

## **PAINTING IN SEARCH OF ITSELF- WAYNE ENSRUD**

Art resides in the soul and is a certain perfection of the soul.

### ***CLASSICAL AND BAROQUE***

In studying composition, there are two major groups: the Classical and the Baroque. These artists divide the history of art between them.

The Classical artists are concerned exclusively with static forms that emphasize the permanent aspects of the work, and pass over in silence everything that might suggest the feeling of mobility – they base themselves primarily on form and banish everything threatening to disturb it – that would plunge it back into the original chaos from which it was rescued by the work of the intellect.

The Baroque artists take the opposite course, striving to catch the intoxication of life, the continuous and inexorable movement that creates time and is created by time. Form, for those artists, is a barrier that man has erected to stop this flow. The Baroque artists are bent on taking advantage of this life force, reveling in its headlong pace and at the same time subjecting it to their discipline. Of this rushing life they demand intensity, which serve to enhance their own – but they also impose on it their own lucidity, so that they may guide and direct it at will. Occasionally relaxing, they let themselves be swept away on its intoxicating tide.

But, both groups – the Classical followers of plastic form with its compact and clear-cut units and the Baroque, passionate devotees of

vital movement, take orders from the superior strategy of composition which mobilizes all the resources of art to attain the final goal which is aimed at communicating an inner experience.

As the work of art takes shape and is perfected, it asserts itself as a plastic organization – but at the same time as a manifestation of life. As it evolves into an independent, autonomous reality, it becomes more intimately linked with the artist – as he creates it, he detaches it from himself, but in its new existence it remains a permanent testimony to its creator. A testimony for the artist's own use for it is not impossible that in order to understand himself better he needed to contemplate this projection of the forces stirring in the depths of his own soul.

Therein lies the essential MYSTERY OF THE WORK OF ART, which eludes all logic and analysis.

#### *DUALITY – CONTENT OR FORM*

The problem of the duality between plastic form and expression is solved the moment it is raised. CONTENT OR FORM? No, no, no, it is content AND form. It is the significance of which the work is the bearer that calls for, and demands FORM, so that it will become perceivable.

To ignore form at the expense of content (expression) is to set at odds two things that cannot even be viewed separately. Form achieves its true density only if the works inner drive is made manifest. Therefore, the

content (expression) of the work cannot be communicated and cannot be effective – cannot even truly come into being unless it is given FORM. Otherwise, we have imbalance, failure is a miscarriage. The exclusive emphasis on form is one of the aspects of an excessive concern with technical problems and strict definitions, which today stands in the way of a broad conception of culture.

### *EXPRESSION*

A work of art which is merely a realistic re–presentation of nature does not deserve the name, but a work which is nothing but an exercise in plastic form is an empty shell. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries maybe indicted before a court of history for two different and converse crimes – the former for having succumbed to the temptation of realism, the latter, to the temptation of plastic form. For both realism and plastic form can be justified in the work only through their connection with the Soul of a Creative Artist !!

It would be just as great an error to believe that the artist's soul is a sufficient justification for the work of art. The work of art is not merely an echo of the soul. To be sure it is always nourished by the spirit of an individual or a society, but the work of art will not fulfill its task – which is that of embodying this spirit – unless it gains independence from it.

In the last analysis, art is essentially a mode of expression. The term “mode of expression” implies the thing that is expressed as well as

the way of expressing it. There is a saying that the way of giving is more important than the gift.

### *ART IS A LANGUAGE*

Baudelaire wrote that, “The purpose of art is to create a magical suggestion which will contain both the object (form) and the subject (personal expression) – the world outside the artist and the artist himself.” The power of the work of art is produced by the painting itself – it lies buried in the viewer’s soul and the genius is the one who has the power to awaken it.

ACTUALLY, THERE IS NO CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO SINCE THE WORK OF ART AFFECTS THE INTEGRATION AND THE UNION OF THE CONTENT (EXPRESSION) WITH THE CONTAINER (FORM). THIS IS PERHAPS THE TRUE MIRACLE OF ARTISTIC CREATION.

Therefore, even though the work of art appears to our eyes as a form and as nothing but a form, we perceive it to be charged with a double meaning. The first meaning is the plastic form which produces an emotion born of the visual impression – the second meaning is that the work appears as a sign or symbol. This sign manifests a presence, a presence comprised of society as well as the individual, and in case of genius, the work projects eternal , universal elements.

The composition which affects the unity of the painting demonstrates all the complexity of the relationships constituting it. In the

painting, the inner life of the artist is joined with plastic form – the former is externalized through the mediation of the latter , and the latter borrows breath that animates it from the former. Nature supplies the raw material for both, which through aesthetic process becomes manifest (concrete) to the viewer.

In the last analysis, each and every aspect of art is spiritual in essence. Whatever problems the art historian attempts to solve he always encounters the spirit.

So, we must at last confront this problem of communication – the starting point for the artist and the terminal point for the viewer. For when all is said, this is perhaps the supreme justification for the magic which is painting – to give substance to a STATE OF MIND through the mediation of plastic forms.

### *THE LANGUAGE OF SPIRIT*

Language cannot come close to conveying the totality of our inner life – we all know how much of it is left unspoken. Words are labels we attach to ideas which were designed to promote understanding among men. Words suggest ‘things’ to each of us by means of conventional and common meanings. Words are used by man as signs which has the power of arousing in the listener a thought relating to some concept already familiar to both the speaker and the listener. Words have no other function unless we are capable of giving them new and purer meanings.

To perform their function, words have to eliminate from the ideas they signify all emotional components that are an integral part of our individual inner experience and preserve only the central core, which is very small but has the advantage of being firm and clear. Language, like the intellect, has been forced to confine itself to the realm of the objective in order to secure firm ground for its development. It was able to retain at best only such subjective elements as can be caught within the rigid net of rational thought.

#### *INADEQUACY OF WORDS*

Take such a simple word as 'tree.' For primitive man, the tree was a deity – for a vacationer it denotes relaxation and rest – for a painter, it is light playing on the foliage – for the musician, it is the singing breath of the wind – and, the businessman sees a potential source of salable timber. It became necessary to eliminate all of a thing's individual qualities and particularities in order to make it possible for people to communicate regarding whatever. The intellect, pruning, weeding out of the tangled mass of sensations and emotions discovered the basis of communication.

The shock of being deprived of being able to endow words with the power of expressing more than bare facts or abstract ideas, to instill words with the unique fragrance of the reality from which they were extracted, to make them communicate 'a quality of vision – a revelation of the particular universe each of us sees and no one else can.'

With this in view, language resorted to images, in order to SUGGEST things rather than to denote or define them – thus it escaped from itself to enter the domain of poetry, to become an ART. For ART is that medium thanks to which the inexpressible does not have to remain imprisoned in the secret places of each individual life. Poetry and art are based on IMAGES. Images possess the power of penetrating into the individual soul and extracting from it and communicating to others its great treasures.

### *ART AND THE INNER SECRET*

Each of us carries within the self an unknown world which is born and dies in silence. In order to experience this world and to dwell within it, a man must plunge himself into a state of concentration which isolates him from others and makes him unable to communicate with them.

Art and poetry are indispensable not only as a means of penetrating the secret places of the human spirit which Proust called “the real and incommunicable part of ourselves.”

There is a realm that transcends ideas which is the realm of the spiritual. It is in the realm of the spiritual that the peaks of our inner life are situated – those peaks from which we glimpse regions inaccessible to thought.

The realms of the unconscious and of the spirit, where the inner life of the individual and of society is nourished, are doomed to exist in silence because of the inadequacy of ordinary language, unless they are

liberated and made manifest through art and its images. Only art – or its sister, poetry – can rescue them from this silence, by translating them into signs. This is why art has always been the chosen language both of religious revelation and individual avowals, of all that lies beyond the sensory and rational knowledge that falls within the normal province of the word.

### *SELF-EXPRESSION*

Two languages are available to man. One externalizes what he experiences, explaining it with the help of images, what he feels more or less dimly. The first language requires objective clarity, striving to preserve the irreducible quality, the riches and the nuance of the initial emotion.

Both require, first of all, that we circumscribe a portion of our inner life, in order to concentrate our attention upon it and to understand it – and secondly, that we give it FORM. The form in which it will be communicated. The second stage involves a projection into the physical world, the domain common to all men. This amounts to a real transmutation – what was at first only felt is changed into an idea, then into words. This is the way the first language, that of the intellect, works. The language of emotions follows a parallel course. First, IMAGES, more or less distinct, are aroused in the mind – these are then given material form through a special re-presentation.



The two languages differ in scope. The idea-word, achieves maximum objectivity by neutralizing the sensory elements – however, something of their quality is retained thanks to the adjective and the capacity of words have of creating mental images by means of associations. The image, however, belongs to the realm of art – a direct, non-reflective projection of the inner life , unexpurgated, unfiltered, it is charged with an almost infinite content, powerful and imprecise.

The idea-word is enriched, recharged with the sensibility of which it was at first stripped – and as it is able to call up images , it rises to the level of poetry. Conversely, the image is impoverished when it becomes intellectualized. The idea-word , by resorting to suggestion, acquires a radiance that increases its scope – whereas the image, when it strips itself down in order to compete with the idea, loses some of its emotional force. AN IMAGE THAT AIMS ONLY AT RENDERING IDEAS LOSES THE SOURCE OF ITS POWER. The symbol, spontaneous and irrational has indefinable and unlimited significance. The allegory which merely embodies an idea is no better than a halting word, less precise than a written text, and incapable of speaking to the unconscious.

There is evidence that language at first consisted solely of images. Only gradually did it achieve the bareness required for abstraction.

When writing first appeared it consisted of simple figures scarcely differing from those of art, then moved away from these as it came closer to making use of abstract signs. This development led from the

pictograph, ideogram and hieroglyph to syllabic and finally to alphabetic script.

### *THE WESTERN ATTITUDE*

The Western development was determined purely by practical needs which had its effect on art in societies bent primarily on increasing their material power. For this reason the West concentrated on the development of the intellectual resources of art, which were regarded as more reliable, more controllable and more manipulable, at the expense of the spiritual. Western art has evolved under the constant threat of losing its emotional values, in its concern with registering tangible data, those most effectively controllable by the intellect. Out of this concern arose its great temptation – REALISM. Time and again the West has succumbed to it.

The prevailing dream of Western aesthetics is to be in a position to explain art, to give an objective estimation of a painting, either by comparing it literally with the model it represents or by showing that it is an application of a particular theory or, better still, of a mathematical proportion.

### *THE GREEKS*

The Greeks were the first in the West to try to arrive at a clear conception of art and strove to reduce it to sensory and intellectual data.

As a result Greek art tended to be shorn of its powers of suggestion, which were allied with the life of the senses. Greek art did not aim at the expression of ideas. It did not undertake to communicate states of mind, unless we call that condition of emotional indifference which is a mark of inner peace a state of mind. Such a condition seeks neither to express nor to suggest. It is only what its visual appearance shows it to be.

Why, then is Greek art one of the greatest, one of the most sublime, the art which some regard as the highest ideal? Because, both in imitating nature and in striving for measure and proportion, it aims only at quality – and quality is something that maybe experienced, but not proved. Thus, the full powers of what can be perceived only by the senses were restored to art. With the advent of Roman art the keen sense of quality gave way before the demands of the imitative principle, leading to naturalism, leading to academism.

### *THE EASTERN ATTITUDE*

The Eastern attitude has preserved a much greater instinct for sensory values than has the West. For Indian thought, the inner life is made up of essentially latent tendencies that reveal the importance of the subconscious. These unconscious memories and tendencies strive to emerge into the daylight to become conscious. They are a seething cauldron of possibilities seeking to project themselves. To be actualized

they must enter the physical universe where they must assume a form perceivable by the senses or by the intellect.

Art is the assuming of form, the donning of clothes in order to gain admission to the physical world – it is the process of creating an image that will embody obscure forces. By means of art these forces make their way into and take their place in the visible world.

Diffused vapors can be transformed into water and then into ice, thus acquiring tangible substance – the same substance can be made to re-assume its liquid or gaseous state. In a similar way, the artist's sensibility acquires physical substance when it is transmuted into IMAGES. Now, being perceivable by others, it waits for the viewer who will restore it, within himself, to its original condition as a STATE OF MIND.

While the West is primarily concerned with the specific form of the work and its quality, the East regards this as only a passing phase, a means by which one soul communicates to another its intensity, by revealing the unique and irreplaceable savor it has discovered in things.

The eleventh century artist, Kuo Hsi, said, “An artist should identify himself with the subject and observe it until its profound meaning is revealed to him.” His task, then, is to reveal this meaning to others.

The West has been familiar with both attitudes toward art, and has, fluctuated between the two. At times, clinging to the Classical tradition – creating forms that reflect the union of reality with intellect – at other times, its primary purpose has been to communicate the artist's inner

experience to the viewer. Delacroix wrote “*painting is but a bridge connecting the painter’s mind with the viewers... the chief source of interest lies in the soul, and is irresistibly communicated to the viewer’s soul.*”

### EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT

“*I don’t understand what this painting means!*” is an objection frequently encountered. The fact is that painting does have a meaning, but that meaning can only be felt, not understood by the intellect, and it cannot be explained! The language of IMAGES does not elucidate, does not supply us with an inventory of familiar elements – nor does it give us theoretical formulas that would enable us to reconstruct in our own minds the ideas presented to us. It AIMS at preserving a particular fragrance, savor, presence. It tosses this sumptuous gift at our feet – it is up to us to bend down and take it, and to breathe our life into it.

Painting does not explain – IT IS – and shows what it is – it is up to us to experience it, through its capacity for being communicated.

Incorrigible Westerners that we are, we believe only in meanings that can be expressed by clear and distinct ideas. But, there are meanings that are communicated in the way a motionless string can be set to vibrating in unison with another vibrating string. There are, in short, IMPLICIT as well as EXPLICIT meanings. The IMPLICIT meaning is the true province of art. TO LOOK FOR EXPLICIT MEANING IN ART IS A

FUNDAMENTAL ERROR, BASED ON A TOTAL MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE MEDIUM.

“*To know how to draw,*” for Ingres, is to master and to be able perfectly to re-produce a set of recognized forms. For Delacroix, it is to invest the line with an electrical quality that ‘induces’ a similar current in the viewer. This is, by definition, to abandon the conventional forms, which Classical art strove merely to reproduce perfectly. Suggestion is effective, for the Expressive artist only by virtue of its force and its divergence from established conventions.

There is NO meeting ground between these two systems of aesthetics. EXPLICIT language can only be based on the known, on bringing what is known to perfection, and IMPLICIT language only on the revelation of the unknown, of that which has not yet been experienced.

### *LINEAR AND PAINTERLY*

There is no such thing as objective vision. Form and color are always apprehended differently according to temperament. Every painter paints ‘with his blood.’

They are two conceptions of the world, differently oriented in taste and in their interest in the world, and yet each capable of giving a perfect picture of visible things.

The Linear style sees in lines – the Painterly in masses. Linear means that the sense and beauty of things is first sought in the outline –

that the eye is led along the boundaries and induced to feel along the edges. Seeing in masses takes place where the attention withdraws from the edges and the primary element of the impression is things seen as 'patches.' It is indifferent whether such patches are seen as color or as light and dark areas.

As soon as the attentive eye 'leaves' the line as boundary takes place, then the Painterly possibilities set in. Then it is as if at all points everything was enlivened by a mysterious movement. Now, the forms begin to play – light and shadows become an independent element, they seek and hold each other from height to height, from depth to depth – the whole takes on the semblance of a movement ceaselessly emanating, neverending. Whether the movement is leaping and vehement, or only a gentle quiver and flicker, it remains for the spectator inexhaustible.

We can further define the difference between the styles by saying that linear vision clearly defines each separate form, while the painterly eye aims at movement which passes over the sum of forms. Linear style re-presents things as they are (explicit) – the Painterly style presents them as they seem to be (implicit) – as suggestion.

Linear style is the style of distinctions of forms giving the spectator a feeling of security. The Painterly style has more or less become free from forms 'as they are'. There is no longer a continuous line and the outline edges are dissolved. Everything appears to be in movement and transition.

### *RATIONAL AND SENSORY TYPES*

Child psychology confirms the existence of two distinct human types – the RATIONAL and the SENSORY which re-presents two different worlds. The distinction between the Classical and the Baroque artist suggests each of the two worlds has its own particularities. One is dominated by the mechanism of separation , and the other, by the joining or connection. The first world tends to immobility and compensates through precision for what it loses in dynamism. The other, oriented toward movement , often errs through impreciseness of form.

We might be justified in speaking of an intellectual type, or a sensory type, each oriented toward a different one of the two great possibilities open to man. We discover elements of both in man's basic attitudes toward the universe and toward himself. The world appears to him as an object of knowledge, and even as a reason for acquiring knowledge, for knowledge is indispensable to man if he is to find his way about in this world. Now, two modes of apprehension are possible, depending on whether the sensory or the intellectual faculties are put to use. The first, the sensory mode, seeks being – the second, the intellectual mode, seeks knowledge.

To explain – sensory knowledge, which is primarily INTUITIVE, tends toward an identity with the object so close we could call it FUSION – a surge of identification and love makes it possible to experience this



object, as though we ourselves had become it, as though we had been integrated into its existence. The highest degree of such knowledge is found in the MYSTICAL STATES OF ECSTASY.

For The artist, sensory apprehension of the world means cleaving to life – following its rhythms in order to absorb them – surrendering to and even letting oneself be invaded by the surrounding forces and opening one's whole sensibility to them. Sensory apprehension tends to use art for the purpose of achieving communion with the world or the part of the world which interests it, and to let itself be carried by the current of REALITY.

By contrast, INTELLECTUAL apprehension tends to separate itself from its object, even to move as far away from it as possible in order to keep it under its lucid scrutiny, and thus to be able to determine its limits and its form. For what this type of apprehension seeks is to define and to characterize the object, – to grasp it in its permanence and universality – APART FROM LIFE, one might say, and shed those variations which go against the typical and the immutable. In this view, life is only a source of disturbance and accident , a factor causing variability and uncertainty which must be eliminated as completely as possible, in order to attain to the stable structure which constitutes the essence and a truth of reality.

It is clear that an art of the sensory type will be based primarily on MUSIC, which renders the variable modulations of living time – and an art of the intellectual type is based primarily on architecture, which works

with materials as nearly permanent as possible, and reduces everything to a question of forms and their relationships.

Such is man's dual position in the face of the universe. The sensory type is intoxicated with life, with its rhythms and intensity – it lets itself be carried away by it as a run-away horse, losing itself in the sensation of speed, of passionate participation. Everything is in flux and is at once a cry of despair and a spasm of ecstatic enjoyment.

Everything in the art of the intellectual type is well-defined – definitive. It strives always for a stable perfection of balance and order in an ideal state not subject to change. It takes shelter in a world of frozen images which conceal its precariousness. Nothing flows in this art, neither time nor space. It dreams of escaping from time. This art suggests the security of a structure sealed off from outside disturbances where every image becomes a closed world, perfect, complete, self-sufficient which no longer fears anything.

### *CLASSICAL/BAROQUE*

The two contrasting techniques strikingly illustrate the two fundamental attitudes of the human mind. The Classical artist recognizes only one material element, the most solid, the most durable – STONE. This art seems always to tend toward sculpture or architecture. The Baroque artist, on the other hand, surrenders himself to the air, to the winds, to water and its rapid or violent flow, to fire and its leaping,

devouring flames. The favorite material is cloth, whose softness is stirred by the least breath of air.

### *QUALITY*

Proudhon said, "*Art is freedom itself.*" Art is more than a superficial pastime, diversion or pleasure. Art goes always to the deepest roots of our existence. Its disappearance would destroy man's innermost psychological and moral balance. Art, together with morality, is the last stronghold of exclusively human values. Art is for this reason one of our most precious possessions.

The requirement of quality is so essential to art that it justifies the two directions by which quality is achieved. This duality is the greatest obstacle encountered by those theories that attempt to reduce art to a single principle.

Thus again, we see the problem of FORM and CONTENT. The opposition between an art that emphasizes emotional force and an art that emphasizes aesthetic form – one that is achieved by a violence that disturbs quietude and the other that demands the security of formal perfection.

This is why quality evades all devices designed to ensure it. For quality cannot be conquered, it has to be deserved. It has never been obtained by known and tested methods – it must be re-created afresh each time, by an effort of which the result cannot be predicted in advance.

Imitation, even the most excellent models, is always and has always been a sure guarantee of failure, precisely because its results are PREDICTABLE. Delacroix said, ***"I reject expressiveness without beauty as well as beauty without expressiveness."***

We may ask the cause of this strange duality of beauty, although each of the two conceptions is based on an acceptance of qualitative values. How is it possible for beauty to be pursued by two such different, irreconcilable, contradictory methods, one aiming at EMOTION, and the other at formal harmony?

Only psychology provides an answer to this aesthetic problem. Human nature itself implies such a duality which reflects two kinds of minds, two essentially different temperaments. We have attempted to clarify for our understanding the dual aspects of the human mind which we have referred to as Classical and Baroque - Rational and Sensory, Explicit and Implicit, Linear and Painterly.

### *THE FUNCTION OF ART*

Art has as many faces as has human nature itself - each type of temperament contributes its resources and particular pre-dispositions. We may ask, however, whether all of them, though by different means, do not pursue the same end. If it were possible to uncover this common end behind the variety of expression that is dictated by the diversity of human

temperaments, if it were possible to define it in its unity, we would have fathomed the ultimate purpose of this human activity – ART.

### *OUTLET FOR THE SPIRIT*

Never have human eyes been so hungry as they are today – never have they searched so desperately – for art has been removed from them! The lamentable misunderstanding that was realism has led art into a kind of suicide. Reacting against realism, and attempting to restore art to health, the modern school has LOST CONTACT with the public and shut itself off within the closed circle of its own eccentricities.

Art has lost the sense of its function and become an infinitely rarified form of play for specialists who scorn human society and take refuge in solitary concern for themselves and their own intellectual virtuosity. A society whose highest and most indispensable activities have become atrophied or distorted is bound to DECLINE.

Poussin said, “*Art ultimately aims at providing enjoyment and delight.*” Not a bad idea!

**Bibliography:** *Dialogue with the Visible*, Rene Huyghe