

ÉLUARD-PICASSO MANUSCRIPTS (1911-1915)¹

Giorgio de Chirico

What impressionism should be...

What impressionism should be: A building, a garden, a statue, a person, each makes an *impression* upon us. The problem is to reproduce this impression in the most faithful possible fashion.

Several painters have been called impressionists who in reality were not. In my opinion there is no point in using technical means (divisionism, pointillism, etc.) to try to give the illusion of what we call *truth*.

For example, to paint a sunlit landscape trying in every way to give the sensation of light. Why?

I too see the light; however well it may be reproduced, I also see it in nature, and a painting that has this for its purpose will never be able to give me the sensation of something new, of something that, previously, *I have not known*. While if a man faithfully reproduces the strange sensations that he feels, this can always give *new joys* to any sensitive and intelligent person.

Impressionism and sensationalism...

Impressionism and sensationalism: Those French impressionist painters whom I would rather call sensationalists follow an excellent path. I believe they are far ahead of the poets and writers who are their contemporaries. In any case there is much more novelty in what they do than in the whole of modern literature. I am talking of their work in so far as I compare it with the impression that modern painting as a whole makes on me. However, I must add that though the road they follow is a good one, it is absolutely opposed to the one I follow, for I believe that one must never forget that a picture must always be the reflection of a profound sensation, and that profound means strange, and strange means uncommon or altogether unknown. Now, what is the impressionist method of

¹ For the history and structure of the Parisian Manuscripts see the original French transcriptions *ivi.*, (note 1). The majority of de Chirico's early texts was published in J. Thrall Soby's monograph *Giorgio de Chirico*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1955. The original English translation by Robert Goldwater and Louise Bourgeois is reproduced here courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York (© 1955). The present, full translation of the manuscripts includes three texts that were not published in 1955: *On Optimism; Thus, religion and philosophy are like two great symbols...* and *Also Bad taste because this falsified idea of the beyond and eternal life...* (translated by K. Robinson), as well as various brief passages that were omitted in the 1955 translation. In addition, a number of small changes have been made to the original translation for greater compliance with the original French text in order to reflect the artist's thought with greater accuracy. The present translation of the manuscripts does not include the artist's poems and texts in prose which were published in English translation by W. Bohn in "Metaphysical Art" n. 14/16, 2016, pp. 195-205.

procedure: they see something: a landscape, a figure, a still life; then using a certain technique to imitate what they see, they try to give to whoever looks at their painting a sensation which what they have reproduced could not give if it were seen in nature. Thus Mr. Cézanne, in painting a still life, a napkin with big squares, and some tomatoes or fruits, succeeds in giving us *a sensation* which could not be given by all the still lifes of the museums in which the fruits and vegetables are much truer, in the meaning generally given to truth, of course. It is a fact that this kind of painting is better than what is done generally; nevertheless, there are unfortunately limits to this, and besides, if one is sincere one must admit that in such a conception of art chance often, not to say always, plays a large role in what the painter does.

In my way of thinking and working, the problem is different. Revelation always plays the principal role. A picture reveals itself to us without us having seen anything and even without us having thought of anything, and it is also possible that the sight of *something* reveals a painting but in this case the picture will not be a faithful copy of that which has caused its revelation, but will resemble it vaguely, as the face of someone seen in a dream resembles that person *in reality*. And in all this, technique plays no role; the whole sensation will be given by the linear composition of the picture, which in this case always gives the impression of being something *unchangeable*, where *chance* has never entered. G.C.

On Optimism

[Seeing] everywhere in the Greeks a spirit of optimism toward life is a mistake that philosophers and scholars have always made that invariably derives from that small dose of psychology that must be added in order for them to really *understand* something for once. The idea that a man or a people make of life can always be judged by the idea they form of the hereafter.

The most foolishly pessimistic man will create paradise, eternal happiness, eternal beatitude (read as: *platitude*); thus thought the Greeks, thus think the Christians. On the contrary, the more intelligently pessimistic man when considering the hereafter will think of nothingness, as did Buddha, as did Schopenhauer. Nonetheless, the fact remains that both Buddha and the Christians were pessimists. What, at this point, would be the position of a profound man with regard to these questions? It will naturally be something that goes beyond all positions; it will begin, rather, by not being a position. Abstract, becoming solitaire and eternal in the certainty and joy he feels in seeing the universe in a *different* way, constantly searching for new joys and new strangeness, the idea of life being good or not will be the last of his concerns, because when life gains depth it ceases to be good or bad. For this reason, the words *good* and *bad* can only be applied to life when it is taken from a purely human point of view and commonly understood as such. However, as soon as one goes outside this circle, life becomes eternal and eternity is neither good or bad, just as emptiness has neither color nor odor.

It is only after becoming used to thinking in such a way that a man has the right to say: I am profound. And only then, if he can create, will his creation have grand and eternal value, added to the eternity of all other values. Only then will he be able to become a poet; he will finally know what echoes his songs awaken. Sadly, all that men have done and continue to do is nothing but a fistful of mud that a ray of sun dries and a breath of wind disperses.

A revelation can be born of a sudden...

A revelation can be born of a sudden, when one least expects it, and also can be stimulated by the sight of something, a building, a street, a garden, a square, etc.

In the first instance it belongs to a class of strange sensations which I have observed in only one man: Nietzsche.

When Nietzsche talks of how Zarathustra was conceived, and says: "I was *surprised* by Zarathustra," in the participle surprised, is contained the whole enigma of sudden revelation. When a revelation results instead out of the sight of an arrangement of objects, then the work which appears in our thoughts is closely linked with the circumstance that has provoked its birth. One resembles the other, but in a very strange way, like the resemblance there is between two brothers, or rather between the image of someone we know seen in a dream, and that person in reality; it is, and at the same time it is not, that same person; it is as if there had been a slight and mysterious transfiguration of the features. I *believe* and have faith that, from certain points of view, the sight of someone in a dream is proof of their metaphysical reality, revelation is to the same degree proof of the metaphysical reality of certain accidental occurrences that sometimes happen to us; in the manner and the arrangement that things appear to us and awaken in us unknown sensations of joy and surprise: the sensations of revelation.

Paris

Thus, religion and philosophy are like two great symbols...

Thus, religion and philosophy are like two great symbols of what we call the universe in general; we believe in religion, we believe in philosophy but we believe only in the human layer of these two eternal enemies. Because we would not be able to *believe* in their intimate existence, faith is impossible with eternity. As such, we believe in a tree, in a mountain because we see it, we believe in a man for the same reason; the entire surface of the earth is like this in the eyes of humans; it is that dogma and faith are for the believers, reason and research for philosophers, but behind this surface we believe and we no longer believe at the same time, there is only the quintessence of thought that can go into this world, who knows why? Maybe even for this there is no *reason*.

On earth. There are many more enigmas in the shadow of a man walking in the sun than in all past, present and future religions.

Nietzsche very properly remarks...

Nietzsche very properly remarks: “With the greatest respect one says of a man ‘He is a character!’ Yes, if he exhibits a coarse logic, a logic obvious to the eyes of the least discerning! But as soon as it is a question of a more subtle and profound spirit, which is coherent in its own way, a superior way, the observer denies the existence of a character.”

The same observation can be made on art, and also on painting. A profound picture will be entirely without the gesticulations, the idealism which attracts the attention of the crowd and makes the name of an artist well-known. All momentary posture, all forced movement will be put aside. Calm, tranquility, even serenity, but in this serenity, as in an eternal lamentation, all paths known until now; all grandeur, all sublimity men have known, their hopes and fears, their joys and their suffering, friendship and love, all will blend their music; but the real value of such a work of art will lie in its new song, for more important than all these will always be the new thing that the artist has brought out of the void, something which, previously, *did not exist*.

A Summer Evening

A Summer Evening: Yesterday, I saw a picture by Van Gogh. A landscape: trusses of hay, a mountain in the distance, a warm and sultry summer evening; behind the mountain appears the moon – red and gigantic. Summer evenings, when it is hot, have a poetry of their own – a heart-rending lamentation. In this picture one feels this poetry; one feels it also in the music of M. Rabaud’s *Daughter of Roland*, above all in the melody, “*Mariez Joyeuse avec des Duvandel*”. It is something beautiful, terrible and profound. I have perceived it also in some of Titian’s pictures.

Also Bad taste because this falsified idea of the beyond and eternal life...

[...] Also bad taste because this falsified idea of the beyond and of eternal life destroys everything that life and death have that is beautiful. What is more noble, more sublime than to feel the true beauty of death that comes as a recompense to the thinker tired and weary from the long roads walked during the $\phi\epsilon\nu\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ of his existence, who desires to forget once and for all everything he has learned. There are few men who have felt the grandeur of death, I do not say its depth as it has none. Allow me to quote this poem by the Italian poet Pandolfo.

It will complete what I have just said with melancholic grandeur:

Hymn to the death of Pandolfo Collenuccio
 As a pilgrim in his vague wandering tired
 Of his long and fatiguing journeys
 rough rugged and wild places,
 Already bent through age and white-haired
 To his sweet native shelter
 Sighing hastens, remembering
 His father's bones and his first age
 Tender pity for himself
 He feels, and his troubled limbs
 He desires to rest in the place where he was born
 And he liked good living:
 Thus I, that go towards worse years line
 Enwrapped in dream, in smoke, in vanity
 To you I address my prayers,
Singular refuge that brings peace
To the human journey, o Sacred death

And religion with its stupid nightmares of the beyond has distorted all the noble beauty that one can conceive [...].

To be really immortal a work of art must...

To be really immortal a work of art must go completely beyond the limits of the human: good sense and logic will be missing from it. In this way it will come close to the dream state, and also to the mentality of children.

I remember that often having read Nietzsche's immortal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I derived from various passages of this book an impression I had already had as a child when I read an Italian children's book called *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Strange similarity which reveals the profundity of the work. Here there is no naivety; there is none of the naive grace of the primitive artist; the work possesses a strangeness similar to the strangeness that the sensation of a child sometimes has, but at the same time that he who created it did so consciously. In the same way I believe that in order to be truly profound a picture must attain this ground. Böcklin and Poussin reached the utmost limits of painting; one final effort and painting too will have its picture that will carry *us beyond all pictures*.

In the middle ages the study of nature led astray those artists who created *Gothic* art. One can observe the same phenomenon among modern artists: poets, painters and musicians. The truly profound work will be drawn up by the artist from the innermost depths of his being. There is no murmur of brooks, no song of birds, no rustle of leaves. The Gothic and Romantic disappear, and in their stead appear measurements, lines, forms of eternity and infinity. It is this revelatory feeling that guided the architects of Greece; this is the feeling produced by Roman architecture. This is why I believe that Greek and Roman buildings, and all those which later were fashioned upon the same principles, even though somewhat transformed are what is most profound in *art*.

On Music

On Music: Music cannot express the *nec plus ultra* of sensation. One never knows what music is about, and after all, having heard any piece of music, whether by Beethoven, Wagner, Rossini, or Monsieur Saint-Satins, every listener has the right to say, and can say, *what does this mean?* In a profound painting, on the contrary, this is impossible; one must fall silent when one has penetrated it in all its profundity, when one turns the corner of all its walls, and not of its walls alone. Then, light and shade, lines and angles begin to talk, and music too begins to be heard, that hidden music that one does not hear. What I listen to is worthless: there is only what I see with my eyes open and even better closed.

There is no mystery in music; that is precisely why it is the art people enjoy most, for they always discover in it more *sensations*. I felt this last night; yes, I felt it in a profound and silent fashion, in an intense fashion. Should I perhaps call such an experience a truth? But such truths do not talk, they have no voice; still less do they sing; but sometimes they look at one, and at their glance one is forced to bow one's head and say, *yes, that is true*. What results, a picture for example, always has a music of its own; that is inevitable, that is the mysterious destiny of all things to have a thousand souls, a thousand aspects. I felt this yesterday at evening: painting, profound painting: In my picture, the end of the meal or the music of shattered light, this sensation beyond music is written in letters of fire. Music remains confined, something one takes before the meal or after, but which is not a meal in itself. Here is an enigma which I do not advise imaginative minds to dwell upon too long, for in spite of its afternoon warmth, it is icy. But what joy, great God, what joy you give me when I understand. Is this life, or its opposite, or is it neither one nor the other? Yet it makes me happy, I would not desire it to *be* otherwise, although who knows, perhaps it *is* otherwise, and perhaps also...

G. C.

When after having left the Munich Academy...

When after having left the Munich Academy, I realized that the road I was following was not the one I should follow. I had entered upon tortuous paths; some modern artists, especially Max Klinger and Böcklin, captivated me. I thought of those profoundly *felt* compositions, having a particular mood [*Stimmung*] which one recognized among a thousand others. But once again I understood that this was not what I sought. I read; a passage from Homer enthralled me – Ulysses on the island of Calypso – some views, and the picture rose before me, and then I felt I had finally found something. Or while reading Ariosto: Roger, the typical knight-errant rests beneath a tree, he sleeps, his horse crops the grass nearby, all is silent and solitary, one would expect to see a dragon fly by. The scene enchants me, suddenly I conjure up the knight, the horse, the landscape; it is nearly a revelation, but I am still not satisfied. Could not Mantegna, Durer, Böcklin, [Hans] Thoma or Max Klinger have painted such a picture? Something new is needed.

Then during a trip I made to Rome in October, after having read the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, I became aware that there is a host of strange, unknown, solitary things which can be translated into painting. I meditated a long time. Then I began to have my first revelations. I drew less, I even somewhat forgot how to draw, but every time I did it was under the drive of necessity. Then I understood certain vague sensations which I had previously been unable to explain. The language that the things of this world sometimes speak; the seasons of the year and the hours of the day. The epochs of history too: prehistory, and the revolutions in thought throughout the ages, the classical eras, the Middle Ages, modern times, all appeared strange and distant to me. There were no more *subjects* in my imagination, my compositions had no *sense*, above all no *common sense*. They were calm: but each time I looked at them I experienced exactly what I had experienced at the moment of their conception, which is the most irrefutable proof of their profound worth.

Above all a great sensitivity is needed. One must picture everything in the world as an enigma, not only the great questions one has always asked oneself, why was the world created, why we are born, live and die, for after all, as I have said, perhaps there is no reason in all of this. But rather to understand the enigma of things generally considered insignificant. To perceive the mystery of certain phenomena of feeling, of the character of a people, even to arrive at the point where one can picture the creative geniuses of the past as things, very strange things that we examine from all sides. To live in the world as if in an immense museum of strangeness, full of curious multicolored toys which change their appearance, which, like little children we sometimes break to see how they are made on the inside, and, disappointed, realize they are empty. The invisible tie that joins a people to its creations. Why for instance are the houses in France built in a certain style and not in another. There is no use citing history and the causes of this and of that; these are descriptions that explain nothing for the eternal reason that there is nothing to explain, and yet the enigma always remains.

The dormer windows on the roofs of the houses in Paris always produce a strange impression in me; I believe there is an unknown force which has driven the architects to make these *dormers*,

to *feel* them. I see a link between the dormer window and the red trousers of the French soldier, and the characters of the revolution, and a thousand other things which I cannot explain, and this is true for all peoples, all periods, all countries. I have talked of all these strange things to suggest the degree of intelligence and sensibility at which an artist must arrive in order to conceive what I mean by a picture.

What is needed above all, is to rid art of all that has been its familiar content until now; all subject, all idea, all thought, all symbol must be put aside. If I still accept something of Max Klinger, it is not as a thinker, a symbolist or a scholar; it is because he *invented* something which had not previously existed, something that can be seen in fragments here and there. Only he did not have enough force to understand the inner recesses of his heart; that corner which is the most profound, the most mysterious and finally the truest, to look only into this corner, and to see only through this corner. To have the courage to *give up* all the rest. This is the artist of the future: someone who renounces something every day, whose *personality* becomes purer and more innocent every day. For even without following in someone else's footsteps, as long as one is subject to the direct influence of something someone else also knows, something one might read in a book or come upon in a museum, one is not a creative artist as I understand it. Above all what is needed is great confidence in oneself. The revelation we have of a work of art, the conception of a picture *must* represent something which has sense in itself, has no subject, which from the point of view of human logic *means nothing at all*. I say that such a revelation or conception must be felt so strongly, must give us such joy or such pain, that we are obliged to paint, impelled by a force greater than the force which impels a starving man to bite like a wild beast into the piece of bread he happens to find.

That is what the painting of the future must be. It is impossible that there are many men in the world who can paint in this way. But perhaps a time will come when one will take into consideration only work painted under the conditions I have just described. I must explain something here. I have said that there cannot be many such men. But I believe that there could be more of them than there are at present. For they do exist. I have known some of these men, gifted with a great sensitivity, able to feel unknown things, upon whom the sight of people and things do not make the impression *that they generally do*. If such men were better guided, if they could renounce, know what they should renounce and above all divide and separate, and not confuse the sensations specific to each of us, which we know someone else could never have with those reflected sensations (whether of a man, a work of art, or a period), which sometimes please us but which never succeed in producing the cold shiver, the profound and solitary joy of revelation: composition conceived for itself, strange and senseless, in which we perceive a whole world that no one knows, a world of which we are perhaps the only inhabitants. I myself did not suddenly arrive at this conception of painting. The possession of this important good fortune, there is the enigma of the French spirit. And aside from this, I believe that all these sensations, these voices, these forms that have no well-defined meaning, have always existed.

One bright winter afternoon I found myself in the courtyard of the palace at Versailles.

Everything looked at me with a strange and questioning glance. I saw then that every angle of the palace, every column, every window had a soul that was an enigma. I looked about me at the stone heroes, motionless under the bright sky, under the cold rays of the winter sun shining *without love* like a profound song. A bird sang in a cage hanging at a window. Then I experienced all the mystery that drives men to create certain things. And the creations seemed still more mysterious than the creators. It is futile to explain certain things scientifically, nothing is achieved. The palace was as I had imagined it. I had a presentiment that this was the way *it must be*, that it *could not be* different. An invisible link ties things together, and at that moment it seemed to me that I had already seen this palace, or that this palace had once, somewhere, already existed, and its round windows, why are these an enigma? Why are they – and can only be – *French*? That they can be nothing other than that? Do they have a strange expression?

Something altogether superficial like the smile of a child who does not know *why* he smiles; or something ferocious, like a chest pierced by a sword, or like the wound produced by a sword. And then more than ever I felt that everything was *inevitably* there, but for no reason and without any *meaning*.

There is nothing like the enigma of the Arcade – invented by the Romans, made of all that is Roman. A street, an arch: The sun looks different when it bathes a Roman wall in light. In all this there is something more mysteriously plaintive than in French architecture. And less ferocious too. The *Roman* arcade is a fatality. Its voice speaks in enigmas filled with a strangely Roman poetry; shadows on old walls and strange music, profoundly blue, having something of an afternoon at the sea-side, like these lines of Horace:

Ibis Liburnis inter alta navium
 Amica propugnacula
 Paratus omne Cæsaris periculum
 Subire, Mæcenas, tuo?
 Quid nos, quibus te vita si superstitis
 Jucunda, si contra, gravis?

The silence of happiness (Stendhal).

The silence and melancholy of a new happiness (self-portrait)

SECOND PART: THE FEELING OF PREHISTORY

I write this second part for profound minds to forgive me for the first part. And it is through this second part that such minds will perhaps understand what I am driving at.

The problem of what an artist should do...

The problem of what an artist should do becomes more and more disturbing. Nothing is profound enough, nothing pure enough. Everything that has satisfied painters until now to us seems child's play; this is why we look behind barriers in search of *something new*. Is it a dream, or a vision? In the past, artists used to like to dream; their sweet souls fell asleep in the moonlight, to the sound of a flute, on a woman's scented breast. All this *is no longer*. Yet our souls are haunted by visions; they are anchored to everlasting foundations. In public squares shadows lengthen their mathematical enigmas. Over the walls rise nonsensical towers decked with little multicolored flags; infinitude is everywhere, and everywhere is mystery. One thing remains, immutable as if its roots were frozen in the entrails of eternity: our will as artist-creators. Will *we* regret the *other things*? Never. Our joy is only greater. We shall work.

G. C. Paris, 15 June 1913

Inside a ruined temple the broken statue of a god ...

Inside a ruined temple the broken statue of a god spoke a mysterious language. For me this vision is always accompanied by a feeling of cold, as if I had been touched by a winter wind from a distant, unknown country. It is the frigid hour of dawn on a clear day, towards the end of spring. Then the still glaucous depth of the heavenly dome dizzies whoever looks at it fixedly; he shudders and feels himself drawn into the depths as if the sky were beneath his feet; so the boatman trembles as he leans over the gilded prow of the boat and stares at the blue abyss of the broken sea. It is the hour that had already been. Then like someone who steps from the light of day into the shade of a temple and at first cannot see the whitening statue, but slowly its form appears, ever purer, slowly the feeling of the primordial artist is reborn in me. He who first carved a god, who first wished to *create* a god. And then I wonder if the idea of imagining a god with human traits such as the Greeks conceived in art is not an eternal pretext for discovering many new sources of sensations.

The artists of the middle ages never succeed in expressing this feeling. This feeling, this sacred

shudder of the artist who touches a stone or a fragment of wood, who polishes it, touches it, caresses it, with sacred feeling that the spirit of a god resides within it. Rare is the modern painter or sculptor who creates while gripped by such a joy. And yet I cannot otherwise conceive a work of art. Thought must so detach itself from all logic and meaning, human fetters that all *things* appear to it anew as if lit for the first time by a brilliant constellation.

[...] prehistory is within me taut like a vibrating cord which is at the same time that of an arch to launch a dart towards the cerulean depths and of a zither to awaken a new and unknown song.

...penitus lucere cavernam

mirantur, dein effosso procerâ sepulcro
membra viri magno percussi vulnere pectus

If in the first light of dawn one can feel the shudder of death shot through with the shudder of eternity, receding to the very end of time, then many a covering and many a veil falls before this feeling. The medieval horror of death disappears, and with it the fear of the moment. One night, in Paris, in the oppressive silence of the sleeping city I heard the resounding blows of a hammer upon planks. It seemed to me that somewhere a man was awake making a coffin. Then a dog howled in the night. Without reflecting I had a strange sensation that at that moment baneful stars moved in an unknown heaven.

Another night, a distant bell had just struck twelve when the sound of water running in a pail made me shiver as I lay on my bed. In the immense silence this noise seemed to me eternal like the hammer blows I had already heard. This time, however, the sensation was more beautiful, and suddenly a face appeared before me, a face wearing the expression of *that which always is*. Once more my mind turned toward the past.

Turn Fauni similis circum pollercere coelum
et languere simul tenebras et sidera pastor
cernit ...

Day is breaking. This is the hour of the enigma. This is also the hour of prehistory. The song in dream, the revelatory song of the last, morning dream of the prophet asleep at the foot of the sacred column, near the cold white simulacrum of a god.

One of the strangest and deepest sensations that prehistory has left with us is the sensation of foretelling. It will always exist. It is like an eternal proof of the senselessness of the universe. The first man must have seen auguries everywhere, he must have trembled at each step he took.

The wind rustles the oak leaves: it is the voice of a god which speaks, and the trembling prophet listens, his face bent towards earth.

Thinking of the temples dedicated to the sea gods, built along the arid coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, I have often imagined those soothsayers tending to the voice of the waves receding from that Adamic land. I have pictured them head and body wrapped in a chlamys, waiting for the mysterious revealing oracle. So also I once imagined the Ephesian, meditating in the first light of dawn under the peristyle of the Temple of Artemis of the hundred breasts.

And I think still of the enigma of the horse as a sea-god: I imagined myself once in the darkness of a temple rising on the seashore, the talking, oracular steed that the blue god of the sea gave to the king of Argos. I imagined him fashioned in marble as clear and pure as a diamond, crouching on his hind legs like a sphinx, in his eyes and in the movement of his white neck all the enigma and the infinite nostalgia of the waves.

What is the trembling that the mystic priest felt as on a stormy night he approached the sacred oak?

In Rome the sense of prophecy is somehow vaster: a feeling of infinite and distant grandeur inhabits it, the same feeling with which the Roman builder imbued his arcades, a reflection of the spasm of the infinite which the heavenly arch sometimes produces in man.

Often the prophesy was as terrible like the roar of a dying god. Black clouds would draw close to the towers of the city. In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare has marvelously expressed such a moment, when he describes the sudden and terrible appearance of the lion to the Roman sentinel.

More distant and more beautiful is the song of the Italian poet:

Sed taciti durare bores tacitosque per omnes
pergere terribilem fugientes pone bubulum.

The first ploughman wants to lay out the limits of the city. The wandering herdsmen make fun of the man, who insists. With an iron sound a large furrow is opened. But the earth is arable only to draw a boundary. And suddenly, like a flash of lightning in a clear sky, the Olympian bird appears in the air. He gazes long and fixedly on the man's work. His wings spread under the sun's golden shower, he looks at the limiting plough, then disappears in the distance of the heavenly depths.

Hic ample sub sole datis immobilis alis
Forma aquila visa est opus observare dui, mox
defixis illuc oculis se mergere coelo.

Some few modern artists, among them the cubists, have freed themselves from the stupid Gothicism of French impressionism and seek an art at once more solid and more spiritual; a *more Roman art*. Their development is the reverse of that of the medieval architects. So much the better.

*An exhibition in Florence of some works of Andrea del Castagno
Florence, le 25 May MCMXI*

At the beginning of the 15th century in Florence, Donatello's naturalism had just woken Tuscan art from the deep mystic dream into which it had been sunk by the ascetic compositions of Giotto and his followers. The naïve visions and unhappy nightmares of deeply Christian thought were thus forever discarded. The saints now move more freely in pictures and frescoes, their glances, which have become less ecstatic, turn towards earth and the things around them. No more the skies so strangely blue and deep, no more the solitary and melancholy landscapes which seem to await some miracle.

Horizons become less vague; behind the virgins and martyrs rise beautiful, solid arches and sunlit pediments. This is the road down which walked the first Florentine artists of the Renaissance. In painting the study of reality was begun by Masaccio, who, one may say, achieved in color what Donatello achieved in marble and bronze. One of the most interesting artists of this period is Andrea del Castagno, whose life and work deserve to be better known.

This Florentine painter was a strange man, with an evil and melancholy expression, and an angular face. He was violent and simple, as skillful with pencil and brush as with club and dagger. His life, forever stained with blood by a murder, has something sad and brutal about it. Born in the first decade of the 15th century, in a little house called "il Castagno" in the village of "Mugello", a hamlet near Florence, he was still a child when his father died. Several years later he entered the service of an uncle whose sheep and goats he tended in the ravines and on the wooded hills of Tuscany. Thus he never knew the sweet pleasures and deep feeling of a family, those sentiments shape and ennoble a man's soul.

Always alone with his dog in the midst of his flocks, violent and suspicious, he often fought, throwing stones at the rogues he met along the road, and thus grew up into a strong and brutal man.

Then by chance, during a hot, stormy day, a naïve artistic vision turned him from the rude and somber life he had been he had been leading: surprised by a shower while he watched his flocks, he took shelter in a tiny house hidden among cypresses and grape-vines, and there, in a bare, faintly lit room, he saw a man lovingly painting an altar-piece. This sight so impressed the shepherd that he stayed and watched the painter, and from that day on he began to draw the likenesses of men and animals on stones and walls. The peasants watched young Andrea's mania with curiosity, and a Florentine gentleman, Bernardetto de Medici, having taken notice of him, brought him to Florence, where, it is said, the shepherd of Mugello began his studies in the atelier of Masaccio. His talents were soon known.

A biographer tells us of the terrible impression that the movements of his figures make; of the terrible expression of the heads of the men and women that he painted. One of his first works was a fresco in the church of San Miniato al Monte: it showed St. Miniato and St. Cresci taking leave of their mother and father.

In the monastery of San Benedetto there were also many paintings by Andrea, which were destroyed during the civil wars.

In the first cloister of the monastery of the Monaci degli Angeli, opposite the main portal, one can still admire his magnificent picture of the *Crucified*.

Several of Castagno's best works may be found together in Florence, in a vast room belonging to the church of St. Apollonia. Apart from a Last Supper, painted on canvas, most of them are frescoes. There one may see several figures of famous Florentine men, painted for the palace of Pandolfo Pandolfini at Legnaia, near Florence. The figures are life size, simply painted, with a firm, hard outline; the predominating color is a dark red. The heads of the various people are very expressive, and several have that *terrible expression* mentioned by his biographer. Such for instance, is the figure of Pippo Spano which seems like a portrait of Castagno himself. Solidly set on long legs covered with armor, the warrior grasps a long, curved two-edged sword with both hands. His curly head of hair is tilted slightly to the left; haggard, staring eyes betray the ravages of thought. The whole is a vivid image of the Florentine of the time, constantly preoccupied by wars, plots and murders, always armed, on the watch, uneasy and suspicious.

Faithfully and naively, the painter has recorded the marks these worries have left upon his countenance.

Next to the figure of Pippo Spano stands that of Farinata degli Uberti, the chief of the Ghibellines, who in 1260 saved Florence from the destruction his fellows wished to wreak upon her as a revenge against the Guelph's:

DOMINUS FARINATA DE UBERTIS
SUE PATRIAE LIBERATOR

says the Latin inscription underneath.

Nearby, the figure of a tetrarch: he holds a chief's baton in his right hand; a large white cloak is thrown over his armor; his head is turned a little to the left, as if he were listening to someone talk.

By his side one sees a strange figure of a virgin warrior with long blond tresses. She leans upon a lance held in her right hand, while a graceful gesture of her left hand lifts the long folds of the cloak that covers her cuirass.

This figure is followed by that of Dante, dressed in a purple robe, and holding the Divine Comedy. He holds out his left hand as if he were explaining some obscure passage of his work. Posed in the same position is a portrait of Petrarch, draped in an immense red cloak that also covers his head in a hood. Next to him Boccaccio, dressed in white, shows a book that he presses against his breast.

But the most striking painting is the Last Supper, whose composition is very different from other, much more famous versions of the same subject. The whole canvas has a certain classic flavor, and is far from mystical. In a large room decorated in green and rose marble and flanked by two

crouching sphinxes, the twelve apostles with Christ at the center are seated at a long table covered with a white cloth. All have a calm and pensive air, and one would imagine it to be a group of Greek philosophers come together to discuss the enigmas of life and the universe. A soft and even light shines through two windows on the left. The apostle John has sunk down on the table, his head in his arms, in an attitude of resigned sorrow. St. Thomas, his head lifted and his chin on his hand, looks towards heaven and seems gnawed by doubt. Judas, seated on the other side of the table, his hair as black as ebony and his skin a bilious yellow, appears as an evil spirit menacing the peace and calm of the gathering.

The *Pieta* is another strange and original fresco; its composition is simple but filled with pain and sorrow. The Virgin differs from all other pietas. Castagno has painted a pale Christ with closed eyes, who seems more faint than dead.

Two angels, holding him by the arms, lay him gently at rest in a tomb decorated with sculpture.

His biographer tells us that Castagno was very jealous of a painter then famous in Florence, Domenico Veneziano, who had been called to Tuscany because of his new method of painting in oils. In the sacristy of Santa Maria di Loreto he and Piero della Francesca painted figures of a rare beauty which had given him a reputation in Florence. Castagno pretended friendship for Domenico, and the latter, a good and simple soul, became fond of him. Domenico used to sing while he accompanied himself on the lute, and on clear moonlit nights the two painters wandered in the silent streets of the city and often sang serenades under the windows of their women. Finally Domenico revealed to Castagno the secret of his method of painting in oils.

But Castagno, thinking that his colleague stood in the way of his own fame, hated him more and more, and the idea of murder began to fix itself in his mind. One summer evening the artists were working together as was their wont; and since the night was fine Domenico took his lute and invited his friend to go out with him. But Castagno refused, saying he had some drawings to finish, and Domenico went out alone.

Andrea watched him from his window, and as soon as he saw that he had gone some distance, he put on a mask, armed himself with a heavy club with lead balls, ran and hid behind a wall. Then, as the unhappy Domenico came quietly home, he leaped upon him, struck him several terrible blows, burst open his belly, broke his lute, and then, as if nothing had happened, he went home and resumed the work he had interrupted. When some people who had been attracted by the cries of the wounded man called Andrea, he pretended to be terribly distressed by the misfortune of his friend, and holding him in his arms he cried out, weeping, "alas my brother, alas my brother", until the unfortunate painter had breathed his last. No one would ever have thought of this as murder, if Castagno, on his deathbed, had not confessed his guilt.

In 1478, after the Pazzi family and other conspirators had killed Giuliano de Medici and badly wounded his brother Lorenzo in the church of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Signoria decided that all the conspirers should be painted upon the wall of the Podesta as traitors. This fresco was proposed to Castagno, he accepted it with enthusiasm, and carried it out in an excellent work portraying all

the traitors hung by the feet and contorted in strange positions. From that time on, he was nicknamed *Andrea degli Impiccati* (Andrea of the Hanged Men).

When Castagno died at the end of 1478 and the murder he confessed to became known, it was covered up after giving him a funeral deserving of a murderer in the Santa Maria Novella church where the tomb of his victim is also found, the unlucky Domenico from Venice. On his stone sepulture is written:

Castaneo Andrea mensura incognita nulla
Atque color nullus, linea fuit.

Invidia exarsit, fuitque proclivis ad iram,
Domitium hinc Venetum sustulit insidiis
Domitium illustrem pictura. Turpat acutum
Sic sæpe ingenium vis inimica mali.

PAULHAN MANUSCRIPTS¹

Meditations of a Painter

What the painting of the future could be

What will the aim of future painting be? The same as that of poetry, music and philosophy: to create previously unknown sensations; to strip art of everything routine and accepted, and of all subject-matter, in favor of an aesthetic synthesis; completely suppress man as a guide, or as a means to express symbol, sensation or thought, once and for all to free itself from the anthropomorphism that has always shackled sculpture; to see everything, even man, in its quality of *thing*. This is the Nietzschean method. Applied to painting, it might produce extraordinary results. This is what I try to demonstrate in my pictures.

When Nietzsche talks of the pleasure he gets from reading Stendhal, or listening to the music from *Carmen*, one feels, if one is sensitive, what he means: the one is no longer a book, nor the other a piece of music, each is a *thing* from which one gets a sensation. We weigh and judge this sensation, comparing it to others more familiar, and chose the most original as we consider it the newest.

A truly immortal work of art can only be born through revelation. Schopenhauer has, perhaps, best defined and also (why not) explained such a moment when in *Parerga and Paralipomena* he says, “To have original, extraordinary, and perhaps even immortal ideas, one has but to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar, and in this way reveal their true essence.” If instead of the birth of *original, extraordinary, immortal* ideas, imagine the birth of a work of art (painting or sculpture) in the mind of an artist, you will have the principle of revelation in painting.

In connection with these problems let me recount how I had the revelation of a picture that I will show this year at the Salon d’Automne, entitled *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*. One clear autumnal afternoon I was sitting on a bench in the middle of the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square. I had just recovered from a long and painful intestinal illness and found myself in a morbid state of sensitivity. All of Nature surrounding me, even the marble of the buildings and the fountains, seemed to me to be convalescing also. In the middle of the square stands a statue of Dante draped in a long cloak, holding his works to his body,

¹ The Paulhan Manuscripts include poems and texts in prose. These have been translated in English by W. Bohn and appear in “Metaphysical Art” n. 14/16, 2016, pp. 195-205 (available on the Foundation’s website: www.fondazionedechirico.org).

thoughtfully bowing his pensive laurel-crowned head toward the ground. The statue is of white marble, to which time has given a grey tinge that is very pleasing to the eye. The autumn sun, warm and without love, lit the statue and the church facade. I then had the strange impression that I was looking at all these things for the first time, and the composition of my picture came to my mind's eye. Now each time I look at this painting I relive this moment once again. Nevertheless, the moment is an enigma to me, for it is inexplicable. And I like also to call the resulting work an enigma.

Music cannot express the *non plus ultra* of sensation. After all, one never knows what music is about. After having heard any piece of music the listener has the right to say, and can say, what does this mean? In a profound painting, on the contrary, this is impossible: one must fall silent when one has penetrated it in all its profundity. Then light and shade, lines and angles, and the whole mystery of volume begin to talk.

The revelation of a work of art (painting or sculpture) can be born of a sudden, when one least expects it, and also can be stimulated by the sight of something. In the first instance it belongs to a class of rare and strange sensations that among modern men I have observed in only one: Nietzsche. Among the ancients perhaps (I say perhaps because sometimes I doubt it) Phidias, when he conceived the plastic form of Pallas Athena, and Raphael, while painting the temple and the sky of his *Marriage of the Virgin* (in the Brera Picture Gallery, Milan), knew this sensation. When Nietzsche talks of how his Zarathustra was conceived, and he says "I was *surprised* by Zarathustra", in this participle *surprised* is contained the whole enigma of sudden revelation.

When a revelation results from the sight of an arrangement of objects, then the work which appears in our mind is closely linked to the circumstance that has provoked its birth. One resembles the other, but in a strange way, like the resemblance there is between two brothers, or rather between the image of someone we know seen in a dream, and that person in reality; it is, and at the same time it is not, that same person; it is as if there had been a slight transfiguration of the features. I believe that as from a certain point of view the sight of someone in a dream is a proof of their metaphysical reality, so, from the same point of view, the revelation of a work of art is the proof of the metaphysical reality of certain chance occurrences that we sometimes experience in the way and manner that something appears to us and provokes in us the image of a work of art, an image, which in our souls awakens surprise, sometimes meditation, often, and always, the joy of creation.

Giorgio de Chirico