

3rd INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ART CRITICS

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Amsterdam - the Hague . July 2 - 10, 1951

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" PSYCHOLOGY OF ART "

Report of Léon Degand :

For present purposes, Psychology of the Plastic Arts, not Psychology of Art.

Psychology, and not history, sociology, morals, philosophy or metaphysics, of the plastic arts, in spite of the inevitable contacts of the last five with the first .

No problem of the psychology of plastic arts can be efficaciously studied without first :

- 1°) considering the artistic phenomenon in its ensemble in which three factors - not two - are at work : the creative artist, the work of art, and the spectator.
- 2°) giving very special attention to the nature of plastic language .

One part of the artist's activity is that of spectator . And the true spectator, even if he is not a creative artist, never marks time, with regard to the content of a work of art, in a purely passive and receptive attitude .

The content of a work of art is communicated, understood and employed functionally, not only by virtue of the materialised expression of this work, but also the meanings attributed - often very freely - by the spectators to this expression .

The possibilities a work has of conveying meaning are determined by the nature of the language used in this work . Discrimination, among the arts, from the point of view of their means of expression : discursive arts and intuitive arts . Whence differences in the realm of meaning .

If paintings and sculpture act by means of, and owe their value above all to, their meanings, a psychological study of the plastic arts should start with a psychological examination of the means of expression, communication, excitation to which these meanings are bound; that is to say by a psychological examination of the plastic language - whether or not this plastic be solidary with the representation of the visible appearances of the external world .



Now this examination reveals that the plastic language is such - being partly intuitive - that if the means of expression of this language are capable of being fixed, the significations of these means are much less so . The faculty, possessed by all plastic expression, of being the centre of diverse and variable plastic meanings, authorises, imposes and stimulates the multiplication and variation of interpretations (spectators) and of utilisations (creative artists) . The psychological study of plastic forms and their combinations should not then, in any case, make an abstraction of the fluctuating character of their power as plastic signs and combinations of signs .

Necessity of creating psychological laboratories of the plastic language, where, in opposition to "Gestaltist" methods, the rôle of Education shall always be taken into account in the interpretation, creation and utilisation of plastic signs. The work of such laboratories might put an end to a whole useless literature, and establish more solid foundations for the questions of psychology of the plastic arts .