity.

Materials must be reckoned only as a medium to express imaginary sensations. Many times materials in their natural state are a source of inspiration for the artist, but such sensations remain imaginary till not realized into concrete forms which serve to stimulate in the layman the admiration for nature. The tendency of many modern artists to imitate forms of materials in their natural shape, because in them they see imaginary visions, is not functional.

It is a fact that materials and techniques are more and more valuable according to the lesser and lesser artistic quality of the work. In this case the exploit of materials and their varied technical application may be very attractive only as a decorative expression.

We should understand that artisans have to express themselves through attractive colours and materials, otherwise almost nothing would remain of their work, while the artist may do a masterpiece by using only paper and charcoal or clay. In this respect we must be careful not to misunderstand a production of good taste from a work of art conveying fully the emotive power of the human's soul.

TACTILE VALUES

In art tactile values refer to the physical appearance of the object; they give the sense of constructiveness and mathematic order of the object.

SPACIAL VALUES

Spacial values are those from which we feel a sense of freedom from our terrestrial bandage and elevate our spirit in relation to celestial space.

VISCERAL AND MUSCULAR VALUES

Refer to sound and colour inasmuch the vibrations issuing from sound and colour affect our visceral and muscular system.

Therefore works of art arise in us feeling corresponding to barometrical, thermometrical, visceral and muscular senses.

But not all sensations we prove are constructive. Art which awaken in us senses of despair, depression or fear is not apt to lift our spirit towards higher ideals. To stimulate carnal desire or other low passions is contrary to the purpose of art, except in those cases in which such subjects are treated to show human's vices and consequently teach us to abstain from those vices.

To represent murdered, bleeding figures or vulgarities inherent to our body is not the purpose of art because such production does not stir sensations which serve to refine our intellect and spirit.

Art has not to excite our low appetites but has to bring our imagination in spheres where nothing is to fear because only serenity and beauty are sovereigns.

BAD OR GOOD INFLUENCES OF THE HUMAN INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY

Man have an unlimited intellectual power which may be used in a bad or good way towards one's fellow-creatures. Referring to art, this power, as we have seen, may affect human brain in doing good or bad. Thus we have to reject any art which does not inspire good sentiments and high thoughts. For instance to day we have a lot of films and books treating criminal subjects; this production stimulates only bad actions. Thus it cannot be classified as art.

The examples of great conquerors such as Alexander or Napoleon, inspire brute force. The examples of great usurpers of power through shrewdness inspire tortuous and dishonest feelings. On the contrary examples of humanists and great genius which in every field have worked for the benefit of Humanity, stimulate noble actions and noble thoughts.

THINGS AWAKING LOW DESIRES AND ART AS INTENSIFICATION OF LIFE

Many things we see awake in us a strong animal desire to possess them and at any cost we wish to satisfy the lust and greediness of our animal senses.

For this reason many things bring us in a state of discord with the ideal of life. In our animal state we desire money, material honour, sexual pleasure or other things which do not help our ascensional progress.

On the contrary, art stimulates feelings of sublimity—it educates our aesthetic sensitiveness—it refines our thoughts—it makes us enamoured of all good and beautiful things.

Of course, among the various artistic productions, there are many which instead to be socially functional are passive, but such kind of art is eliminated by a natural course of time having not a substantial influence in our progress.

CONCEPTION AND FORM

Benedetto Croce states that there is no form without conception as there is no conception without form. Within this simple statement there is the key of modern controversy in art. For our conviction we believe that as a writer cannot write a novel without having conceived first the plot, so painters or sculptors cannot do any valuable work without first having conceived it through their imagination. Also to paint a still life we need a foreconception of its composition and colour.

Conception and form mean intellectual development and artistic experience. Conception only remains abstract as far as it has not been expressed by some kind of medium in order to communicate it to other people, while forms only are mere studies necessary to attain knowledge and skill but cannot be considered as works of art.

We have said that conception means intellectual development which is attained through education and which in modern time is indispensable for any artist who wants to create art. In fact in the past artists having also a very limited education could make fine paintings and sculptures because they illustrated a literature dictating them the conception.

In modern time the education of the artist is such that he himself wants to conceive his works, while is reluctant to follow the conceptions of literary production. Hence in modern time the artist must have his intellectual and sensitive power so developed as to be himself a poet, a philosopher, and a humanist.

AESTHETICS IS MYSTICISM

Likewise the ascets who by maditation communicate with the Infinite soaring in abstract spheres, so the observer or listener of a work of art may be so moved as to lose his own consciousness and become a unique thing with that work of art. When this person returns to normality he has the sensation to have been initiated to mysteries which exalt, enlighten and have creative virtues.

THE IDEAL OF ALL ARTS IS TO HUMANIZE HUMANITY

The goal of man is to reach a human family truly humanized, that is to say a Humanity freed from its primitive instincts. Every effort we do to reach such an idealism reflects in us a sense of serenity.

This kind of thinking should be regarded as a kind of new universal religion capable to unify in spirit the whole Humanity.

Of course, this kind of spiritual unity does not mean to abandon our individual aspirations for higher spheres of thinking and acting. It is just for such a reason that this progressive idea is in contrast with those philosophical domgas teaching man fatalism as matter of unchangeable reality.

Reality of life is a fight for our material existence; once satisfied his animal part by drinking, eating and enjoying sexual pleasure, man, as an animal creature, would not need anything else. Thus left without intellectual and spiritual support, man would be a mere brute.

Till now religions have checked this animal instinct by alluring man to heavenly life in doing good deeds, or threatening h'm with devilish punishment for his bad deeds.

The ideal of art is to render man completely free from fear or from greedy thoughts of a future benefit through doing calculated deeds.

The aim of art is to refine this man to such an extent as to act or think according to the rule of beauty which as we know it is synonymous of goodness.

Doubtless we are far from such an idealism. As we have said, in the past religions influenced in great extent the human progress. Modern politic tends to give to man a material justice, but regretfully this implies also wars and revolutions.

Apparently in contrast, but in reality as complement to the tragic political progressive effects, art prepare the temple of intellectual beatitude and so like politic, art in modern age is essentially functional for the spiritual ascension of Humanity.

Till the last century, art was made to illustrate religious thoughts and to illustrate military or civil deeds of monarchs and emperors. Nowadays art is made to refine man and give him an aesthetic contemplative pleasure.

Considering that man tends to imitate and feels so much the influence of his surroundings we may imagine the progress Humanity could derive by teaching children only good, pure and beautiful things. In few generations we could have a semi-idealized humanity. This, of course, for us is a dream, but a dream which will be realized by the Man of the future.

EVOLUTION OF MODERN ART

NEO—CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM

The frivolity of the French upper society of the eighteenth century originated an intellectual and political reaction which culminated in the revolution. People claimed political justice, while based on moral principles, philosophy taught that the existence of a perfect order was discovered beneath of the human experiences. It was a philosophy creating a man-made harmony wherein everything is dictated by a reasoned preconception. In its start, classicism had its purpose for political and moral reforms, later on the real facts did not correspond to such idealism for order. The revolution first degenerated in a period of terror while the bloody exploits of Napoleon and his fall brought to illusion and so no more in harmony with principles which admitted only reason and not sentiment.

Indeed no art of much consequence is created without the fusion of the emotion and intellectual values.

David, 1748-1825, was the founder of the Classic school. At the beginning classicism fought against academism and afterwards David imposed both in art as well as in customs his own will according to classicism which means he established another kind of academism. David and his school, used to depict historical facts of Rome or Greece in order to awake in the mass of the public a sound morality inspired by national sacrifice; it was an art stimulating a morality by the means of historical great facts but not reflecting the inner feeling of the people.

Some of the classicists created works wherein "emotion" is evident and the contrast of these two schools was so profound that Cross, 1771-1835, a pupil of David most faithful to the classic school, but romantic by nature, committed suicide because unable to conciliate the two contrasting ideas.

Romanticism was the reaction of impulse against reason. Emotion against intellect—mysticism against rationalism—indivi-

dualism against formula. Romanticism felt the longing for the appealing Orient and for the wildness where release, and stimulation could be found. The exaltation of suffering, voluptuousness of spiritual torment, melancholy became a fashionable feeling. Of course, like all movement also romanticism had its people who cultivated such feeling as a pose.

Like David established the romantic school, Gericault, 1791-1824, founded the romantic school with his famous Raft of the Medusa. Here Gericault relates the tragedy of the French frigate "Medusa" with a strong violence of pathos. People flocked to see it but certainly did not realize that such a picture was the beginning of new era in art.

David's colours are rather flat, ornamental tasteful, in Gericault the colour becomes simple and related to the subject. The effect of chiaroscuro is dramatic too.

REALISM

Both classicists and romanticists were alluding themselves to find a formula to explain the mystery of man's existence. Neither thought we are here for some reason we cannot understand and our being is justified and meaningful. The classicists sought to clarify the mystery by intellectualizing man's experience.

The romanticist sought his heart in the more ambiguous area of the soul and as such cultivated suffering believing that through emotions one may find the answer of our existence. Both were idealists refusing to accept the world as a real fact.

At the end of the nineteenth century these idealists became disillusioned and turned to realism.

But realism had been anticipated many decades before by the great Goya. Goya was not a theoretical man but a man of fervent expression which gave to his art a great vitality.

Goya was a realist who saw the world as it was and accepted it as a matter of fact. Although he knew that vice, stupidity, avarice, bigotry could not be cured, nevertheless he fought against the intellectual inertia.

On the contrary of what David or other new classicists had none, Goya never flattered anybody for his advantage. Also when he painted the "royal family" he recorded the insignificance of the portraited characters without any hint of flattery.

Never Goya glorified war, but recorded it as a deed of disaster and violence.

Realism started in France in the second half of the nineteenth century. Daumier, 1808-1879, was one of the most striking realistic painter of that time; Courbet, 1810-1877, is another great exponent of this school.

The Barbizon school of France had many famous painters among whom Corot, 1796-1875, is the most important. Corot lived entirely for his art without theorizing or opposing his ideas against anybody else. Although he had no individual school, Corot had a great influence and many imitated him. Corot's views have a peculiar appeal for their spatial value and relationship of the plastic values.

LE SALON DES REFUSES, IMPRESSIONISM

The painting exhibited in the Salon des Refuse's in Paris in 1863 marked a line of boundery from neo-classicism and romanticism with new forms of art.

Manet, 1832-1883, was the principal exponent of the exhibition. The academicians who were incharge of the exhibition of the salon had refused over four thousand paintings thinking to get rid of a movement which had already started and which had to eliminate academism altogether.

In fact the salon des refuses established the idea that every painter has the right to paint as he pleases and his work be judged as an individual by other individuals, instead to paint according to a school whose officials have the power to grant or deny him the right to be seen by the public.

Impressionism means to paint the effect of light playing on form in contrast with the idea that forms are giving the effects

of light. Thus form become secondary because the eye in its impression sees only the light defining, not sharply, outline and volumes.

In 1874 a group of French artists among whom Cezanne, Degas, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley and others organized an exhibition. Their idea was that no any arbitrary kind of formula could not be forced unto a painter without dwarfening his creativeness. They demanded the right to paint as they pleased, and what they felt. Only in this way they could fulfil their creative potentials. From 1874-1886 the group gave eight exhibitions. The result was that impressionists, inspite the attacks of the academicians, won the attention of dealers and collectors of art.

POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Lautrec died in 1901 and was the last painter of the impressionistic school. Four artists, Gezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat and Gauguin were "modern" in the sense of departing from reproducing forms according to their reality. They thought that an artist is free to distort the visual world whatever way he thinks necessary for expressing its inner reality most important to him. Post-impressionism started as a reaction against the formlessness of impressionism. It re-defined the bounderies of forms and solidified the masses which with impressionism had become uncertain because their fusion with the air.

In the last period of his career Renoir, 1841-1919, retreated from impressionism in order to find more solid forms. Seurat, 1859-1891, followed the same aim in a different way. Seurat defined his figures in simplified geometrical masses filling the space with colours divided according to their components and applying these tints in small dots of even size. Thus blue would be painted with dots of violet and emerald according to the scientific theory etc.

Therefore between impressionism and post-impressionism there is the great difference because the former looked for light

disregarding to define forms, while post-impressionism returned to the plastic solidity of forms.

Cezanne, 1839-1906, was the leader of post-impressionism from which modern art originated with its infinite "isms".

Cezanne's theory may be summarized as follows:

1. The object painted should be understood as it was composed by many facets; the colour of each facet advances or retreats according to light.
2. Colours must be perspectival.
3. Distortion of forms when necessary to the harmony of the composition.
4. Geometric basis of the composition.
5. All object of the picture should direct towards a central point or many points centralizing towards a principal point.
6. Truly plastic volumes and masses architectural.
7. Re-create the object the artist paint, altering, if necessary, its form, but at the same time retaining the essence of the object.
8. Planes, volumes, forms are adapted to a single conception forming an inseparable unity.

Contrary to the impressionists, Cezanne painted his pictures not according to the moment of day or night light, but bathed in an unchangeable atmosphere proper to the artist's judgement.

ROMANTIC POST-IMPRESSIONISM.

While Seurat and Cezanne were painters within the classic tradition, Van Gogh and Gauguin were romanticists expressing themselves with violence and pain, peculiarity still more emphasized by expressionists: indeed Van Gogh from impressionism stemmed to expressionism. Many of Van Gogh's paintings and drawings were made after such an impulse of mystic and spiritual force as to prevent the artist to consider what to do or not to do lest the miracle of this mysterious impulse could vanish.

Sometime the artist squeezed the colours from the tube to reduce time from the impulsive conception to its realization.

Such kind of art is appreciated by many because it reflects the emotions of the human being and as such is understood by human beings.

GAUGUIN, 1848-1903

At the beginning of his artistic career Gauguin wanted to paint as a primitive man in a primitive land. According to this idea he developed a theory based on the use of pure tints, non modelling, or at least only flat shadows to give the idea of volumes of the flat painted figures. Emphasis of lines of the composition. This theory was first carried on by the Nabis (prophets) and afterwards by the "fauves" or "fauvists".

But although formulating such a theory, Gauguin did not adhere to anything but his own temperament as the Tahiti paintings testify.

Looking at the painting of the first period made in Brittany with those made in Tahiti we may notice how the former theory was abandoned to follow the natural impulse which created the later masterpieces. Instead of the realism of the impressionists, Gauguin cherished symbolism.

Within the complications of the painting of the nineteenth century the predominant idea was to express supernatural mysteries.

Among the many artists who tried to paint the real unreal and the unreal real Rousseau, 1840-1910, discovered a world of enchantment. Rousseau did not theorize at all, yet he materialized a land of mystery. Everything Rousseau painted is a commonplace and yet uncommonly revealed; with him reality and unreality reach perfect fusion and one is indistinguishable from the other.

FAUVISM

Fauvism was an adjective to indicate a group of painters among which Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, Marquet, Dufy etc., who exhibited in the Salon D'Automne of 1905. The critics labelled the group of the young painters as "fauves", which means "wild beasts". The fauves had not a theoretical formula but in the whole we may say they used colours in large areas with freedom and in a flat way as Gauguin had done before. Thus fauvism was not organized and very soon its components dispersed and followed their own individual stimulus. The importance of the exhibition of the "fauves" was that collectors of art did not rely anymore from the judgement of the critics who in the past had misjudged and annihilated great artists such as Monet, Van Gogh and Gauguin. Accordingly people interested in arts started to buy works of new expressions. This was the beginning for the collectors to accept forms of art also when they did not yet understand their real artistic value.

EXPRESSIONISM

The purest expressionism belong to the painters of the northern countries, such as Scandinavia, Holland and Germany.

Expressionism is concerned with the inner emotions, pathos, morbidity and tragedy. It exaggerates colours and distorts forms for the benefit of expressing the inner feeling with strong force.

Munch, Enson, Nolde, Barlack and, as seen although Van Gogh did not follow any school he too was an expressionist.

The German expressionism took a political character after the first world war. It was a revolt against the horror of a world which had revealed itself as a political organization given to mass murder and moral anarchy. Klée, Dix, Croz, Beckmann and many others were the chief exponents of the German expressionism.

CUBISM

Cubism developed between 1907-1909, Picasso and Bracque being its principal creators.

At first cubism was analytic treating the object as seen simultaneously from many views, that is to say the object is seen from many angles as one looks around a statue an all angles are recorded together by the means of many planes which may become transparent revealing other planes behind them, crossing and merging together.

To see an object under many angles is referred to as the theory of the fourth dimension which means also the other theory of space and time inasmuch the fourth dimension implies movement and movement means also time.

Analytic cubism ended in formulas which deprived the artist to express his individuality as can be seen from many works by Picasso and Braque having the identical character. Colour too became monotonous; consequently Synthetic Cubism arose. Synthetic Cubism let free the artist to decide about forms and colours. Form could be composed according to the artist's judgement while colour became again an important factor.

Leger is another great exponent of cubism, but contrary to many others he was anti-intellectual as he thought that the painting had to convey the meaning by itself without the aid of literary explanations.

The last development of cubism was Dynamic Cubism in which the artist desires to reveal the forces inherent to static objects.

TEXTURE

In the past, texture did not bother very much any artist, but in modern time its has taken a remarkable importance. Braque in particular used to exploit the texture of the canvas, collage application of paper or pieces of fabric, mixing sand with colours or pressing rough materials on the surface of the painting etc. This idea has been brought to the extremes by artists who have applied on the canvas pieces of glasses, metals and other objects forming a picture by the means of real things.

FUTURISM

Dynamism was the basic principle of futurism. Futurism wanted to represent the life of to-day violently transformed by the victorious science; therefore the futurists drew inspiration from airplanes, motorcars, railroads, battleships and everything else representing modern dynamic life.

Futurists put the beholder of the picture in the center of the composition where many objects appear simultaneously overlapping each other in continuous movement. But in a way the theory of simultaneity had been already adopted by the analytical cubism and so futurism ended with the first world war. With Boccioni, futurism was the precursor of the theory to render in sculpture a composition where solid forms and forms of space merge and interlock.

ABSTRACTISM OR NON OBJECTIVISM OR NON REPRESENTATIVE ART

Analytic cubism was half way to abstractism, synthetic cubism returned to forms although these forms were altered according to the artist's conception. Kandinsky's theory is that both form and colour exist without any expressive meaning, without reference to the real world. This idea is confirmed by Mondrian who states that lines and colours are the essence of painting, therefore they must be freed from the imitation of nature and allow to exist by themselves. Mondrian also states that painting occupies a plane surface and consequently this surface must be respected and the painting be flat.

In what concern form, Mondrian thinks that the rectangle has an almost universal meaning and so is the best figure for universal representation. Colours must be pure and as such only primary colours should be used, red, yellow and blue.

PURISM

Purism was called a movement which resumed cubism under geometrical and rigid forms. From purism derives many artists such as Nicholson, Brancusi, Cabo etc.

VOLUME AND SPACE

Some modern sculptors are of the opinion that as space moves outside an object it moves also inside of it. For this reason sculptors like Moor create volumes and hollows which should give the sensation of the inner and outer space.

Another theory is the movement of the volumes into space like the clouds in the sky which by moving take different forms. This idea may be realized by some forms, say like leaves, attached to thin stems which under the pressure of air moves and change their relationship with the space.

REACTION TO ABSTRACTISM

Many artists who worked in abstractism found it unsuitable for their expressions. Towards 1920 and 1930 a reaction against abstractism took place both in Europe and America. In Europe it took the form of fantasy while in America took a social and national form, particularly this happened in Mexico.

Rivera, 1886-1957, tried cubism, but after a visit to Italy he was fascinated by the Italian frescoes which stimulated him a new individual art. Rivera created a national style which renewed the Mexican culture. In particular his art backed the revolution to abolish and free Mexico from the power of the landlords who had kept the peasants in selfdom.

Orozco, 1883-1940, was a sociological expressionist based on the theory that humanity in its mass is capable of vilest cruelty while individually human beings suffer. Orozco sees humanity at once victim and victimizer. From such ideas his grotesque and fantastic figures.

Siqueiros, 1896, represents modern Mexico as a nation with international ties in the terms of industrial development rather than eruptive force of the revolution.

Tamayo, 1899, represents an international artist who has abandoned the strict nationalism to follow the artistic trend of Europe.

Towards 1920 in North America art had a realistic regional character. Among various artists we may mention Benton 1889, Wood 1892-1942, Curry 1897-1946, Marsh 1898-1964, Shahn 1898.

Benton painted in definite lines and masses like a primitive, Wood painted with such accuracy of drawing and painting as to be compared with Gothic art. Curry illustrated social and mundane subjects in an a realistic illustrative way. Marsh's art reminds the European eighteenth century style. Shahn was less regional more American and more modern of all, he felt the influence of European art but maintained his American character. Shahn was

a political mind who treated often subjects satirically to fight against injustice and stupidity.

SURREALISM

In Europe, the reaction against abstractism was surrealism. Surrealism is based on the idea to impress by the means of paradox. The paradox of surrealism is that every detail of the represented images are painted carefully according to the real existence of the objects, but this existence cannot exist because it is out of the real of possibility. Surrealism discloses a real world where the impossible and the undeniable are one and the same thing.

It is difficult to understand the symbolism of a surrealist painting because the composition is dictated to the painter's unconsciousness, the source of dreams.

Dali is the most important exponent of surrealism.

DADA

Like the German expressionists, Dadaism born from the social chaos Europe experienced after the world war 1. Indeed the Dada movement and surrealism have strict contacts.

Dada theory was that the world had been unable to think its way to rational behaviour in three millennium, therefore it is not possible for artists to pretend to find order and meaning in its chaos.

Dada rejected any moral and aesthetic principle because aesthetics is based on reason and the world has demonstrated that it has no reason.

At first, dadaism included Kandinsky, Kokoschka, Modigliani, Picasso, Klee, Arp and others but very soon the group dissolved because any artist followed his own idea and temperament.

Whatever one may think about dadaism, surrealism and expressionism, the real fact remains that since the first world war humanity is experiencing a moral chaos which affects all modern expressions of art.



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