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" THE SOURCES OF ABSTRACT ART AND OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN HOLLAND "

Report of Pierre Francastel :

I - Although very different opinions may be expressed as to the value of abstract art, agreement is fairly general on a certain number of definitions . The first question which crops up is to know how far these definitions can be applied to the totality of works produced during the last half-century and laying claim to the title of "abstract". Is there an abstract art capable of being defined by a certain number of characteristic features common to the different formulae put into practice ? In other words, does abstract art constitute a generic form of art, independently of the sum of works in which it has already found expression and in which it will continue to find expression ? On the other hand, what place is occupied by the DE STIJL group in the elaboration of the doctrine and in the realm of plastic creation ? - These are the first two questions, - by no means solved-, to be met .

II - In so far as the first one is concerned, it seems desirable to open a double debate :

1°) Does there really exist an absolute distinction between the realms of the figurative and the non-figurative ? Can we, for example, isolate Klee and Miro from the abstracts, by pleading a difference in quality ? The problem is a fundamental one, for it implies - according to the solution you prefer - either that the "true" abstracts are exploring an absolutely original path, by means of a complete rupture with those of their contemporaries who have to all appearances used forms very similar to their own; or, on the contrary, that abstract art is one of the aspects of the general evolution of the art of our time .

2°) This first question implies a judgment on the process of stylisation of the abstracts, but it also and above all implies a very delicate stand concerning the notion of the plastic object . It would rather seem that most critics have not closely examined this notion of the object . And into the bargain they have not taken into account the most recent psychological researches, which make it difficult to defend certain positions relating to the "non-objective" nature of abstract painting . The whole problem of the relation between the interior image and perception is inherent in this question, and it would hardly seem that a solution has been reached .



III - The problem of the object - and the part played by the plastic screen - make it necessary to bring up the question of the communicability of the abstract work of art . It is often said that the abstract artist differs from the figurative artist, in that he manifests in his work the incommunicable world which is within him . The question is worth reconsidering seriously . There is no such thing as art from the individual, any more than there is form from the formless or from the virtual . Behind this question looms that of the value and general nature of the plastic sign in general . It is impossible to judge the origins, impossible to judge the value of contemporary abstract art, if we leave it in the shade .

IV - The answer given to this last question depends to a great extent on the answer which must be given to the problem of the relations existing between abstract art or contemporary abstract arts, and certain great forms of art in the past . More exactly, is the art of the DE STIJL group without connection with the primitive arts discovered at the very moment of its elaboration ?

Such would seem to be the questions of principal, whose early discussion would open the door to an appreciation both historical and critical of the works of abstract art in Holland .