

Principles and Criteria of Art

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Once again we would draw attention to the fundamental importance of art both in the life of a collectivity and in the contemplative life¹, an importance arising from the fact that man is himself made in the image of God": only man is this image directly, in the sense that his form is an "axial" and "ascendant" perfection and his content a totality. Man by his theomorphism is at the same time a work of art and also an artist; a work of art because he is an "image", and an artist because this image is that of the Divine Artist.² Man alone among earthly beings can think, speak, and produce works; only he can contemplate and realize the Infinite. Human art, like Divine Art, comprises both determinate and indeterminate aspects, aspects of necessity and of freedom, of rigor and of joy.

This cosmic polarity enables us to establish a primary distinction, namely the distinction between sacred and profane art: in sacred art what takes precedence over everything else is the content and use of the work; whereas in profane art these are but a pretext for the joys of creation. If within the framework of a traditional civilization art doubtless is never wholly profane, it may however become relatively so precisely because its motive force is to be found less in symbolism than in the creative instinct; such art is thus profane through the absence of a sacred subject or a spiritual symbolism but traditional through the formal discipline that governs its style. The position of non-traditional art is quite different: here there can be no question of sacred art and at most it may be called profane religious art; moreover the motive of such art is "passional" in the sense that an individualistic and undisciplined sentimentality is placed at the service of religious belief. Whether profane art is naturalistic and "religious", like Christian art of modern times, or both traditional and worldly, like medieval European or Indo-persian miniatures or Japanese woodcuts, it often presupposes an extra-sacerdotal point of view and so a "worldliness" such as makes its appearance at a relatively late stage in the theocratic civilizations. In primordial periods art always was limited to either objects of ritual use or working tools and household objects, but even such tools and objects were, like the activities they implied, eminently symbolical and so connected with ritual and with the realm of the sacred.³

¹ See the chapter on "Forms in Art" in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (The Theosophical Publishing House, 1993) and that on "Aesthetics and Symbolism" in *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* (Perennial Books, 1987).

² In Masonic terminology God is "The Great Architect of the Universe" but He is also a painter, sculptor, musician, and poet; there is a Hindu symbolism which represents Him as creating and destroying the worlds as He dances.

³ Highly significant, by its very excess, is the reaction of a Sioux chief (quoted by Charles Eastman in *The Indian Today*) on being shown a picture gallery. "So this is the white man's strange wisdom" he exclaimed. "He cuts down the forests which have stood in pride and grandeur for centuries, he tears up the breast of our mother the earth and befouls the streams of clear water; without pity he disfigures the paintings and monuments of God and then bedaubes a surface with color and calls it a masterpiece" In this connection it must be pointed out that the painting of the Red Indians is a writing, or, to be more precise, a pictography.

This brings us to a most important point: to a great extent sacred art ignores the aesthetic aim; its beauty arises above all from its spiritual truth and so from the exactitude of its symbolism and from its usefulness for purposes of ritual and contemplation, and only secondarily from the imponderables of personal intuition; in fact this alternative could not present itself. In a world which knows no ugliness on the level of human products—a world, in other words, to which error in forms is still unknown—aesthetic quality cannot be a primary consideration; beauty is everywhere, beginning with nature and with man himself. If aesthetic intuition, in the deepest sense, has its own importance in certain modes of spirituality, only in a secondary manner does it enter into the genesis of a work of sacred art; in that process, beauty, first of all, does not have to be a direct aim and then it is ensured by the completeness and integrity of the symbol and by the traditional quality of the work.⁴ This must not, however, make one lose sight of the fact that the sense for beauty, and so also a need for beauty, is natural in normal man and is indeed the very condition behind the detachment of the traditional artist in regard to the aesthetic quality of sacred work; in other words a major preoccupation with this quality would for him amount to a pleonasm. Not to feel the need for beauty is an infirmity, not unrelated to the inescapable ugliness of the machine age, which under industrialism has become widespread; since it is impossible to get away from industrialism people make a virtue of this infirmity and calumniate both beauty and the need for it: this is like the proverbial saying that “he who wants to drown his dog, accuses it of rabies”. Those who have an interest in the public assassination of beauty seek to discredit it by the use of such terms as “picturesque” and “romantic”—just as people seek to suffocate religion by labeling it fanaticism—and by passing off what is ugly and trivial as being what is “real”; this is to reduce beauty to a mere luxury of painters and poets. The cult of chance—of a chance that is ugly and trivial—betrays just the same intention: the “world as it is” is but ugliness and triviality garnered in the chaos of coincidences.⁵ There is a hypocritical pretense of virtue which would circumvent this problem by an appeal to “pure spirit” and is all the more unpleasant for being allied to the so-called “sincerity” of the man claiming to be “dedicated” or “authentic”. When things are looked at in this way people soon come to regard as “spiritual”—because “sincere”—things which are the very antipodes of all spirituality. The abolition of beauty, whether sincere or not, means the end of the intelligibility of the world.

To return to the main question: if sacred art expresses what is spiritual either directly or indirectly, profane art must also express some value, unless it is to lose all legitimacy; the value it expresses, apart from the value of which every traditional style is the vehicle, is, first, the cosmic quality of its content and, secondly, the virtue and

⁴ Professed aesthetes are inevitably profane in their point of view; they betray their insufficiency by the air of unintelligence apparent both in their art and in the way they exercise their choice, as well as by the fact that on certain levels their taste always tends to be somewhat coarse. For most Europeans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries icons were “ugly”; it may be that their own work is not exactly ugly, but it is certainly lacking in truth and intelligence in most cases.

⁵ In France, for instance, advertisement posters are spread about like some filthy and insolent gangrene devouring the countryside; they are to be found not merely in towns but also in the tiniest hamlets and even on isolated ruins, and this is equivalent to the destruction—or a kind of destruction—of both country and fatherland. We write thus, not in the name of the “picturesque”, which does not interest us in the slightest but in defense of the soul of a people. Such appalling triviality is like the trademark of the machine, which seeks to devour our souls, and is thus shown up as “the fruit of sin”.

intelligence of the artist. Here it is therefore the subjective value of the man which predominates, but-and this is essential-that value is determined by the sacred, by the fact that the artist is integrated into a traditional civilization the genius of which he inevitably expresses; in other words he makes himself the exponent, not only of personal, but also of collective values, since both alike are determined by the tradition in question. The genius is at the same time traditional and collective, spiritual and racial, and then personal; personal genius is nothing without the concurrence of a deeper and wider genius. Sacred art represents above all the spirit, and profane art the collective soul or genius, but this of course presupposes that it is integrated into the tradition. Taken together spiritual and collective genius make up traditional genius which gives its imprint to the whole civilization.⁶

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Before going further we should perhaps define the Sacred", although it belongs to that category of things which are blindingly clear. But precisely because of this very clarity, such realities have become for many people incomprehensible, as is also true, for example, of "being" and "truth". What then is the sacred in relation to the world? It is the interference of the uncreate in the created, of the eternal in time, of the infinite in space, of the supraformal in forms; it is the mysterious introduction into one realm of existence of a presence which in reality contains and transcends that realm and could cause it to burst asunder in a sort of divine explosion. The sacred is the incommensurable, the transcendent, hidden within a fragile form belonging to this world; it has its own precise rules, its fearful aspects, and its merciful qualities; moreover any violation of the sacred, even in art, has incalculable repercussions. Intrinsically the sacred is inviolable, and so much so that any attempted violation recoils on the head of the violator.

The supernatural value of sacred art arises from the fact that it conveys and communicates an intelligence which is lacking in the collectivity. Like virgin nature it has a quality and function of intelligence which it manifests through beauty because in essence it belongs to the formal order; sacred art is the form of the Supra-formal, it is the image of the Uncreated, the language of Silence. But as soon as artistic initiative becomes detached from tradition, which links it to the sacred, this guarantee of intelligence fails and stupidity shows through everywhere; aestheticism is the very last thing that can preserve us from this danger.

An art is sacred, not through the personal intention of the artist, but through its content, its symbolism, and its style, that is, through objective elements. By its content: the subject represented must be as prescribed either when following a canonical model or in a wider sense; always, however, it must be canonically determined. By its symbolism: the sacred personage, or the anthropomorphic symbol, must be clothed or adorned in a

⁶ In traditional art are to be found creations-or rather what might well be called revelations-which may appear unimportant to those who are prejudiced in favor of individual "masterpieces" as well as from the standpoint of the "classical" categories of art; but these creations are nonetheless among the irreplaceable works of human genius. Such are the Nordic decorations, so rich in primordial symbols, the motifs of which are also to be found in the folk art of most European countries and indeed even in the depths of the Sahara; such also are the Abyssinian processional crosses, the Shinto *toriis*, the majestic eagle-feather headdresses of the American Indians and the Hindu saris in which splendor is combined with grace.

given manner and not differently and may be making certain gestures but not others. By its style: the image must be expressed in a particular hieratic formal language and not in some foreign or imagined style. In brief, the image must be sacred in its content, symbolical in its detail, and hieratic in its treatment; otherwise it will be lacking in spiritual truth, in liturgical quality, and-for all the more reason-in sacramental character. On pain of losing all right to existence, art has no right to infringe these rules and has the less interest in doing so since these seeming restrictions confer on it, by their intellectual and aesthetic truth, qualities of depth and power such as the individual artist has very small chance of drawing out of himself.

The rights of art, or more exactly of the artist, lie in the technical, spiritual, and intellectual qualities of the work; these three qualities are so many modes of originality. In other words the artist can be original through the aesthetic quality of his work, then by the nobility or piety reflected in it, as well as by the intelligence or knowledge which enables him to find inexhaustible variations within the framework laid down by tradition. All sacred art proves that this framework is relatively wide: it does indeed restrict incapacity but not either talent or intelligence. True genius can develop without making innovations: it attains perfection, depth, and power of expression almost imperceptibly by means of the imponderables of truth and beauty ripened in that humility without which there can be no true greatness. From the point of view of sacred art or even from that of merely traditional art, to know whether a work is an original, or a copy is a matter of no concern: in a series of copies of a single canonical model one of them, which may be less "original" than some other, is a work of genius through a concatenation of precious conditions which have nothing to do with any affectation of originality or other posturing of the ego.

Apart from its function as a direct aid to spirituality sacred art is indispensable as a support for the intelligence of the collectivity: to abolish sacred art as was done in the Renaissance or in Greece in the fifth century B.C. is to abolish that intelligence-or rather that "intellectuality"-and so to give free rein to a sensibility that is passionate and henceforth ungovernable.⁷ Moreover the theological function of religious art must not be overlooked: art should by its determinate aspects teach revealed truths, that is, by its types or models, and it should suggest spiritual perfumes by subtle aspects which will depend on the intuition of the artist. Now, naturalistic religious art makes truth hard to believe and virtue odious for the simple reason that in it truth is suppressed by the cacophony of a necessarily false description and virtue is drowned in an almost unavoidable hypocrisy; naturalism compels the artist to represent what he could not have seen as if he had seen it, and to manifest sublime virtue as if he himself possessed it.

This teaching function is also incumbent, though far less directly, on profane art when it is linked to the tradition by its style and by the mentality of the artist; in European medieval miniatures can be discerned an expression of the Christian spirit doubtless indirect, but nonetheless intelligible. The opportuneness of profane art is, however, psychological rather than spiritual, so that it always remains something of a "two-edged sword" or a "lesser ill" and therefore one must not be surprised at the severe

⁷ It is, of course, the "collective intelligence" which is here in question, not intelligence in itself: Greek decadence did not affect the spirit of a man like Plato. If, however, the collective intelligence is compromised, that clearly will render the unfolding of particular intelligences more uncertain. What Greek decadence had destroyed, Christianity recreated to last for a thousand years.

condemnations launched against profane art in periods still stamped with a sacerdotal outlook. Here as in other fields the functions of things may vary according to circumstances.

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Scriptures, anagogy, and art are derived from Revelation though at very different degrees. Scriptures are the direct expression of the Speech of Heaven whereas anagogy is its inspired and indispensable commentary⁸ art constitutes as it were the extreme limit or material shell of the tradition and thus, by virtue of the law that "extremes meet" rejoins what is most inward in it, so that art is itself inseparable from inspiration. Anagogy is the vehicle for metaphysical and mystical intelligence-aside from its purely legal interpretation-whereas art is the support of the collective intelligence and is contingent to the same degree as is the collectivity as such. In other words, scriptural Revelation is accompanied by two secondary currents, the one inward and indispensable for contemplative men, the other outward and indispensable for the generality of people. For the sage there is no common measure between the commentary on Scripture and art; he may even do without the latter provided it be replaced by a void or by virgin nature and not by a false art. For the tradition as a whole, however, art assumes an importance almost as great as exegesis, since tradition cannot manifest itself apart from forms. Again, if the elite have far more need of exegesis than of art, the generality of people have on the contrary far more need of art than of metaphysical and mystical doctrines; but, since the elite depend "physically" on the whole collectivity, they too indirectly have need of art.

Commentary in the widest sense however, comprises an aspect that is outward because it treats, among other things, of exoteric questions. Conversely, art has an aspect that is inward and profound by virtue of its symbolism; it then fulfills a different function and speaks directly to the contemplative mind: in this way it becomes a support for intellection, thanks to its non-mental, concrete and direct language. Besides the metaphysical and mystical commentary on Scripture there is a legal and moral commentary addressed to the community as a whole, just as there is, besides the formal and collective function of art, a function that is strictly spiritual and esoteric. Seen from the latter point of view art will be more inward and more profound than verbal expositions, and this explains the central function which a sacred image, such as that of the Buddha, can assume. There is a highly significant connection between the loss of a sacred art and the loss of anagogy, as is shown by the Renaissance: naturalism could not kill symbolism-sacred art-without humanism killing anagogy and, with it, gnosis. This is so because these two elements, anagogical science and symbolical art, are essentially related to pure intellectuality.⁹

⁸ We are referring to essential commentaries whose inspiration, though secondary, is nonetheless a necessary concomitant of Revelation; other commentaries, whether metaphysical, mystical, or legal may not be indispensable.

⁹ Guénon wrote somewhere that the Middle Ages were the only period in which the West as a whole knew a true intellectual development; and it was not by chance that this was also the only period in which the West knew a sacred art, if in both cases we leave aside more or less prehistoric times and isolated survivals of these times such as Pythagoreanism and Nordic art.

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Of Hindu figurative art it can be said that it is derived from the postures and gestures of yoga and of the mythological dance. Dancing, the divine art of Shiva-Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance, was revealed to the sage Bharatamuni by Shiva and His spouse Parvati themselves and was codified by the sage in the Bharata-Natya-shâstra. Hindu music, closely connected as it is with dancing is founded on the Sama Veda, its rhythms being derived from the Sanskrit meters. It is dancing which provides the determining note of the whole of Hindu art: sacred images translate this figurative mythology-or figurative metaphysic-into the language of inert matter.¹⁰ Let us add that this art is neither moral nor immoral, for the Hindu sees in sexual matters their essential cosmic or divine aspect and not their accidental physical aspect.¹¹ Hindu architecture also has a foundation in the Scriptures, which describe its celestial origin; its profound connection with Hindu dancing results from the form of the Vedic sacrifice.¹² The whole of Hindu architecture is essentially a coordination of the circle and the square in accord with the Vedic fire altar, Agni; in other words the architecture is derived from the primordial altar.¹³

If there is something vegetative, and thus alive, about the Hindu temple because of this sort' of spiritualized sensuality characterizing the Hindu soul-a sensuality always close to asceticism and death and opening on to the Infinite- Greek and Egyptian temples mark each in their own way, an opposite point of view. The Greek temple derives from a perspective of wisdom marked by a clarity which is no doubt already too rational; it indicates measure and the logical finite. The use of marble and the choice of profane

¹⁰ "Without knowledge of the science of dancing it is hard to understand the rules of painting" (*Vishnu-Dharma-Uttara*). "Only those sculptures or paintings should be judged beautiful which conform to canonical prescriptions, not those which please a personal taste or fantasy" (Shukracharya). "The particular form suitable to each image is to be found described in the *Shilpa-shâstras*, the canonical texts followed by the image-makers. . . . These texts supply the data needed for the mental representation which serves as the sculptor's model. According to his vision, says Shukracharya, he will fashion in temples the image of the divinities he adores. It is thus, and not by some other means, in truth and not by direct observation, that he will be able to attain his goal. The essential part of art, the 'visualization' (and one could say the same of the ecstatic audition of the musician) is thus a kind of yoga; the artist is sometimes looked on as a sort of yogi. Often, before undertaking his work, he celebrates certain special rites aimed at stifling the working of the conscious will and setting free the subjective faculties. In this case truth does not come from visual observation but from 'muscular awareness' of the movements the artist has understood and realized in his own members. The Shastras also give the canons of proportion. These proportions vary according to the divinity to be represented. Architecture also has its own canons which regulate even the very smallest details" (A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Understanding Hindu Art*).

¹¹ The average Westerner is always ready to reproach Hindus for what he believes to be "impurity"; for a true Hindu it is this very reproach that shows an impure attitude.

¹² "It is hardly necessary to point out that the Vedic sacrifice, which is always described as the imitation of 'what was at the beginning' is, in all its forms and in the full meaning of the terms, a work of art and at the same time a synthesis of the arts of liturgy and architecture, and one can say the same of the Christian Mass (which is also a sacrifice in mime) where the dramatic and architectural elements are inseparably united" (A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Nature of 'Folklore' and Popular Art" in *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*).

¹³ Hindu cosmology concerning the cardinal points and architecture coincides remarkably with that of the North American Indians-and perhaps also with that of the peoples of Siberia-so that it is easy to see in this fact a same heritage from the Hyperborean tradition. The circle appears again in the form of the Red Indian's camp surrounding the central fire, as also in the form of their tents or huts, while the symbolism of the square is actualized in the rite of the Sacred Pipe.

subjects went hand in hand with the decadence of Greek statuary which originally used wood and metal and represented only the Gods. As for the Egyptian temple, it stands, not "in space" like the Greek temple, but "in eternity"; it suggests the mystery of the Immutable and gives the impression of being of the same order as the starry vault of heaven.

Christian art for its part is founded, from a doctrinal point of view, on the mystery of the Son, "Image" of the Father, or the mystery of God "become man" (or image) in order that man (made in the image of God) might "become God". In this art the central element is painting: tradition says that it goes back to the likeness of Christ miraculously imprinted on a cloth sent to King Abgar, as also to the portrait of the Virgin Mary painted by St. Luke; another archetype of icons of the Blessed Face is, by its very nature, the Holy Shroud, prototype of the sacred portraits, and then the Crucifix. The Seventh Ecumenical Council declared that "the painting of icons was in no wise an invention of painters, but is on the contrary an established institution and tradition of the Church"¹⁴ But the general use of icons did not become established without difficulty: if the early Christians had some difficulty in admitting them this was by reason of the Judaic heritage; their scruples were of the same order as those of the Jewish-born Christians over abandoning the Mosaic prescriptions about food. It is in the nature of certain traditional values that they are only actualized fully in a particular human situation; in the realm of sacred art the doctrine of St. John Damascene was providential because it formulated truths which could not have been enunciated in the earliest days of Christianity.

Sacred art also has fields which are more or less secondary not by definition, but from the point of view of a particular traditional perspective-in Christianity, for example, architecture and enamel work; and it often contains elements drawn from pre-existing art which provide the primary matter-up till then symbolically 'fin chaos'-for the new art: thus it was that the spiritual genius of Christianity was able to make use of Greco-Roman, Oriental, and Nordic elements for its artistic expressions. Such elements were reforged into a powerful original mode of expression and the same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the elements used by the Islamic and Buddhist civilizations.

The Buddhist conception of art is, at least in certain respects, not remote from the Christian: like Christian art, Buddhist art is centered on the image of the Superman, bearer of the Revelation, though it differs from the Christian perspective in its non-

¹⁴ In the sixteenth century the Patriarch Nikon ordered the destruction of icons influenced by the Renaissance and threatened with excommunication those who painted or owned such paintings. After him the Patriarch Joachim required-in his last will and testament-that icons should always be painted according to ancient models and not "follow Latin or German models, which are invented according to the personal whim of the artist and corrupt the tradition of the Church". Many texts of this kind could be cited. In India, tradition speaks of the painter Chitrakara who was cursed by a brahmin for having broken the rules in the composition of a painting for which he had received a commission. If painted pictures are a necessary expression of Christian spirituality, sculptured images have only a secondary necessity which is also more or less "local". A cathedral covered with sculpture is assuredly a profound and powerful expression of Christianity, but one that is essentially determined by a fusion of Teutonic with Latin genius. A Gothic facade aims at embodying a preaching as concretely as possible; it may include esoteric elements-and indeed must do so by reason of its symbolism-but it has not the quasi-sacramental character of an iconostasis, a character that Charlemagne misunderstood because of his typically Western "rationalism" according to which the purpose of pictures or images was merely didactic. One of the glories of the Western cathedral is its stained glass, which is like an opening towards heaven: the rose-window is like a sparkling symbol of the metaphysical universe, of the cosmic reverberations of the "Self "

theism, which brings everything back to the impersonal; if man is logically at the center of the cosmos, this is, for Buddhism, "by accident" and not from theological necessity as in the case of Christianity; personages are "ideas" rather than individuals. Buddhist art evolves round the sacramental image of the Buddha, given moreover, according to one tradition, in the lifetime of the Blessed One in different forms, both sculptural and pictorial. The situation is the opposite of that of Christian art for here statuary is more important than painting although the latter is nonetheless strictly canonical and not "discretionary" like Christian statuary. In the realm of architecture, we may mention the stûpa of Piprava built immediately after the death of Shakyamuni; apart from this, elements of Hindu and Chinese art were transmuted into a new art of which there were a number of variants both in the Theravada and the Mahayana schools. From a doctrinal point of view the art in this case is founded on the idea of the saving virtue emanating from the superhuman beauty of the Buddhas: the images of the Blessed One, of other Buddhas and of Bodhisattvas are sacramental crystallizations of this virtue, which is also manifested in religious objects, "abstract" as to their form but "concrete" in their nature. This principle furnishes a conclusive argument against profane religious art as practiced in the West, for the celestial beauty of the God-Man extends to the whole of traditional art, whatever the particular style required by a given collectivity; to deny traditional art- and here we have Christianity chiefly in mind- is to deny the saving beauty of the Word made flesh; it is to be ignorant of the fact that in true Christian art there is something of Christ and something of the Virgin. Profane art replaces the soul of the God-Man, or of the deified man, by that of the artist and of his human model.

In Chinese art- setting aside Hindu influences in Buddhist art- everything seems to be derived, on the one hand from the writing, which has a sacred character, and on the other hand from nature, which is also sacred and is observed lovingly as a permanent revelation of Universal Principles. Certain techniques and materials- bronze, paper, Indian ink, lacquer: silk, bamboo, and porcelain- contribute to the originality of this art and determine certain of its modes. The connection between calligraphy and painting is both close and decisive, a connection also to be found in Egyptian art. Writing is a form of painting; the Yellow people trace their characters with a brush and their painting takes after writing; hand and eye retain the same reflexes. Of Confucianist painting it can be said that it is neither essentially sacred nor yet wholly profane; its intention contains a moral aim in a very broad sense of that term; it tends to represent the "objective" innocence of things and not their "inner" reality. As for Taoist landscapes, these externalize a metaphysic and a contemplative state: they spring, not from space, but from the "void"; their theme is essentially "mountain and water" and with this they combine cosmological and metaphysical aims. It is one of the most powerfully original forms of sacred art; in a certain sense it stands at the antipodes of Hindu art in which the principle of expression is precision and rhythm and not the ethereal subtleties of a contemplation made up of imponderables. It is not surprising that Chan Buddhism (Zen in Japanese), whose character is at once unarticulated and rich in shades of meaning, should have found in Taoist art a congenial mode of expression.¹⁵

¹⁵ In speaking of Chinese art we include also that of Japan which is a highly original branch of that art with its own particular genius combining sobriety, boldness, elegance, and contemplative intuition. The Japanese house combines the natural nobility of materials and simplicity of forms with extreme artistic refinement and this makes it one of the most original manifestations of art as a whole.

In architecture the major buildings of the Yellow race have the same superposed curves as the pines which surround them; the wide, horned, and in a sense vegetative shape of the Far-Eastern roof-the whole usually resting on wooden columns-even if its prototype is not the sacred conifers, it nonetheless retraces their dynamic and majestic life. When a man of the Yellow race enters a temple or palace he enters a "forest" rather than a "cavern";¹⁶ this architecture has about it something living, something vegetative and warm; even the magical intention of the upward curved hips, which give the protecting roof a certain defensive aspect, bring us back to the connection between tree and lightning and so to Virgin nature.¹⁷

The non-figurative or abstract arts of Judaism and Islam must not be overlooked. The former was revealed in the Torah itself and is exclusively sacerdotal. The latter is akin to it by its exclusion of human and animal representations; as to its origin, it issued from the sensory form of the revealed Book, that is, from the interlaced letters of the verses of the Koran, and also-paradoxical though this may seem-from the forbidding of images. This restriction in Islamic art, by eliminating certain creative possibilities intensified others, the more so since it was accompanied by express permission to represent plants; hence the capital importance of arabesques, of geometrical and botanical decorative motifs.¹⁸ Islamic architecture inherited from the neighboring civilizations, was transmuted by its own particular genius which tended at the same time both to simplification and to ornamentation; the purest expression of this genius is perhaps the art of the Maghreb, where no pre-existing formalism invited concessions. In Islam the love of beauty compensates for the tendency to austere simplicity; it lends elegant forms to simplicity and partially clothes it in a profusion of precious and abstract lacework. "God is Beautiful" said the Prophet, "and He loveth beauty".¹⁹

All that has just been said certainly does not mean that partial deviations may not arise in traditional art: especially in the case of the plastic arts it sometimes happens that a

¹⁶ A Gothic cathedral is a petrified forest, in one way welcoming though in another remaining cold; to the idea of protection it adds the idea of eternity and so mingles a celestial coldness with mercy. Its stained glass windows are like a sky glimpsed through the foliage of a forest of stone.

¹⁷ There is a story that the Chinese roof represents a boat upside down: according to a Sino-Malayan myth the sun comes from the East in a boat and the boat is wrecked in the West and, turning over, covers the sun, thus producing night; a connection is made, not only between the overturned boat and the darkness of night, but also, as a result, between a roof and the sleep it protects. Another source of Far-Eastern architecture, so far as the wooden columns are concerned, may be the primitive Sino-Malayan lake-dwellings (See E. Fuhmann, *China*).

¹⁸ Persian miniatures integrate things in a surface without perspective, and thus in a sense without limits, like a piece of weaving, and it is this which makes them compatible-at any rate as "worldly" objects-with the Islamic perspective. In a general way Moslems distrust any "materialization" of religious subjects as if in fear that spiritual realities might become exhausted through an excess of sensory crystallization. The sculptured and "dramatic" imagery of the Roman Church has indeed proven to be a "two-edged sword"; instead of making it "sensitive" and "popular" the Church ought to have maintained in it the hieratic abstraction of Romanesque statuary. It is not the sole obligation of art to "come down" towards the common people; it should also remain faithful to its intrinsic truth in order to allow men to "rise" towards that truth.

¹⁹ It is understandable that the smiling grace of Islamic architecture should have appeared to many Christians as something worldly and "pagan"; indeed the volitive perspective envisages the "here-below" and the "hereafter" only as levels of existence which mark separation and opposition and not as universal essences which unite and are based on identity. In Renaissance art virtue becomes crushing, lugubrious, and tiresome: beside the Alhambra the palace of Charles V seeks to be grave and austere but only achieves a heaviness and opacity which banish all higher intelligence, all contemplation, and all serenity.

more or less superficial virtuosity stifles the clarity of the symbolism and the inner reality of the work; worldliness can lead to errors and faults of taste even in sacred art, although the hieratic quality of the latter reduces the danger of such deviations to a minimum.

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After these very summary considerations let us return to the purely technical aspects of art. It is important to make a distinction between intentional stylization and mere individual lack of skill, evidenced either by an opacity introduced into the style or by an impression of unintelligence, confusion, and arbitrariness. In other words, it is necessary to know how to differentiate between an "artlessness" which, in transmitting positive suggestions, becomes thereby precious, and faults due to the personal incompetence or coarseness of the artisan. An apparent fault in drawing may arise from an intuition of harmony and may contribute to beauty of expression, of composition, of equilibrium; precision of drawing may be subordinated to other more important qualities to the extent that the content is spiritual. Apart from this, if traditional art cannot be always and everywhere at a peak of attainment, this is not because of any principial insufficiency but because of man's intellectual and moral insufficiencies which cannot fail to become exteriorized in art as in his other activities.

The agreement of a picture with nature is legitimate only insofar as it does not abolish the separation between the work of art and its outward model; without such separation the former loses its sufficient reason, for its purpose is not merely to repeat what already exists; the exactness of its proportions must neither violate the material—the plane surface in the case of painting and the inert material in the case of sculpture—nor compromise the spiritual expression; if the correctness of the proportions is in accord with the material data of the particular art while also satisfying the spiritual intention of the work, it will add an expression of intelligence and so also of truth to the symbolism of the work. Authentic and normative art always tends to combine intelligent observation of nature with noble and profound stylizations in order, first, to assimilate the work to the model created by God in nature and, secondly, to separate it from physical contingency by giving it an imprint of pure spirit, of synthesis, of what is essential. It can definitely be said that naturalism is legitimate insofar as physical exactness is allied to a vision of the Platonic Idea, the qualitative archetype; hence, in such works, the predominance of the static, of symmetry, of the "essential."²⁰ But we must also take account of this: if we start out from the idea that "form" is in a way necessarily opposed to essence the latter being universal inwardness and the former "accidental" outwardness, we can explain certain deformations practiced in sacred art as a reduction to the essence or as a "scorching by the essence" so to speak. The essence will then appear as an inner fire which disfigures, or as an "abyss" in which proportions are shattered, so that what is sacred and "formless"—which is not chaotic but spiritual—is like an irruption of essence into form.

Again, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the human spirit cannot be simultaneously deployed in all directions. Since traditional symbolism by no means

²⁰ In this connection Egyptian art is particularly instructive; other examples of this meeting between "natural" and "essential" can be found in Far-Eastern art and also in the admirable bronze and pottery heads found among the Yorubas of Ife in West Africa which are among the most perfect works of art to be found anywhere.

implies by definition an observation of physical forms carried to extreme lengths there is no reason for a sacerdotal art to tend towards such observation; it will be content with what the natural genius of the race requires, and this explains that mixture of "deforming" symbolism and refined observation which characterizes sacred art in general. At times the qualitative aspect violates the rules governing the quantitative reality: Hindu art marks femininity by the breasts and hips and gives them the importance of ideograms; it transforms into symbols characteristics which would otherwise simply be accepted as natural facts, and this is in keeping with the "deforming essence" mentioned above. As for simple lack of physical observation which as such is independent of any symbolical intention, we would add that, where it is conditioned by the requirements of a particular collective soul, it is an integral part of a style and so of a language which is in itself intelligent and noble; this is something quite different from the technical clumsiness of some isolated artist. Complete naturalism, which reproduces the chance variations and accidental aspect of appearances in a literal manner, is truly an abuse of intelligence such as might be called "luciferian"²¹: it could not, therefore, characterize traditional art. Moreover, if the difference between a naturalistic drawing and a stylized but unskillful drawing, or that between a flat and decorative painting and another in which there are shadows and perspective, represented progress pure and simple, this progress would be enormous and also inexplicable because of its very enormity. If one were to suppose that the Greeks-and after them the Christians-had been for many centuries incapable of looking and drawing, how could one then explain that these same men became endowed with ability to look and draw after a lapse of time that was relatively very short? This ease of the change between incommensurable positions proves that there was here no real progress and that on the contrary naturalism only represents a more exteriorized outlook combined with the efforts of observation and skill called for by this new way of viewing things.

The whole of the so-called "Greek miracle" amounts to a substitution of reason alone for intelligence as such: artistic naturalism would have been inconceivable without the rationalism which inaugurated it. Integral naturalism results from the cult of "form" of form envisaged as something "finite" and not as "symbol"; reason indeed regulates the science of the finite, of limits and of order, so that it is only logical that an art which is directed by reason should share with reason itself a flatness refractory to all mystery. The art of classical antiquity is often compared to the clarity of full daylight; it is forgotten that it also has the "outward" quality of day-light, which lacks any aspect of the secret and the quality of infinity. From the standpoint of this rationalistic ideal, the art of the cathedrals-and also Asiatic art, to the extent that it was known-inevitably appears chaotic, "disorderly", irrational, and inhuman.

Now if we start from the idea that perfect art can be recognized by three main criteria: nobility of content-this being a spiritual condition apart from which art has no right to exist-then exactness of symbolism or at least, in the case of profane works of art,

²¹ This abuse of intelligence is the general characteristic of modern civilization. Many things are taken to be superior-as indeed they are if considered in artificial isolation-which are in fact merely hypertrophic; artistic naturalism is just that, at any rate when taken as an end in itself and when it consequently expresses nothing more than the limitations of form and of the accidental.

harmony of composition²², and finally purity of style or elegance of line and color, we can discern with the help of these criteria the qualities and defects of any work of art whether sacred or not. It goes without saying that some modern work may, as if by chance, possess these qualities; nonetheless it would be a mistake to see in this any justification of an art that is deprived of all positive principles; the exceptional qualities of such a work are in any case far from being characteristic of the art in question when viewed as a whole, but appear only incidentally thanks to the eclecticism which goes with anarchy. The existence of such works proves, however, that a legitimate profane art is conceivable in the West without any need to return purely and simply to the miniatures of the Middle Ages or to peasant painting,²³ for a healthy state of soul and a normal treatment of materials always guarantee the rectitude of an art devoid of pretensions. It is the nature of things-on the spiritual and on the psychological as well as on the material and technical level-which demands that each of the constituent elements of art should fulfill certain elementary conditions, these being precisely the ones by which all traditional art is governed.

Here it is important to point out that one of the major errors of modern art is its confusion of art materials: people no longer know how to distinguish the cosmic meaning of stone, iron, and wood, just as they do not know the objective qualities of forms and colors. Stone has this in common with iron that it is cold and implacable, whereas wood is warm, live, and kindly; but, while the coldness of stone is neutral and indifferent like that of eternity, iron is hostile, aggressive, and mean, and this enables us to understand the significance of the invasion of the world by iron.²⁴ The heavy and sinister nature of iron requires that in its use in handicrafts it should be treated with lightness and fantasy such as one sees for instance in old church screens which resemble lacework. The meanness of iron needs to be neutralized by transparency in its treatment, for this is not in violation of the nature of this metal but on the contrary confers legitimacy on, as well as bringing out, its qualities of hardness and inflexibility; the sinister nature of iron implies that it has no right to full and direct manifestation but should be mastered or broken in order to be able to express its virtues. The nature of stone is quite different; in the raw state it has something sacred about it, and this is also true of the noble metals, which are like iron transfigured by light or cosmic fire or by planetary energies. It must be added that concrete-which, like iron, has invaded the whole world-is a base and quantitative sort of counterfeit stone; in it the spiritual aspect of eternity is replaced by an anonymous and brutal heaviness; if stone is implacable like death, concrete is brutal like a crushing.

²² This condition equally requires correct measure in regard to size; a profane work should never exceed certain dimensions; those are, for miniatures, very small.

²³ The same does not of course apply to sacred art, which, in the West, is exclusively the art of the icons and of the cathedrals; by definition it has something immutable. Mention can be made once again of the popular art of the various countries in Europe which is of Nordic origin, at least in a relative sense since it is difficult to assign a precise origin to an immemorial art. In fact this "rustic" art, preserved above all among the Germanic and Slavic peoples, has no clearly discernible geographical limits; it is possible to trace some of its fundamental patterns all the way to Africa and Asia without having to conclude, in the latter case, that these are borrowings. This is one of the most perfect of arts and, in principle, it has the capacity to cleanse the chaos in which our artisanship, or what is left of it, is struggling.

²⁴ The accumulation in Christian churches and places of pilgrimage of gross and harsh iron work cannot but impede the radiation of spiritual forces. It always gives the impression that heaven is imprisoned.

Before proceeding further we would wish to add the following reflection, not unrelated to the expansion of iron and its tyranny: one may be astonished at the haste shown by the most artistic peoples of the East in adopting ugly things of the modern world; but it must not be forgotten that, apart from any question of aesthetics or spirituality, people have in all ages imitated those who were strongest: before having strength people want to have at least the appearance of strength, and the ugly things of the modern world have become synonymous with power and independence. The essence of artistic beauty is spiritual, whereas material strength is "worldly" and since the "worldly" regard strength as synonymous with intelligence, the beauty of the tradition becomes synonymous not merely with weakness, but also with stupidity, illusion, and the ridiculous; being ashamed of weakness is almost always accompanied by hatred of what is looked on as the cause of this apparent inferiority-in this case, tradition, contemplation, truth. If most people-regardless of social level-unfortunately have not enough discernment to overcome this lamentable optical illusion, some salutary reactions are nonetheless observable in some quarters.

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It is told of Til Eulenspiegel²⁵ that, having been engaged as court painter to a prince, he presented to the assembled company a blank canvas, declaring that whoever was not the child of honest parents would see nothing on the canvas. Since none of the assembled lords was willing to admit he saw nothing, all pretended to admire the blank canvas. Now there was a time when this tale could pass as a pleasantry but none would have dared to foretell that it would one day enter into the manners of a "civilized" world. Today anyone can in the name of art for art's sake show us anything he likes²⁶ and, if we cry out in protest in the name of truth and intelligence, we are told we have not understood, as though some mysterious deficiency prevented us from understanding, not Chinese or Aztec art but some scribble by a European living next door. According to an abuse of language very prevalent today not "understand" means "to accept" and to reject means not to understand, as if it never happened that one refuses something precisely because one does understand it or on the contrary that one accepts it because one does not. Behind all this lies a double and fundamental error but for which the pretensions of so-called artists would be inconceivable: namely that an originality counter to the hereditary collective norm is psychologically possible outside mental derangement and that a man can produce a true work of art which is not in any degree understandable to a great many intelligent and cultivated people belonging to the same civilization, the same race, and the same period as the self-styled artist.²⁷ In reality the premises of such originality or singularity do not exist in the - normal human soul; still less do they exist in pure intelligence. Modern outlandishness, far from relating to some "mystery" of artistic creation, is merely philosophical error and mental deformation. Everyone believes himself obliged to be a great man; novelty is taken for originality morbid introspection for profundity, cynicism for sincerity, and pretentiousness for genius, so that a point is

²⁵ A character of medieval legend, famous for his pranks (Translator's note).

²⁶ The author is here thinking chiefly of the West (Translator's note).

²⁷ This is singularity carried to its limit, to the point of caricature. Now it is well known that "singularity" is a defect stigmatized by every monastic discipline; its gravity lies in its connection to the sin of pride.

reached where a diagram of anatomy or some zebra-like striping may be accepted as a painting. "sincerity" is elevated to the rank of an absolute criterion, as though a work of art could not be psychologically sincere and at the same time spiritually false or artistically a nullity. Artists so affected make the grave mistake of deliberately ignoring the objective and qualitative value of forms and colors and of believing themselves to be sheltered in a subjectivism which they deem interesting and impenetrable, whereas in reality it is merely commonplace and ridiculous. The very nature of their error forces them to have recourse to the lowest possibilities in the world of forms, just as Satan, in wishing to be as "original" as God, had no choice open to him but horror.²⁸ In a general way cynicism seems to play an important part in a certain atheistic morality: virtue, it says, consists not in dominating oneself and remaining silent, but in letting oneself run riot and proclaiming the fact from every rooftop; every sin is good if boasted of with brutality; a struggle in silence is labeled "hypocrisy" because something remains concealed. To the same order of ideas belongs the belief that it is "sincere" or "realistic" to uncover cynically what nature keeps hidden as though nature acted without sufficient reason.

The modern conception of art is false insofar as it puts creative imagination-or even simply the impulse to create-in the place of qualitative form, or insofar as a subjective and conjectural value is substituted for an objective and spiritual value; to do this is to replace by talent alone- whether real or illusory-that skill and craftsmanship which must needs enter into the very definition of art. as if talent could have meaning apart from the normative constants that are its criteria. It is clear that originality has no meaning except through its content, exactly as is the case with sincerity; the originality of an error-or the talent of an incompetent and subversive individual-could not offer the slightest interest; and far better to have a well-executed copy of a good model than an original creation which is the "sincere" manifestation of an evil genius.²⁹ when everyone wants to create and no one is willing to copy; when every work wants to be unique instead of inserting itself into a traditional continuity from which it draws its sap and of which it eventually may become one of the finest flowers, it only remains for man to cry out his own nothingness in the face of the world; this nothingness will, of course, be viewed as synonymous with originality since the minimum of tradition or normality will be taken for a maximum of talent. In the same order of ideas let us also mention the prejudice which would require every artist to "renew himself " as though human life were not far too short to justify such a requirement or as though artists were not sufficiently numerous to render such a renewal on the part of each of them superfluous. After all one does not complain of the fact that a man's face remains the same from day to day nor does one expect Persian art to turn suddenly into Polynesian art.

²⁸ Modern art builds misshapen churches and pierces their walls with asymmetrical windows looking like breaches caused by bursts of machine-gun fire, as if by this means to betray its own true feelings. However much people may boast of the "boldness" of some such architectural design, they cannot escape the intrinsic meaning of forms: they cannot prevent such a work from being related by the language of its forms to the world of larva and nightmares: this is spiritism transmuted into concrete.

²⁹ It often happens that the value of a work is denied because someone has discovered -or thinks he has-that it is a "fake", as if the value of a work of art lay outside itself. In traditional art the masterpiece is most often an anonymous culmination of a series of replicas; a work of genius is almost always the resultant of a long collective elaboration. For example, many Chinese masterpieces are copies of which the models are unknown.

The error in the thesis of "art for art's sake" really amounts to supposing that there are relativities which bear their adequate justification within themselves, in their own relative nature, and that consequently there are criteria of value inaccessible to pure intelligence and foreign to objective truth. This error involves abolishing the primacy of the intellect and its replacement either by instinct or taste, thus by criteria that are either purely subjective or else arbitrary. We have already seen that the definition, laws, and criteria of art cannot be derived from art itself, that is, from the competence of the artist as such; the foundations of art lie in the spirit, in metaphysical, theological, and mystical knowledge, not in knowledge of the craft alone nor yet in genius, for this may be just anything; in other words the intrinsic principles of art are essentially subordinate to extrinsic principles of a higher order. Art is an activity, an exteriorization, and thus depends by definition on a knowledge that transcends it and determines its rules; apart from such knowledge, art has no justification: it is knowledge which determines action, manifestation, form, and not the reverse. It is not necessary to produce works of art oneself in order to have the right to judge an artistic production in its essentials; decisive artistic competence only comes into play in relation to an intellectual competence which must be already present.³⁰ No relative point of view can claim unqualified competence except in the case of innocuous activities in which competence anyhow has but a very limited importance; human art derives from a relative point of view; it is an application, not a principle. Modern criticism more and more tends to put works of art into factitious categories: art is thus made out to be no more than a movement, and a point has been reached where works of art are appraised only in terms of other works and apart from any objective and stable criterion. The artist of the "avant-garde" is one whose vanity and cynicism impart momentum to the movement; critics seek, not for works which are good in themselves—some of them would even deny that such works exist—but for works which are "novel" or "sincere" and can serve as points of reference in a movement which is in reality a downhill slide towards dissolution; the "quality" of art is then seen only in its movement and its relationships, which amounts to saying that no work has intrinsic value; everything has become fugitive and discontinuous. Artistic relativism destroys the very notion of art just as philosophical relativism destroys the notion of truth; relativism of whatever kind kills intelligence. One who despises truth cannot in sound logic present his own contempt of it as truth.

In the same context it is significant that people are quite ready to extol some so-called artist on the ground that he "expresses his times" as though a period as such—namely something which may be anything at all—had rights over truth³¹; if what a "Surrealist" expresses really corresponded to our times, this expression would prove only one thing, namely that our times are not worth expressing; very fortunately, however, our times do still contain something besides surrealism. Be that as it may, to claim that a work of art is good because "it expresses our times" amounts to affirming that a

³⁰ This competence may, however, be limited to a particular traditional world. The competence of a brahmin may not extend to Christian icons, though there is here no limitation of principle. A necessary competence has the right, though not of course the duty; to be limited to a particular system of concordant possibilities.

³¹ This compliment is even paid to philosophers; "the existential" the bare fact, everywhere crushes what is true by taking its name. "Our times" is a sort of false divinity in whose name everything seems permissible, whether on the plane of thought, or that of art, even religious art.

phenomenon is good simply because it expresses something; in that case crime is good because it expresses a criminal tendency, an error is good because it expresses a lack of knowledge and so forth. What defenders of surrealist tendencies either forget or do not know is above all that forms, whether in pictures, in sculpture, in architecture, or in some other medium, arise from a hierarchy of cosmic values and translate either truths or errors so that there is no place here for adventuring; the psychological efficacy of forms, so beneficial when they are true, makes them on the contrary deadly if they are false.

In order to maintain an illusion of objectivity as one slides into subjectivity, imaginary-and frankly hysterical-qualities are projected into the most insignificant futilities: people discuss endlessly about shades of "contrast" and "balance" as if these were not to be found everywhere; in doing so they end by trampling in scorn rugs which are masterpieces of abstract art though unsigned. When almost anything may be art and anyone may be an artist, neither the word "art" nor the word "artist" retains any meaning; it is true that there exists a perversion of sensibility and intelligence ready to discover new dimensions and even "drama" in the most uncalled for extravagances, but a sane man has no need to concern himself with these things.³² The great mistake of the surrealists is to believe that profundity lies in the direction of what is individual, that it is this, and not the universal, which is mysterious, and that the mystery grows more profound the more one delves into what is obscure and morbid: this is mystery turned upside down and therefore satanic, and it is at the same time a counterfeit of the "originality"-or uniqueness- of God. The error is to be found, however, also on another and seemingly opposite side: art then becomes an uninspired "technique" and a work of art amounts to no more than a "Construction"; this is no longer a matter of residues of the subconscious, but only of reason and calculation, though this by no means excludes interferences from the irrational any more than intuitive surrealism excludes artificial procedures. Pseudo-sincere affectations of simplicity do not escape from this same condemnation, for brutal compression and idiotism have nothing to do with the simplicity of primordial things.

All that has been said above also applies moreover both to poetry and to music: here again some people arrogate to themselves the right to call "realistic" or "sincere" anything which, they say, "expresses the spirit of our age" when the reality to which they refer is only a factitious world from which they can no longer escape: they make a virtue of this incapacity and then disdainfully apply the label of "romanticism" or "nostalgia" to the innate need for harmony which is proper to every normal man. Ultramodern music-"electronic music" for example-is founded on a despising of everything that enters into the very definition of music; mutatis mutandis, the case of the poetic art is similar: it becomes no more than a system of sounds-wretchedly contrived-which violates the principle at the basis of poetry. There is no possible justification for this puerile mania for "making a clean sweep" of centuries or millennia in order to "start from scratch" to invent new principles, new bases, new structures, for such invention is not merely senseless in itself but also incompatible with any creative sincerity. In other words some things are mutually exclusive: no one can call forth a poem from his heart while at the same time inventing out of nothing a language in which to express it. Here, as with the visual arts, the initial error is belief in a quasi-absolute originality, that is, in something which does

³² One can find "abstract" works-rare though they be-which are neither better nor worse than some African shield, but why then make celebrities of their authors, or why not, conversely, count every Zulu as one of the "giants" of art?

not answer to any positive possibility; for the musical sense of a racial or traditional collectivity is not open to being modified right down to its very roots.³³ People talk about "liberating" music from this or that prejudice, or convention, or constraint; what they really do is to "liberate" it from its own nature just as they have "liberated" painting from painting, poetry from poetry, and architecture from architecture; surrealism has "freed" art from art just as by execution a body has been "freed" from life.

This allusion to music obliges us to draw attention to the fact that at the time of the Renaissance and in the following centuries the decadence of European music and poetry was incomparably less-if indeed there was any decadence or to the extent there was-than that of the plastic arts and of architecture; there is no common measure between the sonnets of Michelangelo and the works for which he is more famous,³⁴ or between Shakespeare or Palestrina and the visual art of their day. The music of the Renaissance, like that of the Middle Ages of which it is a continuation, expresses in sound what is great and chivalrous in the European soul; it makes one think of wine or mead and of stirring legends of the past. The reason for this disproportion between the arts is that intellectual decadence-decadence of contemplative, not of inventive intelligence-is far more directly manifested in the visual arts, in which elements of intellectuality are necessarily involved, than in auditive or "iterative" arts, which chiefly exteriorize the states-and ultimately the beauties-of that plastic substance which is the soul.³⁵ In the plastic arts and in architecture the Renaissance means an art of passion and megalomania; the baroque, is an art of dreams. In music, baroque exteriorizes what may be lovable, tender, or paradisaical in the dreamy whereas in the visual arts it manifests the illusory and ludicrous aspects, enchantment coagulating into a nightmare. In the nineteenth century romantic poetry and music reinforced and made more acute the attachments to earth; like all sentimental individualism, this was a terrible sowing of agonies and sorrows, though in romanticism in the widest sense there are still many beauties one would wish to see integrated into a love of God.

Whereas ancient music included a spiritual value which can still be felt even in music of the end of the eighteenth century, the plane of music changed at the start of the

³³ We have heard certain Asiatic music blamed for its "simplistic method" and this is typical of a mental deformation which admires only what is factitious or forced: everything is shut up in a psychosis of "work" of "creation" even of "construction" factors which become synonymous with "quality" as though the beauty of a flower or a bird's song depended on laborious and hypercritical research, on an atmosphere of laboratories and vivisection.

³⁴ Apart from his sonnets the human greatness of Michelangelo appears chiefly in his sculpture, in works like the Moses and the Pieta, and that apart from any question of principles or style. In his painting and architecture this greatness is as if crushed by the errors of the period; it gets lost in heaviness and pathos or in the cold gigantism that also characterizes the statues and which is a dominant mark of the Renaissance. With the impressionists the academic spirit fell into discredit; one would gladly believe that this was due to a slightly deeper understanding but such is not the case, for an unforeseeable change of fashion was enough to call everything once again into question; moreover the academic spirit has already been revived within surrealism, though always in the climate of the oppressive ugliness characteristic of that school.

³⁵ English architecture was less devastated by the Renaissance and by baroque than that of most continental countries. It may be that, by one of those paradoxes of which history is prodigal Anglicanism preserved-against Rome-a certain medieval heritage in matters of art, and this would seem to have been the less unlikely since the English are less creative than the Italians, Germans, or French. Something analogous could no doubt be said about the popular architecture of Spain and particularly of Andalusia where Arab influence seems to have played the part of a preserver.

nineteenth century so that it became in fact a kind of substitute for religion or mysticism: more than in the profane music of the preceding periods musical emotion came to assume the function of an irrational excuse for every human frailty; music grew ever more hypersensitive and grandiloquent to the degree that "everyday life" became imbued with scientific rationalism and mercantile materialism. But in general it was still real music, linked to the cosmic qualities and consequently capable of becoming, even if rarely the vehicle of a movement of the soul towards Heaven.

Let us, however, return to the plastic arts and add the following, which will at the same time serve as a conclusion: for contemporary artists and insofar as profane art is concerned, there can be no question of just "going back", for one never gets back to one's starting point; rather should the valid experiments of naturalism and impressionism be combined with the principles of normal and normalizing art as is in fact done by some artists who are in general little known; modern art-starting from the Renaissance-does include some more or less isolated works which, though they fit into the style of their period, are in a deeper sense opposed to it and neutralize its errors by their own qualities.³⁶ However, in the case of sacred art resort to canonical models and treatment is called for without reservation, for if there is in modern man an originality to which a human being may have a right, this will not fail to show itself within the framework of tradition, as already happened in the Middle Ages according to the diverse mentalities in space and time. But above all it is necessary to relearn how to see and to look, and to understand that the sacred belongs to the field of the immutable and not to that of change; it is not a question of tolerating a certain artistic stability on the basis of a so-called law of change, but on the contrary of tolerating a certain change on the basis of the necessary and clear immutability of the sacred; it is not enough that there be genius, it must also have a right to exist. Words such as "conformism" and "immobilism" have been coined so as to be able to escape with good conscience from everything which, in the formal clothing of Revelation, necessarily participates in Immutability.

Insofar as profane art can be legitimate-and it can be, more than ever before: in this period of disfigurement and vulgarity-its mission is one of transmitting qualities of intelligence, beauty, and nobility; and this is something which cannot be realized apart from the rules which are imposed on us, not only by the very nature of the art in question, but also by the spiritual truth flowing from the divine prototype of every human creation.

³⁶ Of famous or well-known painters the elder Brueghel's snow scenes may be quoted and, nearer to our day, Gauguin, some of whose canvases are almost perfect, Van Gogh's flower paintings, Douanier Rousseau with his exotic forests akin to folk painting and, among our contemporaries, Covarrubias with his Mexican and Balinese subjects. We might perhaps also allude to certain American Indian painters whose work shows, through a naturalistic influence, a vision close to that of the ancient pictography. Conversely, equivalents of the positive experiments of modern art can be found in the most varied of traditional art, which proves not only that these experiments are compatible with the universal principles of art, but also that-once again-"there is nothing new under the sun".