

with the necessary power to determine the direction and character of artistic creation. It is true that the environment itself is uncertain and vague (like a haze from which, like sharp edges and rays of light, arise only certain idiosyncratic inspirations of the spirit, which are however not sufficient to create a *structure* in a spiritual environment. And it is precisely this indifference what makes the artistic milieu a useful stage for the development of a new expression. It has to be said that art contains a drive to organize this uncertain matter in the same way as a philosophical idea born at a *particular moment*, for which it is useful, gives its time a surprising yet self-evident order. Guided by a focused evolutionary instinct the artist actively enters this particular stage and introduces into it magnetic interference; his task is to organize an environment formally, while the environment alters him as far as contents and nature are concerned. It is true that all possibilities for a new expression are already stored in this new creative environment filled with energies which are to be used by the artist to establish a system of harmony and constructive unity, and that behind every artistic shift, every new form, hides the mechanism and sum of things which together constitute the present world. For a conscious individual, however, the greatest and most comprehensive thing *in the world* is his own view.

The connection with objects in an environment is the first obvious characteristic of modern art. A new environment is like a new region, inviting us to investigate and measure it; the sense of a new environment immediately brings about a lively need for a new taste, a hitherto hidden form and new, contemporary, purely modern beauty. The modern mind, inquisitive, sharp and penetrating never misses an opportunity to gain a change from a new situation. A new life is saturated with desire for mystery and with a will to penetrate it, something that in science happens with an almost military effort, while in art it happens by means of beauty and excitement.

The modern era is by nature anti-naturalist: it overcomes nature, takes possession of it and creates an artificial world governed by man's powerful abilities. Everything man has so far achieved by means of technique, ingeniousness and practice, certainly, rapidly, self-assuredness, knowledge, firmness and strength, is used by humanity to stand up to the perceived oppressive power of god and nature. In the same way in art, the raw character of naturalism is changed under the impact of a mind more effective and incomparably deeper than by way of mere copying and imitation of reality in previous times. Our era is governed by intellectual principle and purpose wholly missing in decadent times. Naturalism knows no other way of grasping objects than by copying them, in the same way as Australian savages believe that in order to capture animals, it is necessary to imitate them. On the other hand, principle is like mathematics, grasping the size and volume of objects by dividing them into differentials with a newly abstracted integrated volume. Modern art is aware of other tasks: it is not content to multiply nature even if the artistic temperament makes it prettier, just as photography is not enough to gain inner knowledge of an object, or just as the intellectual existence of a famous man cannot be multiplied by means of bronze and plaster casts of his popular bust.

The fundamental change that the art of our time is going through is conditioned by longing for the unknown, for new impressions, as if for an entire new world. This inner motivation gives new art a peculiarly emotive expression, and so we have the painting of emotion, architecture of emotion and emotive poetry, in which emotion is manifested not through a mood but by agitation from a state of calm. Modern art is a strong desire to conquer reality; based on principle, it detaches itself from the living raw basis of reality and channels all its efforts into an act of turning the massive dynamics of life into construction and into an abstract surface spiritualized by intellect. Its process is spiritualization and formation, transformation of the world into an

Picasso's paintings from 1911 are entirely different from his contemporary work. When they were described as having a rather impressionistic form, Picasso's worshippers considered it to be a stupid insult. Today, we can see his next developmental shift, in which he gradually abandons his earlier masterly opalescent quality of light, constructing his new paintings from large planes of unusually pure and brilliant color. Without wanting to touch on the question of quality, I can only say that today, his paintings are in a certain way closer to the best paintings by French cubists than they were then, although all young painters are indebted to him for their development.

None of the other Cubists however matches his capacity for deep insight, which makes their paintings more superficial, and it is also something they had been rightly criticized for; they did however construct their pictures from large planes and clear colors, without a spatial, aerial or luminous medium, strengthening the developments in painting in a particular way which has been unjustly underestimated. In this sense, for example, Léger's *Woman in a Blue Dress* from the Autumn Salon of 1912 has a certain developmental value, and it would be unfair to forget that, despite the painting's shortcomings.

The form of contemporary painting has its prominent characteristics with which it gradually achieves a remarkable and unprecedented expressivity. The new perspective is constructed in a simple and clear way into spatial compositions, whose logical visual harmony is pleasing to the eye and to the mind. By means of its construction, which is somewhat architectural, the painting achieves a greater objectivity: beautiful color planes, unusually clear and sensitively rendered, appear without the help of light and shadow. Here, color finds its most objective application, at the same time becoming the medium of the most absolute and pure visual plasticity. These outstanding, luminous modern pictures are the opposite of the Dutch way of painting and in their perfect clarity they superficially resemble early mediaeval paintings, in which the space is also built on a particularly artificial principle. Like their mediaeval predecessors, modern paintings have their internal decorativeness, which is the opposite of superficial embellishment. The painter's intentions do not have to be restricted solely to still life; he can just as well take on the task of executing, with the same consistency and completeness, figurative paintings in which the object, built under the pressure of a different view and painting method than the illusory painting of the previous era, comes to resemble modern architecture, which also works with the basic functions of planes towards a perfect spatial effectiveness. More than ever before, the painter strives for a beautiful way of painting and for the greatest visual purity.

It is not therefore an exaggeration to say that the highest esthetic pleasure modern era can offer an intelligent and sensitive person can be found above all in Cubist painting and architecture.

Translated by *Alexandra Buchler*



THE SPIRIT OF CHANGE IN VISUAL ART Vlastislav Hofman

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Growing organically and developmentally to become part of the modern environment means to encompass spontaneously certain expediencies. With Taine's doctrine of evolutionary determinism shaken, it is no longer customary to invest the environment

clever and clear use of world view to the benefit of formal vision, in order to create a new beauty and new artificiality. When this beauty is born, it does not have a general recognition; in the eyes of aestheticians and antiquarians who rehash art created a long time ago, without their contribution, and pass it from hand to hand, it appears raw and crude. Yet the fact that autonomy of form is already here, realized in the new art, cannot be weakened simply because it is inconvenient to eyes accustomed to eclectic and naturalist art.

To create conditions that would allow a powerful and fertile rise of the new beauty, we must have faith in our present—we must consider the modern era to be the most beautiful of all. If we want to create modern beauty, we have to, above all, discard sentimental admiration for things of the past, in the same way as a soldier senses new beauty in a gunshot from an automatic weapon, the beauty of perfect functionality, a feeling very different from the old, dull beauty experienced by the magical hunter-marksman. The modern viewer should experience the same naive and uncomplicated feeling when confronted with art.

Modern art then aims for ideality of form devoid of illusion. Early medieval art also lacked the suspect illusive magic of later styles; its expressive language was all the more mysterious for being pure and original.

Yet, new art does not turn away from reality, nor does it escape to an ideal of beauty existing outside our world. On the contrary, a full, living sense of our time teaches us to try to force our way into the very core of reality, down to the skeleton carrying it. Our sense of reality is sharpened to the extent that everything that is mere illusion leaves a deep soul with a sense of tortuous dissatisfaction and improbability. The modern mind is not earthbound; it keeps close to reality that continually challenges man to conquer it by action. And this true reality, no longer appearing ugly or ordinary to our senses, is the permanent subject of man's creative work. We no longer need to beautify it, to veil it with symbols and metaphors, to paint it with dazzling colors and clothe it in a cloak of godliness. Art no longer belongs to another world—it happens in the same reality as the work of a scientist, chemist, physicist or engineer.

Art of the past created an ideal world rather than an ideal form. It contained beautiful "idealized" objects, rendered by means of naturalistic imitation. The dignity of art was replaced with a certain illusion of godliness, a noble aristocratic beauty that was meant to be better than mere reality. Here, rational and civilian revolution brought liberalism and cleansing, and put an end to much of the exquisiteness of the past. Only when it's gone can new reality be ushered in, introducing new ideas and a deeper inquisitiveness and vision than before. Now we demand of poets more than elegant, philosophical rides on the back of Pegasus, of musicians more than beautiful melodies, of painters more than academic mastery, as all this is nothing but a theater stage displaying a charmingly posing illusion of beauty. The modern era discovers in itself something far more elemental and basic and does not demand satisfaction and intoxication, but our own construction. The interest of modern art aims for things, aims to possess them. The new expressive language conveys the mystery and truth of reality in the new touch of the spirit, making such a strong impact on us that we become almost frightened of reality. Modern painting examines things with an almost analytical precision, circles them, is surprised by them; art has never before proceeded with such precision as it does now.

This is how we find in new art a kind of dualism: a striving for fully objective reality and a striving for full ideality of form. The new law of modern art is that it must achieve such an ideality of form so as to become a complete and synthetic substitute for objects. Our art, being thus stored between two equally strong, new, and necessary demands, is a problem that does not admit an unlimited number of solutions. In it is a source of inexhaustible wealth that we can see in the future of new art.

ideal state, into a sum of autonomous forms. Here, the very word "form" acquires a different meaning: it no longer means decorative form, as this would bring the modern spirit little practical, clean and expert quality, nor is it a natural form, imitating natural things and based on observation of processes of the physical world. The modern form is objective: it does not consist in imitation of objects, nor is it their symbol—it is the object, it is treated as an autonomous entity, irrespective of whether it does or does not resemble a particular natural object. The special nature of modern art then lies in its emotiveness, its state of emotion, in its clear and sure awareness of being based on principals, a kind of conscious, rational logic of artistic creation, and finally in its daring, innovation and readiness to test new expression attractive for its very novelty. These are the three given, specific factors in the indeterminate equation of contemporary art; the indeterminate and variable value is the deep originality of initial ideas, the mysterious effect of modern environment, the fundamentally insensitive and emotive disposition of the poetic, almost meditative character. It is clear that modern art is a sum of human intellectual powers of unprecedented complexity, and that the inner process, by means of which it comes into being, is very different form the easy process of naturalistic work.

Modern art is based on striving for form of absolute and fundamental certainty; its tools are media such as color, space and sound. Cubism, for example, has its "astral" space without atmosphere, devoid of the magic and stickiness of naturalist juices; it is not a space governed by elemental spontaneity and passionate natural forces, but an autonomous, pure principle that establishes a certain *l'art pour l'art* attitude in the best sense of the word, in which Bach's music is *l'art pour l'art* as opposed to Wagner's.

The turn from naturalism that is so characteristic of modern art is best imagined in the following way: starting with the Renaissance, European visual art tried to create an imitation of a beautiful external appearance of things. This tendency lasted until the 19th century, and its modifications and styles were caused by changes in European "moral temperature," rather than by fundamental revolutionary transformations. The modern mind however has absorbed too much scientific knowledge not to know that what happens under the surface of things, within their structure and power, is more mysterious and also more beautiful than their external layer. The most perfect illusion of an object would no longer offer the contemporary spirit a full and lasting satisfaction. At this point, the task of art becomes to liberate itself from nature and to become its master. Impressionism at least managed to free itself from the materiality of nature, imbuing it with the rapidity and subtlety of psychological action, but this did not interfere with the nature of art in a deeper sense and there was still a resolute step to be made: replacing nature with artificiality, with autonomous human order and full authority of artificial form, so that form, a creation of the mind, replaces natural objects. Modern art clothes objects in monumental garb, making it possible to substitute this monumental principle independently and autonomously for reality; art takes form by processes different from mere transposition of reality.

What I would call an artistic substitution of object is an abstract surface and form, devoid of naturalism, emotive and artificial. The neoimpressionist color dot already was such autonomous thing, a small space contained in a touch of paint, subjecting natural appearance to a certain principle. In today's art, the changes taking place are far more fundamental, effecting the very core of visual understanding. Interest in form has become clarified and rid of coarse impurities. What art aims to achieve by numerous means and experiments is ideality of form. Yet the realization of this ideality is not easy to achieve: the artist does not find it in the world in a ready-made state; on the contrary, he has to prepare it. Modern art is acted, not dreamt; it has to pursue its idea by way of logic and intuition, by means of strange play with things of the world, by

Contemporary art realizes the demands stated here fully and outstandingly. What is the modern artist's form of expression? He speaks by means of lines that are the most complete shorthand for the long journey along which nature was transformed through the prism of the soul; he speaks by means of surfaces that delimit natural surface, a unique surface, made of the same molecules so as to sound loud and specific; he speaks by means of forms constituting the last borderline between impossibility and probability; here, color planes perhaps resembling colorful ribbons, strange stripes and blocks, are the artistic outcome that fundamentally rejuvenates the decorative impact of a painting, creating an effect that cannot be achieved by means of color photography; this process of abstraction from natural appearance is taken so far that the formal components acquire a geometrical or machine-like character. How, then, can one create ideal form and simultaneously feel the reality of things? By divesting things of the magic of their changeable surface and denuding them; by recovering their formal construction from within, by simplifying and developing them, summarizing and multiplying them in one single vision. There are many more means and systems than can be mentioned here. Numerous conquests and pressures ultimately through the barriers maintained by eclectic traditionalists and create watersheds. And just as this movement with its intensity disturbed many notions and aesthetic systems that had once been considered complete and absolute, so has the mechanical homogeneity of linear narrative been broken down by free verse, newly organized in search of its legitimate bonds, so has space in Cubist paintings been broken down into painterly substitutes, and melody into a disparate and automatic tone system. Yet, this process of breaking down is not the same as rational analysis; it is the spreading of wings to take the most daring flight for which an entire century has been preparing.

Translated by Alexandra Büchler



EXCERPT FROM *CUBISM* Vincenc Kramář
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Picasso's art can teach us two lessons. First of all, it shows us in the purest, most original and perfect form the essential formal problems of modern painting and their solutions, at the same time presenting the type of modern artist who can serve in many ways as an example. The values involved are therefore artistic and moral. The quintessence of this new art, I repeat, is that it springs from the innermost spiritual and intellectual depths. It is art that draws on the artist's imagination in which all his experiences are concentrated. The process by means of which it comes into existence is real creation, not mere imitation of something seen. Objects, the way Picasso renders them, cannot be seen in nature, if nothing else than because they are not a product of optical perception, but of various experiences, of the entire man. Apart from that, these paintings combine into a single whole several views of an object, and it is the intended composition of the painting, ensuing from the emotional involvement, that dictates the selection, composition and various emphasized properties of objects that live their own life here. The dimensional aspect things as we know it from our everyday experience has been abolished here, and things present themselves to us as something far more complicated and mysterious than we knew them to be until now. Above all, they appear

to us as products of spatial relationships, and alongside this central axis are their material and other properties. Like every primary art, Picasso's work is entirely objective, stating that lines, colors, and light in his paintings are not the end in themselves but that they mean something, and if they form as part of a strict image construction something new from material given by experience, that they are an expression of a new world-view that is just being born. This objectivity is intrinsic to the very composition of the painting, which is no longer a merely pleasant or in any way purposeful arrangement, but a structure, through which the object finds its full embodiment. And there is one more quality this art possesses that we need to mention, which is close to objectivity, but in another sense, namely, the striving for objectivity. Understanding the world as a construction made purely of shapes, this art desires to suppress all the influences of the subject and external factors that might color or distort it. Things are to appear to us in their pure flawless beauty and above all in their permanent essence. The "reality" of this art is not that accidental and changeable reality of naturalism and its branches, but a comprehensive, permanent reality, given by the laws of the functions of our intellect. It is certain that this art—its creation or its perception—is not cozy lounging in an armchair, as Matisse once described his own decorative—the in perfect sense—paintings. Not that it would have been impossible to create similar enjoyable works in his circle. I have already mentioned Picasso's simple, economical works, products of happy creative moments, but we must not forget that to be able to enjoy these pleasant things to the full, it is necessary to have experienced the development from which they have blossomed like flowers. That is not to say that they cannot be enjoyed without any mediation. They can, but this enjoyment would embrace little more than the beauty and sensitivity of the painting matter, which is by no means sufficient to understand Picasso's art, and new art in general, fully and correctly. Such art, invested with the artist's feelings, intelligence, with his entire being, in turn addresses the entire being of the person perceiving it—not a mere "viewer"—requiring direct collaboration. For those who seek in art nothing more than a pleasant tickling of the senses, Cubism will always be a hard nut to crack, or an outright nonsense. However, real artists have never created for this class of people. Those who want to find inner enrichment and growth in art will find such wealth in the new art, that all the effort invested in penetrating its essence will turn into pleasure. The main condition is, however, to live a life of one's era, as instinct is not enough to create or perceive art, but in both cases is indispensable.

[...]

In short, only backward people, or those who live in delusion, fail to arrive at the truth that external naturalism, moods, and pure subjectivism are outdated. Only they can believe that it is still possible to cover the canvas in paint without thinking and that by doing so they are contributing to the development of contemporary art. No, art that belongs to the present and the future is much more complex and generous and demands honest work from the entire person. Its *inner spiritual and intellectual quality* is a higher developmental form, from which there is no return, containing everything that claims the label of a living, progressive art.

[...]

Now we must realize that only the baffled viewer, whose creative intelligence and feeling are not sufficient to deal with Picasso's paintings and who is uninformed about their essence, sees in them triangles, squares, cubes and cylinders, etc. in the same way as in the case of Impressionism, when the same kind of conservative viewer saw nothing more than a canvass with material color spots. Our author correctly explains how man in his tendency towards objectification—a painfning must definitely represent something!—in his puzzlement grasps in the inaccessible painting the shapes he knows from his own experience, in this case the geometrical shapes. In reality, those