

SYMBOLISM AND PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

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I have attempted in this paper to deal with problems involving symbolic interpretation in painting. The first chapter presents aspects of language as a scientific phenomenon and the second chapter attempts to deal with the language of Symbolism in painting. In the conclusion I have attempted to discuss the factors concerning my own personal iconography. All authors discussed or whom I have used are listed alphabetically at the back.

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Preface

It is very difficult to look into the mind and discover a part of yourself that is, in spirit, not there because it doubts the rest of the world:

For this reason, the ancients taught their students to give rise to a gentle feeling of doubt about ... WHO? at all times.... to strip the mind of seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing and to ensure its constant rest, or undisturbed condition... Who is taking a meal? ... or Who is sleeping? the reply to WHO? will invariably be the same: It is Mind.¹

The awareness of fleeting forms and the pursuit of vanity can lead one to presume a pre-eminent position for art among the most beautiful of all life's experiences. However, along with art go many pains and sufferings. Galileo and Descartes proposed a world which is not only verified through experience but also a world produced through the great effort of the human soul. It is not easy to get:

Insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed by forms; or, insight into the manner in which, under

1. Charles Luk, The Secrets of Chinese Meditation, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1964, p.47-48. (We know that we should control the wandering mind and strip it of all thoughts ... but we also know that this is the most difficult thing to achieve For practises of self-cultivation and, ancients devised a technique which can help us to prevent thoughts from arising in our minds.... It consists of looking into the mind before it is stirred by a thought or mental world.)

varying historical conditions, specific themes or concepts were expressed by objects and events; or, insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts.²

Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Cassirer, and Susan K. Langer, to name but a few, are among those who think and write clearly and concisely concerning philosophy and Art. How well they are able to express their own insights into the creative consciousness. My philosophy is faith as opposed to experience, and my art is a product of deep belief. I believe that to art there is a pre-conceived plan in terms of the pre-conscious life of the intellect. I attempt to awaken to the flux of change within me and I do not rely on any dogma, or rules pertaining to art, other than to do it.

I believe that artists participate in the very process of change which goes on in every society. One imagines that no less a man than Galileo participated in the very process of change with which we are concerned. From within man himself come the seeds of doubt, and if these seeds are allowed to grow, noble intentions may aspire to do a truly good work of art.

My philosophy and practise of art is eclectic. I choose from good and bad works of art, elements I feel are not lacking in consciousness, or presence, or beauty. I find objects wonderful to paint and find and draw and I try to express my affinity with the so-

2. Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1939, p.15.

called natural features of the painting of the Proto-Renaissance. Already with Gothic Art something else is beginning to happen. The description of space is becoming more formal. The attempt of re-introducing, as a modernist development in art, the restructuring of style and intent of the gothic craftsmen and church-builders of the Middle Ages, in terms of the works of artists such as Gauguin, Van Gogh and Puvis de Chauvannes, has been largely ignored by modern critics in terms of a rebirth of traditional, gothic iconography in the works of the Symbolist painters, and in turn, a rebirth of the gothic or a caring-for Christ in the modern day world. Most people think the Symbolists were exhibitionists who created the ignorance with which their work was met, but in truth they were humble creators seeking to define the experiences upon which their work was based. They had to be interpreters of their own scripture; architects, priests, and labourers for the building of their own Cathedral-of-the-Mind. In artists like Gauguin were combined all the elegancies of traditional iconographers, with one main difference---they subjectively interpreted content to suit their own understanding. They used the New Testament as food for thought and the sum of the Symbolists' paintings is to bring us to a closer understanding of the Word, as God and man.

I am impressed with a less complex art dealing with the arabesque, literally a waving line, undulating back and forth in a

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serious, orderly progression, usually creating an outline of symmetrical, palmette designs. I tend towards the oriental simplicity of a unity of opposites, both visually and iconographically. The unity of the Catholic world during the spiritual reign of Aquinas, for the artists, was not so different from the unity which Gauguin found for himself in terms of his subjective interpretation of the meaning of art. The type of space of which we are here speaking is flat. It does not attempt to let one get into it. This type of art does not attempt to deal, in a Western sense, with depth in space. The viewer is left free to wander in and out of the picture plane but never too deeply into space. The light is an equality in each of the component-parts:

When he discusses space, Erwin Panofsky puts the problem of plastic art in its true perspective, by rescuing it from a rigidly dogmatic definition of space as three-dimensional and governed by the laws of perspective. He reminds us... that what we call space is not a constant in the whole of human experience, but is something which has gradually evolved.³

When I confront the canvas I am attempting to take it back to the beginning in terms of the scripture of my own experiences. I try never to have those experiences without faith. In order to have faith, sometimes one must go to the mountain. For me, art comes from the raw, base part of a person, deep down inside him, just waiting to come out unconditioned by previous experience. Just as the white of the canvas is unconditioned by previous experience. That whiteness,

3. Jean Duvignaud, The Sociology of Art, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p.43.

or feeling, is the soul which must be set free in the artist, first, before he can set it free in terms of images. Therefore the artist is always purging himself and trying to make himself better able to see the world around him knowing full well that if he should succeed, he may be discounted as an artist for having failed to conform to some manner. Sometimes one gets what one wants but one loses what one had, so I feel the difficulty for the artistic personality is to adjust to living in a world that is not so sure of art, or perhaps is more sure of art than he is.

My own pre-occupation with art has me reacting to the artistic processes of other artists. My own art is mostly non-referential and by that I mean I try not to react to others except as a part of a process of being more creative for myself. By the time influences appear in my work, I have thoroughly digested the information I need to clarify a position within myself. As Heinrich Wölfflin said in The Sense of Form in Art, the subject is better suited to a lecture hall where with the aid of modulating the voice for emphasis of points needing clarification, as well as slide documentation, one may get to the point more warmly. Personally, what I wanted from Cassirer and Panofsky, as well as a host of others, was insight into the history of cultural types and themes and concepts, so that I might better relate myself to the world that is our classical western heritage at large, the world of ideas.

For me, the key point I am making here concerning Symbolism and the Gothic image is the relationship of the painted word to the

printed word, and whereas the history of painting in Western times grew from the illumination, if you will, of allegories of vice and virtue, so the space of such an artistic presentation must, at first, be shallow and pre-iconographical. The space is often flat, or shallow in the illustrations which accompany many books. During the Middle Ages, artists were not allowed to paint nature naturally and were forced, like the Symbolists, to read between the lines. When the painted world and the printed word get together they usually describe a scene so deep with moral significance that the light-hearted concerns of the more painterly qualities inherent in art, are commercially run-over as the edition goes to print. The space of such a presentation must heed first the editorial need to make sense. During the Middle Ages artists were not allowed to paint nature but instead, like the Symbolists, found freedom in interpreting the Bible.

The grief which provides good in art is that surrender of an individual spirit into the larger body of the world. Taken as a congenital factor in the evolution of art, misery, sorrow and the meaninglessness of disease and suffering in man's life is seen as a potent force to express naturalism in art. However, many people do not see suffering in art or life as natural. They cannot stand to see the pain of suffering. But why blind ourselves to any facet of human experience?

to the Middle Ages art was didactic. All that it was necessary that men should know — the history of the world from the creation, the dogmas of religion, the examples of the saints, the hierarchy of the virtues, the range of the sciences, arts and crafts — all these were taught them by the windows of the church or by the statues in the porch. The pathetic name of Biblia Pauperum given by the printers of the fifteenth century to one of their earliest books, might well have been given to the church. There the simple, the ignorant, all who were named sancta plebs dei learned through their eyes almost all they knew of their faith. Its great figures, so spiritual in conception, seemed to bear speaking witness to the truth of the Church's teaching. The countless statues, disposed in scholarly design, were a symbol of the marvellous order that ... reigned in the world of thought, Through the medium of art the highest conceptions of the theologian and scholar penetrated to some extent the minds of even the humblest of the people.⁴

4. ° Emile Male, The Gothic Image, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958, p.vii.

Chapter One: Language

The light that emits from art, can create in man any number of possible interpretations; but the symbolic transformation inherent in the act of creation is the basic fact of light enhancing itself. How may man, who appears to be trapped within walls of solid flesh and spirit, be capable of anything but symbolic representation? Man is called by the name of Adam. He is created by the mixture of dust and breath. He is essentially descended from light. That man who is created by light, but is also created of dust and breath, cannot be called upon to perform anything but works having a symbolic function.

Language, having a symbolical function called meaning, became for the brute a force useful when words acquired the ability to obtain what he wanted. That language, in which myth resides, cannot obtain what one wants from everyday life without the aid of logic. Logic, in a certain sense, may be said to be that necessary ingredient of language which in fact creates magic, and that certainly creates for man a way out of the absurd mess that things seem to be in. Logic creates magic in the sense that logic has a higher symbolic function called meaning, which makes possible that necessary higher analysis in which at least a thing may be said to be seen for what it is not, and by default, one may work out what a thing is, to be seen or not.

Language is magical in the sense that propositional, or symbolic language, has the ability to cut through, or transform, the technique of handling a problem by traditional, empirical methods.

Discursive, or derivative intelligence is sometimes swallowed up in the spontaneity of the creation of a work of art. Derivative intelligence needs the logic of the imagination to help it understand the symbolical function of a work of art. During the act of creation itself things happen so quickly that, to be derivative or didactic or anything but what the act of creation calls for, would be verbose.

According to Susan K. Langer, philosophy is nothing more than the interpretation of general propositions. The theory of symbolic knowledge pre-supposes symbolic meaning and the very nature of symbolic knowledge lies at the basis of our interpretation of the real difference between actuality and possibility:

Freud once indicated that there have been three major blows to man's narcissism. Copernicus delivered the cosmological blow; Darwin delivered the biological blow; and psychoanalysis delivered the psychological blow.⁵

An artist who studies the growth and development of speech and literary habits, cannot properly function if he is not allowed to make his own mistakes. (When I say, an artist, I might as well mean a philosopher or scientist). Everyday working speech cannot properly analyze a work of art without the epistemological considerations which must be given to etymology, philology, eschatology, or ontology. I mean that when a whole process is concluded to be the sum of its parts, then the

5. David Bakan, Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, p.3.

parts of the whole must never forget their debt to the whole, and each individual part must remain attentive to the needs of the whole.

Word and mythic image, which once confronted the human mind as hard realistic powers, have now cast off all reality and effectuality; they have become a light bright ether in which the spirit can move without let or hindrance. This liberation is achieved not because the mind throws aside the sensuous forms of word and image, but in that it uses them both as organs of its own, and thereby recognizes them for what they really are: forms of its own self-revelation.⁶

In Kant's Critique of Judgement he raises fundamental questions concerning the aesthetic notion of idea. If it is possible to discover a general criterion by which we may describe a fundamental aesthetic structure from all other possible modes of knowing, then such a criterion is to be sought in the character of human knowledge, which is such that the understanding is under the necessity of making a sharp distinction between the reality and the possibility of things.

Here the problem is that until now, in the general course of history, we have been dealing with a cause of events which remains hidden. And this cause of events will remain hidden and will not be scrutinized in the laboratory. Augustine says in his Confessions that Reason was lost through the Fall of Adam and that Reason cannot reconstruct itself. Reason cannot be, by its own efforts, reconstructed and returned to its former pure essence. The only answer we receive from Religion is that it is the Will of God to conceal Himself. Man is made in the

6. Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans, Susan K. Langer, New York: Dover Publications, 1946, p.99.

image of a Deus Absconditus, and therefore man remains an homo absconditus. God is an intuitive intelligence and a pure act which cannot think of a thing without, by this very act of thinking, creating and producing the thing-in-itself. It is only in man, with his derivative intelligence, that the problem of the possibility of things arises. According to Kant, the difference between actuality and possibility is not metaphysical but epistemological. Our knowledge of things does not denote any character of the things in themselves. Rather it applies only to our knowledge of the things. Kant did not claim that there is a divine intellect. He merely employed the concept of such an intuitive understanding in order to describe the nature and limits of the human intellect which is a discursive understanding dependent upon images and concepts. According to Kant, it is this fundamental dualism in the condition of knowledge which lies at the bottom of our distinction between actuality and possibility.

Chapter Two: Symbolism and Painting

The aims and purposes of art may be said to be a unity in the manifold. Digression is not an inherent form of art. But, to digress, one need only attempt to form a path and not stray from it in order to discover that the shortest distance between two points may well be a straight line, but not always an easy one to find. The History of Art may well be thought of as a straight line, but I disagree. The temptation is always there to divide art into periods and conveniently push artists into similar categories so they will appear to be the same. Works that seem like each other will therefore be made to seem even more similar. We know only too well that it is very difficult to reconcile, altogether, the form of art which do not seem to belong together. Music, painting, literature, architecture and sculpture, as well as arts which to a lesser degree require intellectual participation, have a side to themselves about which it is difficult to verbalize. My purpose here is to determine areas open to criticism within the subject of iconography in art, and its relation to the personal, individual artist.

Music, for example is an involvement with that which is inexpressible, or that about which it is difficult to verbalize. And yet, every day people are communicating through their appreciation of music, in such a way that they find release from the everyday conventions of society that normally restrain and tie one down. Music is used as a release, and for me that release is at the essence of all art.

To me, it is impossible to imagine a culture not having a variety of art forms. To me, the man-made hierarchy of different forms of art does not exist. Music speaks a language which is equally as forceful and expressive as architecture, sculpture, painting, prose or poetry. Architecture, in an architectonic sense, flows. Painting, in a painterly sense, flows; and poetry, as well as prose, in a literary sense, also flows. The inter-relatedness of all arts has always fascinated me and I want to know what links up all forms of art. It seems to me to be the ability to communicate or to express man's inner needs. There is much that is seen in man's life that has a direct bearing on his mind without him knowing about it. Man is that creature who, desiring to know, sees. Now what he sees may differ from man to man:

Ludwig Richter relates in his reminiscences how once, when he was in Tivoli as a young man, he and three friends set out to paint part of the landscape, all four firmly resolved not to deviate from nature by a hair's-breadth; and although the subject was the same, and each quite creditably reproduced what his eyes had seen, the result was four totally different pictures, as different from each other as the personalities of the four painters. Whence the narrator drew the conclusion that there is no such thing as objective vision, and that form and colour are always apprehended differently according to temperament.

The definition of man is a difficult one to attempt. Once again, the problem of that which is inexpressible about man, or that which is difficult to verbalize about him, comes to the fore of an artistic

7. Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950, p. 1.

journey, making it impossible to understand an artistic statement without first understanding the reasons for its having come into being. In a short paper on the philosophy of symbolic function in art, space does not permit me to go into a myriad forms the definition of being might take. The iconography of being, rather, interests me in as much as I am aware of many different layers of artistic interpretation. For me the problem is, how do I interpret art? The artistic statements of others are accepted, by me, as much to learn about myself as to learn about others. When I discover how other people think, usually I am affected. When I am concerned with the symbolic satisfaction I have with art, then I am concerned with the symbolic satisfaction all men have with art.

Iconography relates to me in the sense that all men have a particular insight into the processes called art and I am truly amazed when I discover some of the, if you will, ethnographic possibilities of art. That is to say, the movement and distribution of art within the possibilities afforded people when they move. Erwin Panofsky has categorized three levels of artistic interpretation. The first is pseudo-iconographical, or the level at which only forms are recognized to be expressive of objects and events. The second level is allegorical, a level of assigned meanings for specific images. The third level is iconological, in which the history of cultural symptoms or symbols in general were expressed by specific themes and concepts. The themes and concepts of art, when art has a chance to define the areas of art open to criticism, lead one to a critique of art. For when art argues with art about art, then a critique of art is the result.

Discursive thought gives rise to science, and a theory of knowledge restricted to its products culminates in the critique of science; but the recognition of non-discursive thought makes it just as possible to construct a theory of understanding that naturally culminates in a critique of art. The parent stock of both conceptual types, of verbal and non-verbal formulation, is the basic human act of symbolic transformation.⁸

The language used in science and the language used in art are not always the same. The language of art is a painting of the passions and the emotions of the soul of man. The language of science is suited to the investigation of empirical evidence and the way things seem to be when man is in control of his destiny. Neither language seems to be impossible to reconcile with the other, yet the scientific side of the coin must never hesitate to have a name to describe an experience, whereas artists can keep to themselves until they feel ready to create. I say art has a symbolic function, and yet I say that this is not so obvious a statement as it seems to be. Of course art is symbolic because it seeks to unite the types of symbolic function inherent in man. Art is symbolic because it shows the face of an image which is not always easy to understand. But when I say that art is not conscious of itself then I am really getting obvious. Of course, art is not aware of itself for only man can feel and make and look at art. Can we apply a laboratory procedure to investigate a work of art done by someone who is not conscious, in every detail, of how he creates?

8. Susan K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1942, p. 148.

It is universally acknowledged that to a Freudian psychologist, an analysis of the impulse which drives people to create is an issue well worth investigating. He does not look for a perfection of form which makes this work, above all, a work of art; he looks rather for its hidden content:

It goes without saying that the mode of imaginative beholding is not an outward thing, but is also of decisive importance for the content of the imagination.⁹

There is much in common between the artistic space of Symbolism, with a capital S, and Medieval painting and Illumination. I would like to propose that a critique of art, when venturing to discuss the symbolic languages of religion, myth and art, must always come up against the symbolic, discursive thought of empirical science because the coherent structure of art is always embedded in the grid of human experience, and this involves science.

Just as there are three basic levels to iconographical interpretations, so there are three levels of distinguishing between the use of sign, symbol and Symbolism:

Symbols, in the proper sense of the term, cannot be reduced to mere signals. Signals and symbols belong to two different universes of discourse: a signal is a part of the physical world of being: a symbol is a part of the human world of meaning. Signals are operators, and act upon symbols, which are designators.¹⁰

9. Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History, New York; Dover Publications, Inc., 1950, p. vii.

10. Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 31.

The act of symbolization, (with a small s), is essentially making images for symbols. The symbols we speak of here, are different from the symbols of dream-analysis of Sigmund Freud. Just as we must find the answer to a dream, if we remember it when we wake up, so too must the Symbolist remember which images went where, and for what reason, into a painting. He may not be able to paint well enough to express clearly his intentions, but surely when he decides to use symbols of his subjective-objective awareness, he is externalizing his own dream-iconography:

When Kant defined reality as any content of empirical intuition which follows general laws and thus takes its place in the context of experience, he gave an exhaustive definition of the concept of reality in the canons of discursive thought. But mythic ideation and primitive verbal conception recognize no such context of experience. Their function ... is rather a process of almost violent separation and individuation. Only when this intense individuation has been consummated, when the immediate intuition has been focused and, one might say, reduced to a single point, does the mythic or linguistic form emerge, and the word or the momentary god is created. And this particular genesis determines the type of intellectual content that is common to language and myth; for where the process of apprehension aims not at expansion, extension, universalizing of the content, but rather at its highest intensification, this fact cannot fail to influence human consciousness. All other things are lost to a mind thus enthralled; all bridges between the concrete datum and the systematized totality of experience are broken; only the present reality, as mythic or linguistic conceptions stresses and shapes it, fills the entire subjective realm. So this one content of experience must reign over practically the whole experiential world. There is nothing beside or beyond it whereby it could be measured or to

which it could be compared; its mere presence is the sum of all Being. At this point, the word which denotes that thought content is not merely wedded to the word, but is consumed by it. Whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Réality. The potential between symbol and meaning is resolved; in place of a more or less adequate expression, we find a relation of identity of complete congruence between image and object, between the name and the thing.¹¹

I use the term Symbolism to denote a characteristic of art different from symbolization. Symbolization is not Symbolism. Symbolization cannot be anything but that study of mere signs and symbols which operate and designate our minds like a cattle-crossing. Symbolism, in the sense of a form of space-awareness involving poets and painters and writers may be said to be that form of artistic communication between men who consider themselves to be free men, and the equals of any painters and writers who ever lived. Gauguin wrote of Impressionism:

The Impressionists study colour exclusively, but without freedom, always shackled by the need of probability. For them the ideal landscape, created from many different entities, does not exist. Their edifice rests upon no solid base and ignores the nature of the sensations perceived by means of colour. They need only the eye and neglect the mysterious centers of thought, so falling into merely scientific reasoning. When they speak of their art, what is it? A purely superficial thing, full of affectations and only material. In it, thought does not exist.¹²

11. Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. Susan K. Langer, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966, p. 99

12. Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970, p. 679.

Symbolism is more than just filling the canvas with symbols which have a meaningful existence for the artist. There is an interrelatedness between the mind of the artist and the symbols he projects. The form of the object may be generally represented naturally, while the colouring may have been handled in as subjective a manner as possible, but he must still be able to paint well enough for us to be able to see his intention. It is only through using what he feels is meaningful in his world that he is able, through distorting certain perceptions, to express his subjective symbolism.

The manner in which the Symbolist, or Synthetist artist behaves in terms of colour, in terms of his putting colour where he, himself, subjectively feels is right, is similar in a non-objective way, to the choice of coloured backgrounds in Proto-Renaissance or Medieval painting and illumination in Europe. These forms of painting have in common religious subject matter, and a background consisting of planes of symbolic colour. In the Virgin and Child with Angels and St. Francis, in the Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Cimabue has chosen to surround his subject matter with a blue background symbolizing Heaven and Heavenly Love. Blue is the colour of truth, because it always appears in the sky after the clouds are dispelled, suggesting the unveiling of truth. Once the artist has composed his characters in space, he then envelopes the figures in a background of blue. Just as the figures are highlighted by the colours attached to them, so is the ground, therefore, reduced to being that which separates the figure, from the edge of the canvas. It is painted in a monochromatic way so as to draw attention to the multiple colouring of

the subject matter.

Since there was no really true to life attention paid to detail in terms of general representation for these illuminated manuscripts and murals, the colour scheme chosen had to be a symbolic one, developed over the centuries before the re-discovery of perspective. If the modern spectator did not know that these landscapes were painted according to a colour scheme of Heavenly Love, then he might make the mistake of thinking that each artist had injected his own personal interpretation into the colour scheme. This is what I mean when I say that the colouring for Medieval paintings seems to be subjectively interpreted, like the colour used by a Symbolist, until one knows the truth:

Medieval writers on painting had been predominantly theological in their approach. For them the arts were entirely subject to the direction of the church; they accepted its general scale of values, which emphasized the spiritual and had no interest in the material; and for this reason they made no demand that artists should imitate the outside world. Their duty was rather to evolve the appropriate symbol to convey the moral and religious lessons of the church. The painter was a craftsman who performed a practical function under the direction of the church, and through the organization of the Guilds, like any other craftsman.¹³

The artists of the Middle Ages employed a planar depth system. They did not have access to the theory or practise of three-point perspective. Artists who clearly seem to be in the tradition of the Middle Ages, and those who seem more sympathetic to the space of the Proto-Renaissance, were really creating a sort of bi-dimensional space not very

13. Anthony Blunt, Artistic Theory in Italy, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, p.1-2.

involved with a deep setting and certainly not interested in the use of chiarascuro to produce the illusion of a third dimension.

With Symbolism, what we are concerned with is not the problem of the interpretation of scripture as with medieval art, it is rather with the problem of revealing a critical manifesto of the artists, about that which cannot be verbalized. "Gauguin was convinced that what he was attempting in painting was unprecedented and that it, therefore, had to be worked out in ideas as well as in the work itself."¹⁴ The theory of symbolic forms involves looking at, as well as in writing about, art. The philosophy is not always obvious in a work of art. Artists make statements and whether or not these statements are perceived as art is in the mind of the spectator:

Paul Verlaine and Charles Rimbaud found life tolerable in the cultivation of their own feelings and sensations. Baudelaire's culte de moi was revived; his concern with individuality of expression was transformed into an obsessive concern with the intimate, private world of the self that led to a rejection of the exterior world... The whole of the visible universe is only a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination assigns a place and a relative value; it is a kind of nourishment that the imagination must digest and transform... A work of art was to be so expressive of basic feelings and so evocative of ideas and emotions that it would rise to a level on which all the arts were interrelated; sounds would suggest colours, colours sounds, and even ideas would be evoked by sounds or colours.¹⁵

14. Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art, Berkely: University of California Press, 1968, p. 51.

15. Ibid., p. 49-50.

Paul Gauguin, while not being a typical artist, was indeed a typical, or archetypal Symbolist. What Van Gogh did with colour could not have been possible without the dictum of experience that was Paul Gauguin's art. What painful manifestations of spirit have resulted in a theology of the poetical and lyrical? Man must always be pulled from himself and this is why his search for art always ends up with himself. The poetic cry from Marsyas' lips, "why do you tear me from myself?", could not have been but a painful attempt on behalf of Apollo to enter the thought of Marsyas. Pain is therefore the answer to an artist's prayers. Take Dante, who said: "Enter my breast, and so infuse me with your spirit as you did Marsyas when you tore him from the cover of his limbs."

Readers of Plato who study the Symposium as a secret compendium of mysteries would remember that, in the drunken speech of Alcibiades, Socrates himself was called a Marsyas, and that this dubious appellation followed immediately after the description of him as a silenus figure, in which he was compared to a deceptive contraption in statuary shops which shows outwardly the face of an ugly man, but, when opened, proves to be full of gods. Like Silenus, Marsyas was a follower of Bacchus, and his flute was the bacchic instrument for arousing the dark and uncontrollable passions that conflict with the purity of Apollo's lyre. The musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas was therefore concerned with the relative powers of Dionysian darkness and Apollonian clarity; and if the contest ended with the flaying of Marsyas, it was because flaying was itself a Dionysian rite, a tragic ordeal of purification by which the ugliness of the outward man was thrown off and the beauty of his inward self revealed. That Socrates, who was a disciple of Apollo and had adopted from an inscription on Apollo's temple at Delphi his own maxim, know thyself, should be figuratively described as a Silenus and a Marsyas meant that his ruthless

pursuit of bewildering questions was but the guise of an inward clarity -- a disguise which was indispensable because it reckoned with the two-fold nature of man. To bring out the hidden clarity in others, whose souls were covered and confused by their bodies, required a cathartic method, a Dionysian ordeal by which the terrestrial Marsyas was tortured so that the heavenly Apollo might be crowned. If you consort with singers and harpists, you may trust your ears... but when you go to philosophers, you must withdraw from the senses, you must return into yourself, you must penetrate into the depths of your soul and the recesses of your mind, you must acquire the ears of the Tyanean with which, because he was no longer in his body, he heard not the terrestrial Marsyas but the heavenly Apollo, who on his divine lyre, with ineffable modes, tuned the melodies of the spheres... Not only Socrates, Diogenes, and Epictetus, but also Christ and the Apostles, The Holy Scripture, and the very Sacraments of the Christian Church, reveal, if properly understood, a Silenus-nature... 16

It is with the ears of the Tyanean that we must hear these words of Gauguin: "How do you see this tree... is it really green? Use green then, the most beautiful green on your palette. And that shadow, rather blue? Don't be afraid to paint it as blue as possible."¹ What he means by this, I believe, is that one must be attuned to the possibilities of colour inherent in the way the play of light changes the surface of an object during the various phases of the day. The question of the amount of subjectivity with which one might interpret a work of art is always a question of style and commitment. A theory of art which refuses to quit and reappears in varied forms until it hits a peak of sunbursting,

16. Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968, p. 172-173.

17. H.B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art, p. 88-90.

unclouded critical quality, will eventually find its freer counterpart in a work of art. When this happens, when literature and painting meet in terms of form and style, the temptation is always to attempt to determine which form of art came first. However formal written criticism of a work of art can only seek to declare and express the originality of a work of art. In terms of the History of Art, critical manifesto of personal intentions by various artists have appeared to cover the more intellectual sides of art. We must thank these artists who during their lifetime have written critical manifestos about what, essentially, cannot be verbalized:

Just as painting can reproduce faithfully, so it can also reproduce objectivity, just as meaningfully. The normal and final end of painting, as well as of the other arts, can never be the direct representation of objects. Its aim is to express Ideas, by translating them into a special language.¹⁸

The Symbolists' intention is never to see the direct object represented as itself. The thing-in-itself, which cannot be known, is seen as an instrument by which the clouded mind may be subjective, and yet interpret phenomenal existence as objectively as possible. The relation of iconography to abstract painting represents an interesting problem with regard to the amount of meaning one may derive from an automatic work of art other than the processes involved in doing it. Highly charged with personal emotion, subjective artists cry to their own creative talents to give them the ability to perform symbolical function.

18. Ibid, p. 88-90.

Conclusion

Inevitably what we are discussing here is the problem of language in relation to abstract thought. About that which cannot be abstracted, I try to abstract. I write about that which cannot be gambled upon because I gamble on myself, about the soul which is a gift from God, and I know I cannot express to the complete and final end of every aesthetic notion, the exact and infinite fullness I feel in being alive. The ability of myself to understand modernist thought in art does not rest on my ability to paint, but when I practise a theory in a physical sense in my paintings, I gain insight into my own formal declarations of intentions concerning shades of meaning inherent in light and dark colour values. I apply to my own awareness when I am away from painting, and put into practise, what I have learned from painting about relationships between shapes and colours, between size and shape, and between form and content. To each of us there is a portion of good, or immortality, or Idea; as well as a combination of laziness, grief and ineffectuality.

A work of art such as the Pieta, by the anonymous Pisan painter, the Master of San Mattea Crucifix, in the National Museum, Pisa, comprises a summary of all that its creator was, and as a sign of the times reveals the saintly character of a man who not only believed in the ability of the subject of his painting to be capable of rising from the dead, but also that the subject of his painting could see beyond the temporality of his times and glimpse into the lives of His flock, both at the time of His Passion, and for ever and ever. Though Jesus died yet He lived in the sense that He never died spiritually and his energy was not diminished by frustrations or setbacks. He always lived in the will of his Eternal

Father and He knew that, though He was able to experience the subject matter of everyday life, He was also divine and that as long as He obeyed the Will of His Father, He could do no wrong. I believe in the synthesis of painting and religion in terms of the spirit which understands both kinds of transformation are necessary to temper the soul to a discipline of love.

The unity of spirit, mind and body necessary to conquer the self-gratifying desires inherent in the self is imparted to a whole host of activities within the orbit of man's physical and mental universe. Addressing myself to the modernist developments in art, however, I must conceive of art as a two-edged sword which does not need constructive criticism, and on the other hand, as something which, being willing to grow, does need constructive criticism to serve freedom of expression. Art is not intended to serve criticism, but when the artist takes into his hands the response-ability of stating his case in writing, he runs the risk of juggling messages chaotically or existing side by side within himself in contradiction to his sense of better judgement. He may know what he wants to say but not be able to say it in terms of historical accuracy, or in terms of the facts of creation as he remembers them, while adhering to strict rules of academic principle and practise. When he remembers how it actually feels to create, he may not wish to divulge the very esoteric and deeply personal religious experience behind his paintings. Fearing that none would believe the whole to part relationship he feels the world has with God, the artist seeks to prove that he is not God, even though he understands how the powers that be can create so many varieties of human experience. The artist must paint it as he sees it knowing that when he successfully paints the true Word of God, he will be understood both as an artist and a man:

Self-assertion is only one of the poses, and finally, a precarious one in the artist's quest for his identity... As psychic management, its credence dwindles, as do all later day romantic urges. One of the most continuous images of the mission of art held by individuals of the most diverse stylistic creeds, is a kind of aesthetic fundamentalism, popular among artists of this century because it is philosophical extensive. Upset and unmoored by the most inconstant and absurd twitting of modern experience, the artist recoils in words as if to merge with oracular being, a primal genesis. He latches on the Adamic myth. He analogizes his creativity with that of a divine power. In Klee, de Kooning, Kokoschka and Schwitters, we behold the intermittent temptation to equate art with The Law of the Old Testament, the Biblical Word. This noun is singled out with obvious knowledge that in Hebrew it signified the highest and noblest function of man -- his original need, (which is behind nature...and does drive it forward). Though it does not answer any hard questions, The Word becomes the rubric for the besieged intelligibility of modern art. Yet, if he would be in harmony with an old time religion, the artist does not conceive of...sinning. He is simply the bringer of action, the speaker of the first language.¹⁹

The main ideas put forward in my text, I believe, propose that languages are art forms and art forms are languages. The language I believe in consists of my knowing my own response-ability to a given stimulus in terms of a soul that is mine to express. The thing-in-itself, which most people claim is impossible to know, is for me not impossible. I know that most people create because I have studied Art History and I know what most people would like to see, in terms of a painting, and I project using my arsenal of living, amorphous shapes, what it is like to be human. My creations are portrayals of real and weak human emotions in their most gullible and fruitless positions, as men are when confronted by a power too real for their imagination to handle, such as in times of war, when men become beasts and forget the pleasures of life.

19. Max Kozloff, The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art, Artforum (May 1974), p. 42.

My creations are portrayals of real and weak human emotions in their most gullible and fruitless positions, as men are when confronted by a power too real for their imagination to handle, such as in times of war, when men become beasts and forget the pleasures of life.

My creations all portray what is small and fragile and helpless about life. I transform my own images, from graphite sketch to final painting. I pull, twist, frighten and stare at my own weaknesses. The texture of a primed canvas can be as nimble and as nubile as a young woman, and the caressing artist coaxes true passions from his psyche within himself, and by looking at their forms in their living, metamorphic, ever-changing possibilities, he creates a living landscape specially made for his subject matter. I paint meekly inspired people -- a nun, in a cloister, using only red, white and black; a black devil standing under an archway, playing on a red violin, thereby expressing all the passions of his music through the colour of his red violin. I paint a young boy sitting in a crouching position, with both of his hands joined in such a way as to give the appearance of having one too many fingers; a creature half-man and half-goat, with red skin, sitting in a hell-fire; and King Herod, from the New Testament, painted in blue against a yellow ground, calmly walking in his garden awaiting the news of the deaths of the first-born. All these paintings are painted as economically as possible using whatever means I had on hand to twist the possibility of failure for whatever reasons, into anti-gravitational success; success is being able to come to grips with my imagination and my love of all kinds of subject matter, to transform myself and produce a positive, contemporary image.

When I paint, it is quite possible that the meaning of a colour may change from one painting to another and even within a single painting. I use component-units of colour for each painting and each component-unit of colour is responsible to itself to be of the highest possible transparency in terms of colour, and each colour is often distorted by the colour that lies beneath it. A light colour often seems more transparent when painted over a dark colour, and a dark colour often seems lighter when painted over a light colour. When I speak of component-units of colour I mean the colour as it would appear to be, taken directly from the tube, painted at least three layers deep.

When it is established what colour and numerical significance each component-unit is to have according to my own specifications, I break down the component-units in terms of the values of light and dark inherent in the piece on which I am working. They become component-parts of the painting, each component-part contributing to the evolution of the general representation of the work as a whole. To me, each colour belongs to, and inevitably drifts towards the particular pole of light or dark to which they belong, in the circumstances in which they find themselves in the work of art. Now, of course it is not the colours themselves that actually do the organizing; it is the artist. I use colours as imaginatively as possible, often reversing what seems to me to be the right order for the work to produce, in the image, a feeling of the possibility for change.

I use black as a night-form-free-for-all. I use black as a symbol for darkness, shadow, the background, the blacks of the eyes, nostrils, the colour of evil and as anything whatsoever that gives birth to ideas not

normally channeled by light. The black holes of the nostrils are quite important in terms of my being able to enter the consciousness of the subject-matter, up through the nostrils, and to enter the subject as he breathes, thus really knowing him.

White represents Day, purity, upliftingness of spirit, transcendence of the ego, virginity, and purity of ideas. As Day, white may be represented as a boy in which all the beatitudes of a girl might be present. The ultimate sort of figure for me seems to be a boy who is lost in the sense that he cannot remember his origins, and cannot get back to originality. That is to say, Man is created as any calf is, his legs still wet, covered with the placenta. Man, like John the Baptist, is born in skin and blood. I try to trace the creation of what it might be to be made a man, in my paintings. I attribute my creations with all the very best possibilities of staying alive as parts of myself with only their best sides showing and with no possibility of dying. That is the most tragic thing about my paintings -- they were made to last forever but they will not. Time sees to that.

Red is used as a symbol for the use of the verb, to read, in the past tense, as in, "He read (red) a book." By painting the colour red for the word it sounds like, it implies to me that someone might be "read" and he might also be "red". The pun is obvious:

We have... a large... group of jokes, influenced... by the contempt with which they are regarded. They are the kind which are generally known as puns and which pass as the lowest form of verbal joke... because... they can be made with the least trouble. And they do in fact make the least demand on the technique of expression. It is enough for

a pun if the two words expressing the two meanings recall each other by some vague similarity, whether they have a general similarity of structure or a rhyming assonance, or whether they share the first few letters, and so on.²⁰

Axioms and corollaries of formula picture-making might result from a visual joke, or a trompe-l'oeil, or a diatribe about the relationship between words and pictures.

Red is used as a symbol for blood and when I use the blood or red for the ground on which the subject matter is standing, it usually means to me that there is blood in the ground and that therefore the real and passionate part of a man's life might be spent in the earth. For me, that ambiguity in interpretation hopefully commits the spectator to retrieve, decipher and digest the meanings I have hidden in my work. The way a child might pronounce light as white because of his or her inability to harden the L sound, with the coincidence that I would paint light, with white paint, is a visual pun. These kinds of coincidences, or puns, in combination with both numerical and colour symbolism, seem to be extremely symbolical interactions, necessary for the growth and development of a thinking artist; between his hand and his eye, between his spirit and his flesh.

The true artist must create a school for thought that enriches the lives of his fellow man. To seek to aspire to be among the very best colourists a painter must abandon all notions of previously conditioned situations and learn to see with hand and eye, the reasons why, to paint or not to paint. The language of art consists in interpreting life's signals

20. Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960, p.45

and placing them properly in context in a work of art. The noun of the Word of God is referred to as the Deed of man. The action and the word, are one and the same and the artist realizes this. Placed within his consciousness, a mental-mirror, or image of the thing-in-itself projects from his open mind. The artist sees this negative-after-image of life in his Mind's Eye, as it were, and transforms it into a physical sense in his work. The transformation of art is the work done upon the creator. The object existing as his statement is the symbol of his transformation. For me, it is like a ministry. I love God and I try to perform true to His tasks as if they were special burdens which I can bear. I try to use the art of painting, ut pictura poesis, to show the meaning of the painting to be to reveal the meaning of the words showing like a King, The Christ who is Crowned.

I believe that all the Arts are valuable and open to criticism. The ultimate joy of working within a system is that the language of the system can be used to effect change upon itself. Ultimately and inevitably, the true freedom of an artist will learn to live with an ideology that has weighed him down:

To the art historian's analysis of the symbolic meaning of the language of art, the champion of modern art opposes the structural analysis of the artist's statement; to the scholar's reference to history, he will oppose the modern anthropologist's cultural patterns; and to the humanist's ethical values, the Promethean freedom from responsibility.²¹

21. Nicolas Calas. Art in the Age of Risk, New York: E.P. Dutton, & Co. Inc., 1968, p. 114.

I try to mix the character that is inherent in works of self-cultivation, and to use this character within myself to impart to the characters of my composition the character necessary to have integrity and to appeal as uplifting and unanimous endeavours of the spirit. The image is, for me, the essence of the work and the words appear as an after-thought. I try never to put down anything until I have truly studied it and am holding within myself many unconfirmed proposals as to the value of my work. I do believe that in the end the word and the image work together to enlighten minds.

In terms of images, time-in-change is represented by images of man-in-change. The change in man is the key to his general representation. As things flow, in order to keep them alive, man must move quickly. His images therefore must be willing to change. To summarize is also to categorize and when a thing is categorized to the n-th degree it can be seen to be not a summary at all but a proposition. This is how it is when a thing seems to be as mysterious after examination as before.

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