

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ART HISTORY AND ART CRITICISM

Report of Lionello VENTURI

The aim of criticism is to judge a work of painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. to determine whether it is a work of art or not, and what kind of work of art it is. But there is no measure which can be adapted to all kinds of works, as there is no holy water which can baptize the elect or be refused to the damned. Therefore criticism has to reconstruct the creative process of the work to establish if it was the imagination which, at the end of the process, overcame the senses, the reason and the will in view of the free creation of the work, or if, on the contrary, the imagination was the victim of sensual, intellectual or moral interests, then the work of art would be a failure. To recognise the role of the imagination at the beginning of the process, at the time of the inspiration, or at the end of the process, when the last touch is given to the work, critical intuition may be sufficient. But it is the development of the process which sets numerous problems to critical knowledge.

If the inspiration is derived from a woman's face, criticism has to know whether the artist's interest centers on the construction of the design or on the effect of light and shade on the face. If the inspiration derives from what is not seen, from the emanation of a God perfect in beauty it is necessary to realise if this God is pagan or christian to follow the artist's imagination. Finally, if ^{the} inspiration derives from a geometrical figure, it is necessary to know what part Science played in the thought and feeling of the artist and his contemporaries.

Now the taste for design and light, for pagan or christian ecstasy, for Faith in Science, belongs to History and precisely to the history of civilisation. Nothing but History can help to understand the passions to which the artist gave way, the ideal he gave himself, the tradition he has followed or against which he rebelled. History alone can show us how the first inspiration became, through struggles, defeats and victories, the definitive form of the work. Finally History only allows the critic to distinguish the work which is a skilful repetition of that which is freely created.