

# TRIBUNE LIBRE

## BEGOTTEN, NOT CREATED...

### JOINT REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ART

So make the work  
instead of speaking it  
because it alone  
can speak of itself.

If as navel-centred  
my meagre findings linger  
creativity is spent  
my fecundity, dead.

“Art-expression”, “art-language of the artist”: is it not through taking such shortcuts in our thinking that we most often attempt to bring within the ambit of our understanding – but also, in consequence, reduce?<sup>1</sup> – what for us is more or less anachronistic, due to an excess of the “extra-ordinary”? Here, as elsewhere, we should be wary of facility: we should not adopt customary habits of thought on the subject of art and the artist.

More than this, looking at art should be an encounter. And an encounter must be earned, induced. Yes, induced; because it presupposes a certain disposition of being.

What the artist teaches us above all is the difficult path to reconciliation. We must accept to reconcile ourselves, in our freedom, with a deeper layer of our being, often silenced or ignored, which is known as sensibility and which the artist calls out to. We must accept to be deprived of, but also liberated from, the easy reference points of reason and object. A critical conversion in a world where we have developed the habit of seeing everything through the prism of knowledge, where the future of the “seen” dies in the concept.

Listening, paying attention to the artist’s unfolding journey and to his ethics, will teach us to speak within ourselves the language that is his own.

Can you experience  
what you feel  
without what you know  
burning up?

Little nest in the world  
simply relinquish your pride  
to the not knowing  
that the knowing does not know.

Not understanding, but allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed, enraptured, so that “the song of the world” finds an echo within us.

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<sup>1</sup> “Reason has only one way of explaining what does not originate within itself, which is to reduce it to nothingness.” (Émile Meyerson, *The Relativistic Deduction*).

Encountering the artist leads us down this path as it reveals to us the “magical theory of vision” referred to by Merleau-Ponty.<sup>2</sup> Better than anyone, Francis Pellerin invites us to see more clearly, if not differently, to rejuvenate our way of looking, to relearn how to see. Not to put any limits on the way we construe things, but to open it up to the point of *éberluisisme*, the condition of seeing or imagining things.

To see things, to imagine something that is not in fact there: were we to take our cue from the Académie Française, we would define *éberluisisme* as a chronic state of seeing things brought about by impaired sight, or at any rate an alteration or anomaly of vision. But the Académie speaks the language of scholars and learned persons, not that of poets. When an artist refers to it humorously, but nonetheless claims it or makes it his own, *éberluisisme* cannot be equated with impairment. It is, in fact, a state of grace which finally allows one to go beyond a reality that is far too objective to reach the truth which for the artist underpins this reality.<sup>3</sup>

Reality is ailing. It is doubly afflicted: most often confined within the limits of the “seen”, we moreover condemn it to reveal – in the instant – its principle, whether it moves us or interests us. This reality is dead reality. Our eye reifies it, immobilises it, constrains it, names it, dates it, objectifies it. The trap of cognitive (or conceptual) reduction is not far from closing!

But before being known, is reality not perceived, experienced? Why reduce the experienced to the instant and the perceived to the seen in this way? While the painter’s mind “*goes out through the eyes to wander among objects*”, the artist, even more so, goes out into the world with every fibre of his being quickened and vibrating so that the essence of reality impresses itself upon him.

Through a “communion of senses” his vision is thus enriched. It does not so much become more refined as it “broadens within him”, matures, draws from the length and breadth of his life the future that it will have.

To see what I see	What I perceive
I breathe in a different way	passes into me
my eyes are the relay point	I see it
in readiness for awareness,	if I validate it.

Breathing the blue  
of a ballet of swallows  
reality is music  
to a radiant heart.

Because ultimately only the too-real element of the impression slips away irretrievably to inhabit a place where the completed, the outdated, resides – there to remain with the fixity of something that cannot be reborn. As for the impression itself, it expires only upon exhausting the extent of a life.

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<sup>2</sup> “The painter, any painter, *while he is painting*, practises a magical theory of vision. He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else that, according to Malebranche’s sarcastic dilemma, the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects; for he never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’Esprit (Eye and Mind)*

<sup>3</sup> “Exactitude is not truth.” Henri Matisse

Therefore, it is not only from the “communion of senses” but also from the “communion of instants” – the building blocks of a life – that the artist’s vision intends to nourish itself. And while each and every impression claims acknowledgement for its originality, it is also enriched by the light shed by experience and by the availability of being that instants past have hollowed deep in the artist. It is a wonderful exchange whereby the seen “educates” the perceived, and furthermore, places the vision and the artist himself within a temporal context.

From movement  
and gradually  
real made  
reality.

We have time  
that which begins  
and begins again  
has no ending.

Without past, without memory  
could a future be  
how to see what is coming  
recreate our memories?

But the cycle of vision cannot end so prematurely. And the vision is embodied, “validated” in the work. The artist, a visionary, is first and foremost a creator. “Creator”, “artistic creation”. The paradox of the creator! When, fascinated by what is beyond us, we naturally tend to think in terms of knowledge or even of ability, we must learn to recognise that art is “the humblest service”.<sup>4</sup>

The state of grace of the vision must mature until it becomes a promise, because it can also be the grace of an encounter and a happy marriage of which the work is the fruit. The creator is the father, but this would indicate that the advent of the work in part escapes him. Who can say which part of him, besides the father, is in the process of emerging? Paternity is also a long exercise in patience during a time of inactivity. Then at last, one day, it happens. But the father must continue waiting, assisting, before he can welcome and obtain. Would he truly “obtain”, had there been no wait?

Thus, the work appears, matures, arises, surprises. No prior thought could have defined its form, made it, in short, pre-exist this incarnation, nor even have foreseen the potential moment of advent. The artist must accept that he may be surprised by his art, that it is not he who is ultimately the orchestrator of that which is operating. He must accept that his knowledge goes hand in hand with an equal relinquishment of knowledge, but without feigning ignorance, because if the work could be despite him, it also could not be without him. He must submit to the lengthy waiting period, with the tension that sustains it. Obtaining is not simply receiving. A combination of tension and the open (*ouvert*) suggests, rather, a yawning gulf (*béance*). Obtaining is and can only be “ob-tension”.

The tension ends with “recognition”. An essential coming together, beginning and ending, which consecrates, baptises and brings forth, child or father. A moment that resonates intensely no longer with the vision holding a promise, but with the work born before our very eyes “the unhoped-for hoped-for work”.

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<sup>4</sup> “By this is banished that error that would see art as the vainest and most capricious of vocations; art is the humblest service [...]” Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé, *The Correspondence*

What we do without knowing consists in witnessing the work which is in the making from the moment we embrace it.	He is not the one who brings forth, the father, he is the one who obtains.
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I know it, I find it  
 at the rhythm it chooses  
 I listen to it with my eyes  
 it speaks with my hands.

A subtle dialectic of vision versus know-how, memory versus the present, the instant versus enduring time, characterises the artist's progress towards the work that seeks itself within him and which he has been chosen to take "out of time".<sup>5</sup>

We perhaps better understand why *éberluisisme* is not simply a joke: the "price of grace" for Francis Pellerin is no other than a broadening of this "magical theory of vision" to the fullness of a life. We discover, with Pellerin, that a conception of art can – should? – also and naturally be wisdom.

This wisdom is the committed practice of a man of experience: a life of work where expertise is earned. Yet even more so, it is an attitude of asceticism.

For the truth to reach the work, the artist must make his "ascent to the truth", an undertaking of renouncement and risk. To renounce the comfort of a path waymarked by fashion or routine: to risk losing oneself, losing everything, "to risk more than life" as Heidegger put it. This is the price the artist has to pay to be the "creator", the "begetter" of his work.

He went wandering like masterless dogs and found, like a bone, the never-seen thing.	He neither took nor received, burning against the silence that constantly loses him and better starts anew only trying without really knowing what, rich with having nothing that heals the fear of knowing only how to love what one asks for and what one receives dead.
One feels the laughter within the moment all is quiet and being quiet burns in one's heart what one dares.	

Wisdom can thus be an art of living well, of cultivating joy, a way of loving oneself on the path one has chosen. Learning both the rigour and the happiness of being a cork in the sea, tossed by the waves, indifferent to the route taken because the journey poses no problem, no more than knowing on which beach it will be washed up. The freedom of a cork bobbing on the waves which would not envy all those "cork fishing floats" or "bottle corks". The solitude of a cork on the waves that accepts that it possesses no other quality than that of savouring its journey, sure of the beauty of this as long as it can be savoured, without caring to know what it is or what it appears to be in the eyes of a possible beholder.

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<sup>5</sup> "Lifted out of time and given to space, it [the art-thing] has become enduring, capable of eternity." Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé, *The Correspondence*

Speaking to me of travel  
an inviting form  
draws from the depths of my being  
that which I dare not;  
I will never know  
which word opens the door,  
from the bottom of which garden  
I come out of my secrets  
as someone other than me  
as I know myself to be.

The artist does not create as he lives, he lives as he creates. His conception of art is his life: committed practice, enduring wisdom which is able to welcome the work finally born of his patience.

I do not draw my art from my ideas  
but from what practice begets  
united acts  
of a knowing in order to see  
of a knowing how to do  
of a knowing how to wait  
to reach  
to welcome  
to love oneself in the other  
in their eyes.

6<sup>th</sup> October 1977

Poems by Francis Pellerin

*Premier Grand Prix de Rome – Sculpture*

Text by Monique Merly

*Holder of the Agrégation in Philosophy*