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# ON THE SUBJECT OF PAINTING<sup>1</sup>

*“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice,  
he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!  
And having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”*

Our spirit is only on loan;  
It is for us to return it in good repair.

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<sup>1</sup> Original title, *A propos de peinture*, Publications Techniques et Artistiques, Paris 1945. The original French text is available for download free of charge at [www.fondazionedechirico.org](http://www.fondazionedechirico.org) ("Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 17/18, 2018, pp 27-90).

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## FOREWORD

Our age is so full of events in which the life and property of millions of people are in jeopardy that we wonder whether it is quite appropriate to speak on a subject whose importance is solely spiritual.

You will however excuse us, because we feel it is worthwhile. Beyond war itself, there are a number of problems concerning the human being which would be wrong not to address.

In the face of war, our will is powerless; however, it depends on us, on the will of mankind, to preserve or destroy the moral values that other men have created and that constitute the “spiritual attainment” of mankind, this capital to which a small number of old-fashioned dreamers is still attached.

It is for them that I write.

Men have a tendency to give their life primordial importance; this is just when it concerns the empowerment of the Spirit.

But the life of men and peoples is replaced over time by other men, by other peoples, who bear with them the same potential strength of spirit.

What is not replaceable is that which the Spirit has gained.

Humanity has taken thousands of centuries to emerge from darkness.

What remains of the countless billions of beings that have died since man has inhabited the earth?

An Ethic, an Aesthetic.

Destroy these and man, all men, will have lived in vain.

Might we believe that our life is without purpose? Our reason refuses to admit it. Man is here to carry out a mission, and the empty destiny of the materialists cannot satisfy us.

We are here to fulfil our potential; many – alas! – have departed without being able to do so. Our task is therefore all the more urgent. We are here, depositories of a spirit that manifests itself only very rarely, in exceptional beings and under certain circumstances. We must take precious care of these manifestations. It is our only wealth.

The greatest of manifestations of the spirit are indubitably religious ones. Without ethics man returns to being an animal. Aesthetics, it is true, is auxiliary to ethics, but it completes the latter by giving it visible form.

The purpose of man is the pursuit of moral and physical “Beauty”, and everything he has been able to achieve in this domain must be sacred to us. Although, in addition to the vital life force that seeks “Beauty” in these two forms, there is another force driving the world, which is that of the destruction of Beauty, the disintegration of all harmonious construction, a force that takes the Spirit back to the mystery of its origins. Since its existence was ascertained, men have called this force the Spirit of darkness.

Some may find it rather puerile to speak of painting in connection with these two forces, whose acknowledgement, as old as the world, is found in all religions. But however little one thinks about this, one must know that the whole of human history boils down to the struggle between these two forces. What the one has gained over the other is so little that we ask ourselves whether our efforts – meaning the effort of the millions who have preceded us to emerge from chaos – will be worth anything in the end.

And nevertheless, from the menhir and the rough-hewn idol of primitive civilisations to the splendour of cathedrals, the path man's creative spirit has walked upon is long. It is up to us to preserve it and, if possible, to continue this bearing of witness.

I don't know who the journalist was who considered excessive the zeal with which artworks were protected from the destruction of war and asked that less effort be expended and that more be directed towards protecting living beings. He was wrong. Human life is certainly worthy of respect, but less so than a work of art, inasmuch as life, as we have said, is more easily replaceable. The only great wounds which humanity has not healed from are those inflicted by iconoclasts; these wounds are still open and the spirit bleeds from them whilst witnessing our barbarity.

Of course I prefer the life of one of my children over all the world's artworks. I also prefer it, a life for a life, to all the lives in the world, my own included, but that does not prove that I am right; it proves that I am excessively sensitive.

Our life emerges and disappears; it is but an episode in the life of humanity, and when the latter's interests are in jeopardy it cares not about our feelings: war is the demonstration of this.

But let's get back to our subject.

In the midst of the events we are going through, one may wonder what on earth a book on painting is doing here.

Does Art have anything to do with the current tragedy? Is painting an indispensable raw material like coal, iron, oil and tin, for the possession of which peoples must fight and die?

Painting was known to man before he knew iron, coal, oil and tin.

Art is the first manifestation of the spirit of man.

The flint axe is yet animal; the cave paintings in Altamira are already man.

Since then man has come a long way, discovered the face of the earth, peopled it with empires that he founded and destroyed by fire and by the sword; and of all these past grandeurs and decadences, nothing remains today but the works of art.

Greece, Persia, Rome. Empires gone. Forgotten suffering of the men who built them.

But we suffer still over their mutilated monuments.

“THE BUST OUTLIVES THE CITY”

## A LITTLE HISTORY

In the year of grace 1637...

Nicolas Poussin was forty-three;

Jordaens, forty-four;

Ribera forty-nine;

Zurbaran and Velázquez, thirty-nine and thirty-eight respectively;

Van Dyck thirty-six;

And Rembrandt, the youngest, had just turned thirty.

These men were not only contemporaries but also of the same generation. They might have sat around the same table to celebrate the birthday of an older master, Rubens, who had just reached his sixtieth year.

Is there a painter or painting enthusiast who would not be moved by the thought of looking upon such a spectacle?

Why so much splendour in the same moment, and why such poverty in ours (Salons of 1944-1945)?

Are men less intelligent today, less gifted? We do not believe so. They give proof of this every day in fields other than painting. So? What did those men have that our contemporaries do not? One thing only:

*They knew their metier.*

The word “metier” will recur often in this book, like a leitmotif; which indeed it is.

We long ago reached the conclusion that abandonment of the rules, for centuries the lynchpin of the art of painting, has been the chief cause of current decadence.

When the science of execution was lost, the promotion of the new-at-all-costs began and has led us to the madness of today. No longer capable of doing “something equally well”, painters were obliged to do “something else”.

The problem did not arise today; we observe the origin of this decadence at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jacques-Louis David, having become arbiter at the time, dictator of painting, inaugurated a process that subsequently became the official curriculum in Fine Arts Academies.

As may be seen in his unfinished work *The Tennis Court Oath*, this process of filling-in consisted of painting piece by piece, with opaque colours, binding the shades one to another while still wet with a back-and-forth action of the brush until they intermingled in the transitions.

This process, the only one known and practiced thenceforth, is not only defective but of almost insurmountable difficulty for those seeking results while approaching the classical masterpieces.

Only certain men of extraordinary skill such as Gros, Gérard, Géricault and Delacroix succeeded in giving their works this solid aspect of classical painting which, given their talent, they

could have achieved to the full had the traditional art of painting been handed down to them directly, from master to pupil.

Obliged to create their metier on their own, they found themselves up against the same difficulties facing our painters of today.

Having only tradition in mind, these 19<sup>th</sup> century painters nonetheless managed to preserve, as far as it went, a certain conceptual and aesthetical unity.

Delacroix countered the Greco-Roman coolness of David, carried on by Ingres, with the exuberant baroque of Rubens, but all that was nothing but family quarrels.

In this struggle between classicists and romantics, continuity was maintained all the same.

Gros followed on from David, leaving the continuation of his own work to Géricault. The latter in turn paved the way for Delacroix. *The Plague Victims of Jaffa* announced *The Raft of the Medusa*, which itself prefigured *The Barque of Dante*. And no one dreamt of crying out plagiarism against these men who reciprocally transmitted their task.

The evil, the disintegration of effort, was yet to begin, but the problem still remained unresolved: the science of painting had to be recovered.

Delacroix worked at this all his life, turning ceaselessly to Rubens who was indubitably one of the best, if not the best example of technical virtuosity.

Ingres was also concerned with this for a moment, but, slave to material success, he soon got down to doing nothing more than fulfilling commissions, working in the metier he had inherited from David. In spite of this, these painters still retained a sense of classical beauty, and we have lately had occasion to see an exhibition that included *a copy* (!) of Ingres by Sérusier, shining with an unexpected glow as it was placed among more recent works, thus highlighting in a striking manner the incoherency and distressing mediocrity into which painting has fallen today.

Courbet was convinced he had rediscovered this “body” which had been lacking in painting since David, but his great discovery boiled down to the use of bitumen as a base, an error that Prud’hon had also committed, and to applying colour with the spatula. To lend “body” to his painting, he treated it as “thickness”.

The first of these errors, common throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century painting, caused the almost total blackening of a number of paintings, and of the “drips” and cracks one sees the shadows.

As for painting with the spatula, or thickness painting, it contributed above all to the “encrustation” of a whole pleiad of postimpressionists who still believed that with this means they rediscovered matter, the precious side of great painting.

“Great painting is smooth,” said Degas.

These errors did not prevent Courbet from wholly surpassing the painters of his age in terms of talent, but he thrashed around, like everybody else since, against “a material difficulty of execution”.

To convince ourselves of the degree of mediocrity to which painting has fallen, we need only take Courbet’s large canvas *Firemen Running to a Fire* (in which he painted real firemen, no doubt

in protest against the excess of “Romans” at the time) and set it next to the works of Rubens in the Medici Gallery at the Louvre.

This comparison, indubitably painful to our vanity as modernists, would be an example and a useful lesson for young painters: they would need no further convincing that genius is not everything, that to be a great painter you must also know how to paint.

Besides these men we have mentioned, painting was practised throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a quantity of painters whose mediocrity did not suffer from what was lacking in their art.

An ignorant public made do with these productions that confounded anecdote with expression, size with greatness... and painting stumbled increasingly towards conventional blandness.

This is how things stood when Manet arrived.

Manet too wanted to recover true painting. Above all he loved Goya, in whom he found tradition rejuvenated by contact with life.

Manet admired Goya, just as Delacroix had admired Rubens. After years of effort and attempts of undeniable grandeur – *Olympia*, *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* – Manet realised that it was impossible to equal the masters (which was his ambition) without having first been initiated into the secrets of their art.

Assessing the problem, if not as insoluble, at least too tough to resolve and, seeing that the public was unaware of the very existence of such a problem and preferred the mediocrities of the official salons, Manet got discouraged and abandoned this pursuit.

It was with Bazille, a painter little known as he died too soon, that Manet sought a distraction from this powerlessness and embarked on a kind of light, surface painting which came to be known as Impressionism.

But if Manet put himself forward as innovator, he was far from being an individualist since he gathered a group of painters around him, curious about this novelty but on the whole fairly disciplined inasmuch as their aim was to establish a school and, if possible, a new tradition.

They did accomplish this, and we should be the last to question the talent of these creators and the undeniable charm of their works. Impressionism has been the one intelligent moment in painting since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But it is not a complete art. The constants of art consist in form; colour is only an accessory.

This kind of painting deals only with the relationship of nuances, and is consequently extremely ephemeral. A Rubens, an El Greco may have changed with time (very little in our view); at its core we always find composition and form. What will remain of impressionist canvases when the unstable chemistry of the colours has destroyed these subtle interrelations of nuances that are the foundation of the impressionist painting? Absolutely nothing, and we already know of some examples, signed by great names, where only our respect for their signature prevents us from declaring them empty.

Impressionism is an incomplete art; it comes from pastel technique (let us not forget that Manet was a pastel artist), which is to say from surface painting.

In order to paint in depth, we need to return to the technique of oil painting, as employed by all great painters prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At all events, Impressionism had brought a solution to the mediocrity in which painting was floundering, and the epic battle this group of men had to fight is worthy of our respect.

It was when the indisputable intelligence of this movement began to make itself felt, which is to say at the turn of the century, with the taste for novelty having overflowed into a certain public, that painting was invaded by the exasperation of non-conformism.

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Acceptance of Impressionism by a certain elite had baffled the public. What? These gaudy colours, these violet shadows, these yellow and orange lights are supposed to be Art?

Everything is relative. Set next to Goya's *Charles IV and His Family* or Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, it was like daubing. Next to Gérôme's *Pollice Verso*, it was Art.

But then, if the slightly violaceous shadow in a landscape could be rendered in pure violet, if slightly gilded light became orange-yellow straight out of the tube, if that was admissible then why not paint green ladies, blue hair, violet trees? And why stop there? Why paint trees or figures? Since it was a matter of laying smears of colour on a canvas, sometimes harmonious but always arbitrary, why bother with form? Why not dilute it in this waltz of multicoloured stains that seemed to be becoming the sole *raison d'être* of painting? And form disappeared, or became a pretext for dyer's sample swatches.

And thus painting, once an art, became a game. With a little taste – and who in France is lacking in taste? – anyone at all could style himself an impressionist painter, or a fauve, surrealist or cubist. As far as tradecraft goes, it calls for less skill than that of the carpenter, smith or violinist.

The profession of painter has become an amusement, a pastime, an excuse for sons of good family, with a disgust for exams.

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Following the triumph of Impressionism, the only way for a painter to get himself noticed was to proclaim himself an innovator.

The lack of understanding toward the impressionist generation allowed each and every one of these innovators to present themselves as a misunderstood genius.

As the Impressionists had initially sold their paintings at modest prices, once this form of art achieved fame, it was easy for considerable profits to be made.

Having acquired a taste for this trafficking, a new category of dealers appeared, adept at exploitation of the misunderstood genius.

It is the art dealers who have brought about this outbreak of eccentricity in painting.

Anything that may give rise to doubt is well worth exploiting, and all manner of nonsense has been encouraged and permitted to favour such speculation.

It will be agreed that this could lead only to the total deformation of taste and to the decomposition of painting.

Which is just what happened. As encouragement, this undertaking to demolish the spirit found fertile ground in the restlessness that distinguished our age, and in the foolish and misguided snobism of the elite.

After long hesitation, certain officials-in-charge are now ready to accept these banalities – sight unseen – which have long since had their day.

In our view this sets a deplorable example to young painters who, relying on reason, do not want to accept such amusing pleasantries as the ultimate aim of Art.

## EULOGY OF MADNESS

It is odd to note that nowadays, as examples of “genius”, we are nearly always given the alcoholic, the paranoiac or the simpleton, whereas the great masters of the past were generally the vastest, most cultivated and steadfast spirits of their times.

For the last hundred years the spirit has been steered towards anti-conformism. Everything served up as bearing the “genius” stamp is antisocial by preference.

Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Gauguin, Van Gogh etc...

Are they proposing a eulogy of madness?

Without denying the talent of these men, is it really indispensable to the creation of works of spirit that one must first leave the social world, declass oneself? And to be a genius is it absolutely necessary to be a madman?

In any event Ronsard, Malherbe, du Bellay, Corneille, Racine, Nicolas Poussin, all these men to whom we still acknowledge a certain merit, were not mad as far as we know.

One may think that this preference for the “deranged genius” is merely a fashion. *Our age is fond of madmen, head-cases, as Romanticism was fond of consumptives.*

Decency once set limits to the various forms of expression. Likewise respect for certain beliefs. These have been thrown overboard.

The prestige attached to the word “Freedom” permits all kinds of abuse. Any licence whatsoever is called “freedom of expression”. Under the pretext of anti-conformism, all kinds of turpitudes have been shamelessly disseminated. In literature, the great resource of the realist novel, adultery, awakens not the slightest interest in our generation. One starts getting moved only by rape.

The sexual corruption of adults has become commonplace and the social novel can do nothing else but arouse interest through the display of corrupted children.

Anything susceptible to scandal, anything that might shock our sensibility, is all the more marketable.

As Valéry says, “our age feeds on poison, and to remain effective one must continually increase the dose.”

How far will we go?

In the past, the face of the dead was modestly covered. This respect has been lost today.

Death no longer has anything sacred about it: we have even seen a sculptor of talent draw public attention by turning a “laid out” body into a figure of derision and mockery.

Can we blame him? Without such unsavoury audacity he would undoubtedly have gone unnoticed. Merit in itself is no longer enough. One must raise a scandal to get noticed.

This, of course, is not the case of everyone. People capable of causing scandal are still only an exception, thanks be to God.

This is how they become exceptional individuals.

Exceptional for merit?

Exceptional for scandal?

After a while the public no longer knows. That’s how far we have gone.

## “MODERN”, A FETISH WORD

In all intellectual manifestations, but especially in painting, infatuation with the new is such that one need only say “it’s modern”, and all kinds of silliness and extravagance become admissible.

Anyone wishing to rise up against these excesses today will find neither an easy task nor the road to prestige. One would appear to be against progress (another fine word) and to have understood nothing.

Anyone declaring admiration for works of the past is considered of limited intelligence. All that stuff is dead, they claim. Irremediably dead. Everything has changed and one must live abreast of the times.

At first glance this appears highly seductive. Living abreast of the times would seem altogether natural; however, things take a turn for the worst when we look at what our age has to offer.

It is undeniable that from the material viewpoint things have changed greatly over a century, perhaps for the better, we are not quite sure yet; but from a spiritual viewpoint, is there anyone willing to claim that we have made progress?

Now, what we want to talk about here is Art; and pending proof to the contrary, we have always considered Art as a spiritual manifestation.

Does our age offer us an Art so great that everything before it must be considered dead weight?

Note that it is only with the appearance of certain extremist theories that this living Art and dead Art slogan began.

The Art of the past may be dead, but uniquely due to our inability. The greatest task a new generation of artists can undertake is that of resuscitating it in all its splendour.

Here is a worthy task to fire up enthusiasm in our youth, instead of dawdling in obsolete revolutionary attitudes: because the world has changed in the last forty years, and what might have seemed “amusing” at the beginning of the century is now nothing more than an outmoded pleasantry.

At the beginning of the century there was a certain allure in being fauve, cubist or surrealist. It corresponded to the spirit of the age. Invention was everywhere: the motor car, the film projector, the zeppelin, the aeroplane and so on... And some believed that Art too had to follow this movement: art got confused with mechanics (hence cubism, with its slightly mechanical look). But if mechanics and all its derivatives have since then made giant steps, then Art – which wanted to copy these – has remained where it was, for good reason; it has gone on insisting with ridiculous powerlessness, like the chicken hatched by a duck which found out too late that it wasn't made for swimming like ducklings.

Art has nothing to do with mechanical progress. It has another mission to carry out. One so noble and great that it is in no way inferior to that assigned to engineers and men of science who, themselves, are obliged to live in a modern world.

The artist's role in this modern world is to safeguard the spiritual values laboriously acquired by the generations that have gone before us, values that do not change: one loses them or preserves them.

As far as “Modern Art” is concerned, our fear is that they are in the process of being lost.

As a matter of fact, the characteristic of so-called modern painting consists chiefly in an inability to fully complete a work. All they can do is be lily-livered or luscious.<sup>1</sup>

As the true art of painting was lost more than a century ago, painters have had to dream up another, which, due to its empirical method is inevitably mediocre; and it is the quality of a crust, of that which is unwashed and awkward – which we eventually have gotten used to – that characterises all the painting of our age, be it the kind certain critics call “*art pompier*” or that of the fauves, cubists or surrealists eulogised thereby.

Surrealism, chronologically last in the various distractions that helped painters who wanted to forget their powerlessness, attempts to rediscover this precision, this lost honesty of execution, but although painters of this school generally possess a mastery often lacking in the others, it does not surpass that of “*art pompier*”. The only difference between these two tendencies is the choice of subject. Surrealism develops Freudian themes to which our intellectuals are more recep-

<sup>1</sup> A non-translatable play on words in French between “lâché” (cowardly) and “léché” (“licked”) as in an overelaborate finish on the painting (T/n).

tive, whereas the other ones settle for an elementary aesthetic more accessible to the public at large.

But both employ identical means of expression, which is to say the representation of objects in chiaroscuro by means of an opaque paste, the shadows and the light areas blending in the half-tone through patient finishing touches with the brush.

A number of connoisseurs of “well executed” painting has been repelled by the “licked” finish to which all 19<sup>th</sup> century painters were obliged to resort.

Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, great painters had no need of such “licked” finishes to lend their works a quality of achievement, completion and definitiveness.

Look at a work by Watteau or Chardin – never mind a Rubens or Rembrandt – look at these works close-up and you will see how they are painted boldly, without evident finishing touches to weigh them down. With all the freshness of spontaneity, they are finished, complete and definitive.

Classical painting, in the execution of a work, took care to execute an object of value. Between classical painting and the painting of today there is a qualitative difference comparable to that of a Persian carpet of the best period and a rug from the bazaar.

The kind of painting that is called modern is not progress but a makeshift measure.

If we wanted to employ the right term, “modern painting” would designate that which begins with Giotto. It was Giotto, after Cimabue, who, in freeing painting from Byzantine rigidity, set it on a plane of Western Reason.

Painting has been of modern conception from the Renaissance onwards. But above all, it is the invention of oil painting that brought art to a degree of perfection that has not been surpassed since.

I ask those who are familiar with the works of Van Eyck or Antonello da Messina whether they find anything therein that seems foreign to them. Whether they do not feel, as we say, entirely on an equal footing with them. Whether this art does not speak our language, that is, if it is not modern.

As for ourselves, we feel a greater affinity with this art; our spirit relates to it more readily; it identifies better with these works than with Freudian introspections, descends into the unconscious, imitations of prehistoric, Byzantine or Negro art that they want to palm off as Modern Art.



Throughout history, up to the moment when “ineptness struck an attitude of genius”, the art of painting, or simply painting as it is called today, consisted in creating *objects of value*.

Any painting whatsoever from an age other than our own, is first and foremost a precious object, on a par with a gem or a fine item of furniture, and quite aside from the emotion conveyed by what it represents.

A painter is interested only in how to paint.

Rubens painted both fêtes and crucifixions with the same colours and in the same way (and what a way!). He was not inhibited by the subject; he painted what was asked of him, and it always turned out to be an object of value.

A painting, aside from and over and above the metaphysical aspect that the literati have wanted it to have, should also and before anything else be an object of value.

Today most paintings have nothing of value but the frame.

## EUROPEAN PAINTING

It is rightly said that art has no country.

Indeed, as a language common to all, it is a universal means of expression.

This does not mean that each artist does not have a sentiment or personal approach specific to their land of origin. But if we really want to take the trouble to investigate these differences from close up, we see that most of the time these result from an isolation from sources of inspiration rather than a fundamental cultural difference.

It thus happens that artists who are born in one country, but whose artistic development took place in another, are more likely to have the qualities and defects of the adopted country's Art rather than that of their homeland.

In the history of European painting this separation into what we may call "different styles" of painting, rather than "different arts", is all the more perceptible where communication between the different countries was more problematic.

Nonetheless, in spite of these communication difficulties, thought itself succeeded in creating a certain unity, and it is often easier to classify these different styles by period than by country.

Some might see this as being somewhat arbitrary, but it is not if one considers the undeniable kinship of creative conception that can be observed between artists from different countries when they belong to the same generation.

As a general rule we may assume the existence of a European culture which, from Greece to our own day, by way of the middle ages, represents a certain unity.

Cradle of modern civilisation, Europe in the mediaeval period was, from a spiritual viewpoint, a homogeneous whole. Notwithstanding the lack of political cohesion, it was Christian nation, in contrast with the Moslem nations. It was the West.

At the time of the Renaissance Europe maintained its spiritual unity. Be it under the political rule of Austria, Spain or France, it was Europe. Mazarin, of Italian origin, guided the destinies of France. Francis I summoned Leonardo da Vinci and Francesco Primaticcio to decorate Fontainebleau. Marie de' Medici had Rubens decorate the Louvre. Charles V summoned Titian to

Spain and a Greek, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, having been Tintoretto's pupil in Italy, became the most representative painter of Catholic Spain.

It was in Rome that José de Ribera got to know the Realist Art of Caravaggio, an art which he brought to Spain and which lies at the origin of that realism in painting which the Spanish shared with the Dutch from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly, it was to Rome that Nicolas Poussin, the greatest French painter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, went to seek the science of painting; and even more recently, Boucher, Fragonard and Goya were all influenced by Tiepolo. It is in this way that Art, in its variety, preserved European unity.

Of course every country has always had its own painters, but their dispositions did not include any kind of calculation, any nationalist exclusivism. It was strictly a matter, in the spirit of painters, of broadening their field of knowledge as much as possible and bringing the discoveries they had made abroad to their own countries.

It was the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its explosion of exclusivist nationalism, which more than any other epoch changed this universality of Art. Since the various countries of Europe had to protect a nascent industrialisation within their frontiers, all other activities were influenced by this state of things.

## ART AND INDUSTRY

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the only Palaces built were those of Industry. As the spirit of man was increasingly guided and absorbed by the astonishing discoveries of science and mechanics, art was no longer cultivated except by self-sustaining groups that were increasingly isolated and diminished. In a period of increasingly fast and easy communication, we witnessed a paradox in which art restricted its vision and took refuge in exclusive nationalisms and regionalisms where one attempted to preserve a tradition that social instability, brought on by a transformation of production methods, threatened to overwhelm.

Must we think, as some assert, that Art has to follow the same evolution that the astonishing progress of science and mechanics has imposed on the rest of human activities? But first and foremost, what relationship does art have with science and mechanics?

As painting has lost the science of its application, artists should dedicate themselves to the recovery of what has been lost instead of adding something new. In mechanics we see nothing to which Art could be likened.

If we are talking about adapting to the needs of modern life, wholly driven towards the materialism it invites, then this would mean that Art must become useful, step into the rhythm of life by becoming an aid to progress in business and industry; in a word, the true living art form of our day would be commercial art.

The artist has an important role to play in industrial production, not so much as decorator as was thought until now, and which brought us the Louis XV salamander and other horrors, but in the sense of “aesthetical controller”. To give an example: in almost all the big America companies the head manufacturing engineer is assisted by an “Art Director” whose job is to give an aesthetic form to the objects produced. Industrialists have taken note that, quality being equal, beauty sells better than the ugly, and have also grasped that beauty may be found in undecorated pure forms.

The artist has a great role to play in a position of serial production control, be it only to prevent the spreading ugliness of the numerous industrially produced objects that increasingly fill our living environment. But he must, we repeat, intervene solely to attenuate “engineer” bad taste and not to add embellishments, which generally do nothing but aggravate such bad taste.

As “consultant”, the artist’s role might be considerable within the framework of mechanistic life. Graphic design in advertising is another modern art form which we would do wrong to despise. It meets a current need, and if its quality has been mediocre to date it is the fault of businessmen who still haven’t always realised that money skimmed on art advertising drafts considerably reduces its efficacy and who still prefer today, be it out of ignorance or parsimony, to address the mediocre.

For some years now, America’s industry has been aware of the importance of quality advertising, and the sums paid to artists are such that no one, whatever his reputation, refuses to work in the field.

Far be it from us, then, the idea of deprecating this form of art, since we have practised it and it has given us the leisure to write our reflections on painting, but we refuse to accept that the purpose of Art is to be an auxiliary to industry.

We think, on the contrary, that the purpose of Art is solely spiritual and that the artist’s true objective is that of a creator of “beauty”, without purpose, at least from a materialist point of view.

Under this form of “useless beauty”, Art need not be disturbed or preoccupied by the current rhythm of life. This form of beauty is eternal, and not at the mercy of new discoveries like science or mechanics; it lies outside and above such contingencies. And an Egyptian or Greek bust, a mediaeval tapestry or a half-bust by Rembrandt may, without becoming diminished, both decorate and “honour” by their presence the office of the greatest magnate of modern industry.

Nevertheless, if in our opinion this economic evolution changes nothing with regard to the purpose of art, it has greatly changed the artist’s conditions of life.

It is here perhaps that we must seek the real reasons for the “evolution” of Art, because although Art must be selfless, it does not follow that the artist must also be. The artist, like everybody else, needs to live from his work, and this obliges him to make concessions to the taste of the moment, to the dominant [idea] of the age, with the risk of going out of fashion if, to satisfy this taste, he neglects the constants in art, the rules and laws that make a work of art not a passing fashion but a permanent source of beauty.

## THE FLAVOUR OF THE DAY

As for the flavour of our day, here is what the eminent art critic Eugène d'Ors wrote in 1937:

“It appears that the age in which much courage was needed not to be revolutionary is coming to an end.” It has lasted a long time, and for certain lofty souls has been very hard to get through. This, because one was repelled by seeing conformism take on the brilliant disguise of independence, seeing the mark of courage become an official stamp or hallmark. The bourgeois, be it understood, loved to assume bohemian tastes. One was intuitionist, one was subconscious, one was oneiric.

“Once again, Distinguished Professors preached the direct study of nature to their flock,” urged them to “follow their mood” and to “free their personality”; which at least had the advantage of saving the former from the chore of correcting errors.

“If I recall this nightmare here, it's the result of poorly digested Romanticism, etc., etc.”

Eugène d'Ors wrote this in 1937. His judgement can be faulted only for speaking in the past tense, which was somewhat premature, but this does nothing to diminish his clairvoyance.

## THE PARIS SCHOOL

*To Pablo Picasso,  
Uncontested master of modern painting.*

*To André Derain,  
who should have been.*

This is where we were in 1937.

Since then things have only got worse. We abstain from seeking the reasons here. We take note, nothing more.

What happened that resulted in the formation of this taste, or rather this deformation of taste? Quite a lot happened.

Firstly, the industrial revolution which, having concentrated wealth in hands inept to use it, led to the appearance of a more or less enlightened band of sumptuary advisers, most of whom had nothing but personal gain in mind.

Following that, there was the arrival in Paris, the world's recreation centre, of a quantity of foreign artists who could not endure the fate of being folkloric illustrators in their hometown.

Each of these artists came to Paris with a distinctive background and two desires: to sell and to make themselves known.

To achieve this objective, one had to go through a dealer, the merchants who make or break a painter's reputation today. Paul Guillaume, an art dealer in rue La Boétie, used to say to anyone who would listen: "It's up to me who's got talent."

Clearly, self interest lies at the heart of this trade, as in all others. At the start, leonine contracts bind the painter to a gallery. When the storeroom is full, the merchandise is launched. As with any new pharmaceutical specialty, advertising plays its part. Books lauding the artist appear. Articles in the papers and in magazines. Critics, not always impartial, take to their pen to help out. A good understanding between dealers is required so ratings don't drop. A new status is created.

Since a reputation could be made only in Paris, it is no surprise that the desire to figure among the elect has made this city a painter's Mecca.

Italians, Spaniards, Dutch, Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Finns, Norwegians, Swiss, Serbs, Bulgarians, North and South Americans, Belgians, English, Germans and a few French formed what it was agreed to call "The Paris School".

As may be seen from the list, contemporary art has a universal character. Although, after having compared the different viewpoints of this universalism, one sees how these have been simplified and, after a number of qualifying rounds, we find ourselves with two clearly defined tendencies. These tendencies are: abstract art, of a surrealist derivation, and imitative or realist art.

In these Babel Olympics, the "finals", if we may be permitted a sporting expression, is played in Paris with French referees. The teams lined up are Spain on the one hand, with Pablo Picasso representing abstract art and Salvador Dalí, the surrealist derivative, and on the other, the French team with Henri Matisse and André Derain, still defending the right to life of imitative and realist art.

The Spanish team has the upper hand for the moment. Pablo Picasso has just won the current lap and, in keeping with the language of sport, is some lengths ahead of his competitors. Whereas Salvador Dalí, having dragged in his wake much of European painting with his "surrealism", is about to repeat the exploits of the conquistadores by colonising America.

A new form of Spanish flu is therefore threatening to invade all countries on the two continents; except Spain, because this art is a Spanish art for export only, like "artistic" Spanish dance, and can only develop outside the Iberian "climate", which is impervious to this kind of exercise.

As the home team, the French are handicapped from the start on the basis of good sense which most French people possess and are obliged to take into account; and further by a sense of the ridiculous which, in full view of their compatriots, prevents them going too far with eccentricity. So, again in the language of sport, they are about to "lose their lead" at the top of the league.

Matisse and Derain, who represent France's most important trends in current painting, are disadvantaged in this match by their "obligation" to remain within the human, within the limits of reason in spite of everything.

Far from home and not having to care about "what people will say", the Spanish can allow

themselves to throw overboard all the laws and principles that still encumber the French; so the former have the biggest chances of coming out on top.

It is the well-known phenomenon of tarts who dare to flaunt their debauchery only when far from their birthplace.

That's where we are. On one hand, we have a desire for novelty, although controlled by reason; on the other, for the new at all costs, reason or not. In this contest of who'll be craziest, there are no doubts about foreseeing the winner. So much for reason.



Picasso and Dalí on the Spanish side, Matisse and Derain on the French, dominate the whole of “modern” contemporary painting. The rest is only variation on the same theme, or on different themes by these painters.

Around the orbit of these four “greats” and, exceptions made for some “variants” of talent, gravitate the small fry who, having invented nothing, bathe in the brilliance of these painters. (We are not speaking here of neo-impressionists whose audacious “admissions” remain in the realm of decorative painting).

But let us get back to those “responsible”.

If we eliminate Matisse, whose orientalist graphism barely goes beyond impressionism (a flat-tint impressionism, like Lautrec and Gauguin, but under another form); if we likewise discard Dalí, whose orthopaedic-visceral surrealism has not been stored up by the dealers, and whose absence from Paris deprives him of much topicality and consequent splendour, we are left with only two great figures in present day painting, André Derain and Pablo Picasso.

Picasso and Derain, after having sacrificed themselves to the Cézanne doctrine, had to abandon a kind of painting that was becoming commonplace. They wanted to renew the formula and find another form of Art that would bring “novelty” to the monotony of the Cézannean prism in which painting was locked.

After a few trials with African art, Derain returned to more human forms where he could employ a language more proper to the expression that tormented him. Respectful of the concrete beauty found in all traditions, Derain went back to the Louvre and set himself with a schoolboy's love to studying “the mellow harmonies and the austere and smiling rhythms of the primitives.” Antique tapestries and Renaissance painters exalted his imagination. Since the dimensions of these masters' works no longer have a function in our day, he was obliged to adapt his talent to more modest formats. But the Louvre contains all the examples. The still lifes of Chardin, the landscapes of Claude Lorrain, Courbet, Corot, Manet, all this wealth was absorbed and assimilated by a painter with an avid curiosity of knowledge, one who wanted to save painting from the new conventionalism of the abstract.

All that Derain lacked, to be included among the great painters and to save our age from the mediocrity to which it is condemned, was the masters' knowledge of craft.

While Derain frequented the Louvre, Picasso, encouraged as he was by art dealers, drew from the symbolic Art of the Blacks a geometrical deformation that satisfied the desire for novelty that is natural to all commerce. To meet this desire, Picasso condemned his imagination to being always alert. This desire to amaze obliged him to adopt exasperated methods, the tour de force of a circus juggler, in order to hold the audience's attention. It is difficult for a true art to get out of these perpetual trances, this eternal starting over again. Picasso is not the only one responsible for this state of affairs. The literati took advantage of his uncontrolled imagination to carve out an avant-garde reputation for themselves. To defend indefensible concepts before an astonished public, a whole literature has grown up around Picasso which, in serving him, served themselves to create a mystique of the absurd, of nothingness. A good companion indubitably, since everyone who has got to know him has eulogised him. It seems that Picasso has a predilection for literati. Apollinaire, Reverdy, Raynal, Salmon, Cocteau, Max Jacob, Aragon and Éluard are or have been his friends. Apollinaire in particular is one of those who have done most for Picasso's mystique. One hears a lot about Apollinaire lately. In his *Portraits avant décès*, Vlaminck gives us the key to what heretofore might have seemed an enigma.

Apollinaire, with his love of paradox, his thirst for dry humour, that cynical pleasure certain schoolchildren find in wholly confounding the minds of their more ingenuous and inquisitive schoolmates; Apollinaire and his dialectic lie at the origin of this farce. At the end of his life he wanted to put everything to rights but it was too late. The little monster of the "strange", launched by this sickly imagination, grew and grew nourished on money and nonsense, embedding itself in doubt like a crab beneath the rocks, filling brains in the place intelligence and destroying beauty by taking away its form.

Apollinaire's dialectic has filled the spirit of our age with disorder.

But the source of the evil comes from farther off: it must be sought in the bitter and subtle poison of Romanticism, in a desire for *individualism* and for excessive originality that has taken over the spirit of this age of disintegration and also put in question all human values.

But to return to Picasso. Perhaps we are biased, but our love for tradition, which, in our eyes is represented by Derain, does not blind us to the extent of not being able to recognise the Spaniard's great talent.

Picasso has given sufficient proof of his talent in works of classical conception, within the tradition, which is to say, respecting the rule of representation of an object through pure drawing, sensitive and full of expression. The liberties he has been able to take in his works do not exceed those taken by El Greco, Rembrandt or Goya in theirs, and may sometimes compete with the qualities of these masters.

What we are rising up against is this "freedom driven to the absurd" that has been accorded this

painter, which actually made him lose himself, as it caused him to neglect all effort and discipline and to consider works of art that were really only fantasies, extravagances or jests of a painter who, encouraged by commerce, confused genius with madness.

His “abstractions” copied by talentless painters can only lead us to the total disintegration of Art. Picasso has perhaps done Art a service by reawakening it from a torpor in which painting had fallen asleep in conventionalism. But at the moment it does nothing other than encourage the ignorance and ineptness of a whole generation of painters who, without having given evident proof of their talent as Picasso has, set out from where he ended up, and, taking advantage of his prestige, boast of an art (?) of which they are nothing but the followers.

All this would have little importance if, as we said earlier, business had not caught on to these trickeries and, profiting from the snobbism of some and the imbecility of others, rendered all this jumble of insanity fashionable.

Fashion, you will say, is temporary, fleeting. It may be, but this has been going on for almost forty years now: forty years of cubism, art that is abstract, non-representative, oneiric, Freudian, expressionist, simultaneist, surrealist, and what have you.

Don't you think it's lasted long enough?

We tasted and practised these fantasies, as everyone did, when we were twenty years old.

It is now time to free our spirit from these futilities, from this nonsense that the century has fed on up to now. Our century is adult; the time of infantilisms is over.

## AMBROISE VOLLARD

Ambroise Vollard, the art dealer, is perhaps the man who has most influenced the art of our age. Vollard was a Balzacian character and it would take Balzac to portray him.

All we would like to do is provide an understanding of the role he played in “modern” painting. Vollard arrived in Paris just when the impressionists were beginning to be “discovered”.

He himself would recount of how he was struck one day by the strange aspect of a painting seen in the window of an art dealer's shop. It was a moment in which he was unsure of what he wanted to do with his life and decided to go in and ask the price.

Vollard, who had arrived from Guadalupe and had never seen artworks other than cigar-box chromolithographs, was struck by the exorbitant price. He had always been told that painters lived in indigence. This contrast gave him food for thought and decided his career. He told himself it could be a good business to buy paintings from painters and resell them in a shop.

And that's how Ambroise Vollard became an art dealer.

He didn't get it wrong. Above all, he did not forget the strange aspect that had struck him in the painting he had seen, which would surely interest the public as well.

In his Creole candour he thought that Impressionism was a game of invention, a riddle, and that each painter had to find his own and could invent a new form of painting every morning. And thus he began to seek out and encourage “inventors” of painting.

For him, everything that appeared strange, unconventional, anti-conformist was good. God alone knows what daubs Vollard was able to buy; he counted solely on the extreme, on what might contain a surprise, on what he did not understand.

But if he understood nothing of Art, he did however bring the negro taste from his island, and everything of a primitive, hermetic or totemic conception found his favour. Out of gratitude, he would always venerate the impressionists.

With his business mind he came to create what might be called “Vollardian painting” and to sell “this merchandise” at fantastical prices.

At this point snobbism stepped in.

Vollard, almost the only one in possession of this merchandise, which he championed well, could keep prices high. What was initially factitious in terms of market value subsequently became valuable. Anyone who has played the stock exchange is aware of these processes.

This is the secret of Vollard and Vollardian painting’s success.

Vollard’s merchandise and that of his imitators is now scattered around the world and represents a considerable number of millions. Against this solid rank of created interests, isolated criticisms like ours can do nothing.

The wine is uncorked, we must drink it, as this will go on for a while.

## BLACK MAGIC

*The whole world today is shaken  
by the tom-tom of Africa.*

No longer Apollo nor Pan  
To guide the spirit,  
But the Minotaur,  
And the Serpent,  
And the Moon,  
It is the Dark Continent.

Come a-running all you snobs, gawkers, passersby, demonstrators, simpletons, morons, eccentrics, swing dancers, the appalling and astonished, and other ephemera, lovers of what is done, of what is worn, of oh darling! But really! Would you believe it?, of “is it worthwhile?”, of “am I à la mode?”

Hurry up and see, before the fanciful boutique closes down for relocation... of the brain.

Come in you onlookers, come in and join the dance.

Beauty has gone, the sorceress has taken its place; spells are hopping.

Come in and join the dance: march! Everybody in step! Strike, strike! Feet in rhythm. Dump your civilised detachable collars, your ties, your waistcoats, throw everything to the wind, away with dignity and keep in step. Make a ring around the world, not Ring-a-Ring o' Roses, not the round dance of all the girls in the world, but that demoniacal ring of black foreskins and derrières swaying in a monstrous tom-tom commotion whose stamping brings down cathedrals.

Where are you, Beauty, whose mutilated face weeps behind these masks of civil war reprisals?

What have they done to you, these men whose intelligence is at the service of falsehood?

Come all ye false witnesses and say with inspired grimaces: "How beautiful!" And this will make a ring around all the idiocy in the world.

## INDIVIDUALISM

On a film screen a man is shaving.

With one hand he opens his eye to the utmost, wielding his razor in the other hand.

Close-up.

We see only an immense eye and a razor slicing the retina.

Everything that can gush from a punctured eye comes out.

The spectator's sensibility has been touched.

As well it might be!

Everybody had the chance to see this in an avant-garde and *avant-guerre* film.

It seems that a human eye was not slit in order to shoot the film. No. It was a ram's.

And behold the modern, the new, the unexpected.

It appears that the cineaste responsible for this film has given further proof of his originality. As a guest at a Christmas party he rose from the table right in the middle of dinner and astounded his hosts by knocking down and trampling the Christmas Tree which they had thoughtfully added to the decor of the occasion. He said that one had to get rid of all such junk that encrusts the spirit.

One is either modern or one is not!...

If one is modern, one must destroy everything that is not of today.

But what is today if not tomorrow's yesterday?

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Do not do as others do, be yourself: this is the formula for all who want to make a place for themselves in the arts.

This mania has gone so far that one no longer knows where it might stop.

All the limits man had imposed on himself out of human respect have been surpassed. Sensibility and taste, atrophied under this scheme, no longer react, and they have been saturated to such an extent by extravagances that those whose works scandalised us yesterday look like latecomers today.

We are no longer dealing with shocking the spirit of a certain bourgeoisie but with destroying, without exception, all social rules and conventions.

Indubitably some of these conventions were due for review, but we need to set a limit to such revision because our life depends on it. In a word, man is alive thanks to this grouping of conventions that we call the social system.

Now, how might we establish this limit? In art, as in law or morals, one is within or outside the law. To set out on the right foot we must return to the point of our false start.

They tell us: "The past is the past; you can't turn back".

And this notwithstanding, each time we went back we called it:

RENAISSANCE

## FORMULAS

Take a man with good eyesight.

Lead him into a dark tunnel, or wake him in the middle of the night and ask him if he sees light.

He will of course answer no.

Simulate surprise and try to make him believe that it is light.

He won't believe you.

Get together with two or three false witnesses who agree to back up your lies.

The man will hesitate, lose confidence; doubt of the evidence has been awakened in his mind; he will wonder if he has become blind.

And this is how one can destroy intelligence.

We are travellers lost in a tunnel where everybody claims to see light.

## ANOTHER FORMULA

Take a man of healthy mind.

Make him live with the insane.

After a certain amount of time this man's reason will be unbalanced.

Reason is none other than the faculty of making our actions compatible with real life.

Madness takes no account of reality. The control of facts escapes it. The brain lives in a daydream.

Now, to what reality shall our actions relate if we are living with beings from whom reality escapes at every moment?

Who can sing well with the band out of tune?

Nothing is more fragile than reason, and “our age is stunned by the contagion of the absurd.”

## ON THE NECESSITY OF ART

For our generation, wholly absorbed in the mechanical revolution, art today is not at all necessary. Except for the following:

It shows us that man is not only an animal that walks, eats, wears clothes, kills his fellow man and in the end enriches the earth, but always retains within himself a small flame, the symbol of which the Greek vestal virgin sought to keep alive.

This small flame that is our life, the true, the only.

For the rest will shortly be nothing more than remains.

Art was born with the spirit of man.

It will accompany him until his disappearance.

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Man's first dwellings – caves – were decorated, because man has always needed to cast his eyes upon something that nourished his imagination.

A bare wall is the image of nothingness.

Art makes man forget his condition.

A prison with decorated walls would not be a prison at all.

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Man has survived thanks to Art.

The works of art he has left speak of the 10,000 years of our history.

Art precedes language.

Before inventing words, man made himself understood with gestures. He sought to define these gestures. The alphabet is none other than a form of stylised painting.

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Men who have gone before us have traced out the road of the Spirit in signs.

As for ourselves, all that remains is to recognise these signs so as not to stray from the path, since all who do so perish.

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Beauty is not an opinion that each of us may form as he pleases: it is the mathematical result of the best adaptation for functioning, for life.

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When the sense of beauty is lost, the monstrous appears; and the fact that the diplodocus, the brontosaurus and the iguanodon actually existed shows us that the earth once lived without spirit.

## IDENTITY OF THE ARTS

Rhythm is everywhere. It is the law of the world.

The construction of a painting is subject to the same rules as a symphony, a poem, a piece of architecture.

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The Pythagorean law, the law of number and its expressions, is the same everywhere.

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Proportion. Form. Harmony. Rhythm.

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The unit must be found throughout, and the correlation of its subtle traces between line, colour, surface and volume make the work of art.

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The artist must have his spirit taut as a drum skin on which, if sand is sprinkled, one sees the resonances form geometric figures.

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Everything that moves us echoes within us, following a geometric progression; but the geometry we know is only an infinitesimal part of the one that forms life, of human geometry. Seeking to overanalyse, the artist would kill emotion. He can but have faith in imponderables.

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Great painting, truly great, follows the same discipline, the same rigorous order of the metrics of rhythm, of resonance, of musicality, as a poem by Ronsard or du Bellay, or a symphony by Beethoven or Johann Sebastian Bach.

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What makes for stability: the constant topicality of certain artworks.

The painting of the golden ages, through the stories its painters tell, brings us the reassurance of order, balance, the calm of the complete, everything that our spirit seeks without respite: “a purpose”.

## ART IS COLLECTIVE

The Art of the great civilisations has always represented the spirit of these civilisations.

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Egyptian art expressed Egyptian civilisation, its collective spirit and not that of certain individuals.

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Greek art, Assyrian art, Chinese art, Indian art and Gothic art are collective arts.

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The characteristic of a great art is its unity of conception.

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Today we have artists, but we do not have Art.

This is a sign that our society is disintegrating, losing its cohesion. We do not think social. We think individual.

## ARCHITECTURE

In painting, the current anarchy is of only relative importance. When the fashion for these extravagances has passed, everything will be put away in the attic and amends will be made.

But in the other arts?

Architecture for example?

Mistakes in that field are not easily erased.

Everywhere the ugliness of modern style is already wounding us.

What an aberration! And why, notwithstanding, do we still let ourselves get taken in by the catchphrase “modern”?

When will we understand that the West found its balance with the Greeks, and that since then has done none other than adapt a constant rule to a given milieu?

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If I had a house to build, I would not entrust it to innovators, modernists, for fear that in ten years it would be the butt of ridicule and ready for demolition.

I'd rather put my faith in someone who knew the rule of harmony of which Paccioli speaks, the law of numbers.

Following this rule and my requirements he would lay down the proportions, and no aspect would be left to “invention” (in the sense of innovation without reason and solely out of non-conformism), everything having to stem first from necessity and classical rule.

And this does not imply the exclusion of progress (progress goes more slowly than we do) or any enmity with new forms.

Nothing finer than an aeroplane or a racing motorboat, but this is because here form is the child of necessity, not the product of fancy.

It is the result of the most efficient adaptation of the object to its purpose; there lies its beauty: “*Beauty is fitness*”.

American skyscrapers are beautiful because they meet a need and because they respect simplicity and the classical rules. Besides, most of them consist of buildings of classical inspiration surmounted by simple units, which diminish in function of their height, and are often crowned by a top floor decorated with elements of equally classical inspiration.

They are far from the rantings of our modernist innovators.

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We hear talk of new materials.

But a new material does not necessarily imply a new aesthetic.

Greek architecture in marble bears throughout the mark of its origin in wood.

In the case of dwellings, we are not dealing only with protecting people from the weather, keeping them safe, but at the same time with satisfying, “through familiar forms”, the atavistic sentiment of this security.

Ghyka, in his book *Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts*, gives an overview of the correspondences between the work of art and the work of nature.

The architectural examples in this book show that these architectures are composed of elements progressing in the same mathematical order as that followed in the formation of organic cells.

Between Art, the work of human creation, and Nature, of divine creation, there is a correlation of mathematical harmony.

The work of art, then, is not the result of fashion or chance but of a correspondence between the spirit of the artist and the Spirit *tout court* that rules over creation.

Knowledge of the mathematical laws of cell progression in nature is therefore an essential element for harmonious construction of the entire art work, especially in architecture. We should not forget that the ancients measured in inches, feet, cubits... All building therefore took human proportions, independently of their size.

This knowledge, possessed by the ancients through tradition, has also been lost. Nowadays we build in ignorance, like blind men in the dark.

The disharmonic overwhelms our sensibility. And herein lies the danger. We are heading insensibly towards the monstrous, towards the invertebrate, the ugly.

Man has an instinctive feeling for harmony, which is why all harmonious construction appears *natural* to us. It *completes* the landscape wherein it stands, because it was born and is part of the laws of creation in nature.

By contrast, failure to observe these laws creates disharmonious buildings that impact us negatively and cause us discomfort, like seeing a monstrous wart on a human body. But beware! The spirit of man gets accustomed to everything, even to that which is ugly, even to crime; and frequentation of the ugly and disharmonious might become as necessary to us as darkness to the toad. The one difference between the beautiful and the ugly is that the former, inasmuch as it constitutes order, leads to that which is perfect, to the viable, to life; the latter to disorder, to the monstrous, to the disintegration and hence the destruction of life.

## THE WEST

We are Westerners.  
The West is Greece!  
Forever Greece!

And each time we distance ourselves we betray our origins.

It is not a matter of standing still, but of always “conserving the same reason”.

Our civilisation is Mediterranean. The Greeks were nourished on the spirit of the ancient world and transmitted it to us.

All that we know of Greece bears the hallmark of collective effort, of unity.

The work of art always has the same family feel; it can only be classified by period and place.

Wherever men have lived they have always exchanged and shared their talents, their acquired experience.

Stone espoused the form of their spirit and has remained to bear witness.

They want to deny the past under the pretext of progress.

What progress?

Do you know anything more ancient than the egg? The Greek amphora is an egg standing.

Do you know anything more beautiful, more perfect?

## TOWN PLANNING

One need only glance at the map of a city to identify the periods of its history, of its disorder or political stability.

The physiognomy of a city corresponds to the collective feeling of a civilisation, of a period of history.

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Stones bear witness to the order or disorder of the spirit of man. The straight line is the sign of will. The overall plan indicates breadth of vision, the power of the form of politics.

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The monstrous disorder of the formation of the Paris suburbs, all this cacophony of constructions in succession without logic, serving disparate functions, without cohesion or harmony, is precisely the image of the disorder of the spirit, the lack of moral unity, an image of the anarchy that characterises our age.

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Architecture is the witness par excellence of the form of the spirit of an age.

## RETURN TO NATURE

The impressionists' famous "return to nature" has been interpreted rather excessively by their successors.

When an art becomes bland and conventional due to the repetition of old themes, it is indispensable to enliven it through a return to direct references to nature.

This means finding a subject, studying its characters, drapery, the colour of the sky etc... not only in paintings but also in nature.

It is always thus, each time an age's infatuation with a particular genre of art leads to satiety due to repetition of the same themes.

Caravaggio was one of the first Italian painters who, reacting against the conventionalism of Raphael's imitators, returned to nature, to reality. He was the master of Ribera who, in turn, influenced the entire Spanish school and facilitated the hatching of Velasquez' genius, the master of modern naturalism.

This is the true return to nature. The other, the one that leads us to infancy or to negro art, goes too far.

Under pretext of reacting against the commonplace, it destroys everything that has gone before us. It confuses the return *to the study of nature* with a return to a *state of nature*.

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The current theory of allowing our ME to blossom, which is to say our natural instincts (the ones that differentiate us from our neighbour), in view of finding originality, leads fatally to every extravagance in Art.

Applied to life in general, this theory would inevitably lead to the separation of individuals, to destruction of the social order.

While the whole of man's education has always tended to eradicate in him that which separates him from others, Romanticism invented the cult of the individual that destroyed the labour of centuries.

The alleged superiority of the "natural" man, which is to say the ideal, utopian man in possession of all virtues without ever having heard tell of any, of a sense of good and evil, of the beautiful and the ugly, but strictly by instinct, without anyone having ever taught him... such superiority is nothing but an aberration of Romanticism.

The truth is that man is born not as a package of virtues but as a little wildcat who has to be trained. Nice, indubitably, like all kittens, but a potential wildcat.

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We know examples of unfortunate children brought up in the most total abandon by parents who were heedless or who believed in the virtues of the state of nature. What a distressing outcome! The ones that don't wind up in jail turn into beings who are odious to all, maladjusted, inadaptable, and who pay for their parents' imbecility the rest of their diminished lifetime.

Not only must our actions somehow agree with those of our fellow men and at all times be kept in check by reason, but also our thought and spirit from childhood onwards must be trained and steered in the direction of social convention. Without this discipline no society is possible, but only savages in liberty.

So what is the point of this "total" return to nature (our age is decidedly totalitarian), to the wild, to infancy, to the negro? Do we want to reduce the artist to this? To becoming an antisocial being? Can it not be seen that under this form he can produce only a debilitating art?

Now, the function of art is a cultural function, a social function. Beauty is a form of balance, stability and of life. It has no place on the path of disorder and madness.

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Our age lives under the false conception of the ME cult. This is what must be destroyed, this is the grave error of the century. A philosophical error that leads the world towards moral decay and the loss of reason.

Hypertrophy of the ME can only create monsters. A society is not created with monsters; monsters are not viable. They are clinical cases; curiosities no doubt for sickly if not perverted spirits. But it isn't with a bunch of clinical cases that we nourish the young, unless we want to lead them towards utter decay.

Monsters may be fine for exhibition at a fairground booth, but it would surely be criminal to set them up as a standard.

## ON CRITICISM

When one sees what certain critics are wont to praise in productions of the spirit, especially in the plastic arts; when one takes note of what they present to us in fine and costly printed editions as examples of "modern genius" (editions in which care is taken to create confusion by setting authentic masterpieces side by side with works that are less so); when one has taken in all this one wonders whether certain intellectuals are not party to a great plot in which the watchword is to trouble the spirit, destroy intelligence and abolish reason, for the sole purpose of turning us into a herd of robots.

Pliny the Younger said that only those practising a profession had the right to speak thereof. But in those days there were no journalists. Newspapers and periodicals began to appear just over a hundred years ago, and art critique, since then, has been the domain of literati.

Diderot, one of the first writer/art critics, was highly interested in the expression of feelings. Joy and sorrow well expressed in painting was the ideal an artist had to pursue.

What critics are concerned with nowadays, their pet subject, is personality. To be or not to be personal, “*that is the question*”. Do what you will, provided that it isn’t like anybody else. Does not one see that this has gone in the other direction – that our age has had enough of this anarchy, and that the revolution it is preparing shall take place under the banner of the strictest collective discipline and the abolition of sterile individualism?

It is a mistake to encourage individualism under the pretext of progress. There is no progress when one generation destroys what has been done by another. Man is a continuity, and nothing lasting will be done if we do not use the work of our predecessors as a “fulcrum”.

It is true that the generations immediately preceding our own did not have a coherent unity and cannot be taken as an example. It is not our generation that has broken the chain – the evil comes from farther away – but it is our duty to seek a way out of this impasse.

There is no lack of examples of those who have tried to do so: let us follow them instead of dragging ourselves down blind alleys.

By making it a crime for a painter to draw inspiration from an earlier work, critics have killed all progress, for progress is not synonymous with the anarchy of a perpetual beginning.

Under the pretext of originality, they encourage extravagance and oblige the artist to renounce his masters and condemn him to the arduous job of bartering his sources.

Criticism has made the error of believing it could provide our age with an art form by encouraging and demanding that artists to make an original kind of painting, that is, different from other kinds of painting.

This cliché of originality paralyses all progress and condemns artists to running on the spot. It is the cause of present day disorder because it prevents artists from drawing inspiration from the masters, which is the only way of becoming one themselves, and obliges them to close their eyes to their surroundings, to seek nourishment only within themselves.

The theory that one owes nothing except to oneself is an aberration. It sterilises spirit, taste, intelligence and reason.

Because what man has called taste, intelligence and reason lies in the faculty of judging and ordering his relationships with the universe around him, with the exterior.

Aside from this, man bears within him only what we find when we gut a chicken.

How much more useful Criticism would be if it were to encourage young artists to draw inspiration freely from the masters and indicating those most worthy. This has been the practice in all ages excepting our own.

Criticism is very happy to call a number of our contemporaries “master”, but does not tolerate them forming schools. Of what and whom, then, are they masters?

The truth is that today there are no real masters. The self-styled personality of a few contemporaries consists in repetition of the same theme, which is generally nothing more than an adaptation

adroitly disguised in fashionable tendencies; the one adapts Van Gogh, Gauguin or Cézanne, who formerly adapted El Greco to a new condiment; the other does Poussin or Ingres in wirework – and here I mention only the best... All this because first and foremost, it appears, one must be oneself. But what does being oneself mean?

We are all someone's child. But nobody today dares own up to his own father. Our commonplace personalism has banished all continuity and all discipline, Art has gone adrift, at the discretion of all kinds of snobbery, more or less mercantile or disinterested.

The return to reason, in our view, would be a return to the sources. But to paint like 15<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century painters, one would need to learn how to paint once again.

And here lies the great role of criticism: firstly to insist that a painter should know how to paint, how to model a head, passing from light to dark without transition, without soiling the tone, without apparent effort, in a warm and homogenous colour, giving an illusion of nature from close-up and afar, as we find in Frans Hals, Rubens, Rembrandt, Raphael, Velázquez, Largillière, Watteau, Nattier, Fragonard, Goya and all the great masters.

All this is clearly out of fashion, and for a reason, but it is down to critics to restore a taste for beautiful things to the public, instead of encouraging self-taught painting.

To paint well, meaning, to know one's metier, is not everything for a painter, but it is the indispensable quality without which he cannot say what he may have to say; otherwise he says it badly.

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In his "Physiologie de l'Art" André Malraux said:

"There is no genius in the world who did not begin by expressing himself through the language of another."

"It isn't goats that give Giotto his love of painting; it's Cimabue."

"One does not become a poet by a spring morning, but by the exaltation of a poem."

"For centuries, between intuitive expression and Art, there has always been another art. Between El Greco's childhood drawings and his Venetian canvases lies his love for the Venetian painters."

"It was not to represent life that Cézanne dedicated himself in 'Zola', but to speak the language of Manet."

"A painter is not first and foremost a man who loves landscapes. He is first and foremost a man who loves paintings."

"The artist's raw material is never life; it is always another work of art."

All this amounts to saying that we are not born learnt. But the habit of grasping this truth has been lost.

Critics were evidently right to combat the anaemic, bastard art, mediocre in conception and execution, that was the academic and society art of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

What was wrong with this art was that it wanted not to continue a tradition but to lose one.

Critics were right to defend Courbet or Manet in their day, the last great lords of painting.

But if Courbet and Manet were the nonconformists of their times, that is no reason to defend all of the nonconformists all of the time.

For the love of God, let us return to reason! Enough of dehumanised art! Enough fruit bowls, apples, handtowels in zinc, enough of dropsical or leprous women. Enough Ceza... asininity! Under the pretext of saving us from the cream-cakes of Academicism they give us an example of "ineptness disguised as genius." (Vlaminck dixit).

Now that Impressionism has saturated us with its confetti landscapes, Fauvism with its extremisms, Expressionism and Surrealism with their monstrosities (and I say nothing of cubism, dead from starvation), wouldn't it be better if we sought to recover an art in which the *human figure* might be treated with the grace, the ease and the effectiveness of masters prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

For, what still interests man the most, remains man himself.

## ON PERSONALITY

The confusion between personality and individualism in the art of our days is a grave error.

The encouragement of individualism, which critics still linger over, has created a one-upmanship of extravagance among artists, where true personality is substituted by Freudian introspection and other psychoanalyses.

It is this dispersion of effort in sterile individualisms that deprives our age of all coherency and personality.

It may appear paradoxical, to claim that individualism kills personality.

It isn't in the least, and the error is to have confused the two terms.

The personality is that which is proper to us. We identify ourselves by this most precious possession of ours. It is the quality of our person. It is inalienable and no one can take it from us. It is the grouping of our physical and moral qualities. We received them from our fathers and we pass them on to our children.

This personality, which is our legacy, has changed over the centuries through our ancestors, leaving us with atavistic impressions. We can further modify it through our education and be subjected to influences.

Personality, then, is a grouping of qualities acquired by a long chain of humans who have passed it on to us so that we in turn might pass it on enriched by our own experiences.

Personality is therefore a continuity.

Individualism is the contrary of personality: it considers the individual as a whole and tends to isolate him, to separate him from the rest of the universe; he goes no further than himself.

The encouragement of excessive originality to which so-called modern art is condemned, the new at any price, leads to the destruction of personality by means of the absurd.

Individualism is not personality; the latter constructs, the former destroys what man has taken centuries to build.

It is understandable that individualism was encouraged with view to eliminating a bad tradition, but with that goal achieved, as it has been, and with the present need to rebuild, individualism is harmful.

Tradition is none other than personality passed down. If it is destroyed, another must be created.

Which is what Jacques-Louis David did.

After bucolic charm, Roman strictness.

After pastorals, firemen.<sup>2</sup>

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The firemen have now died in the flames, and only rubble remains.

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The exaltation of personality must come about without the artist seeking it. From the joy he finds in creation, from the freedom of expression granted by knowledge of his metier.

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To express oneself well, one must first know one's language. Today everybody thinks he has to invent his own, and nobody understands it.

It's the Tower of Babel.

## SIGNATURE AND PROPERTY

On the subject of writers who fell in the war and what they might have achieved had they lived, André Chamson wrote:

“Each one of us is diminished by those works which will never see the light. For our trade is not a competitive one, except for the mediocre and ineffectual. Any lofty soul can only feel the fortunes of others as being a part of his own fate.”

This is how we feel about painting: a shared expression, “for everything that belongs to the spirit is ours.”

Today we defend private property so bitterly because we live in an egoistic and individualist social system. Each of us lives only to defend what is his against others. But let us imagine another system in which people at last come to understand that it is in their interest to share everything. We should then be rich, all of us, with all the world's wealth.

<sup>2</sup>A reference to *art pompier*.

We know that this is hard, but why not begin with the spirit?

It has already been done, in antiquity, in the middle ages, and with what results! The splendour of our cathedrals would never have been possible without this submission of the individual to the work.

Suppress the signature and we suppress speculation; man will no longer seek to stand out but to do well.

Some may say that the signature is necessary to maintain rivalry, so that each will give of his best. We are not of this opinion. What would remain of most of the works of present day “masters” if we removed the signature? The signature is nothing but a mark of our vanity. Man becomes great only when he forgets himself.

Involved in a work greater than himself, he surpasses himself.

Sportsmen know it well enough: the team surpasses the individual.

If we want to have art, the artist must forget himself in his work as the musician forgets himself within the orchestra.

This is how artists worked on cathedrals. If only we could return to those admirable organisations.

If unsigned works were presented at the annual salons, do you think the critics would always recognise the same masters?

And wouldn't the admission juries often reject works whose pride of place today is assured solely by the signature?

Often the signature is nothing but a privilege, a special favour.

Away with signatures!

Away with places of honour!...

This is what young painters should demand of the salons, so that their works might be judged by public and critics without bias, on merit alone.

And then, what fun it would be to watch the clueless critics and public, not knowing what to admire, getting it wrong time and again.

The signature is nothing but a guarantee for the ignorant.

## CONTINUITY

*Two thousand years of work  
have made this land  
An endless reservoir  
for the ages to come.*

Charles Peguy

Turning a blind eye to what has gone before us, as we are advised to do, is foolishness.

It is high time we realised that we must go back, not to arrest the march of the spirit but to once more embark upon the great path of reason.

Our personality has been given us to be enriched by all that surrounds us. I take *my own* where I find it, said Voltaire,<sup>3</sup> and the men who came before us toiled only to bequeath us their acquired wealth.

The spirit is one, and all within its domain belongs thereto.

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We are not saying that one may take something from someone and then say “this is mine” but rather, if it belongs to the spirit, “this is ours”.

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Cecino Cennini recounts that Taddeo Gaddi stayed with Giotto twenty-four years before achieving the mastery to paint on his own account.

This done, he sought one thing only: to be as good as his master.

Not a case of doing Taddeo Gaddis, but of doing a good job. Continuity, faith, humbleness.

Setting out from Byzantium, and by way of:

Duccio,  
Cimabue,  
Giotto,  
Taddeo Gaddi,  
Masaccio,  
Masolino,  
Filippo Lippi,  
Fra Angelico,  
Botticelli,  
Perugino,  
Raphael,  
Poussin,  
Ingres,  
Delacroix, etc...

a long chain has come down to us which must continue. From time to time in this long line, a man with a privileged gift adds a new value.

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<sup>3</sup> The famous quote “Je prends mon bien où je le trouve” is from Molière.

Embodying the imponderables of those surrounding him and those who preceded him, he set the course of continuity for a new period.

It is these “witnesses” who, in defining it, enrich the potential of the spirit.

They summed up in themselves the culmination of the personality of an age. They alone are personal, for they are the emblem of a collective personality.

But each time that these geniuses appeared, they came in their own day and no one was surprised. They were the result of their surroundings more than of their individual will.

Genius cannot be commanded.

Everything they did that was new, they did unknowingly, unconsciously. Wishing with all their might to do as well as their master, taking from him the best he had and adding their own.

And it was thus, without breaking the chain, that the Spirit ripened and rose in the splendour of a Rubens in Flanders, Velázquez in Spain, a Veronese in Italy, a Nicolas Poussin in France, an Albrecht Dürer or a Holbein in Germany.

## ON SPIRIT

Contemplation, conversation and reading are initial contacts between two parties of the Spirit. They clash or mutually identify.

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From this contact the idea is born, and from it action; for man acts only through the idea.

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The idea lies at the origin of all. Everything that exists was first conceived by the Spirit.

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The Spirit of man is locked within the limits of logic. It is within these limits that it takes form, like the insect in its chrysalis. Outside of this safe zone, madness lies in wait to destroy it.

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All attempts in painting to go beyond that which is possible, produce the ridiculous and painful effect of the dancer’s leap as he seeks to free his body from the laws of gravity.

The frog that hops and believes it’s flying.

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The human spirit tends towards order, logic.  
Ethics and Aesthetics are the limits of the Spirit, the sole reason of life.

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Art is neither a game nor relaxation.  
Art is a need for exteriorisation, the materialisation of the Spirit.

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The Spirit is everywhere but can only communicate between its parts by exteriorising itself.  
Art is one form of this exteriorisation.

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Great epochs in Art have always coincided with periods of spiritual grandeur among peoples.

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Works of art bear witness of a civilisation to the generations that follow.

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The individual counts for nothing in a civilisation except as a product of that civilisation, and this product will be all the more characteristic once he has abandoned his individuality in order to absorb, adapt to and assimilate the most characteristic features of this civilisation.

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One cannot conceive of progress in human order if man remains closed within himself instead of opening his eyes wide to add to his own spirit the experience and wisdom acquired by those who have preceded him.

If one reflects on the physical structure of man, one notes that it progresses also by mimicry and that everything in us responds to contact with and knowledge of the external world.

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The Spirit in us is part of a whole which fills, which forms and which is the Universe: this spirit has taken over our corporeal envelope solely as a means of manifesting itself and communicating with the rest.

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The history of the species shows us irrefutably this long effort of matter to open the gates of the spirit of communication.

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Sight, hearing and speech: these appeared in nature only after an ongoing and progressive effort over the centuries, the marvellous and mysterious spectacle of which surpasses all understanding. From protozoon to man, the way is marked with this liberation. Everything that lives seeks this exteriorisation, this communion with what surrounds it.

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Thought comes only from the clash of our sensibility with the outside world, and when men have used the golden ratio as measure, the chromatic scale, the rule of harmony, the law of right and wrong, the convention of the word, spoken or written; when they have thus measured the form and intensity of this psychic shock, they have given us the means by which to order our thought in the direction of that universal harmony which is the form of the Spirit.

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It is only during great periods of spiritual unity that man has found pure expression in art. In 40 centuries the West has known such philosophical unity but twice.

Greece,

Christianity,

and produced but two forms of pure art to express this spirituality:

The Parthenon,

The Cathedral;

as with Ethic, so with Aesthetic.

Here are ours:

Individualism,

Scepticism.

Let us not be astonished by our art: it represents our age.

But it is precisely here that the great pity lies: for he who can read signs, our decadence is inscribed therein.

## PAINTERS AND GENIUS

As a rule, the masterpieces of the old masters are *finished* works.

It is in this ability to complete the execution, while wholly maintaining the work's spontaneity of conception, that one recognises genius.

Subsequently, once an artist has given proof of his knowledge and skill, when he has risen to fame, the "connoisseurs" come to detect the hallmark of his genius in the slightest scribble, the most offhand sketch by these masters.

This taste for the incomplete – quite recent – has so overwhelmed the ignorant that, in order to appear otherwise, they created the snobbery of the sketch, developing it to such a degree that everything rough, imprecise or unconsummated is considered a priori as the genius touch, and one cannot admire a finished work today without cutting the figure of an ignoramus.

Genius, it has been said, is eternal patience. What is considered the sign of genius in painting today is impatience.

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Everything that is off the cuff, rapid, incomplete or obscure has a good chance of being taken as proof of talent.

That which is clear, precise, understandable – in a word, finished – is considered a priori as mediocre.

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The incomplete is fashionable and the public, abetted by the critics, hasn't got round to understanding why it must not like what it does understand and like instead what it doesn't.

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In all prejudices there is an injustice.

A painting is not necessarily beautiful just because it is completed. But nor is every rough sketch necessarily a masterpiece.

Today, side by side with undeniable talents whom it would be an exaggeration to call geniuses, there are certain smart alecks who have taken advantage of the clichéd unfinished look and made a name for themselves as masters, whereas they are actually mediocrities.

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Among these contemporary "masters" there are unfortunately more mediocrities than one might believe.

There ought to be a system of selection that obliges *all* artists to produce a *finished* work prior to mastery being accorded.

Why not? And who would it bother but the mediocrities?

This was the practice up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and art was none the worse for it, quite the opposite.

It is claimed that such a trial would obstruct the hatching of geniuses who cannot submit to these disciplines.

This may explain why geniuses have been so rare in times gone by and so numerous in ours.

Our age has nothing but geniuses.

All modern painting stands on genius.

Remove the genius and nothing remains.

Geniuses have often been misunderstood by their times.

Not by ours.

Our age has an extraordinary flair for understanding geniuses. That is the only thing it understands.

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Genius has often been mistaken for madness.

Today it is madness that is mistaken for genius.

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How many idols must be broken that youth may have true guides!

## ON CONDUCT

Since the age of Romanticism so much has been written about the romantic lives of artists that they have ended up being looked upon as a race apart, a phenomenon of nature.

Believing in this sort of superiority, certain young people entering the artistic professions deem it necessary to stand out for their comportment.

May they allow us here to offer a piece of advice. In our view, to possess talent it is not indispensable to grow a Persian style beard or dress up as a musketeer, a mountaineer or a bogus proletarian. These nonconformist airs sometimes inspire respect among the ignorant, but it is precisely in this that such pains to disguise oneself is suspect: it implies a desire to deceive, therefore is nothing less than a kind of charlatanry. Assuming superiority for the fact of being an artist is ludicrous puerility.

The sole quality a man can be proud of is honesty: for the rest, if you have or believe you have talent, then thank the Lord for granting it, and seek to be forgiven for this special favour.

So dress like everybody else, and with as much rectitude as possible: any talent you may have

will be in no way diminished; and if you have none, it will save you from the ridiculousness of believing otherwise.

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Mistrust those who let all this “go to their head”.  
Most of the time it’s empty.

## MUSEUMS

In recent times painters have been often advised to eschew museums, not to look at the masters and to have no other master than nature.

A word that has always enjoyed success – nature! But I should like to meet a jeweller, a goldsmith, a gem-cutter, a luthier or cabinetmaker wanting no other master than nature.

What nonsense! Do you imagine that these trades are learnt by looking at the moon? And why do you imagine that the painter’s trade is easier?

The twenty years Taddeo Gaddi spent with Giotto, Van Dyck’s fifteen years with Rubens, that’s what painters must do to learn their metier. Clearly, if taste runs to preferring a rough pebble over a finely cut diamond, a raw timber table with six inch nails over a Jacob or a Riesener (as in the case of painting today), then there will be no need for masters.

But such furniture and jewels could satisfy only savages. Is this what we have come to?

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Like it or not, and while awaiting better to turn up, the masterpieces of painting are in museums, and it is there that we must go if we don’t want to forget what painting once was.

But it may be that we are advised not to go there in order to avoid comparisons with the works of our contemporaries.

Have you seen the poor figure cut by Monet’s portrait of Clemenceau in the Louvre?  
Sacrilege, some will say.

Too bad! Someone really had to say so.

And may the great Monet forgive us. Monet was a grand old man and indubitably a great painter too.

But the art of the portrait is rare in Impressionism. Impressionism is above all a landscapist’s art.

As surface painting, Impressionism makes us think of those light airs one imagines being played on the flute by shepherds in the Bucolics. For all their charm, these flute solos are far from the great classical symphony.

With these limited means the great impressionists – Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Pissarro – composed admirable pieces, as impressionist art, but they should not be presented beside the Musée du Louvre’s selection of great masterpieces.

An indefinable malaise of counterfeit strikes us today when we pass from the great classics to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century rooms.

It is quite fine to institute a Museum of Impressionism, but this passage without transition, from a completed art to another which is not, can only result in painful comparisons. Painting should be separated, from David onwards, and a 19<sup>th</sup> century museum be established.

## THE ART OF THE PORTRAITURE

The extent to which this art is in decline was evident at a recent Paris exhibition on the French portrait. If great portraits of contemporary figures were called for today, which of our living masters might receive such a commission?

Matisse? Picasso? Braque? Soutine? Rouault? Utrillo? Who else?

Can you picture General de Gaulle, Stalin, president Roosevelt or Mr. Winston Churchill sent down to posterity as portrayed by these painters in their habitual style?

What a laugh!

The truth is that modern painting is incapable of handling the human figure with the nobility of a Frans Hals, a Rubens, a Velazquez, a Rigaud, even of a [Jean]-Marc Nattier or Largillière.

In painting, as in many other things, we are accustomed to such pirouettes, occasionally spiritual but nevertheless nothing more than disguised ineptness.

No! Do not imagine we are here in defence of the “official” artists whose mission is to portray Third Republic presidents for posterity. We know what that kind of painting is worth. These painters, however, have the honesty to produce likenesses that are not too ridiculous. Sometimes not so easy!

We see the objection right away. Painting stands well above such drudgery. Bah! Good likenesses? Stuff for photographers!

A portrait is not *solely* a question of likeness: it must *also* be fine painting. Raphael, Titian, Philippe de Champaigne, Velazquez and Goya did exactly that. Would it be beneath the dignity of today’s painters to emulate these masters? Or simply beyond their powers?

We shall say later what we think about photography as a substitute for painting.

Had Napoleon lived a few more years we might have had his photograph. A close shave! Because instead of the heroic image painters have left us, we would be looking at a paunchy little man who, like his brother prince Jérôme, makes us think of our uncle Gustav decked out for a fancy-dress party.

Photography is not situated in the past; its realism is always contemporary. Photography respects no one. It sees grandeur only in ham actors, with whom everything is external.

David, Gros, Gérard were decadent painters to be sure, but they retained a certain science of painting; Ingres, mannered but teeming with elegance: they have left us heroic or charming images of the First Empire and the court of Louis-Philippe. Winterhalter, the last great portraitist, saved the Second Empire from ridicule (the kind found in certain photos of Napoleon III and his wife).

Today the popularity of ministers and heads of state is established by radio, cinema and photos in illustrated magazines: all these media are ephemeral and live only in the present.

What will be left a hundred years from now?

A few images, ridiculous and without grandeur, in which future generations will see nothing more than farce.

The art of the portrait is dead. It's a shame.

## SCULPTURE

So far we have said nothing about sculpture.

It is not that we are indifferent to this art, but since it is bound by laws that cannot be broken as easily as those of painting, extravagance and charlatanism have been less rife.

A sculptor, even if he is not an artist, is at least a craftsman with a general knowledge of his trade. One cannot work wood or stone as one lays paint on a canvas.

Moreover, the cumbersomeness of sculpture and consequent storage problems have made it unsuitable for the speculation that has plagued painting.

But if the moral crisis has not been so serious, it nonetheless exists.

The crisis in sculpture began with its desire to become independent of architecture, to which it must always be subordinate.

In judging the value of a sculpture, one must keep in mind the architectural style to which it belongs.

Quite aside from its intrinsic quality, it will always share the faults and qualities specific to this style.

A sculpture must always belong to an architectural style.

Should it belong to none, then it must be classified as impressionist, a *bronze d'art*, a mantelshelf piece, a work of brilliance.

"Works of brilliance" have been plaguing sculpture for half a century.

Rodin, acknowledged master of modern sculpture, was a virtuoso of the brilliant piece.

Here once more we shall set the cat among the pigeons.

Rodin has steered sculpture away from its true end. His *Gates of Hell*, to which he pledged a lifetime, is an architectural aberration, a youthful puerility that he was never able to get rid of.

Had he completed this gate, one wonders where he might have put it. Perhaps in some huge

Cabaret du Néant. As for his Balzac, that huge decanter stopper (with Rodin everything is huge), shall one day bear the title “the blind man of Carrefour Raspail”.

His museum gives the impression of an emporium of ambitious and unachieved dreams. Yet he had everything it takes to be a great artist.

A modeller of stunning ability, as demonstrated by his *St John*, his *Walking Man*, *The Age of Bronze*, he lacked only what was lacking in all artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: discipline, a framework.

When this discipline was lost to architecture – the leader and centre of the plastic arts – all the rest went adrift.

A little more architecture and a little less literature is what Rodin needed.

Bourdelle (Gothic) and Maillol (Greek) got the message and sought to bring this art back to its true destination.

Young sculpture is on the right road. The eye to Greece, as taught by Maillol, promises a bright future.

France has such a wealth of incomparable examples of mediaeval and renaissance sculpture; and stone is being worked just as it was in Michelangelo’s day: so the country’s sculpture cannot stray for long from the true way. Better disciplined than painters, since they are undoubtedly more bound to the needs of their metier, young sculptors are waiting only for the return of “builders” who will lay the foundations of a true renaissance.

## ABSTRACT ART OR IMITATIVE ART?

Painting has always been an imitative art, in the sense that its elements are constituted by the imitation of the forms that surround us.

This imitation can of course be interpreted to the point that it renders us a value of the sign, but then it becomes decorative art or writing, or ceases to be a true art.

It is odd then, that the question raised on whether painting should be an imitative art, should occur in the precise moment in which the science necessary for this imitation has been lost, leaving no other solution than embracing the culture of the mark.

We are told that photography has taken away painting’s imitative role. This is too puerile a reasoning. Photography can replace painting no more than casting, known from antiquity, can replace sculpture.

A work of art is above all human expression and partakes of this emotion, inseparable from all that has been conceived in the Spirit.

A photograph gives only an incomplete image, a lifeless image; it is only a reflection, a mechanical recording of the shadows of things. A yellowed photograph has the semblance of a dead thing just as much as the wax figures in the Grévin museum or in hairdresser window displays; it has the

emptiness of an insect's shell; of all that, it is but an imprint and not a materialisation of the Spirit; a photograph can be a document: "A painting is a presence"; in fact in every painting, good or bad, the presence of the painter endures and allows us to observe the form of his spirit.

It is this form of spirit that we register as pleasant or unpleasant and establishes our preferences.

Photography cannot therefore, replace painting, and the art of portraiture would still be prevalent, had it not proven impossible to bring to fruition with the means available to painting today.

The current system of painting excludes the possibility of constructing a figure with the intensity and "realism" of the great epochs.

(We use the word realism in the sense of what a body has and how it presents itself in reality and not in the sense of an exact copy of nature).

Only the forgotten technique of oil painting can enable such realism.

The imitation of reality, in effect, involves a number of issues: the shape, the colour, the atmosphere. Our eye sees an object only through the reflection of the light rays that strike it. Shadow is therefore, nothing but the absence of luminous reflection.

Objects can break down light by reflecting it in a particular way, creating their "own" colour - what the painter calls local colour.

The reflections from the various local colours, form the colour of the environment, which is the dominant colour that every painting must have.

To this must be added changes in the intensity of the colour, determined by the degree of illumination of the object and its distance in our view, which creates depth.

One is thus able to understand how the painter, seeking to render all this in his picture (this is the only imitative part) needs to know his *metier* and how to make skillful use of it. Without this knowledge, it is easier to simply avoid representing recognisable objects the way they present themselves in nature, by interpreting them in a personal way that is simply consonant to one's will or capacity.

It is to this failing, to this facile solution, that we owe abstract, non-imitative or personal interpretation painting.

Thus one needs not master his craft for this and anyone can practice this more or less fanciful art.

But if we can allow ourselves to interpret inanimate objects at will, without this alarming us beyond measure, it is not the same for the human figure, especially if one is dealing with a portrait. The interpretative process has been found to be absolutely wanting in this situation. We therefore need - at least in the art of portraiture - to return to imitative painting.

But to make a good painting it is not enough for the painter to draw well and spread colour more or less correctly on the canvas: these colours must be placed in a way in which they play with light on the flat surface of the painting, just as it plays on coloured bodies in nature; this is the scope that the oil method has brought to painting.

The current method of painting allows only to model through a juxtaposition of more or less familiar tonalities, which give painting that very arbitrary mosaic character but also a certain frankness of execution; this is the method used by the “modernists”. It is also common practice to mix the tonalities on the brush, to blend them into each other, a mediocre and painful process used by these “academics” that weighs down the execution and dirties the colour and whose result has discouraged even the most ardent defenders of imitative painting.

If we add to this that the painter, in order to carry out a realistic work, must, within the current painting process, face all the problems concurrently, by shaping the form in an opaque and dense paint whilst taking into account the diversity of tones for the transition from light to dark, of the local colour, of the reflections, of the colour of the environment, of the depth of the planes... we understand the impossibility of performing one’s work well and it is not surprising that it has been preferred to eliminate these problems, unsolvable through the current method, by abandoning realism for interpretative painting.

Today’s painting has become, by necessity, a sort of mosaic or inlay of more or less pleasant colours, devoid of any relationship with the true art of painting. Today there is nothing but decorative painting; herein lies the difference between so called modern painting and “the other”.

The process employed by the masters (by whom I mean all painters from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose works are now kept in museums) classified the issues and dealt with one problem at a time; however all were resolved with ease and effectiveness.

Any craftsman and painter still able (as everything is vanishing) to imitate wood and marble will tell you about the bases, the foundations, the veining, the drying, of oil on dry, etc...

Go and ask our artist painters, whether they’ve come from national schools or not, what it means; most do not know anything about it, they know nothing of the *metier*; they only paint with their genius.

Today one relies exclusively on one’s own genius, but a genius unable to express himself is only a poor beast; who hasn’t seen the genius that shines in the eyes of a dog! What is he lacking if not the power to express himself in order to be human?

Go and see Mantegna’s *The Circumcision*, or Raphael’s *Madonna with the blue diadem*, at the Louvre; just how virtuous these two artists were in the “imitation” of marble is evident in these paintings; one can also be imparted a lesson on the “imitation” of the human figure, of drapes, etc... subjects that are a higher up the ladder in the *metier* of painting.

And what of the pearly complexion achieved by Rubens! And the silks and brocades! And the fruit and animals of Snyders! And Brughel’s flowers! And the drapes and skies of Tiepolo! Is this not imitative painting?

What is our painting by comparison? And why was the science of painting lost? Must we believe that since the profession became part of the public domain, the masters of the time did not bother to pass on their art, the secret of which constituted their strength, in order to maintain an advantage?

It is odd that this decadence coincides with the disappearance of the guilds that regulated the exercise of the profession and with the creation of the School of Fine Arts.

Is it possible to surmise that a master, generally with two or three apprentices chosen by him, to whom he transmitted his knowledge in exchange for help, would have renounced doing so the moment he was appointed professor and placed before thirty, forty, a hundred pupils, who would all constitute potential competitors? One can believe so.

A painting, in addition to the creative imagination of the artist, requires a proficiency of technique that the painters of our days no longer possess. And herein lies the problem.

Our personal mission has for many years been to rediscover this technique. To this end we have sacrificed much of our time and even profit, that could have come from accepting more fashionable formulas, but which, in our opinion, lead art into dead ends.

In order to free painting from these sophisms it is necessary that it returns to being “imitative”, but it cannot without knowledge of the craft.

Before us, even worthier others have been concerned with rediscovering the *metier* of painting, to free it from the thick, opaque and barely malleable pastes in which it has ploughed into; the solid is confused with the thick, the deep with the heavy. The science of painting has been lost.

## THE ART OF PAINTING

Pacheco in his *Art of Painting* explains: “My son-in-law (he was Velázquez’s father-in-law) often prepares the canvas with colours”.

It can be deduced that this was not always the case and that other painters prepared their canvas differently, that is, monochromatically.

Ingres recounts of seeing an English painter making a copy in the style of Titian starting in monochrome and finishing in colour through the application of transparent layers.

The result, he affirms, was surprising. This is the only true way to paint in oils. For more than ten years, our desire to get closer to the masterpieces has driven us to attempt a rediscovery of the technique of the masters and, having studied it in numerous great painters, we can conclude that practically everyone, from the Italian Primitives up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, used the same method. It consists of a clear sketch in full-bodied monochromatic oil paint, either on a coloured base on which the thicknesses and transparencies play off each other, or by preparing a few sober tones to give an idea of colour over a dominant monochrome.

Over this preparation, once dried, they apply lacquers and other transparent colours. Only this process allows for true and effortless modelling, and a unity of tones in all shades of light and dark, whilst at the same time giving transparency to the shadows, otherwise impossible to obtain. This is the method common to all great painters. Each painter, be it well understood,

then applies his own personality. El Greco, for example, does not try in any way to disguise it. His technique is so clear that it was the starting point for our theory. Consequent to studying him, it is easier to discover this technique in others. Thus, for example, in Ribera's canvas displayed at the Louvre, the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, there's a perfectly visible reddish-brown base, over which the monochromatic base plays with applications of paint and transparencies according to the intensity of the light (we clearly see that the figure of the child is shaped in a grey-mauve tone on which a veiling is added. This is an overall veiling, with vermilion-coloured touches in certain areas: fingers, cheeks, lips, ears, folds of the body) the drape on which the child rests is also executed in monochrome, with the same application process. In the straw around the drape one can see the monochromatic base with the build-up of paint in the highlights, then tinted with a transparent ochre and natural earth in the shaded parts. This procedure is also very evident in the left leg of the shepherd, painted in grey and coloured with a transparent veiling. All colour in general is applied through veiling of the monochromatic base. If Ribera was painting in such a manner, we can suppose that Caravaggio, his teacher, also did it the same way. We have not been able to analyse any of the latter's paintings, but all the works of pre-19<sup>th</sup> century painters that we were able to examine use the same procedure. It can also be seen in the two portraits by Velázquez on display at the Louvre next to the Ribera we previously mentioned. These two canvases, prepared with a dark red base, are painted monochromatically, over which colour has been subsequently added with veiled layers. These layers are clearly visible in the hair, for example, at the points where it touches the collar. Even in the portrait of Queen Anna Maria you can see the red veiling overflowing onto the monochrome base. However the pink knots in the sleeves are painted in full colour, casting doubt on the theory. But Velázquez, compared to others, has a temperament that does not fear stepping outside the formula. He paints quickly and driven by instinct and forgets certain details that he then picks up with coloured paint during the veiling process. These sort of corrections are very rare in Ribera, El Greco or Titian.

El Greco, as previously mentioned, leaves no room for doubt, his use of colour veiling is visible everywhere. This method of painting, which he had learned from the Venetians, is used above all by the Italians of the Renaissance until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and consequently by all painters who have undergone the Italian influence. It is the only way that allows for a clear modelling of the volumes and gives the sensation of relief and depth; the intensity of the colour is equally incomparable. It is possible, in a finished painting, to re-work the light tones with coloured paint then add layers of veiling to put everything back on the same plane, and so forth. That's what Rembrandt did. Look at his *Slaughtered Ox*. This is a monochrome painting in which the red lacquers flow over light transparencies like precious gems and above it all a golden amber tint is applied giving it a sunset lighting. Only this method can allow painters to create masterpieces comparable to the greatest of all time, and confer the precious "matter" of great painting that allows the modelling of the imperceptible passage of light to dark tones that brought so many painters to despair.

Why has something so seemingly simple been ignored for so long? First of all, this “craft” is not as simple as one may believe. We have here, merely introduced the guiding principles; it is for those who are interested, to try and put them into practice; it is there that the difficulty begins, for despite knowing the procedure, we ignore the exact composition of the materials used and after more than ten years at grips with this problem, have made numerous attempts both encouraging and disappointing.

To start with, it is about having the *subjectile* (for those who ignore this term: the surface on which one wants to paint) prepared with a base that is neither too oily nor too absorbent. Lead white primed canvases, by not absorbing the oil contained in the colours, would leave a base that is too oily, too slow to dry and consequently unsuitable for receiving glazing.

Let’s not forget the theory of the artisanal painters who have managed to preserve their traditions, “dry on oil, oil on dry”.

If we consider that veiling will complete the painting, this must be oilier than the layer on which they are applied and consequently this layer must not be too oily.

Therefore, it will be necessary to use a preparation for the surface that can receive a first layer of undiluted paint, sufficiently oily to form a solid base, but not too much, to allow the application of further layers.

The best preparation formula that we have used consists of one or two layers of glue on which a layer of a white lead primer is applied, which when mixed with linseed oil, renders it a consistency similar to liquid cream; a bit of ceruse is then added making an emulsion, similar to a mayonnaise, in an equal or slightly thicker version than gypsum prepared with glue.

This preparation has the advantage of nourishing the canvas, giving a finished appearance to the painting from the outset; it is solid and less susceptible to moisture than simple glue preparation and allows a wide and clean stroke without alteration of tone; it allows painting with acrylics or oils, and dries in eight days thus avoiding the long wait of preparations made with ceruse.

On this base the sketch is painted, by first giving a background tone, or by painting in monochrome on the white canvas, or by painting with a few simple colours: a red or green earth, some white and some black. It is necessary to use a medium that dries rather quickly, that is not too oily: turpentine, Harlem drying medium, perhaps adding a squeeze from a tube of Vibert drying medium into the white.

This is our own recipe and does not replace what the great painters had, which is unknown to us. It is claimed that the sketch with colour, especially among the Venetians, was done in tempera; but tempera does not allow layering and if you try to paint in layers you risk seeing the paint “jump off” whilst drying. Moreover, it has the disadvantage of absorbing too much colour and of letting the monochrome “show through”. In reality the ideal method would be to find a very soft paste that slides freely under the brush; substantial enough to allow layers; that does not dry too quickly and allows a light yet rapid execution so as to be able to glaze the colour in twenty-four

hours; not too absorbent to “drink up” the veilings, not too oily to “reject” them. It is in the white above all that we must find these qualities. The ideal white exists and all the ancient painters who wrote about painting mention it.

We have not yet found it and none of those available on the market answer to these needs.

Once the painting is prepared in this way, it is necessary to let it dry sufficiently before applying the transparent colour if one wishes to avoid disturbing the lower layer.

Further difficulties await us as there are very few transparent colours grinded in oil. Some carmine and yellow tints, but too few warm dark browns, too few blues and no reds. It is therefore necessary to make these colours ourselves, diluting those that are available on the market with a drying medium, allowing the paint to “fix” itself whilst being applied, though not too yielding so as to enable working on a large surface for a certain time without it becoming sticky. It is nevertheless necessary that it dry quickly enough to allow “reworking” if necessary, the following day.

One may deduce that this technique is not then as simple as one might believe. But what splendid results! Of course, this way of painting can only be useful if you want to paint like Rubens, Rembrandt, Veronese or Tintoretto; it is useless if one is satisfied with making something “modern”.

Expressionism, pointilism, fauvism, surrealism... can surpass any “metier”, any “know-how”. Indeed, the more the expression is clumsy the more it will be modern, fashionable.

We write here only for those who are not content with the current approximation and would like to take a further step towards matching the masterpieces of the great masters. We know people whose talent suffers from this ignorance of the true medium of expression.

We simply point the way; our personal attempts have given us the conviction that it is the right one. And in this effort to find the way, alongside painful defeats we have had instances of pure joy.

Make no mistake: we do not claim to have created masterpieces, we simply try to express ourselves in the language of those who have. Our joy comes from the fact that sometimes, in our trials, we have rediscovered the “material” quality of which real masterpieces were created. Once rediscovered it is only a matter of having talent to reproduce similar works.

We certainly are not lacking talented, even greatly talented artists in our time. It would suffice they not immediately believe they are geniuses, a concept which replaces everything else and allows one to say anything, in whatever way and which always results in a masterpiece.

We’re arguing here for those who are talented and have something to say.

What these painters’ works suffer most from is a lack of depth. The subject, at times admirably treated, remains on the surface and lacks the aerial perspective of great painters; planes can only differentiate through linear perspective. Now, this is principally based on how to deal with shadows; all painters with a taste for tradition have felt as we have, a powerlessness in giving the shadows of the painting the depth that can be found in the works of the masters. Despite applying dark tones very well, which give a dark surface, it always remains a “surface”, whilst in the works

of the masters, that feeling disappears to give way to a perception of “space”. In the ancients, the surface is “pierced”, giving us, through an optical illusion, the sensation of the third dimension.

Raphael Mengs in his treatise on painting (Paris, 1786) wrote: “In finishing the work, we will use soft colours to veil the shadows of objects closer to view: this will contribute greatly in giving the shadows a realistic feel, because *transparent paints let the rays of light pass* so that they do not stop at the surface and are not reflected back into the eyes; this permits the spaces to not appear illuminated and to represent real shadows.”

This is the great defect of all painting from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The science of dealing with shadows has been lost. A painting without shadows is flat, has no body, relief, or depth; all 19<sup>th</sup> century painting, with the exception of Delacroix, is surface.

Winterhalter, Bonnat, Renoir, painters with very different temperament, concerned by this, tried to give their works a greater depth by sketching their canvases with transparent colours.

But basically they are nothing but a kind of turpentine watercolour, over which they worked in paint.

By applying these transparencies on the white canvas the shadows remained empty and without body. The ancients prepared “the underneath”, they first of all concentrated all their attention on the painted sketches and it was over this preparation that their transparencies played out.

The best example of this process is the painting by Velázquez *Las Meninas* which is, as we know, in the Museo del Prado in Madrid. This painting, is nothing but a monochrome, coloured with some reds, ochres and earths, which can be seen reproduced on the palette of the painter.

Nothing more sobering has ever been done in painting. And yet the effects of depth, of realism, are such that when one looks at that painting the Spirit is disturbed and one is dismayed that any work by man can ever come so close to real life. It is this sincerity, this lack of emphasis that, to this day, three centuries on, allows this work to remain modern painting’s masterpiece in terms of technique and invention.

At the time when Velázquez was painting it, Rembrandt was finishing *The Anatomy Lesson*, Rubens, *The Three Graces*, Frans Hals, *La Bohémienne*, and Jordaens, *The Abundance of the Earth*.

These are the possibilities that knowledge of the technique of oil painting would have brought to Art. These are the possibilities that we should rediscover and to do so we must try to put some order in our spirit and in that of those who, like us, are looking for a path that will lead them somewhere.

We appeal above all to critics to direct young people towards a return to truth.

The moment we have some of these directors of opinion side with us, our cause will be understood, since we would have against us neither the public, who can only be convinced with great difficulty, through sophisms contrary to its common sense, nor the true elite, which accepts these sophisms principally because it sees the emptiness to which we have been led, by those who pretended to continue a tradition they were actually brutalising.

## THE SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

We have mentioned that following the Renaissance, Italy had become the centre of Art.

Painters from all over Europe went to Rome to look for inspiration.

Despite the new orientation David has given to painting, the prestige of Rome had not diminished, on the contrary: full of ancient virtues, David thought of tracing back to the origins of the Renaissance, searching in the bas-reliefs and Greek-Roman statues the source of a new art. His prestige and authority have influenced all of 19<sup>th</sup> century painting.

In fact, from David to Courbet painting is only a succession of helmets and Roman feathers illustrating Cornelian rhetoric.

Courbet's uprising showed Manet the new path. Turning his back on Rome he went to Madrid, where he found two painters, at the time almost unknown, who were in opposition to Italian mannerism, two great masters of naturalism: we are speaking of Goya and Velázquez.

Since then the prestige of Rome has been broken. Grouped around Manet, painters such as Bazille, Fantin-Latour, Berthe Morizot and later Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Degas formed in Paris what conventionally became known as the 19<sup>th</sup> century French School.

This new orientation of painting was and continues to be completely ignored by academia.

The School of Fine Arts has never understood what happened and continues unperturbed to cultivate its nursery for future Rome Award winners.

Whilst all the countries of the world sent their artists to Paris, Paris continued to send their own to Rome.

Italy is undoubtedly an immense museum, a source of inexhaustible beauty, but if you want to give the young people of rue Bonaparte a pictorial culture beyond impressionism, and a classical unity corresponding to current directions, it is in Madrid that you need to send them, to get to know El Greco, Goya, and Velázquez.

On the cusp of the two centuries, the classic 18<sup>th</sup> and the modern 19<sup>th</sup> century, Goya remains the bridge between two worlds, two cultures, two methods. His work, preserved almost entirely in the Prado, contains examples of science and audacity that have yet to be surpassed. Velázquez, the master of naturalism, and El Greco, whose greatness Cézanne and Barrès have emphasised to our contemporaries, are also in Spain and it is only there that young artists will be able to fully know them.

We know that Velázquez's villa is in Madrid. The School of Fine Arts sends artists in residence there but only as a sort of consolation for those who have not been able to get the Rome prize. The opposite should happen. The trip to Spain should be reserved for the most promising; but is there anyone down there able to "reveal" the Spanish masters to the newcomers? Or is the villa merely a holiday resort where one continues to paint as one would in Nice, Fontainebleau or Paris, without taking into account what they're surrounded by?

In this case one could save themselves the trip.

It would be useful on the other hand to seriously review the teaching method of the Fine Arts School.

Granting the Rome prize to young artists, thus giving them what they consider to be a supreme reward, which fills them with immense hope and the illusion of achievement, to then just abandon them to their fate, is in our opinion, inhumane.

It is well known that dealers of paintings today support only “unconventional” painting.

These young artists, who have willingly accepted instruction and a discipline, have no future before them other than to leave behind the rules learned, and the misery or mediocrity of a place in teaching.

If in the midst of the current disorientation, we want that at least some artists continue this great tradition, it will be necessary to give young people who have demonstrated their talent, a certain material security and not totally abandon them to their own devices.

It would be necessary for these young artists, returning from Rome or Madrid, to find an organisation that welcomes them, a state atelier where they can continue their work without financial worries, which block momentum and almost always nullify previous efforts. There, they could jointly undertake large decorative works for state buildings; “official” portraits that no “freelance” painter knows how to paint any more, mock-ups for state tapestries...

This would then create a collective, the beginning of an art renewal movement, so necessary at this time. Here is a task for the State. Will a minister of Fine-Arts step forward who wants to lend his name to a reform of this kind?

Any city in any country in the world has hospitals, sanatoriums in which the sick, mentally and physically, and the elderly, are cared for... This is all well and good, but why does the community take care of the sick and yet abandon their elite?

They will reply, that the elite can take care of themselves. All well and good, most can. But it is well known that generally artists and scholars are not businessmen. An American university professor, with whom we have spoken recently, has mentioned the case of a remarkable student, of modest origins, who despite having obtained grants and diplomas, could no longer afford to continue and died in misery leaving behind notations of exceptional interest for science.

Why this waste, he asked us, why this abandonment of the best, when the hearts of men so readily feel the need to help the deficient?

This story responds well to American sentimentalism but it is thanks to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that slavery was abolished.

We are told that in France, before the war, the State hospitalised 25,000 alcoholics every year.

Would it not be possible to make an extra effort and take in charge *fifty artists* of each generation, some of whom perhaps could bring prestige and lasting glory to the country?

Can one not find a formula to allow the rescue of these elite?

They tell us: “Official art has never produced anything but mediocrity”. Well then according to this logic, we should close the School of Fine Arts.

But we sincerely believe that this judgment is unjust; there have been mistakes, of course, but a new method of teaching could correct all this and produce true artists capable of renewing art and snatching a deplorable supremacy from unscrupulous traffickers.

## ART, STATE AND THE PEOPLE

They tell us that the form of modern states must be democratic, that is, everything in the State must be conceived and directed toward the benefit of the greatest number. Perfect. But under these conditions, is it sustainable that art defined as “avant-garde” becomes “official art” as is happening at the moment?

Is this art form an expression likely to drive the interest of “the people” in the culture of beauty?

Is this art form really a democratic art that is correspondent to this social philosophy?

Is it the public or a few select dealers of paintings who are asking for this art to appear in State museums?

States have for a long time now, whether democratic or not, gathered collections of masterpieces of art in places open to all, so as to accustom people to the spectacle of beauty.

Certain art critics, who, moreover, when speaking of museums refer to them as “these necropolises”, have recently supported the entry of “abstract art” in national museums, on the pretext that in museums it is necessary to have examples of all the trends in the art world.

Museums of painting, in our opinion, are the collections of the people. If they are to be destined to “eminent collectors”, one could have left these works where they were and not bother creating museums for the State, or rather for the people. A museum should not be a trade fair.

Museums were created solely to give people the sentiment of beauty and provide significant examples for artists.

Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Titian, Rubens, Nicolas Poussin, Le Nain, and Georges de la Tour... are artists who “touch” the people. A great artist is recognisable for his ability, whilst attracting the admiration of his fellow professional, to also stir the emotions of the layman with the perfection of his work.

These are the qualities that must be required in everything that will be expected to enter the Louvre.

We see no inconvenience in creating a separate “abstract art” museum that could be installed, for example, in an annexe of the Museum of Man, at the Palais de Chaillot, as an example of African influence on Westerners. We believe this kind of art would be more suitable there.

In any case, the public should be enabled to give or withhold its approval for certain acquisitions by the State because, after all, in the end it is they who are paying.

The people perhaps do not have enough education to discern the false from the true masterpiece, but they have too much good sense to be influenced by the snobberies to which intellectuals are subject.

The State must take no interest in an art that is of interest only to collectors who are more or less enamoured of the rare.

The art of the State must be an art that can touch and be understood by the people.

And people cannot understand when they are shown green, hydroponic ladies shaped in stripes, with an eye placed on the cheek or somewhere else, or paintings that look like they are done with a trowel, with brown, and then made to believe that this is art and if they do not understand it, they are only a poor imbeciles. We are not surprised if after all this they have become disinterested in intellectual speculation and prefer by a long shot, to go to the bistro.

You will argue that an uneducated public will have a tendency to appreciate falsely denoted masterpieces, just as they love fake porcelain decorated with decals and tablecloths in fake embroidery, but the State is not obliged to encourage this bad taste; on the contrary, it must set a good example, educate and develop common sense. This is how it will fulfil its function of Public Education; this is its role and not that of a collector of rarities.

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Avant-garde art has acquired the reputation of being anti-bourgeois art.

This is a dreadful mistake. "Avant-garde" art is not anti-bourgeois except to the extent in which it destroys established conventions; it is only in this sense that it is anti-bourgeois. Moreover, it is by its very essence and conception the most evident expression of the intellectual vagary of a decadent bourgeois society; and consequently is an art essentially and exclusively of a bourgeois mentality.

This hermetic art, a sort of intellectual puzzle, can only satisfy a minority of decadent snobs or intellectuals who can find no other place for themselves except in a bourgeois society imbued with intellectualism, an inconceivable minority in an egalitarian society.

In this sense it is interesting to note the evolution produced in countries like Russia, which had at the beginning of their regime adopted a favourable attitude to these extremist tendencies.

If the latest information corresponds to truth, this art, which was considered effective during the anarchic period indispensable to the overthrowing of an established order of things, has in fact proven to be incapable, useless and ineffective in the constructive period in which Russia found itself in 1941.

In fact, when the new Russia wanted to give the artist a standing in the national community, it realised that this abstract and dehumanised art was not for the people. What the people ask for are

not puzzles or intellectual refinements to decipher, but something healthy and simple that it can understand and admire. It is not essential that this something be mediocre art; the average person is perfectly capable of appreciating the beauty of the frescoes of Giotto or of Benozzo Gozzoli, for example.

What is unacceptable is that one speaks to the public of the greatness and beauty of works of art, whilst presenting elucubrations that defy common sense, which the public does not understand, is unable to understand, and which humiliate and unjustly impart a feeling of inferiority in it.

I use the term “unjustly” appropriately, because this self-styled superiority of a hermetic art is a mystification and almost always consists of a disguised inability to express one’s self normally in a form that is clear and comprehensible to all.

Though some intellectuals continue to defend, due to a sort of delayed sentimentalism, these modern-first-quarter-of-the-century art manifestations, those responsible for the State who do not work on an abstract plain but in reality, cannot do otherwise but encourage the return of a more human art, capable of giving the people a sentiment of true beauty.

WE NEED AN ART THAT GOES FROM AN ÉPINAL IMAGE OF THE SIMPLE AND INGENUOUS GIORGINO TO THE PRECIOUS SOPHISTICATION OF GIORGIONE’S *SLEEPING VENUS*.

This is the art that will bring men the ideal of beauty to which they aspire.

## THE MASTERS ARE DEAD

“The masters are dead”, replied Delacroix to someone who had called him a master. The point is that Delacroix saw painting on a scale of Rubens and he knew that the men of the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to Tiepolo and passing by Raphael had been replaced by no-one. We must recognise, alas, that although harsh, he was right.

Things did not change after Delacroix, on the contrary; painting has lost its greatness.

Today it cannot be said that painting is dead, but it must be agreed that it is no longer what it once was and is dying.

Nevertheless, there have never been so many painters, and never, have painters searched more ardently. It is true that this ardour, this research, is directed and maintained, not by the thought of equalling the work of the masters, but of distinguishing themselves as individuals, to avoid resembling their peers.

This torment of uniqueness and individualism is of recent creation and corresponds to the period of the moral anarchy of romanticism that has put the Spirit in turmoil.

The painters of the great ages did not have this concern; they learned their trade directly from another painter. An apprenticeship contract linked the student to the teacher for many years.

He therefore had an interest in showing the student his way of working, the secret of his art. The pupil carried on this mastery and his task consisted precisely in continuing well and not doing something else.

Masaccio continued the work of Giotto and of Cimabue; Raphael that of Perugino, and El Greco – the most personal of all – has done works that may be mistaken for those of Tintoretto.

Art is a long chain and every time this chain breaks man falls into the primitive, the inconsistent and grotesque.

It is not a matter of defending the false traditions of Meissonnier and Gérôme, who have made painting a kind of illustration and have lost sight of the essential condition of the work of art: the construction of geometric symphonies. They are concerned only with an anecdotal representation of things, a representation that is all the more deficient because it does not have at its disposal the indispensable means of its execution, that metier which, from Van Eyck to Goya, has allowed painters of all nations to express their particular genius through a means common to all.

After Delacroix, Manet made a final effort to rediscover real painting although, unfamiliar with the craft we are discussing and which allows for the creation of depth, he reduced himself to painting on the surface.

Painting on the surface has no mystery. Greatness requires a little mystery.

Not having this means of expression at their disposal, the painters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to resign themselves to abandoning an impossible tradition and look for something else.

It is from this necessity that impressionism was born. Based on Manet's deep understanding, the school of the prism was formed which, negligent in form, was concerned only with light. It is undeniable that in this we have witnessed one of the most pathetic moments of creation.

Impressionism marks one of those moments when man, struggling with so many difficulties, finds or believes he has found the solution. In any case, impressionism still lives and our era has not found anything better.

Impressionism is undoubtedly a new form of art – an art in itself – but it is an art that cannot say everything; it lacks the in-depth strength that classical art possesses.

Herein lies the drama of painting. On the one hand, a means of expression that is certainly limited but within our reach; on the other, the example of the ancient masterpieces that painters now contemplate as a lost paradise.

Impressionism is nothing but a diversion from our impotence. For a true painter this art has something unstable and temporary, like a sketch that leaves our spirit unsatisfied.

It is this emptiness that Cézanne tried to fill, but his work – whether we like it or not – is nothing but a long and failed attempt.

Nonetheless it is around him and his efforts that all the uncertainty of an era has crystallised; It is from him that the myriad of painters, dissatisfied with impressionism and wanting to give painting a structure, emerged.

We must bow down with respect before these restless souls who have sacrificed so much in the search for an impossible solution and we owe it to ourselves to judge their works, not from a strictly pictorial point of view, but as examples of man's will to find a lost path once again.

It is from this need of a structure, lacking in impressionism, that a movement was born. It was agreed that it be called cubism. Cubism was an attempt to rediscover the disciplines of classical construction, but instead of constructing, it has showed us the scaffolding.

Between impressionism and cubism there is another school of painters called "Fauve", but one could more appropriately call it "individualistic". You already know what we think of that.

This other category of restless people whose representatives, after having been reunited and banished, today compete for the honours of representing official painting, but it is only the result of a lost romanticism, of a method of painting that seeks itself.

Fauvism is nothing but the reaction of a kind of disposition that is contrary to the advocates of official teaching, but even its members do not contribute anything of consequence.

Their individual and anarchist art tends to destroy the discipline belonging to the classical eras that Cubism claimed to rediscover and without which nothing lasting can be built.

No progress is possible if each generation destroys what the former has built.

If one acknowledges that the artist finds his vocation in the contemplation of a work of art, or that the first subject of the artist is never life but another work of art, the problem of today's painting emerges in its totality.

The Greeks, from which all our knowledge emanates, have not invented in six centuries but three types of architecture and these three flow naturally one into the another to form a whole. This means that there has never been a break but rather a continuity.

This is because life in the ancient world did not end in the individual: they wanted to reach perfection and knew that man cannot do anything perfectly if he does not base his work on those who precede him.

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Man does not invent anything: he adds, and the grain of sand becomes rock.

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In these conditions one wonders whether the need of our time for originality at all costs has led us to the impasse in which we currently find ourselves.

Critique calls for the new and the collector the rare. The painter is left very little space to take care of the beautiful; we painters, in short, do nothing but satisfy the passion of the collector and this puts art on the same level as stamp collecting.

We live with a misunderstanding that if not remedied, risks distancing the people's interest

for one of the most important manifestations of the Spirit. On the other hand, leaving this expression of the Spirit in the hands of just anyone can only bring it to complete decadence; and the fact that this decadence leaves the elite indifferent, or almost, is an even more serious and more important sign than is generally believed.

The ancient world built cities and temples.

The Middle Ages built cathedrals.

The Renaissance palaces.

All these projects exceed the individual. The art of these ages was community art.

Our epoch, from Louis Philippe to the present day, is characterised by the rented house and the umbrella, symbols of individualism.

Every age has the art it deserves.

The exaltation of individualism has meant that on account of looking only at ourselves, by dint of self-questioning, we have reached deep night, the subconscious, the sleep of reason. "The sleep of reason produces monsters" Goya said.

Surrealism, the latest addition, has insisted on defining our incoherent dreams, when actually it is the dream of a human order that is to be grasped.

If we wish to find greatness, we must leave individualism and find an art that belongs to all of us. We need to give up our pride as inventors. Painting has no need to be invented, it exists; it is enough to resume where it stopped at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when with it, so many other human values disappeared.

We are tempted to believe that all these disorders come mainly from our inability to rediscover the metier of the Van Eyck, which for three centuries have been the glory of painting and have allowed continuity.

For a new Renaissance [to occur], it is necessary to rediscover Craft, a Mysticism and a Community of builders of cathedrals.

Then, even greatness can once again be found.

Paris, June 1945

*Translated by David Smith and Marco Mona*