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THE MUSEUM AS A COMMISSIONER

The museum taken as a sacred temple of the Muses, or as a great coffin, or still as a common grave of art, meant to be destroyed by the artists' manifests - pelted a hundred times and in reality often reduced to dust - is the museum a real "Maecena", does it produce an impulsion, a stimulus to art by stimulating the artist? The consequence of a policy of purchase as encouragement, as creation or as confirmation of the present tendencies, as fogery of artistic trends, is not to be doubted. Consciously or not, if the museum selects and exposes these works of art instead of any others, it favours the first sort of production, neglecting and suppressing the second one, just as the social impact or the position of force can be disposed of. The growing interdependence of the museum with other forms or types of "Maeoenas", with great collectors, with banks and industrial societies, with the art market, with State (art promotion is given over to the State for diverse motives) makes it necessary to examine critically and precisely the general function of promotion. Here we refer to a more specific promotion - considered under the form of a precise commission given to an artist. How does the result of a commission handed to an artist by the keeper of a museum differentiate itself, on one hand from what he

chooses in the atelier when an opportunity of a heritage, of art market appears, on the other hand from the commission work which is ment to an other field of appliance - private possession, architectural decoration, public buildings, representative interiors atmospheres?

We should like to approach the answer considering three examples.

In 1929 the municipality of the city of Halle wanted to give the city of Magdeburg a painting representing a view of the town. Because of the museum's close subordination towards the municipality and also given the interest in art by its director, Aloïs Schardt, the director himself became the intermediary in the commission and partner of Lyonel Feininger, the artist. Schardt's free impulsions and Feininger's spontaneous enthusiasm were thus given satisfactory response in this work, and moreover a series of paintings were included in the same commission - or as Schardt put it: "to commission a portrait of the town, even if we know that it will not be a traditionally resemblant painting". Feininger obtained a vast atelier in one of the towers of the Moritzburg, with windows turned in practically all directions, and he executed two paintings in 1929, four in 1930 and six in 1931, as well as 30 big drawings: eleven paintings and 29 drawings became property of the Moritzburg gallery. The conditions of work, the atmosphere, the relationship between the artist and his friend commissioner, master of the castle, and his enthusiasm in that work - all sources of information admit that favourable and creative atmosphere, and the painter himself is the first to mention it.

The fascist storm that has swept over the paintings

and to whom were sacrificed innumerable works of art of our century. The important complex of Feininger's works was not spared, and the same happened to the whole German collection of modern art from the Moritzburg gallery - already at that time widely famous: it was dispersed or destructed altogether. Two paintings became private possession in the USA, two in Munich, one in each museum of Köln, Hamburg, Mannheim - one was burnt and two others, it seems, never reappeared - only two works, in 1948 and 1957 were taken back to the original collection.

The Halle museum was an ideal partner for the artist in the elaboration of this series of paintings on the different views of the city, maybe by tradition. The Moritzburg being the first German museum open to expressionism, ensured in 1924, after the total stagnation caused by war and inflation, the best works of the famous Fischer collection - an art merchant in Frankfurt-am-Main: its modern art department thus became the most important in Germany, thanks to a clear vision about the policy of purchase. Feininger, had an exposition organised by Schardt, the museum's director since 1928 - important works were displayed. One can imagine the stimulating and productive atmosphere, founded on the political position of force in the town. The liberal artistic policy of the municipal direction would have been impossible without the support of powerful labourers' parties of the industrial town, above all the KPD, as the acquisition of the Fischer collection had proved. The "Völkischen", the particular cultural sort of German fascists were not able to intervene in this case but the conservateur right wing naturally, did not agree.

Schardt wrote on Feininger's paintings of Halle many times. He confirms in these texts what was not so difficult to apprehend in the work painted up to that date: the commission touched the central preoccupation of the artist and permitted its through elaboration. The spontaneous extension of a painting into a series of paintings is only one of the symptoms. It is not only Feininger's extreme experience in the formal mastership of urban and architectural motives, or of the development of his so particular style when it came to those subjects. Conceiving space and bodies as cristalline formations and filling with them the possibilities of a romantic sensitivity of the world (opposed to the harshness and clarity of the image) he was immediately able to enter what he thought essential in the view of the medieval city, so varied in its organisation, so lively and colourful. The town opened itself to his formal conceptions. He could therefore reaffirm these fundamental formal conceptions in the dominant complex of buildings and his own taste for the lyrical background atmosphere in the tortuous and obscure streets. Perhaps the commissionnar wanted this meeting having had as aim to render the thematic and formal basic postulate more mature and ample - by a precise commission - without any kind of obstacle face to artistic freedom.

Such an agreement can bring an autoconfirmation without pursuite. In the case of Feininger's painting in Halle, something new appeared. We can see that in the comparison between the surface conception, more static and decorative of the "Entry Tower II" painting (1925 in Karlsruhe) as well as the mathematical rigour of many city and architecture paintings from the preceeding years and between the complex

spatial dynamism of the first version of the "Red Tower"
(place unknown)

Before the end of this serie of paintings, Schardt analysed and interpreted their contiguity with the intention of art pedagogy and aesthetical elucidations. These articles published in the records of maintenance of monuments, in the magazine "Kreis von Halle" as well as in other publications, are instructive essays on the capacity of translating nature impressions into composing factors of a painting, of bringing a new way of looking and a new way of feeling reality. In that period this idea was far from being an universal one but it reveals the progressive and obligatory evidence of the museum as intermediary of art and commitionner in the sense of an intense artistic mediation. To the augmented artistic offer must answer the creation of a new request and the functioning of the commission in a much higher level. It is not necessary here to consider that Schardt treated with a traditional public, bourgeois and hence socially delimited, even if this public is inspired by the historical record of the collection. The commissioner who fought with ardour and with pedagogical mind for a highly unusual form of realism, at least at that time, continuing Schardt's argumentation method - in our days treated as conventional methods whereas it is modern instead - represents the modern. He asks for a public comprehension wich would not come from a mist of philosophicalspeculations but in the field concerning art, the visual reality, the rigour of vision and the faculty of control on the transposition into the image.

Naturally in his effort Schardt took as testimony of the exactitude of the paintings, the photo Feininger

used as annexed resources in the evolution of his work - he defined it as taking of views meant to demonstrate Feininger's interfering in nature's impressions.

Feininger himself spoke quite differently about these "drafts" in his letters to Julia: his biograph Hans Hess has even evaluated the influence of the photos on the evolution of the work and its subsequent artistic result quite negatively; however Schardt as commissioner clearly understood the photos' function in spite of their pretended neglection and used them in a polemical way in his argumentation. The sensible point of the interdependence painting-photo was the emprovement for the artist of the image's representation by the influence of reality: the unevenness of the medieval streets with their richly moulded façades, the abrupt lines and the sudden crossings opening and leaving the view on complexes of buildings that Schardt was as enthusiastic in his description as Feininger in his paintings. Two very important moments of those works, quite significant for Feininger's development appear from images and interpretations:

The painter, with all the freedom guaranteed by the Keeper of the museum, felt the commission, unlike a non-commissioned work, as a responsability towards the spectator in the sense of a density of characterization and a gain of expression in the urban reality that influenced him. Not only we have no sign of bridle to the creative intentions of the painter because of the situation of this commission nor public reaction, as said Hess, but it is completely the opposite. Going further then merely optic experiences, as dynamic spatial lines, or as buildings' concentration, or still the changing relation of light and colour, Feininger apprehends the essential points

of the town in such a way that, pertinently interpreted, they can be felt even by contemporary spectators whose daily vision has killed the sensation. In this series of paintings, the painter establishes his relation to concret objects in another way than that of an elaborated creation without contract, more inspired by the "genius loci" - by the physical proximity of life in town, but at the same time, intensively, precisely and formally inspired. What Hess criticizes, that is, the enlarged reference to nature, the reenforced realism is in fact an enrichment of the figurative possibilities of Feininger's, a step further than his usual genre. The requirement that the artist conscious of his responsibility towards the commission enticed him artistically. He may have aspired after an attentive photographic information in the choice of worthy motives, after a constant verification of the most effectual characterisation, he may have been worried trying to transcend the photo in painting - but that must not be considered as a defeat or a weakness. Let us only examine the views of Manhattan executed years later, and in particular "Manhattan II" - the artistic enrichment brought up by the work in Halle becomes evident, though it is true that their formal richness will never be attained again.

The second moment concerns the relationship of these works of art with their time. The emphasis filled with Schardt's didactics, his terminology and his adjectives, equally filled with the spirit of tardive expressionism: for example "the great unwinding of image", or "victorious symphony of light", "rough life", "binding of light" etc. and still "menacing, steep, ghost-like, hollowed, fantastic, victorious" - the same influences that passed from Feininger's

painting to the tardive expressionist cinematographical style, his emotivity, his poetry and his picturesque character - they become evident in this series. The commission came from the effort of providing an artistic creator, but representative of the "spirit of the time" of this junction of Bauhaus rationalism and a lyrical and expressive romanticism, it came from this spirit itself.

The withholders of fascist power confiscated 348 works of Feininger's. Schardt as Feininger were sent away from Germany, after depressing years, after vain tentatives of keeping a free space for art inspite of fascism.

In quite another period, the same museum commissioned a work to Willi Sitte. Pamphlets should have been created for the museum in order to express in a new way like that described in the poem of Brecht about the carpet makers of Kujan-Bulak, the significance of Lenin in our life today. In 1969, the year of the revolutionary's hundredth birthday the series of drawings "According to Lenin", exposed many times in the country, abroad and recently in the Kunstverein of Hamburg appeared. The commissioner also in this case was interested to the works, experiences and desires of the artist but he also formulated certain requirements. The compelling task even for an experienced painter as Sitte of rendering visible the influence of a great figure of history in daily life and specially in the traditional form of image, was in fact very difficult. He had then accomplished his complex social painting "Leuna 1969" famous since: the series of drawings is impregnated by the character of this central work and it extends itself. The central theme is "to learn", its sadness and its joy, and this theme is exposed by the agitated

characteristical vitality of Sitte, his dynamics filled with pleasure and his representation of the personages as well as the movements which disrupt the surface. This commission work is hardly different from the works he was realizing at the same time for himself, but he deepens and variates their basic tendencies. A commission five years later given over to the young artist of Halle here concerned will show rich extensions of this work. The museum of the castle of Querfurt asked Uwe Pfeifer in the end 1974, to draw a certain number of medieval castles. Pfeifer became known from hundreds of citizens of the DDR with his drawings filled with serious reflexion, during the 8th exhibition of art. He is the least famous of the three artists mentioned here; but his case shows the possibility the museum has of influentionating the development of the comprehension of the spectators faced on image as well as the creative faculty of the artist working with commissions.

The museum chose Pfeifer, because of the rawness of his drawing by which he represents life in a modern residential city, his dissecting vision on the influences and the relations of environment in housing worked by technology, the contrast is astonishing with anyone's expectations on the way of representing medieval castles.

The commissioner stressed this contrast in subject and in style, because he wanted to break with the usual historical conceptions which not only the visitors appreciate, but also the specialists of the castles: the attachment to a mode of representation in which castles and ruins become evasion for the contemporary man wearied by technology.

In the years 866 to 899, lists of the abbey of

Hersfeld (the original is today in the academic library of Marburg) were made in which are indexed the villages and the castles whose tithe went to the abbey of Hersfeld by decision of Charlemagne. The portraits of the castles included in this census of Hersfeld were to be drawn by Pfeifer, even what many centuries had modified or destroyed. Since the main interest was the function of the castle in its landscape, the impressing and romantic backgrounds, a rupture with this important weight of our cultural heritage and a new interpretation given our situation, had to take place.

Pfeifer received as he wrote, the request to this work almost as a blow. He would never have chosen it himself because he is so touched by the representation of his direct life conditions. The commissioner succeeded in convincing him when he defined the meaning and his wish that the work might become a subjective interpretation of the theme by means of the most personal graphism. The fruitful dialectic between the aim and the artistic freedom has produced a highly autonomous contribution, a polemical one in our relation to our heritage.

Pfeifer's models as we see them today do not have the same uniform aspect. The well preserved defence walls of Querfurt contrast with ruins like Schrapplau and certain tardive baroque buildings. Pfeifer unified this disparity with the basic mobile of his whole work: a contemporaneous communication, powerful medium by which reality, disrupted every now and then comes to us. Between the testimonies of the past and our sensual experience as well as the elaboration of our minds there are the technical intermediaries. No mountain bags, no walking sticks, no naïvely primitive impressions in the

historical messages. The reflections included relate in a picturesque way to the optic reflectors, they are reflections, but in a double meaning so Pfeifer reflects the form of the castles he perceives, but conditioned by time, as containing events impregnated by the "spirit of the time", and here it binds fundamental questions of the socialist relation towards tradition and more generally with ways of life influenced by technology; he does that but in a polemical, ironical or serious manner. Finally this perception can be that of a romantic who aspires in all these views of towns after a natural and agreeable environment to man but it can also be that of a contemporary Pfeifer, who cannot escape even the modern automobile taking him to the towns of romantic nostalgia and permitting to appreciate them visually.

Once again the appropriate artist has been chosen given the great competence of the commissioner and the public revealed it once again as well. Naturally we must know that in our country the public is really new - its number, its comprehension are enlarged, what the passionate discussion concerning the works of Uwe Pfeifer in the 8th DDR exhibition of art very clearly showed. Above all, the conscience of history, typical vedette word of the culture in DDR, indicates that such a work finds a lively reception and takes to a dialog in which the function of the museum in our society is clearly formulated. The common tendency of seeing in the reanimated buildings that the State takes care of, only the grey past, is questioned by Pfeifer, the interest given to his drawings as well as an idea rejected by this same consciousness; we must take possession of these treasures as active contemporary citizens, needing knowledge and usage - we must also integrate them in an

enriched life: we can also critically notice that our interdependence with the environment is much too easy, too passive, because our environment is unilaterally influentiated by the technique - but we must not, turned to the past, denounce and deny the technique as evil.

Hence the reflexions of an artist are articulate towards a social understanding, but not less than the reflexions on the representation of a museum as commissioner, worried by the many-sided use of the cultural heritage.

romantic who aspires in all these views of towns after a natural and agreeable environment to man but it can also be that of a contemporary painter, who cannot escape even the modern automobile taking him to the towns of romantic nostalgia and permitting to appreciate them visually.

Once again the appropriate artist has been chosen given the great competence of the commissioner and the public revealed it once again as well. Naturally we must know that in our country the public is really new - its number, its comprehension are enlarged, what the passionate discussion concerning the works of Uwe Feller in the 8th DGR exhibition of art very clearly showed. Above all, the conscience of history, typical vestige word of the culture in DGR, indicates that such a work finds a lively reception and takes to a dialog in which the function of the museum in our society is clearly formulated. The common tendency of seeing in the remanent buildings that the State takes care of, only the grey past, is questioned by Feller, the interest given to his drawings as well as an idea rejected by this same consciousness, we must take possession of these treasures as active contemporary citizens, needing knowledge and usage - we must also integrate them in an