



The 1958 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture

Introduction

*I*N a sense human societies delegate to artists, beyond all other members of the community, the duty of full freedom. The average man, except in momentary flashes of comprehension, has not the courage to accept so large a measure of freedom or truth. We are, in this regard, like tender cattle who are let out of the barn to smell the wild air of the night but must be herded back into our stalls at daybreak before the sun appears. We relish a cage of conventions or any containment that offers a deluding sense of security. We prefer not to face the relentless vistas of uncertainty and the meaningless hazards that constantly threaten us as chance visitors on a strange planet.

The artist, on the other hand, when courageous enough, will rejoice in the very situation that the rest of us find scarcely bearable. He accepts uncertainty as a necessary condition of life; not as a frightful threat but rather as an invitation to regard life as a mysterious voyage of discovery and a miraculous adventure. To invent rigid and pretentious patterns of social behavior on the rim of the universal mystery, as human societies do, represents for the artist the building of Fort Panic at the edge of the eternal wilderness. Without uncertainties, he reveals, neither truth nor freedom could exist.

The extreme opposition of these attitudes has become, in our time, the basic issue that separates the lone artist and our entrenched society most decisively. The artist hails limitless while the bulk of society clings to pleasant and safe-looking enclosures. Many, on the public side of the picture, still harbor the wistful illusion that they are in control of their destinies and that they have every right to expect a reasonable degree of security and a reasonable amount of amusement in their lives.

The typical artist doesn't think so at all. He may or may not call on God, as his grandparents generally did, but he recognizes forces and resources beyond his personal control whose rich currents and depths he must adventuresomely enter if he is to succeed. "No daring is fatal," said the poet Crével. He is prepared to surrender himself to these forces and to investigate these unknown levels of knowledge as a source of revelation. The "buried reality" as Steven Spender calls it, is the treasure all artists seek.

It is only through himself, the contemporary artist knows, that he can proceed to this treasure. He himself is the vehicle, the means, the instrument, the way. The same condition has been revealed by the scientist who now knows that, in a final analysis, he will always stand between himself and "nature," between himself and his measurements, making it necessary for him to measure the relationship instead of a particular phenomenon itself. "The atomic physicist," writes the Nobel prize winner, Werner Heisenberg, "has had to come to terms with the fact that his science is only a link in the endless chain of discussions of man with nature, but that it cannot simply talk of nature 'as such.' Natural science always presupposes man . . ." The artist has come to understand this self-obstruc-

tion, too, and has, since the first decade of this century, increasingly lost interest in a descriptive or anecdotal approach to external things in favor of subjective interpretations that by inviting illumination, extend beyond the mere rings of egocentricity.

Few stimulations have been greater to artistic creation in its entire history than this conclusion that man himself is also "nature" and that subject and object are inextricably interlocked. Newly realizing the truth of this, artists have discarded the old, conventional idea of an objective reality, and have found to their amazement and delight, that a vast new world of creative expression awaits them. Once a faith which was limited to the external scene, to objectivity, was lost, a new faith arose in the internal realities and in the limitless and automatic powers of the unconscious mind. After studying sixty drawings by Paul Klee in 1921, Rainer M. Rilke, the poet, wrote: "During these war years, I have often had exactly the same feeling that reality was disappearing: for it is a question of faith to know to what degree we accept reality and then attempt to express ourselves through it."

All depends on faith, and faith in our time has firmly turned its head in another direction. Artists have suddenly seen that they may express themselves not alone by the conventional media, such as oil on canvas, water color on paper, remodeled clay and cast bronze, but that they may use any other combination of material or any manipulation of it that may occur to them. All at once, the logic of the free choice of media is apparent, and before the bewildered world can grasp the obvious point of their move they are communicating their ideas and emotions through every sort and combination of material that the mind of man can imagine. Moreover, since they no longer seek to produce imitations or even paraphrases of objects and figures from the world of appearances, they are free to invent wholly new forms – non-objective and non-figurative – using these limitless combinations of materials. "I do not have to distort," wrote Braque. "I start from formlessness and create form."

Knowing himself an inseparable part of nature, the artist can father new forms: "Art is a fruit growing out of man like the fruit of a plant," wrote the sculptor, Arp. Avoiding a reliance on the logic of external appearances, he seeks to produce organismic constructions rather than abstractions. "A picture is constructed piece by piece exactly like a house," as Paul Klee once expressed it. In other words it need not be a product of a remodeling process, since the work of art is not an image done "after nature" but rather an addition to nature's works, a new organism.

Inasmuch as the artist's creation need not follow the logic of visual appearances, we orientate ourselves to it entirely through the internal logic of its parts – the tensions, rhythms and unity of its artificial anatomy. Even should it contain references to the visible and tangible world about us, we may not insist upon direct comparisons to test its truth inasmuch as no reference back to a model is intended, except poetically. Thus we are in no position to offer the sort of academic criticism that used to be heard about good and bad drawing or incorrect proportions. Its so-called "distortions" are only indications of its independence as a subjective scheme, its isolation as a man-made thing. The drawing (if it is drawn) is good or bad only as it is successful or unsuccessful in achieving the effect the artist intended.

Scientist and artist are already at home in the invisible and intangible reaches of an ever-expanding reality. The development of our knowledge of electricity in the second half of the last century introduced fields of force beyond all the bounds of nature as previously conceived. With electricity, Heisenberg says, "An element of abstraction and lack of visualizability was brought into the otherwise so obvious world view." Nature, it now appears, is a larger subject than we have thought. In this connection, Dr. R. W. Gerard's description of the nervous system, which he depicts as a fluid whole, a continual alteration of the flowing electrical patterns, offers a vivid parallel to certain contemporary pictorial interpretations:

"Now with our discovery of a far more fluid nervous system, one increasingly active and with neural and electrical messages rippling the whole into dynamic patterns which flow from one contour to another as present influences play upon the condition left by past ones – with such a picture the arrival of new neural relationships is no great problem."

"Understanding," wrote Henry Miller in his essay on *The Creative Process*, "is not a piercing of the mystery, but an acceptance of it, a living blissfully with it, in it, through and by it." It is in this spirit that a very large proportion of the artists of our time do their work. They have come to realize that, like life itself, art is not a direction in which there may be progress, as if it were a road or railway line, but rather an area of limitless imaginative possibilities that extends in every conceivable direction as far as the heart and hand may reach. They do not expect to explain things or to find a single truth that will uncover the entire nature of reality. Neither do the scientists. They do, however, hope to enlarge our relationship with the world, to open our eyes to new aspects of the living mystery of creation and to offer certain large and small truths of human experience for our sharing.

Since the Christian epoch of Medieval Europe, the West has never come as close to the conclusions of Eastern thought regarding the nature of reality as we now exhibit. It is not so much that Oriental ideas and tastes have recently been imported, since they have long been accessible; it is rather that our own attitude towards the condition of man again parallels the concepts of Taoists and Buddhists. We now study Zen-Buddhism because we begin to understand it out of our experience. Just as we are painfully learning in the West that we cannot conquer people within our colonial orbits, so our scientists and artists conclude that in the end we cannot conquer "nature." The hand grasps for itself; what we would conquer and we the conquerors are basically one and the same.

As artists, we are not, then, superior spirits who manipulate ideas and forms in opposition to nature's images. It is not a question of our taking or leaving the works of nature as outsiders who may lift or reject what we please. Instead, there is no duality and we also are insiders, "whose constructive powers are no more artificial," as Alan Watts declares in *The Way of Zen*, "than the formative actions of plants and bees," so that "it is no contradiction to say that artistic technique is discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline."

GORDON BAILEY WASHBURN

ALFEO FAGGI

Born in Florence, Italy, 1885. Has lived in Woodstock, Ulster County, New York, since 1923. Commenced studies in Florence at thirteen, at the Accademia delle Belle Arti; followed with five years' study of anatomy in city hospital. Came to the United States in 1913, settling in Chicago.

- 143 Annunciation
Bronze bas-relief, 13¾ x 20 inches

OYVIND FAHLSTROM

Born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1928. Lives in Stockholm, Sweden. Writes poetry and plays.

- 144 Ade-Ledic-Nander 2
1957, oil, 75½ x 84 inches. Plate 85

CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN

Born in North Bend, Oregon. Lives in Paris. Studied at the University of California.

- 145 Sky
Iron, H. 14, W. 83, D. 47 inches

JEAN FAUTRIER

Born in Paris, France, 1898. Lives near there in Chatenay-Malabry. Educated in London. Wounded and gassed in World War I. Small exhibition, 1921. Later encouraged by Paul Guillaume. Several one-man shows in Paris since World War II.

- 146 Women
Oil, 44½ x 57½ inches. Lent by G. David Thompson, Pittsburgh. Plate 41

HERBERT FERBER

Lives in New York City where he was born in 1906. Studied at College of the City of New York, Beaux Arts Institute of Design, and Columbia University. First exhibited as painter at Corcoran Gallery, Washington, 1933. First sculpture show, 1937.

- 147 Three
1958, brass, H. 89, W. 47, D. 24 inches. Lent by Kootz Gallery, New York City. Plate 111

FERNANDEZ-MURO

Born in Madrid, Spain, 1920. Lives in Buenos

Aires, Argentina. He settled there in 1938 and is now naturalized. Self-taught. Has traveled in Europe and the United States, and exhibited extensively. Husband of Sarah Grilo (No. 186).

- 148 Superimposed Circles
1958, oil, 52 x 52 inches

ANGEL FERRANT

Lives in Madrid, Spain, where he was born in 1891. Studied there at the Escuela de San Fernando.

- 149 Coyunturas por enlace
1958, iron, H. 61½, W. 16, D. 16 inches

PERLE FINE

Born in Boston, Massachusetts. Lives at East Hampton, New York. Studied in New York City at the Art Students League and the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts; also graphics with Stanley Hayter and Robert Blackburn. Works in oils, graphics, and collages.

- 150 Wave and Undertow
1958, oil and collage, 40 x 70 inches. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Rosenberg, New York City

HANS FISCHLI

Born in Zurich, Switzerland, 1909. Lives in Meilen ZH, Switzerland. Studied at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich; and the Bauhaus with Klee and Kandinsky. Practicing architect since 1933. Director of the School of Arts and Crafts and the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zurich since 1954.

- 151 "Wand" from the trilogy "Wand, Raum, Fenster"
1957, oil on panel, 47 x 33¼ inches

SEYMOUR FOGEL

Born in New York City, 1911. Lives in Austin, Texas. Studied at National Academy of Design, and Art Students League in New York City. Taught at University of Texas for several years. Also muralist and calligrapher.

- 152 Atavism
1957, oil and magna, 48 x 72 inches