

ART TODAY AND THE GRECIAN WORLD  
( THE ARTIST'S PROFESSION IN TODAY'S WORLD )

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It is only natural and fitting that the topic ART TODAY AND THE GRECIAN WORLD placed under discussion at this congress usually makes us look back on the arts in antique Ellas, on the fundamental role they have played in the history of the world's culture, and on their impact upon today's artistic creativity. And in doing so, we routinely concentrate upon old Grecian artefacts, on they ideas they expressed and the forms they assumed. And we also want to look into the vicissitudes the legacy and interpretation of those artistic ideas and forms have undergone. There is no denying that this kind of exercise is crucially important by itself, and it also helps us pass judgement on the volatile and intricate phenomenon brought about by today's trends the art critics have dubbed the crisis of the avant-garde and postModernism. On the one hand, the phenomenon manifests itself in the artist's desire to revert back to the traditional ways of artistic creativity, or in the back to basic art trend, in a manner of speaking. On the other hand, the phenomenon makes us pause to think whether or not one spurrious trend has emerged to take over from another spurrious trend. In other words, all their faith in the progress of artistic creativity lost, the avant-garde members have dropped their claim that they own the absolute and ultimate truth, only to start preaching a return back to the long-gone 'Golden Age of art.

And I think it might be exciting to examine some neoClassical

and neoByzantine trends that obtain now in today's Greek arts. I have authored a voluminous book on, being, it appears, the only non-Greek writer on the subject.

Now, however, I would like to look into ancient Greece and modern art from a somewhat different angle, and to draw your attention to a phenomenon that foreshadows art itself with all its trends, styles and the entire wealth of its works. What I have in mind here is the artist's personality and professional activity. What is it that the artist is called upon to do? How and why is the artist to perform? The questions seem to me to have become exceedingly pressing, and even disturbing, now.

We have debated issues pertaining to our profession time and again. We conduct systematic studies on the modern state of the arts, and in doing so, we willy-nilly have to face what I presume to be the most acrimonious problem of the day, that of art versus non-art. If our line of reasoning runs within the confines of art proper, never leaving them, it often tends to follow the vicious circle pattern; it is either that an item is exhibited at an art exposition because it is a work of art, or it is recognized as a work of art because it is exhibited at an art exposition. And here out of sound and disputable views of art's nature, limits and forms emerges the basic idea of the *raison d'être* underlying the artist's professional work which is solely responsible for the creation of objects of art.

We can argue that we came to recognize the problem last year, when the AICA and AIAP meetings were held jointly in Finland, but at that time we were not ready yet to discuss it. This is precisely why we would like to start talking about it

right now within the framework of the topic ART TODAY AND THE GRECIAN WORLD, the reason being that it was ancient Greece that saw the world's original clearly-shaped type of an artist come to stay with us with his socially specific features still present today. The type is one of a creative individual vested with his or her very own role to play in societal life and activities, rather than one of a faceless artisan, a pharaoh's clerk or a high priest attending to their professional duties through the medium of art. He is involved with the life of society in his capacity of an artist generating ideas and art forms that reflect the style of his time coupled with his own personal touch. Later on, the type of an artist and his status in society underwent drastic change. But the great masters of Classical antiquity have gone down in the history of culture for succeeding generations of artists to meet the challenge of matching their self-awareness one way or the other. In a word, the world of antiquity was witness to the artist's profession take shape as an independent and socially useful creative activity nothing can ever replace. And at the same time two basic guidelines of that creative work emerged to stay intact up until today.

What I refer to here is, firstly, an activity that produces artistic works proper designed to become phenomena of art and having a life of their own. Secondly, an activity which is involved with a vast range of objects and items that assume their aesthetic value in the hands of an artist, though originally they, by definition, are not created as works of art. It is only obvious that the two basic guidelines of artistic work un-

dergo change in the course of history, entering into new inter-relationships with each passing era. But nowadays we witness artists' activities extend beyond art's traditional boundaries, and powerful forces and interests invade those activities on such a grand scale that the very nature of the artist's work, let alone the change it undergoes, is affected. Occasionally things can go so wrong that the survival of independent spiritual endeavors as reflected in this kind of man's creativity, is put at stake.

It is evident that the fruits yielded by man's other fields of endeavor clearly force the ideas, emotions and forms art generates, out of man's everyday life and man's appreciation of art. For example, industrially manufactured items supply people with such an abundance of colors, plastic designs and textures and with such a diversity of compositional forms and shapes that they make pure art pale in comparison. And this is a phenomenon we cannot will away. It is only natural that a great amount of artistic talent, imaginativeness and creative energy should be drawn upon to design, simulate and decorate industrially manufactured items and related production. This line of the artist's work is vitally needed and highly advisable, of course. There is no doubt about it in my mind. But it is also self-evident that in this case the artist is part of, or gets involved in, a much larger effort it takes to manufacture an item of aesthetic value. It is not so easy to identify and assess that value, for the expressiveness and style of an industrially manufactured item in question is shaped both by artistic work that has gone into it, and by the production technology used, the supply and

demand relation prevailing at the time and the never-ending fashion changes valuable in their own right, among other reasons. These reasons combine to directly affect the artist's creative work, causing it to rise to production, commercial and other challenges and inducing the artist to think and act with a view to meeting the interests and rules that govern those extraartistic kinds of his endeavor. Thus, there appears a very real threat that the artist's personality might be deformed and that his profession might lose its *raison d'être* which is to add an aesthetic dimension to man's material environment, rendering it more beautiful. I think that in a situation like this it is crucially important to realize that the artist's profession striving to produce aesthetic values is indivisible and that the artist's personality is also indivisible, no matter whether his talent is used in the spiritual or applied domains. And here again this is exactly what the old Grecian artists were the first to realize. Let us recollect how proudly stand out the the names signed by pottery makers and painters on those amphoræ and craters that seem to convey the voice of their creators.

I think we can presume that the artist's profession used in the field of industrial production is a topic under discussion by our counterparts in designers' associations. However, the studies conducted on, or, better still, the encouragement given to, the artist's profession which has a value of its own, are an ethical must in our profession. Otherwise what we will be left with is an ersatz art created by non-artists.

This is but one side of the coin. But the coin has the other side, too, which is a part of another direction the artist's

work takes in producing objects of art proper or primarily spiritual values. And it is this direction that makes the artist's profession, its aesthetic expediency and, lastly, art as opposed to non-art, assume their specific and distinctive characteristics. If I start looking into all those problems concerning the emergence of new ideas and art forms, art's impact and a search for new applications in the artist's endeavors, I will end up describing the world's entire history of art as it has evolved during the 20th century. Therefore I will confine my comments to describing just one trend that directly affects the very essence of the artist's profession.

What I want to refer to here is a trend that has emerged out of the frustration generated by today's state of the arts, art forms and ideas and art's ability to influence man. The trend also stems from the feeling that progress in sciences and technology has now taken over the leading positions the art of the avant-garde occupied in producing brand new and impressive ideas earlier on. The view that under these circumstances art has lost its aesthetic expediency with its own artistic potential all dried up, renders it necessary for the artist to look for his or her profession of faith, fundamental expediency and convincing arguments outside the framework of aesthetics. The artist has to turn to man's other fields of endeavor, such as scholarly research, technical design and various public events. And the works that emerge as a result have no aesthetic impact of their own. Rather, their impact is physiological, entertaining, material and practical as produced by optical illusions, attractions, domestic articles or natural bodies. I do not deem it

advisable to describe those kinds and types of objects in any detail, for they can hardly be called works of art, but at the same time they cannot be placed in any other category, since they are designed to enjoy an ideal existence in art's ideal world and they cannot serve any other purpose. Numerous manifestations of this paradoxical phenomenon that could be called paraart are for everybody to watch everywhere.

Let us find out what kind of profession the artist practises in a situation like this. Most likely, it represents a third field of the artist's endeavor midway between the manufacture of aesthetic values and the artist's involvement with society's other activities. In a desire to become meaningful and expedient and to produce quality art, this activity of the artist seeks to imitate the way of thinking and work techniques prevalent in other professions. The traditional ways of practising art leaving the artist somewhat frustrated, he or she tries to work as a scientist, a typist, a craftsman manufacturing tangible and practical items, a light technician, a sound engineer and so on. Facing a situation like this, some artists rebel against this kind of heartless technicism, delving into the distant origins of their crafts in an effort to produce the likes of idols and fetishes. Some other artists, in turn, fall in love with this technicism and begin to compete with modern industrial production in creating the articles so skillfully finished that they can make artisans and electronics industries alike look envious.

However, no matter how sophisticated the artist's skill becomes in manufacturing objects of paraart, his or her profe-

ssion grows substantially misshapen and loses its organic meaning. It evolves into a different trade; the artist becomes some sort of a toy manufacturer, attractions builder, flower arranger, amulet and tatoo maker and the like. This kind of activities stay with us since time immemorial, but I would like to stress again that it was antique Greece that saw the artist's profession emerge out of other professions as an aesthetically expedient activity practised in its own right and called upon to embody a humanistic and artistic approach to reality.

This is ancient Greece's one major legacy that continues to affect today's art in a large measure. However, the legacy is only partly responsible for its own destiny. And those who inherit it have a prominent role to play in interpreting it correctly. That is why it is substantially important to take good care of the artist's profession that has a meaning of its own, a social mission to perform and an ethos to comply with. Otherwise we will be stuck with an ersatz profession as practised by an artist who deals in anything but art. If this is the case, we will have to work out an ersatz criticism to review this kind of ersatz art.

This is my view of a most urgent problem basic to the topic ART TODAY AND THE GRECIAN WORLD under discussion at this congress. In concluding my remarks, I would like to express the hope that we will have yet another chance to deal with the artist's profession in our future work.

Thank you.

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