

SENSITIVENESS<sup>30</sup>

Sensitiveness in life, as in painting and in art in general, is an incontestable quality of the human being who possesses it. It is much easier to recognise the sensitiveness of a human being in life than the sensitiveness of an artist in his work, however, I will speak of sensitiveness in art further on. In life, too, living as we are in a period flooded with words, human beings are not satisfied with words only; and though a man may make as many speeches as he please, making manifest a most refined sensitiveness, he will not be believed and admired with sincerity unless his words – at least from time to time – be confirmed by actions. Besides, to be truly sensitive in life, a human being must possess many other qualities; for one cannot conceive of a human being endowed with sensitiveness alone; with sensitiveness as his sole intellectual quality, whilst being in every other respect unintelligent, wicked, envious, miserly and gossipy. Sensitiveness attributed to a given human being is conceivable only when their spirit is entirely noble, full of goodness and endowed of course with a certain intelligence.

In other words, as a moral quality sensitiveness is never found alone but forms part of a whole ensemble of superior qualities united in the character and intellect of a man or woman. This truth is clear and can be understood by all; to challenge it is pointless. Instead, with regard to art, the ideas of almost everyone are confused. Today, when referring to a work of art, human beings have the mania of using words which have a logical meaning when applied to life, but whose sense changes when applied to artistic creation to the extent of sounding absurd. For instance, it is often said of a painting: “this painting is not extraordinary, it is nothing remarkable, but it shows great sensitiveness”. In other words, its only quality, a quality entirely divorced from all other positive qualities (which are apparently lacking in this case), is sensitiveness. This would imply that the painting in question, a painting possessing sensitiveness, is in every other respect stupid, badly drawn and badly painted by an artist undoubtedly devoid of all talent; whilst talent is the first thing we should consider when judging a work of art.

Let us therefore examine whether we can or cannot accept the hypothesis that in a work of art, as in life, sensitiveness must necessarily form part of a whole group of qualities which, in a painting, either exist all together or do not exist at all.

The innumerable words which are part and parcel of the vocabulary of so many dilettante and ignorant critics and intellectuals – words like “sensitiveness”, “sincerity”, “emotion”, “spontaneity”, “purity” and so on and so forth – can only be used to define in detail qualities existing in a work of art and none of these qualities can exist as an isolated and detached phenomenon.

The way in which a sensitive person acts in life is known to us either by experience or by hearsay. But the way in which sensitiveness makes itself manifest in art and in painting is known only to the very few who know how sensitiveness functions in a work of art. You may now ask me how the word sensitiveness comes to be heard on so many lips. The word is heard from many lips, yes; but from few minds. And this is understandable, for sensitiveness as understood by modernist painters and intellectuals does not exist in painting; it is the invention of the modern critics who, having no clear and interesting ideas to express, have created a complete and special vocabulary which in actual fact has no meaning at all, but which has been

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30 G. de Chirico, *La sensibilità*, published in “Valori Plastici”, Rome, a. III, n. 3, 1921, pp. 60-62; republished signed “Isabella Far” in *Commedia...*, cit., pp. 198-199. Published in English, *Sensitiveness*, in “Horizon – A Review of Literature and Art” vol. X, n. 55, translated by Beryl Eeman, Cyril Connolly, ed., London July 1944, pp. 65-67.

naively and passively adopted by many people desirous of appearing as shrewd and subtle art connoisseurs.

I repeat therefore that the critics have created a language the majority of words of which are in no way fit to be applied to a work of art. This modern jargon seems to have been invented with the express purpose of increasing the stupidity and confusion already reigning in the minds of men.

In life, a human being's sensitiveness can be tested by facts; but with regards to sensitiveness in art, I repeat that it does not exist. And when someone, speaking of a painting, tells me that it shows sensitiveness, I can only reply that I am ready to believe as much, but only on condition that it can be proven.