

FORM IN ART AND NATURE²⁷

Form is undeniably an essential expression of the plastic arts. The more perfect a painting or sculpture, the more perfect is the expression of form. Form confers nobility, beauty and mystery to a painting or sculpture.

The expression of form reached its apex in the most evolved and inspired epochs of art, in the course of which the genius and talent of painters and sculptors attained their full development. Ideal form was achieved during these golden centuries of human genius, meaning that the *idea*, in itself an abstract phenomenon, was rendered fully manifest in a plastic and concrete form. I am referring to the golden centuries of the Renaissance and those that followed and in no way to the primitives who were unable to fulfil their ideas and conceptions in a complete way.

In great works of art form is evident and unreal at the same time. One could almost say that form does not belong to this world due to the extent with which it blends with the surrounding atmosphere. This fusion takes the hardness away from the shape things have in reality.

The words “harsh reality” undoubtedly have their origin in the hardness of the shapes that surround us.

To be able to express form as separate from the atmosphere it is fused with (a fusion that gives it mysteriousness and unreality), has required a progressive and constant effort of intelligence by artists who have had to acquire the necessary mastery to carry out such a task.

Form is the expression of universal evolution not only in art but also in nature.

From infancy onwards man is instinctively drawn to create form. Even the smallest child when holding in their hands a formless plastic material such as sand, earth or snow, tries instinctively to mould it into something expressing a form. This is as it should be, for the Universe has forever transformed matter, shapeless in itself (the first phase of creation), into matter expressed through form, which would be creation in its most advanced phase. The more perfect and complicated its form, the nearer creation approaches its highest expression: sublime harmony.

Great art, through which Universal Talent manifests itself to mankind, is Creation’s highest expression for it is both spiritual and material.

Art is composed of concrete and abstract elements and is equally bound to the physical and metaphysical worlds, which means that it is the most complete creation known to us.

Art is a bridge uniting our world to a world beyond. Our thoughts, well equipped for a voyage into that dangerous world can embark in full security and venture far as the way of return is assured by the stability of the bridge. In fact, cases of madness are extremely rare among artists whereas philosophers and other explorers of the unknown are menaced by insanity, which stands always near ready to seize them.

Form created by nature is the result of a transformation produced by universal movement. This form shows the mystery of creation more clearly than formless material can. Formless material may be the source but form is the objective. In art, which is the product of genius, form shows the mystery of creation in a more evident way than nature does.

In painting form is purely ideal, that is to say, immaterial. Sculpture on the contrary shows us concrete form made of a material existing in volume. In sculpture, it is only within talented execution and conception of its form that great mystery can be found.

²⁷ G. de Chirico, *La forma nell'arte e nella natura*, in “L’Illustrazione Italiana”, illustrated with *Odalisca coricata sopra una terrazza*, Milan 21 March 1943, p. 274; republished signed “Isabella Far” in *Commedia...*, cit., pp. 180-184. Published in English here for the first time.

In painting form is far more difficult to produce. In sculpture one works either with a plastic material such as clay or wax, or with a material of concrete volume such as marble. In painting form is achieved, not through material existing in volume (although in itself formless), but by a metaphysical material with the help of a physical material that is almost inexistent in volume (the actual volume of this material has no direct relation with the volume of the form represented).

In painting, volume is created by a metaphysical material, which creates physical material in its fullest sense. This material, which is not malleable and has no volume to speak of, is however, capable of expressing all volumes and forms.

The origin of painting is to be found in human thought. Human thought is not expressed, as many mistakenly suppose, by means of words (proof of this is the classic question put to someone who speaks more than one language: "in what language do you think?", which is a senseless question for one does not think in language at all). Thoughts are a succession of images, representations passing through the brain with extraordinary rapidity. Images or visions in which form is the dominant element are precise when they deal with a perfectly definite, individualised object. They are however vague when the object is a concept, that is to say an object without specific characteristics. The following example can help to make this clear: a person has a house; when thinking of this house he sees it in his spirit in detail and the image is precise. But if a man is searching for a house and thinks of a house still unbeknown to him, his brain reflects images of the concept he has of houses in general. This image is not precise but expresses the form of a house without distinguishing its characteristics.

Thoughts and visions undeniably have their colours, although their principal strength is the "expression of form".

Man was prompted to draw and paint by means of such image-thoughts expressing abstract form, which come into being without the help of a material, concrete volume.

The thesis of thought as image or vision finds confirmation in the fact that ancient Egyptian writing is based on the descriptive drawings of things. I will add that these drawings presented the form and not the colour of the things represented.

Man tried to express thought without the help of an intermediary element, which in this case would have been words. He turned to images, which is the expression of form achieved by thought, without the help of concrete, malleable material.

I must also say that form, being the basis of thought, is at the same time the foundation from which all our intelligence has arisen.

Form reflected by our brain has given us the possibility to think. Immaterial shape has allowed our thoughts to multiply, to remove themselves evermore from reality, thus allowing us to enter into the abstract. Philosophy, music and science were all born from form. All these creations of our spirit originated primarily from form produced by nature and, later and above all, from immaterial or ideal form.

This immaterial or ideal shape was born from direct form, or to put it in other words, from form existing in nature.

In the same way that sunlight is caught and reflected by the moon, direct form was grasped by the human brain, which then sent it forth into the world. This is the cause of the gradual development of human intelligence.

When the importance of form is grasped, when the significance of form as a progressive, necessary and

inevitable result of evolution is understood, one comes to the conclusion that a negative phenomenon is in act. An art that does not express perfect form (as Greek art has done) or does not express form in its most perfect manner (as in later periods of great artistic production), a plastic art in which shape has disappeared as it has now, is proof that not only genius but even common sense is in a state of decadence.

In contemporary art form is inexistent in both painting and sculpture.

In modern sculpture hardness and rigidity have replaced artistic volume. Concrete form rendered mysteriously ineffable by the talent of an artist is a form that seems unreal even when representing something existing in reality. This magical form has disappeared into the past and no longer exists in our epoch. Today's sculpture is much harder than any object in reality and seems to collide with the eye.

In today's painting, form, or rather, the blotches that are supposed to represent it, give the impression of a monstrous phenomenon both tedious and antiplastic. Form in modern paintings is concave instead of being convex. A form that is essentially concave is the negation of form, or rather, its destruction. In this case form is substituted by a void.

The inexistence of form in modern paintings is a result of inexistent volume; things are visible to us especially by their volume and only in a second instance by their colour.

The explanations given regarding this lack of form in modern painting change nothing. I will put an end to all this nonsense by affirming that form in painting is form that an artist feels by intuition and realises thanks to his talent. It is through a painter's genius that form is transformed and passed on to us, an event which occurs without the intervention of the artist's human power to reason, which remains outside of his genius and does not contribute to creation of that form.

This much is true. A true work of art must not steer the spectator or the creator toward reason, or toward critique, or even to amazement or divagation, but must produce only satisfaction, that is to say, a state in which reason no longer exists.

The avalanche of words, explanations, suppositions, irritation, senseless discussions, etc., that modern art generates, demonstrates that this art provides no satisfaction. The satisfied mind is silent; but nowadays art lovers, creators and supporters of modern art go on talking and talking endlessly...