

**LEBANESE
PAINTERLY
HUMANISM:
GEORGES D. CORM
[1896-1971]**

A republication of Georges D. Corm's 1966 *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* with Arabic and English translations and additional texts, accompanying the exhibition *Lebanese Painterly Humanism: Georges D. Corm: [1896-1971]* organized by AUB Art Gallery 2013.

Curated/Edited by Octavian Esanu

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As of this time the publisher Dar An-Nahar has not claimed the rights to George D. Corm's *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| CURATORIAL STATEMENT _____ | 4 |
| Octavian Esanu | |
| <i>ESSAI SUR L'ART ET LA CIVILISATION DE CE TEMPS</i> _____ | 9 |
| Georges D. Corm | |
| <i>ESSAY ON THE ART AND CIVILIZATION OF THIS ERA</i> _____ | 73 |
| Georges D. Corm | |
| _____ دراسة في فنّ هذا الزمان وحضارته [النسخة العربيّة] جورج د. قرم | |
| An Itinerary _____ | 93 |
| Georges G. Corm | |
| A Lebanese <i>Rappel a l'Ordre</i> : Georges Daoud Corm [1896-1971] _____ | 99 |
| Octavian Esanu | |
| Chronology and Bibliography _____ | 121 |
| Colophon _____ | 134 |

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

The exhibition *Lebanese Painterly Humanism: Georges D. Corm [1896-1971]* organized by the AUB Art Gallery sets on display the work of the Lebanese painter, writer and cultural activist Georges Daoud Corm. Rather than mount a survey show of Corm's numerous paintings and drawings, we have decided to exhibit his works in accordance with one motive: a reflection upon Corm's aesthetic position, expressed in his art but also and more eloquently in his writings. His *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* [written in two stages during the 1960s] can be called a manifesto of painterly humanism. Here Corm most clearly enunciates his aesthetic and intellectual position, which can be broadly defined as a European humanism firmly anchored in Christian ethics. It is with this text in mind, which we republish on the occasion of this event, that we select and display Georges D. Corm's paintings and drawings.

The question of whether artists should revere and build upon the heritage of the past, or criticize and even utterly reject it, has been posed and reposed for centuries. There were disputes over classical tradition versus innovation in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns in late 17th century France, in the Battle of the Books in early 18th century England, and since the 19th century in countless battles fought between representatives of the academic establishment and various avant-garde factions. With the *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* Georges D. Corm brings a variation on this dispute to Lebanon, allowing it to interfere and resonate even more strongly within a local cultural context sharply divided along conflicting economic, political, ethnic, religious and cultural interests. In the *Essai* written in the 1960s, as humanism was increasingly losing ground to a boldly emerging modernist worldview, its author firmly takes the side of a classical European tradition that he sees as perfectly fit for the young state of Lebanon. Corm vehemently condemns the Moderns of his own time—twentieth-century Modernism—affirming instead his faith in Faith, human dignity, classical beauty, and spiritual perfection. The painter considers materialism, both as philosophical doctrine and philosophy of life, as the main problem of the modern age. Writing at the height of the Cold War, the author positions himself squarely in between two conflicting ideologies: the Soviet Union's Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism and the straightforward consumerist materialism of the American "way of life." For Georges D. Corm, both doctrines are highly detrimental to the human spirit, to the ideals of dignity and beauty set high during the Renaissance.

The *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* expresses, above all, Corm's concern for Lebanese cultural identity, which he saw as firmly rooted in the Christian faith and in French 19th century art and culture. Even if many of us today do not necessarily agree with these views [as many of Corm's contemporaries

did not], we launch this event in order to make the artist's aesthetic, political and civic position known to a broader public. In this age of pluralism Corm's painterly humanism takes its place among other doctrines and world-views, both aesthetic and political. In the end, it is Corm's artworks, displayed in this exhibition, that give emphatic voice to his life-affirming humanist position. In response to a split and dispersed modern subject, Corm gives his allegiance to a classical theory of the subject—completely whole and firmly grounded in the knowledge of good and evil; to the disappearance of realistically depicted humans from the modernist canvas, the painter responds with studies of the soul [*âme*] and of “spiritual landscapes” [*paysages d'âme*]; to the modernist dehumanization of art he answers with an art in which the human and the omnipresent Divine coexist. One should add to Corm's artistic and aesthetic values the artist's cultural activism, also based in humanist and spiritual values. Thanks in many respects to his tireless efforts and contributions, Lebanon has today such cultural institutions as l'École des Beaux-Arts, l'École Nationale de Musique, the Musée de la Ville de Beyrouth, the Société des Amis de l'Art as well as many other political and cultural initiatives devoted to the promotion of a Lebanese identity and culture.

For this exhibition we show works from the Corm collection. Thanks to the generosity and foresight of Dr. Georges G. Corm—the painter's son, who has taken care of the collection in times of war and of peace, and who has actively promoted the work of his father through numerous exhibitions and publications—we present to the public a part of this artist's oeuvre. In addition to displaying artworks that firmly endorse Corm's humanist beliefs, we also present works of a different nature: works that can be understood as instances of the painter's “doubt” with regard to painterly humanism as well as works that immediately recall Corm's religious and political convictions. Most importantly, we republish the *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*, reproducing this “manifesto of Lebanese painterly humanism” in facsimile and complemented with an Arabic and an English translation, along with other supplementary texts. With this we hope to make the work and ideas of Georges D. Corm known to scholars and to the wider public.

Octavian Esanu
AUB Art Galleries Curator

We are aware of the many controversial issues and ideas that a reader of Georges Daoud Corm's *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* might encounter. We do not necessarily endorse these views. We re-publish this text for its documentary and art historical significance.

GEORGES D. CORM

ESSAI SUR

L'ART

ET LA

CIVILISATION

DE CE TEMPS



LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON [détail]

PICASSO

Cet essai a été publié en 1960 par la Revue libanaise «Al Chirah». No. 619 du 2 Décembre. Il est, ici, complété.

Beyrouth 1er Oct. 1966

L'Art et la Civilisation de ce temps

On ne peut comprendre l'évolution des Lettres et des Arts depuis le début de ce siècle sans étudier auparavant celle de notre civilisation, car Lettres et Arts ne sont que l'impérissable quintessence des civilisations dont ils marquent les courbes ascendantes ou descendantes.

Les Beaux-Arts engendrés par la Renaissance européenne exprimèrent avec une admirable éloquence l'idéal de la Civilisation humaniste chrétienne. Semblable à celles qui l'avaient précédée, cette civilisation n'a pu naître et s'épanouir que grâce à des disciplines morales, sociales et religieuses qui favorisèrent le développement des facultés spirituelles et de raison de l'être humain, édifièrent des digues autour de ses instincts animaux pour en canaliser l'énergie au service de ses activités créatrices.

Aux éléments de grandeur apportés par les précédentes civilisations, la civilisation humaniste chrétienne des quatre derniers siècles avait ajouté un principe d'une extraordinaire puissance civilisatrice en affirmant la nature sacrée de l'être humain, son libre arbitre et son droit au développement de sa personnalité, à l'épanouissement de ses facultés dans le rayonnement humain d'une vérité chrétienne transcendante.

Pénétré d'une foi ainsi inculquée en lui-même et en sa destinée glorieuse, sinon ici-bas, dans le monde d'au delà la mort ; comprimé comme un ressort de bel acier par les disciplines qui lui étaient imposées, cet être humain de l'Europe renaissante se sentit soulevé par une force conquérante irrésistible, tantôt toute animale, tantôt spirituelle et tantôt faite d'un mélange de ses deux natures.

Il partit à la conquête de continents inconnus, de richesses matérielles et spirituelles inexplorées et considérées inaccessibles ; son génie créateur prenait toutes les initiatives, déclenchait et alimentait des évolutions et des révolutions.

En l'espace de quatre siècles son empire culturel s'étendit sur toute l'Europe et la déborda et son empire territorial sur les cinq continents.

Les Livres Saints, source de spiritualité

Et tout au long de cette épopée, la Bible et les Evangiles n'ont cessé de peser de toute leur spiritualité sur les révoltes de l'animalité humaine toujours prompte à user de force brutale ou de ruse pour assouvir ses appétits.

Des Evangiles surtout procédait l'enseignement des valeurs spirituelles et des richesses morales auxquelles on accède par le mépris des contingences matérielles, par l'amour du prochain, par le respect de la vérité, par la modestie et par la résignation aux misères physiques comme aux revers de fortune. Toutes disciplines rendues faciles par la foi dans une vie de félicités éternelles au delà de la vie terrestre.

Ces mêmes disciplines se sont manifestées dans les Lettres et les Arts. Les passions animales, les décors sordides, les vices et les vertus des individus ou des sociétés étaient transposés sur des plans de nobles tragédies ou de comédies plaisantes et exprimés en un langage pudique et retenu sans qu'ils perdissent rien de leurs puissances évocatrices et émotives.

La Musique, de son côté, répandait en ondes douces et

légères ou graves et puissantes, toujours harmonieuses, les élans de la Foi, les drames des passions et les joies des âmes épanouies, évitant toutes dissonances soutenues, tous mouvements désordonnés, toutes phrases atonales ou inexpressives.

Autant et mieux, peut-être, que les autres Arts, les arts plastiques exprimèrent avec une éloquente fidélité la naissance, le développement et l'épanouissement de cette civilisation. Ils perpétuèrent, en le glorifiant, le souvenir de cet homme de la Renaissance dans sa foi, ses drames et ses comédies, dans ses haut-faits comme au milieu de ses richesses matérielles et spirituelles et, souvent, dans sa misère.

Au dessin naïf et gauche mais rayonnant d'une mystique ferveur des Primitifs, aux quelques rares couleurs pures et lumineuses dont ils disposaient avec un art enchanteur, les artistes de la Renaissance ajoutèrent peu à peu la connaissance des formes naturelles exactes, de la perspective, des valeurs, du modelé et les nuances d'une palette qui n'a cessé, depuis, de se développer. Ces sciences qui se complétaient imposaient à l'artiste un long apprentissage et des disciplines qui lui permettaient, par la suite, de fixer sur la toile ou dans la pierre, avec aisance et éloquence, les êtres et les spectacles de son temps, les visions et les conceptions de mondes et de créatures surréels.

La sève s'est tarie

Mais à la fin du siècle dernier la généreuse sève qui avait nourri, quatre siècles durant, la plus extraordinaire expansion civilisatrice de l'Histoire, semblait tarie. Les peuples qui en avaient été les glorieux ouvriers n'aspiraient plus qu'à la calme jouissance des biens déjà acquis.

Cependant que d'autres forces, d'origine européenne mais nourries et développées sur des sols extra-européens, faisaient leur apparition, attaquaient l'immense édifice de cette civilisation et lui portaient de si rudes coups qu'en moins de cinquante ans elles parvinrent à lui démolir son empire territorial et à mettre en péril son empire culturel.

Nous voulons parler de l'Union des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques et des Etats-Unis d'Amérique.

D'apparence antagonistes parce que d'idéologies opposées, ces deux puissances aboutissent par des chemins différents à l'instauration d'un règne matérialiste dans le monde. Volontairement par la première et inconsciemment par la seconde.

C'est Karl Marx, un européen, qui a fourni aux chefs de la Révolution russe les armes idéologiques qui leur ont permis d'asseoir leur dictature matérialiste à l'intérieur des frontières de leur pays et de pratiquer un savant sabotage des structures sociales et morales à l'intérieur des frontières des autres nations. Europe comprise !

C'est le dynamisme des pionniers européens partis à la conquête des richesses de l'Amérique du nord qui, une fois ces richesses acquises et la doctrine de Monroe dépassée, a poursuivi, par les voies du Commerce et de l'Industrie, sa marche conquérante dans toutes les directions du monde, Europe comprise !

Quoiqu'il ne fasse pas de doute que les chefs d'Etats et les chefs spirituels des Etats-Unis restent fermement attachés aux idéaux humanistes chrétiens et que la masse de la nation continue à s'en réclamer, il n'en est pas moins vrai que les activités de cette masse tendent à la destruction de ces idéaux par leur concentration au service de l'accroissement des richesses et du confort matériels.

Entrée en lice de Freud

Parallèlement à l'envahissement de ce matérialisme, une action non moins irrésistible et dévastatrice s'est exercée aux Etats-Unis sur les caractères et les mœurs grâce aux théories sur le refoulement et les complexes de Sigmund Freud, un européen.

Les conclusions abusives qu'en a tiré la science psychiatrique américaine déclenchèrent un vaste mouvement d'affran-

chissement des disciplines indispensables aux individus comme aux sociétés civilisés.

Licence accordée aux enfants de se comporter conformément à leurs instincts de jeunes animaux. Ce qui eut pour corollaire d'enlever aux parents leur rôle séculaire d'éducateurs et de les amener à se désintéresser des faits et gestes de leurs progénitures.

Licence accordée aux parents, ainsi libérés de leurs devoirs paternels, de changer de conjoint, mari ou femme, aux premières difficultés conjugales comme au gré des variations de leurs désirs qu'ils devaient se garder de refouler par crainte des complexes.

Le foyer, unissant les membres d'une même famille dans une communauté morale, sentimentale et matérielle, s'est ainsi désintégré et, par le fait même, la civilisation dont il est la pierre angulaire. Le mot d'ordre devint : chacun pour soi, c.a.d. le retour aux mœurs de la jungle.

Les plus dures contraintes qui furent jamais imposées à l'être humain furent, incontestablement, celles du christianisme. Et cependant, loin de provoquer en lui des complexes ou d'affaiblir sa vitalité, elles favorisèrent la condensation de ses énergies et les dirigèrent vers des activités spirituelles et matérielles créatrices. Elles avaient leurs soupapes de sûreté dans la confession et la discussion, par l'individu, de ses problèmes et tourments intimes avec des directeurs de conscience, religieux désintéressés, versés dans la connaissance des faiblesses humaines et des moyens propres à transformer ces tourments et problèmes en paix intérieure et force rayonnante.

La science moderne issue des théories freudiennes a remplacé ces confesseurs et directeurs de conscience par des psychiatres professionnels, dosant et tarifant leurs conseils et leurs traitements.

Et l'on ne vit jamais, au cours de l'histoire des peuples civilisés, autant de déséquilibres psychiques qu'on en voit aujourd'hui grâce à la libération des instincts, conjuguée au rythme

accélééré du progrès industriel et scientifique.

Alors que notre civilisation exigeait de l'individu l'honnêteté envers soi-même et envers autrui et le respect de la vérité ; alors qu'elle prêchait l'horreur du mensonge sous toutes ses formes, le marxisme stalinien et le mercantilisme américain ont placé le mensonge au premier rang de leurs armes de pénétration et de conquêtes : politiques pour le premier et économiques pour le second.

La publicité commerciale

Sous forme de publicité commerciale aux Etats-Unis, il est servi par une nuée de spécialistes versés dans la science du bourrage des crânes des consommateurs c.a.d. de l'immense masse des citoyens de tous les pays : Telle boisson américaine est une source miraculeuse de vitalité, et de prestige, etc... Tel film américain qui n'est probablement qu'un vulgaire navet est présenté comme le colosse de l'industrie cinématographique et le chef-d'œuvre des chefs-d'œuvre ; vous ne pouvez conquérir le bien-aimé qu'en utilisant telle crème de beauté, tel savon, etc... etc...

Ce même genre de publicité a été appliqué par les marchands spécialisés, et les critiques à leur solde, à l'introduction et à l'écoulement de la peinture d'avant-garde produite sur une échelle industrielle.

Le mensonge américain ou publicitaire, à base d'exagérations monumentales et d'optimisme radiant, ne visant qu'à l'écoulement de produits industriels pourrait ne prêter qu'à sourire et ne mériter qu'un haussement d'épaules s'il ne donnait le ton à des exagérations moins inoffensives et s'il ne portait atteinte à l'éthique d'un peuple.

Infiniment plus redoutable est le mensonge du marxisme stalinien ! parce qu'il s'attaque aux notions les plus sacrées de notre humanisme et vise à l'asservissement des individus et des peuples.

Adapté aux circonstances et aux mentalités des nations visées, il est revêtu des formes et des couleurs les plus diverses et les plus attrayantes. Par lui, le Kremlin n'a cessé de se proclamer le champion des vertus qui lui font le plus cruellement défaut, et de dénoncer avec des violences verbales outrancières la paille existant dans l'œil de ses adversaires, alors que des poutres existaient dans le sien.

Il n'a pas arrêté de se proclamer à l'avant-garde de la civilisation parce que ses savants ont accompli des prodiges dans leurs domaines respectifs, parce qu'il a privé l'homme du privilège de son âme et de l'usage de ses facultés spirituelles dont il a étouffé les aspirations, parce qu'il n'accorde plus à cet homme qu'une valeur d'animal utilitaire intelligent, réceptif à sa propagande et disposé à sacrifier, la seule existence qu'il lui reconnaît, à l'édification du monde matérialiste conçu et prêché par Marx. Aux yeux des disciples de ce dernier, l'homme au sens humaniste du terme ne doit plus exister !

Aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique, cet homme court les plus grands risques parce qu'il y est plié, adapté et standardisé par le simple mécanisme de la ruée des masses, dont il fait partie, vers la puissance et le confort matériels.

L'écrasante pesée de ce double matérialisme menace gravement notre civilisation humaniste, ses Lettres et ses Arts. Elle fait croire au triomphe des Lettres et des Arts matérialistes auxquels elle a donné naissance, et qui en sont pétris ! Libération des disciplines traditionnelles, primauté de l'instinct, utilisation des méthodes et techniques modernes de la publicité commerciale. Nécessité pour l'artiste de suivre des modes et des courants, renouvelés constamment à l'instar des créations des modes féminines ou des productions industrielles, quelques éloignés que puissent être ces courants et ces modes de son propre génie.

La Musique qui, aux siècles derniers, favorisait le recueillement et l'exaltation spirituelle, se plait aujourd'hui à réveiller et à exciter les instincts animaux de l'homme, son système nerveux et sensoriel par le rappel des tams-tams nègres, des hurlements saccadés, gémissants et déchirants des habitants de

la jungle : hommes qui entrent en transes et bêtes aux abois, par des stridences monotones brusquement explosives, etc... Elle a créé, à cet effet une « Batterie » de Jazz magnifiquement appropriée pour remplacer les violons, violoncelles, violes, harpes, flûtes et pianos qui composaient l'Orchestre tempéré de la civilisation humaniste européenne.

La ronde infernale

Les Ballets, menuets, quadrilles, valse et autres danses classiques, gracieuses et mesurées, ont fait place aux danses des tribus tropicales : piétinements sourds et obsédants, déhanchements, chutes simulées et rattrapées, désaxements du cou, des jambes, du ventre ; déchaînements érotico-épileptiques, tout y est, jusqu'à la bave que vient d'ajouter un jeune américain vite idolâtré par certaines catégories de jeunes !

La poésie n'est plus qu'un enchaînement inintelligible de syllabes et de phrases dictées par un obscur instinct et s'adressant à l'obscur sensibilité du lecteur ou de l'auditeur à qui toute licence est accordée pour leur attribuer une signification, si ce lecteur ou cet auditeur tient à ce qu'elles en aient une.

La Littérature ne connaît plus le raffinement du langage, la pudeur des termes, l'élégance du style ; elle ne met plus en jeu les tourments d'amour et les cas de conscience, les passions, les vertus et les vices des individus et des sociétés encore imprégnés de notions d'honnêteté, de propriété morale et de justice ! mais, en termes crus et précis, en un langage direct et brutal, elle étale les libres jeux des instincts et des appétits de puissance matérielle, de sexualités cyniquement affirmées et exercées.

Quant aux Arts Plastiques, leur désintégration fut accomplie sous le couvert des recherches de quelques authentiques artistes anxieux de trouver une forme appropriée à l'expression de leur sensibilité, et, surtout, sous le couvert de la mésaventure des peintres impressionnistes méconnus et raillés à la fin du siècle dernier. Elle fut accomplie par des commerçants de génie servis par des peintres malades ou anarchiques,

jaillis des quatre coins de l'Europe, ainsi que par de malins fabricants de tableaux dont *l'insolite*, constamment renouvelé, et obtenu par l'abandon, l'un après l'autre, des éléments constitutifs du tableau, était l'unique et fructueuse préoccupation.

Incapables d'ajouter, comme l'avaient fait leurs prédécesseurs, de nouvelles richesses aux richesses déjà acquises du langage plastique, ils disloquèrent ce langage et le privèrent graduellement de sa grammaire, de sa syntaxe et, enfin de son vocabulaire ! le réduisant ainsi à n'être plus qu'une suite d'onomatopées incompréhensibles.

Après avoir aboli la correction du Dessin, c.a.d. des formes, ils firent disparaître la Perspective, les Valeurs, le Modelé et, enfin, le Sujet. Il n'y eut plus sur leurs toiles que quelques tâches de couleur assemblées au petit bonheur des réflexes sensoriels ou au gré d'une intelligence ingénieuse !

Les Arts Plastiques qui nécessitaient jusqu'à dix ans d'étude avant que l'artiste ne se permette de montrer ses œuvres au public dans les quelques Salons annuels, n'exigent plus aujourd'hui, ainsi réduits aux seules couleurs, que quelques semaines d'initiation pour qu'il soit possible au premier venu d'exposer valablement dans l'une des mille Galeries mises à sa disposition par la confrérie des marchands et d'être proclamé « grand artiste original » par ces derniers et par la presse et les critiques spécialisés qu'ils commandent. Aucune base d'appréciation ne peut plus être appliquée à ces œuvres et aucun critérium sinon la réaction sensorielle individuelle du spectateur à telles associations ou dissociations des couleurs.

Il arrivait autrefois à l'artiste de consacrer des dizaines d'études préparatoires et une année pour concevoir et exécuter une seule œuvre. Les œuvres des nouvelles Ecoles sont exécutées, pour la plupart, en quelques heures voire, en quelques quarts d'heure !

Siècle de la vitesse, siècle de l'industrie et du commerce, siècle du mépris des valeurs spirituelles et des clartés de la raison !

Depuis le début de ce siècle ces Ecoles se sont succédées à une vitesse accélérée. Pour n'en citer que les principales : Cubisme, Dadaïsme, Néo-Impressionisme, Fauvisme, Nabis, Expressionnisme, Vorticisme (l'Ecole du « point maximum d'énergie, représentant en mécanique la plus grande efficacité »! (sic) extrait du manifeste officiel) Art Informel, Art abstrait...

Des kilomètres et des tonnes de littérature n'ont cessé de présider au lancement des œuvres soi-disant révolutionnaires qui prétendaient recréer les arts plastiques selon la vision et la sensibilité progressistes du jour pour donner à ce monde nouveau un art digne de lui.

Qu'elles lui aient donné un art digne de lui et digne de figurer dans les Musées d'Art Moderne, en témoignage de l'évolution de cette époque, cela ne fait pas le moindre doute ! Les Arts d'un peuple n'étant jamais qu'à l'image de ses idéaux et de ses mœurs ; mais qu'elles lui aient donné un Art nouveau, rien de plus faux !

Quelques vérités

Pour les croire, il faut être dans l'ignorance de l'Histoire des Arts plastiques ou avoir perdu de vue cette Histoire.

En effet : à ne considérer que les 3 plus importantes nouvelles Ecoles d'Art Moderne qui se prétendent originales : Surréalisme, Art Informel et Art Abstrait, nous avons les preuves qu'elles ont, toutes les trois, pratiqué des arts aussi vieux que l'humanité.

Surréalisme : Il a fait partie de l'Iconographie de toutes les religions depuis les temps les plus reculés : Horus, Osiris, Anubis. etc. étaient des figures surréalistes de la mythologie pharaonique.

Pégases, Centaures, Sirènes, Cerbères, Faunes, Méduses, etc. étaient les créations des mythologies grecques et romaines antiques.

Civa aux multiples bras appartenait à la mythologie hindoue.

Les Anges et les Démons ailés de l'Iconographie chrétienne ne sont pas autre chose que des figures surréalistes, etc. etc.

Au Quatorzième siècle a vécu le plus grand peintre surréaliste de tous les temps : Hiéronymus Bosch.

Art Informel : Cet art a toujours été pratiqué par les peintres classiques qui y recouraient sous forme d'études préparatoires. Ces études s'appelaient *Esquisses peintes*. Elles étaient pour les peintres ce que sont les « premiers jets » ou brouillons pour les écrivains.

Nul ne pensait alors que ces esquisses méritaient d'être exposées et, encore moins, mises en vente. Il a fallu le génie mercantile de ce siècle pour en faire une forme d'art autonome astucieusement appelé Art Informel !

Art Abstrait : Cet art ne pouvait être que de l'Art Décoratif ! et il a été pratiqué depuis la plus haute antiquité par des décorateurs qui gardaient modestement l'anonymat. Nous en trouvons les modèles partout dans la Nature sous des millions de combinaisons de lignes et de couleurs. Lignes et couleurs dans une plaque de marbre strié, dans une aile de papillon, dans une queue de paon, dans les feuilles de certaines plantes, dans un crépi de muraille, moisi, dans une plaque de métal, rouillée, dans les planches anatomiques des intestins, etc... à l'infini.

Des motifs de tableaux abstraits ont été créés par millions par les peintres décorateurs au service des fabricants de tissus imprimés, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours.

Il faut reconnaître cependant qu'une grande partie des abstractionnistes actuels ne se soucie plus d'harmonie décorative et s'adonne uniquement à la confection rapide, instantanée de spectaculaires *rébus freudiens*.

Pour nous résumer, et comme il n'y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil, sauf en matières scientifiques, les nouvelles Ecoles de

peinture, patronnées par des commerçants, se sont contentées d'imiter soit la nature soit d'anciennes œuvres décoratives.

D'autre part, elles se sont lancées à cœur joie dans le plagiat des statues frustes et grimaçantes des tribus primitives des cinq Continents, ainsi que des dessins et coloriations des enfants et des schizophrènes.

Copier ou démarquer des fétiches de pierre ou de bois, grossiers ou grotesques, devint, grâce à ces Ecoles, la suprême expression des arts plastiques et de leur progrès. Et l'on ne vit jamais autant de civilisés s'extasier devant les hideuses images des totems et autres idôles nègres ou aztèques.

Les réactions du public, ses explosions d'indignation, ses manifestations d'incompréhension et les preuves flagrantes qu'il leur a infligé de l'apparement de leurs œuvres à celles des barbares, des fumistes, de déséquilibrés, des enfants, des primaires, des primates et des solipèdes ne put en enrayer le triomphal envahissement, grâce aux prodigieuses orchestrations publicitaires ordonnées par les marchands, grâce à l'obligeance d'une certaine intelligentsia internationale, grâce aux snobs et aux parvenus de tous pays, ainsi qu'aux enchères forcées et truquées.

Ce qu'il y a de remarquable dans cette évolution des arts plastiques, c'est que dans le même temps où les puissances matérialistes étouffaient l'âme humaine, l'Ecole expressionniste, le Picassisme et l'Art informel disloquaient, dans leurs œuvres, les formes humaines, les démembraient et les désintégraient en attendant que l'Ecole abstraite fit entièrement disparaître l'homme de ses œuvres.

Dégradation de l'homme

Nous voulons parler de cet homme doué d'une âme, de cette infime entité éphémère qui est, cependant, l'unique être créé sur cette planète capable de prendre la mesure de l'infini de la création et du mystère de sa pitoyable destinée ; de cet être qui est, de par son intelligence et sa sensibilité, la plus

haute valeur de l'Univers créé ; de cet homme dans ses réalités physiques et morales qui fut au centre des préoccupations des arts humanistes, dits « classiques ». Cet homme a été rayé du dictionnaire marxiste et rayé des œuvres dites d'avant-garde.

Ce qu'il y a de tragique dans ce conflit qui oppose notre civilisation aux puissances barbares qui la battent en brèche, c'est que ces dernières se croient à la pointe de la civilisation parce qu'elle ont accompli des prodiges dans tous les domaines de la science, parce qu'elles ont créé des machines de plus en plus perfectionnées pour rendre la vie humaine plus confortable matériellement, sans se soucier de l'inconfort psychique aigu dans lequel elles le plongent, ayant oublié, par ailleurs, semble-t-il, qu'UNE CIVILISATION NE PEUT ETRE QUE D'ORDRE STRICTEMENT MORAL ET SOCIAL.

Elles se croient à l'avant-garde de la civilisation parce qu'elles ont multiplié les écoles gratuites et les universités, pourvues de tous les comforts modernes mais où les études humanistes et les disciplines classiques sont remplacées par les sciences utilitaires et les sports.

Moïse, Confucius, Bouddha, Jésus, Mahomet qui furent les plus grands génies civilisateurs de l'humanité, n'avaient reçu l'enseignement d'aucune école et n'avaient bénéficié d'aucun confort matériel tels qu'ils sont conçus et vulgarisés aujourd'hui. Le Christ nous a donné ses Evangiles étant dans le plus complet dénuement matériel.

La seule étude qui les a passionnés, qui a accaparé leur intelligence et leur sollicitude fut celle, à même la vie, de l'être humain, de sa nature contradictoire, des tourments de sa destinée, des inégalités physiques et intellectuelles entre les individus qui engendrent de douloureux conflits et l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme. C'est pour pallier et remédier à ces injustices naturelles, aux cruautés des instincts qu'ils établirent et prêchèrent des lois et des disciplines morales et sociales en même temps qu'ils proclamaient l'existence d'une ou de plusieurs divinités dispensatrices de récompenses et de châtiments à qui les humains doivent rendre compte de leurs actes.

Aux évangiles d'amour et de tolérance du Christ, qui furent à la base de la civilisation humaniste de l'Europe Renaissance, les doctrines marxistes opposent les impératifs des luttes haineuses et meurtrières entre les classes sociales, le reclassement de l'être humain dans l'espèce strictement animale, tout en lui conservant le privilège de ses facultés cérébrales dont l'exercice n'est autorisé que dans les domaines scientifiques utilitaires ou dans la promotion des puissances marxistes.

L'Europe humaniste des quatre derniers siècles qui étendit sa lumière et son empire sur les cinq continents semble aujourd'hui privée de ses réactions défensives et de ses initiatives hardies. Elle ne parvient pas, dirait-on, à repousser la barbare invasion d'ennemis dont la science a libéré, en même temps que les instincts animaux de l'homme, l'atome qu'elles tiennent suspendu sur l'humanité comme une monstrueuse et universelle épée de Damoclès.

Il était donc fatal que les Lettres et les Arts, qui se présentent comme l'expression de l'ultime progrès, ne procèdent plus que des facultés instinctives et trop souvent anarchiques de l'homme ; qu'ils ne s'adressent plus à son intelligence et à sa sensibilité spirituelle c.à.d. à ses plus nobles facultés, mais uniquement à ses sens qu'ils se plaisent à flatter ou à exciter et, enfin, qu'ils soient condamnés à se renouveler constamment selon un rythme industriel de plus en plus rapide et doivent ainsi utiliser, pour leur diffusion, la formidable machine publicitaire mise au point et développée par le commercialisme américain.

A part quelques rarissimes exceptions dues à d'authentiques et prestigieux artistes, l'immense majorité des œuvres de peinture et de sculpture, qui prétendent être à la pointe du progrès artistique et devant lesquelles se pâment les snobs et les moutons de Panurge, ne sont en réalité que des œuvres « informes » ou « abstruses » quand elles ne sont pas tout simplement grotesques ou ne relèvent pas des industries mécaniques. Elles n'expriment plus que cette dégradation de l'intelligence et du sentiment esthétique de l'homme qu'elles s'acharment à précipiter et à laquelle nous cédon et nous nous habituons un peu plus chaque jour et que beaucoup finissent par

trouver naturelle, belle et même désirable !

A force de fréquenter, malgré lui, une femme laide, l'esthète finit par n'être plus sensible à sa laideur. A force d'habiter, par la force des circonstances, un taudis, l'aristocrate finit par ne plus en ressentir de la gêne. L'un et l'autre peuvent même finir par aimer ce qui les fit souffrir. Quand ils en arrivent là, tout le monde s'accorde à proclamer leur déchéance !

Raison d'espérer

Dieu merci ! l'Europe qui depuis presque un demi siècle subit l'assaut ininterrompu de ces nouvelles Ecoles, n'en est pas encore là ! Sa civilisation possède encore, dans le vaste monde, d'immenses forces saines jusqu'à ce jour plus ou moins indifférentes aux tintammaresques œuvres et proclamations des puissances matérialistes.

L'évolution des Arts issus du matérialisme envahissant les a conduits par un processus de désintégration continue dans une impasse dont ils ne pourront sortir que par un retour aux disciplines traditionnelles pour exprimer *intelligiblement* les joies et les angoisses de ce temps.

Les besoins de comprendre et les besoins spirituels des humains sont aussi solidement chevillés à leur nature que les instincts animaux. Ils forment avec ces derniers les deux pôles opposés entre lesquels cette nature ne cesse d'osciller. Et c'est lorsqu'elle a été à l'extrême de l'une qu'elle se sent le plus fortement attirée par l'extrême opposé. L'Histoire nous en a fourni d'innombrables illustrations.

Ne voyons-nous pas, aujourd'hui, partout où libre cours a été donné aux instincts des enfants et des adultes, la Société réclamer le retour aux disciplines traditionnelles salutaires ?...

N'est-ce pas une mystique, dans l'empire du matérialisme intégral, qui a porté la jeunesse marxiste russe à consentir au sacrifice de sa vie terrestre — la seule à laquelle elle croit ! — afin de construire, par ses privations et ses souffrances, un

monde meilleur dont jouiraient de futures générations et dont elle est exclue !

Nulle part autant qu'aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique, ce gigantesque foyer de puissance industrielle, on ne voit jaillir aussi haute, si parfois fumeuse et localisée, la flamme de la spiritualité et, aussi ardent, le besoin de croire en un Dieu de paix et de bonté. Entre cent exemples, il nous suffira de nous référer au nombre des vocations religieuses qui s'y manifestent, des Trappes qui s'y fondent et des trappistes qui les peuplent et qui, ces dernières années, ont dépassé de loin celles et ceux de la vieille Europe ! Il nous suffira de citer les innombrables adhérents aux multiples sectes religieuses fondées, depuis le début de ce siècle, par des illuminés ou des exploiters. Nulle part les contributions volontaires spontanées aux œuvres charitables, d'aide et de secours aux malheureux et sinistrés du monde entier, n'y sont aussi promptes et généreuses.

Notre civilisation aux rayonnantes vertus ne disparaîtra pas, même si les progrès de la science parviennent à dépouiller notre christianisme de son contexte divin. L'enseignement de Jésus de Nazareth reste et restera la plus haute expression de la civilisation humaine parce qu'il s'exerce sur les vertus du cœur et de la raison pour établir l'harmonie et la justice sociales, pour créer de la beauté spirituelle et rétablir la paix entre les hommes et dans le cœur des hommes.

Dans le conflit qui oppose d'un côté les doctrines marxistes, la ruée matérialiste et le déchaînement des instincts aux disciplines de notre civilisation, l'Europe qui a donné aux puissances ennemies leurs ferments ne manquera pas, croyons-nous, de donner au monde les germes d'une nouvelle civilisation humaniste issue de la sienne et adaptée aux besoins et conditions de cette ère industrielle et atomiste. Une civilisation dont les Lettres et les Arts remettront à leurs justes places les Arts et les Lettres, absurdes et anarchiques, du matérialisme envahissant.



Depuis 1960 plusieurs Ecoles, dites d'avant-garde, dont les Bop et Op-Arts, se sont manifestées.

Les œuvres issues de ces Ecoles, ainsi que l'immense majorité des œuvres d'art abstrait, n'ont fait que consacrer la rupture, amorcée depuis le début de ce siècle par le Cubisme, de leurs activités avec les Beaux-Arts des grandes Civilisations.

Ces activités ne sont plus qu'artisanales et, parfois, que bricolage où l'INSOLITE est l'objectif principal et **D'OU TOUTE SPIRITUALITE EST EXCLUE.**

Les artistes peintres et sculpteurs de toutes les grandes Civilisations-occidentales aussi bien qu'orientales - ont eu le même idéal :

Créer DES FORMES NATURELLES aussi parfaites et harmonieuses que possible, animées de leurs propres émotions, passions, rêves et conceptions, ainsi, que par leurs idéaux religieux.

On en trouvera l'illustration dans les 10 planches suivantes.

ART PHARAONIQUE



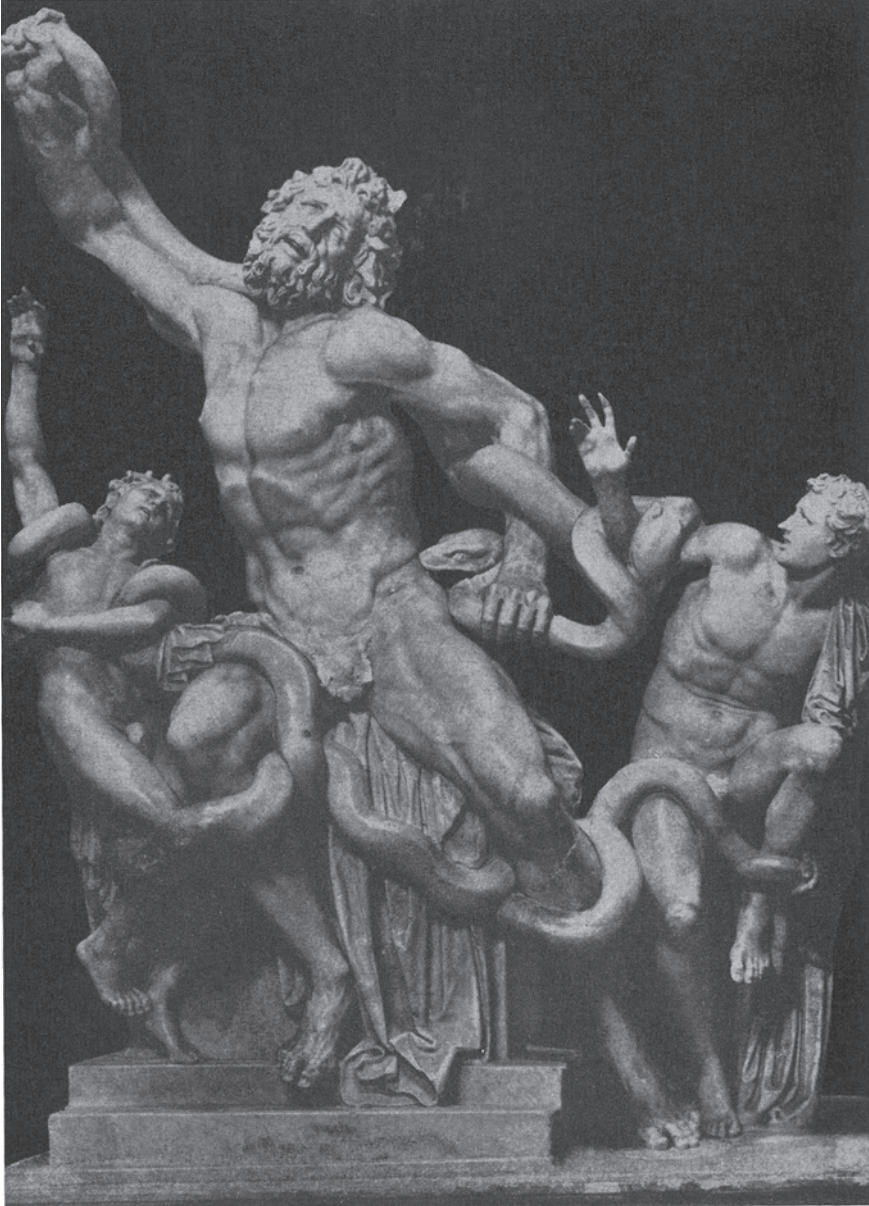
CHERTIHOTEP
env. 1950 av. J. C.
Musée de Berlin

ART PHARAONIQUE



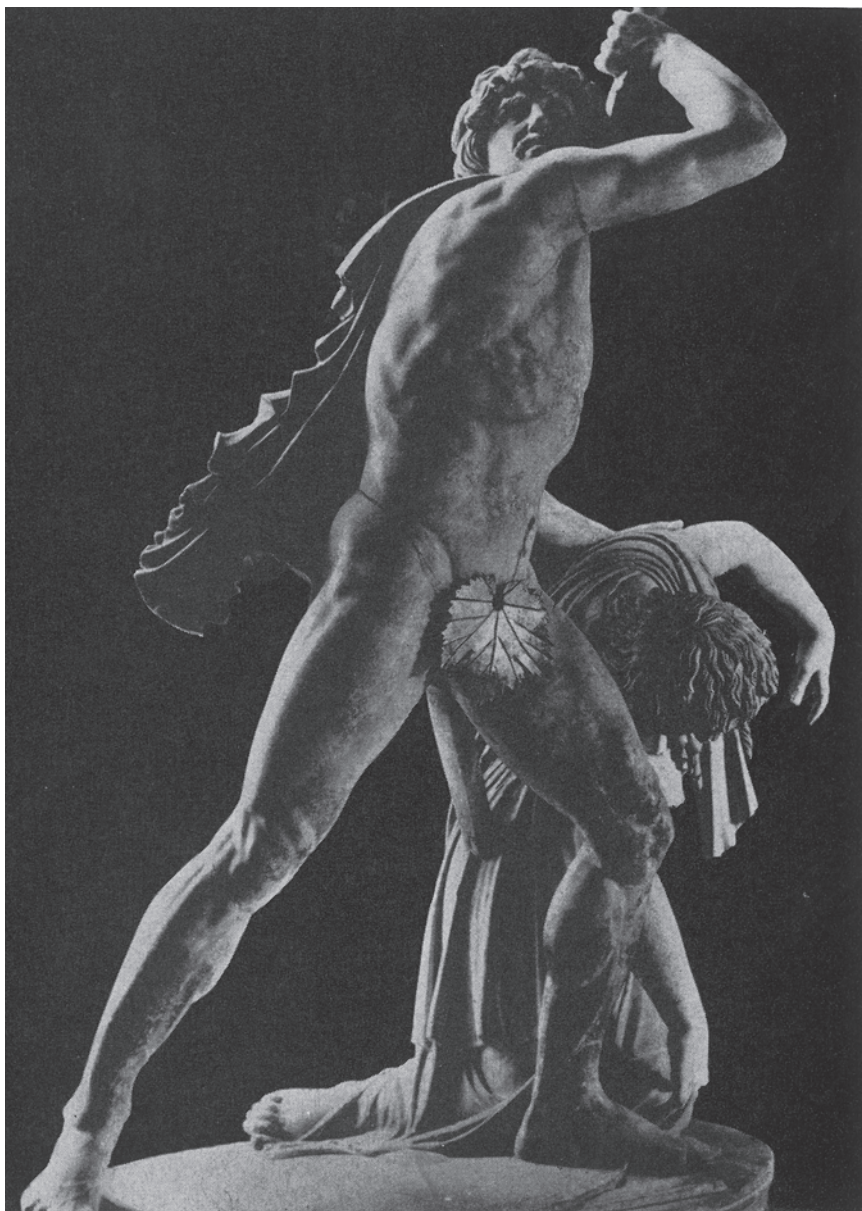
NEPHERTITI
env. 1370 av. J. C.
Musée du Caire

ART GREC ANTIQUE



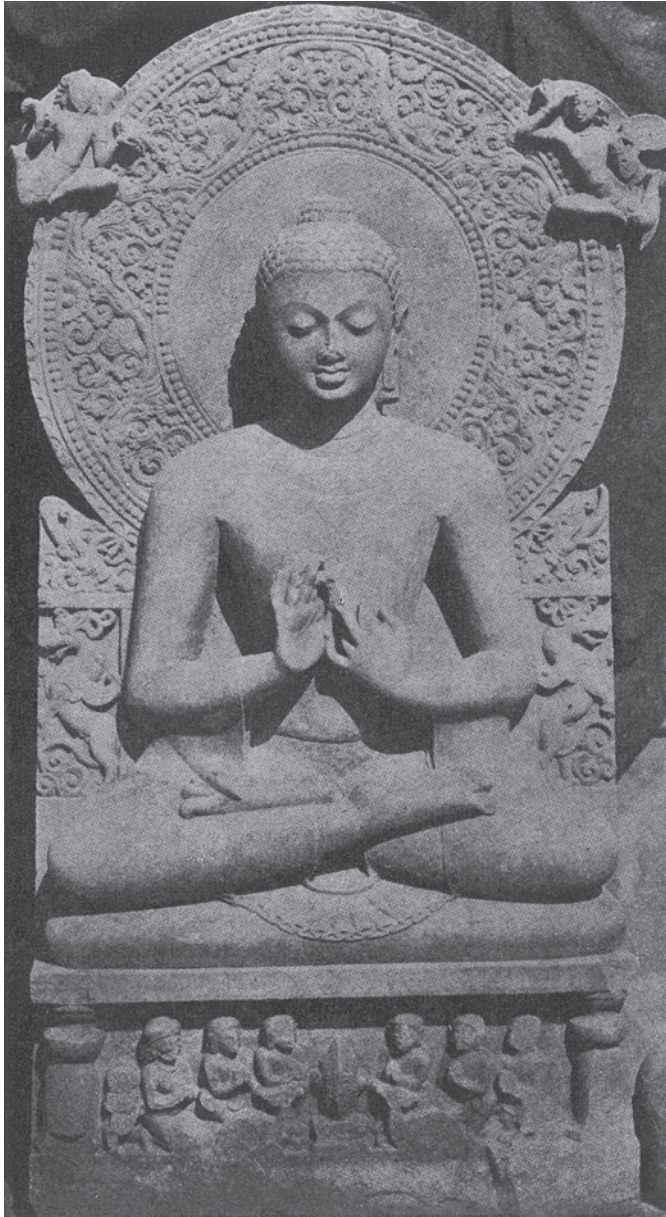
LE LAOCOON
Musée du Vatican

ART ROMAIN



GAULOIS TUANT SA FEMME
Musée Ludovici

ART INDOU



BOUDDHA
3^e Siècle ap. J. C.

ART JAPONAIS



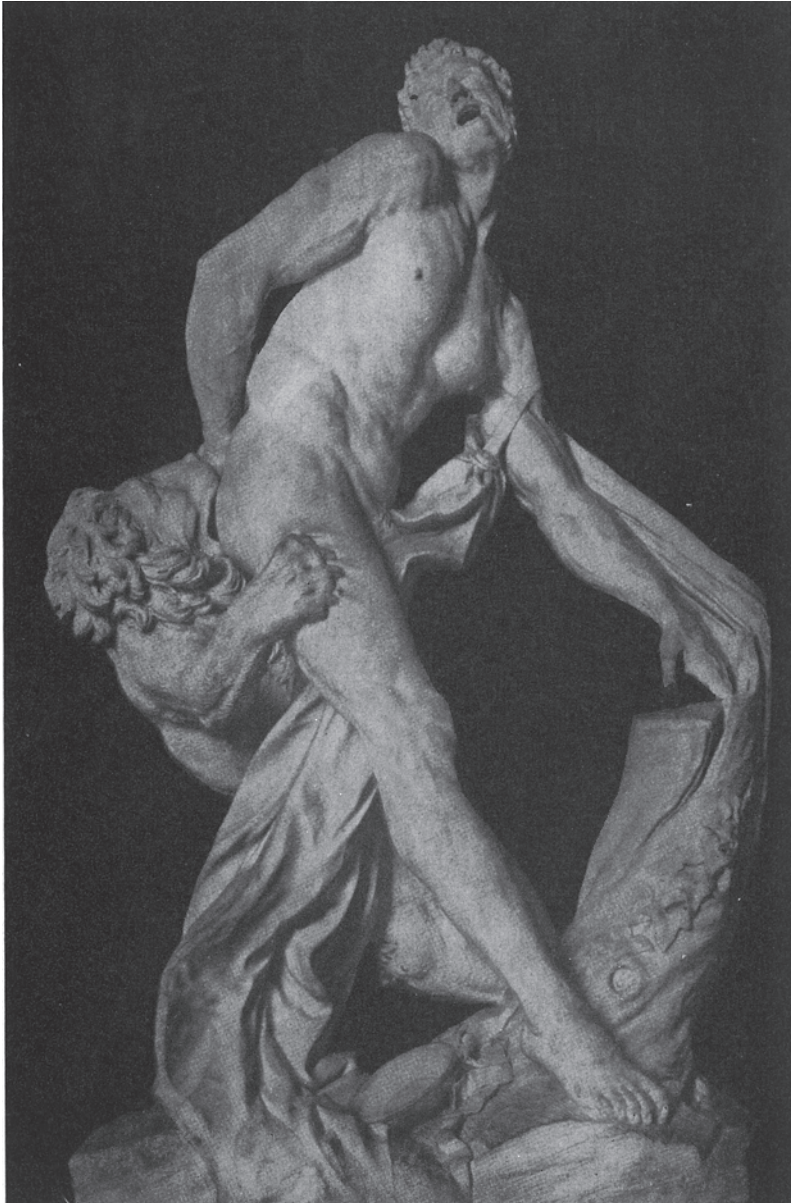
ASANGHA
Patriarcho Indou
env. 1.200 ap. J. C.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVI^e siècle européen



PIETA
MICHEL-ANGE
à St.-Pierre de Rome

ART du XVIIe siècle
européen



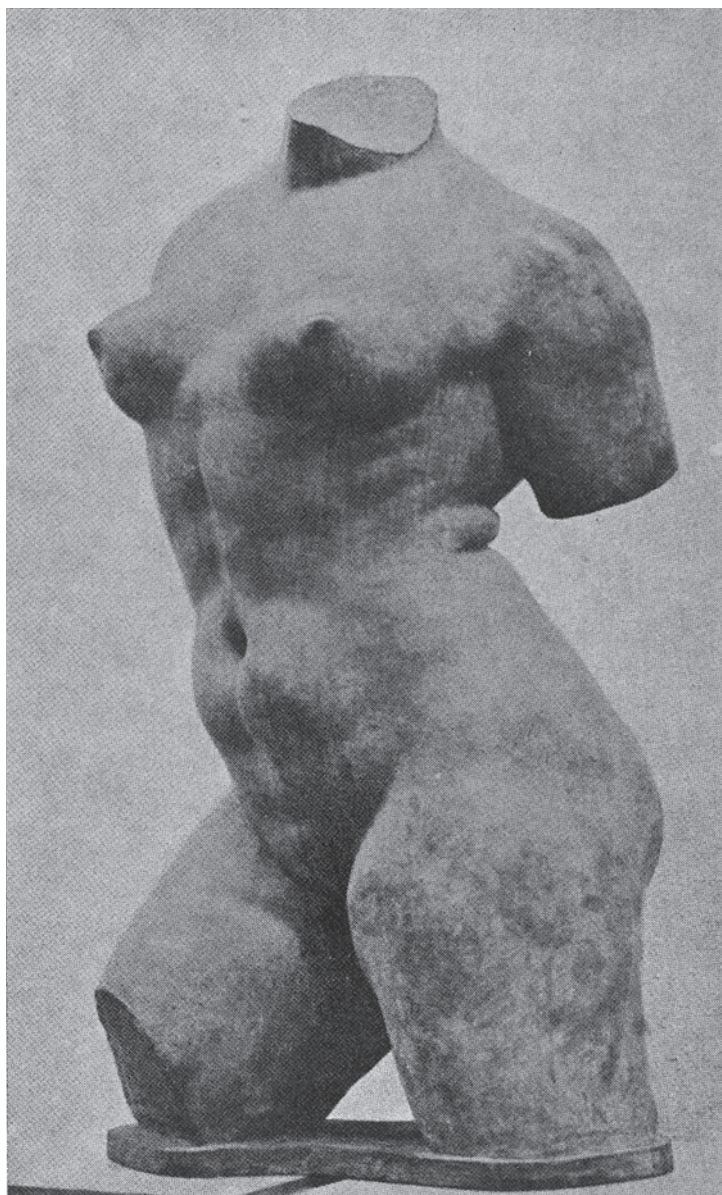
MILON DE CROTONE
PIERRE PUGET
Musée du Louvre

ART HUMANISTE
moderne



L'ÉTERNELLE IDOLE
RODIN

ART HUMANISTE
de ce temps



TORSE
MAILLOL
Musée d'Art Moderne, N. Y.

L'ART TRIBAL

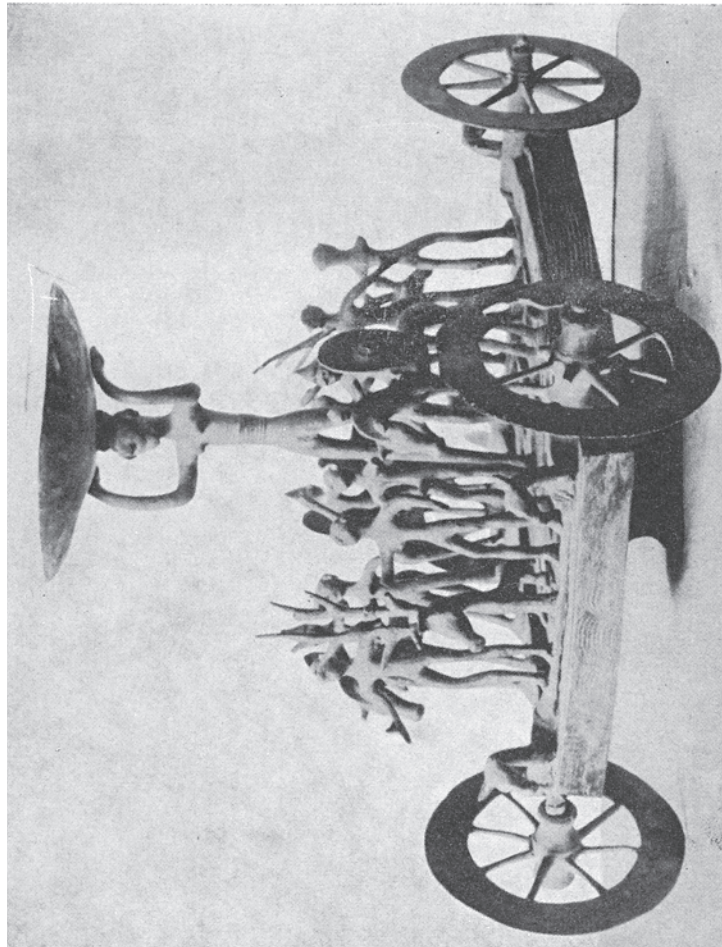
Une des sources d'inspiration
de quelques unes des Ecoles dites
«Progressistes» de ce temps.

ART TRIBAL



VIERGE AURIGNACIENNE
Première époque de la Préhistoire
env. 12.000 ans av. J. C.

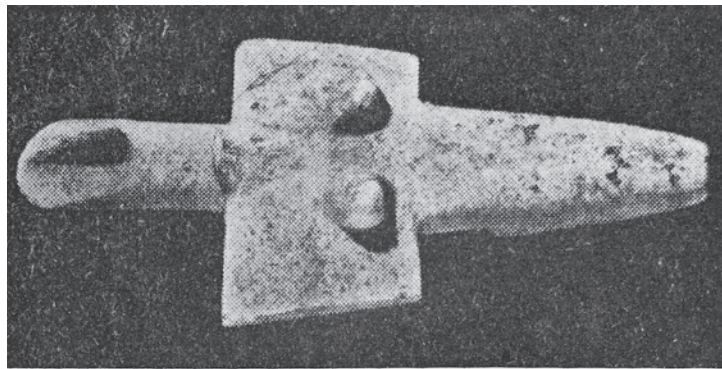
ART TRIBAL



CHAR

Age du fer, env. 1.200 ans av. J. C.
Styrie — Musée de Graz

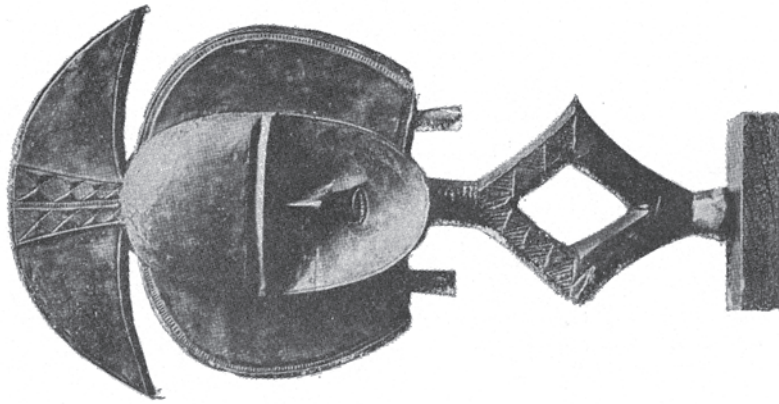
ART TRIBAL



STATUETTE

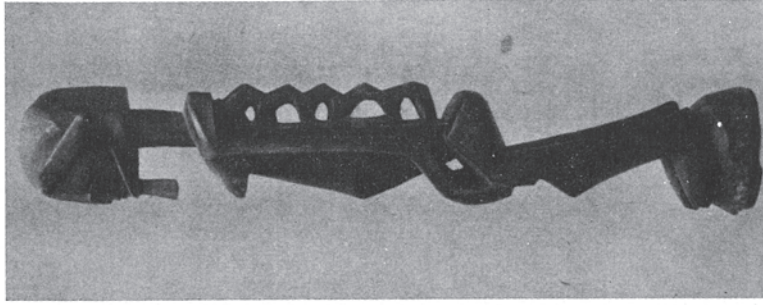
art Sarde primitif
env. 1.000 ans av. J. C.

ART TRIBAL



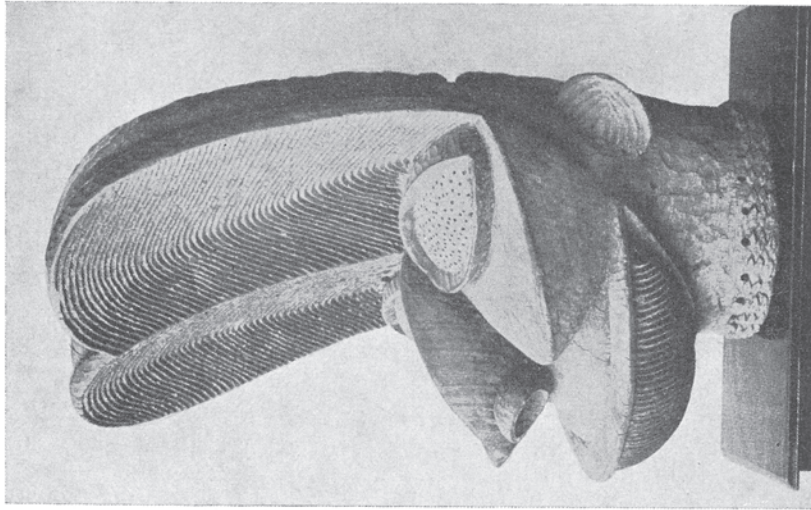
FETICHE
Tribu Bakoulas
Afrique

ART TRIBAL



FETICHE
Tribu Tombo
Soudan, Afrique

ART TRIBAL



MASQUE
Cameroun, Afrique

ART TRIBAL



LE GRAND ESPRIT
Indiens Cayougas

ART TRIBAL



TETE
Pays des Pahouins
Gabon, Afrique

CONFRONTATIONS

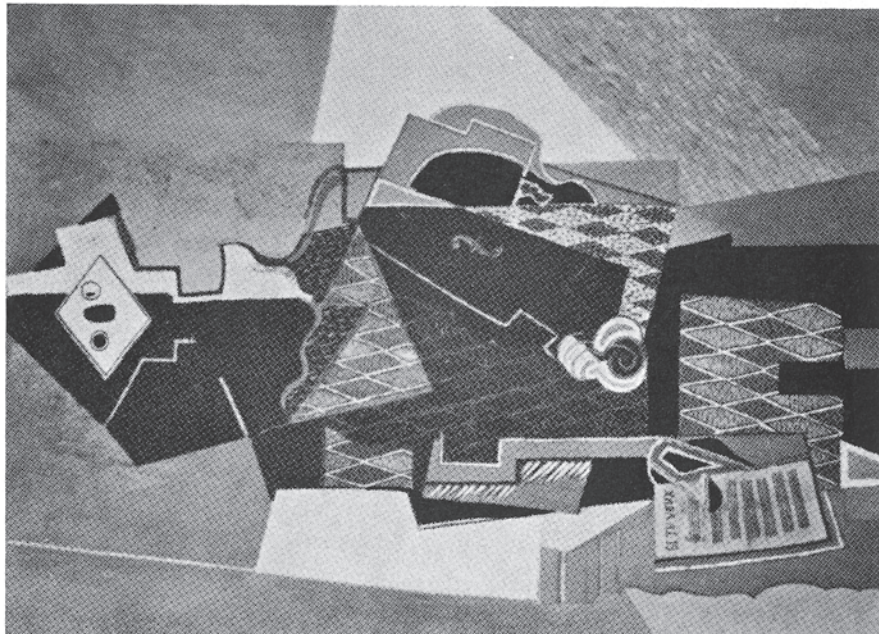
entre

les ARTS DITS « PROGRESSISTES »
DE CE TEMPS

et

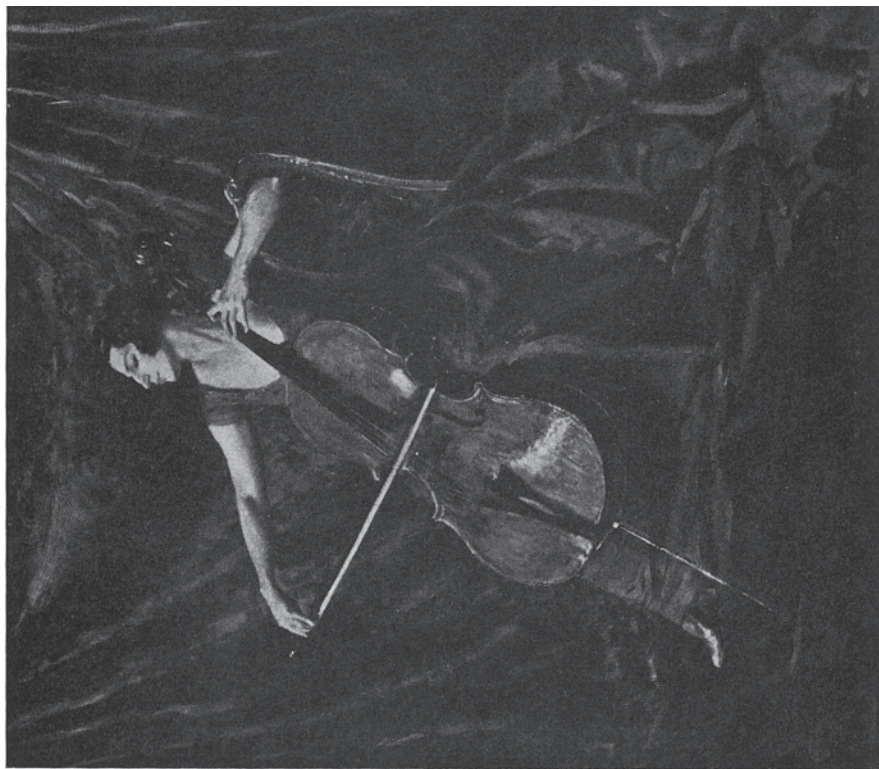
les ARTS DE LA CIVILISATION
HUMANISTE EUROPEENNE

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



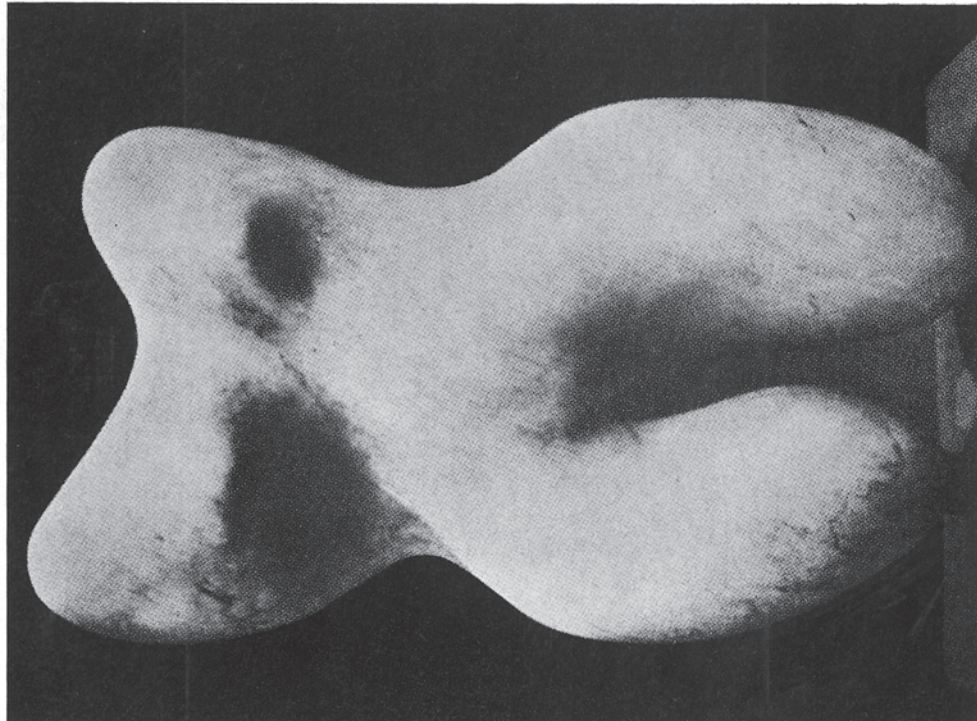
LE VIOLONISTE
PICASSO
Coll. privée, Paris

ART HUMANISTE
de ce temps



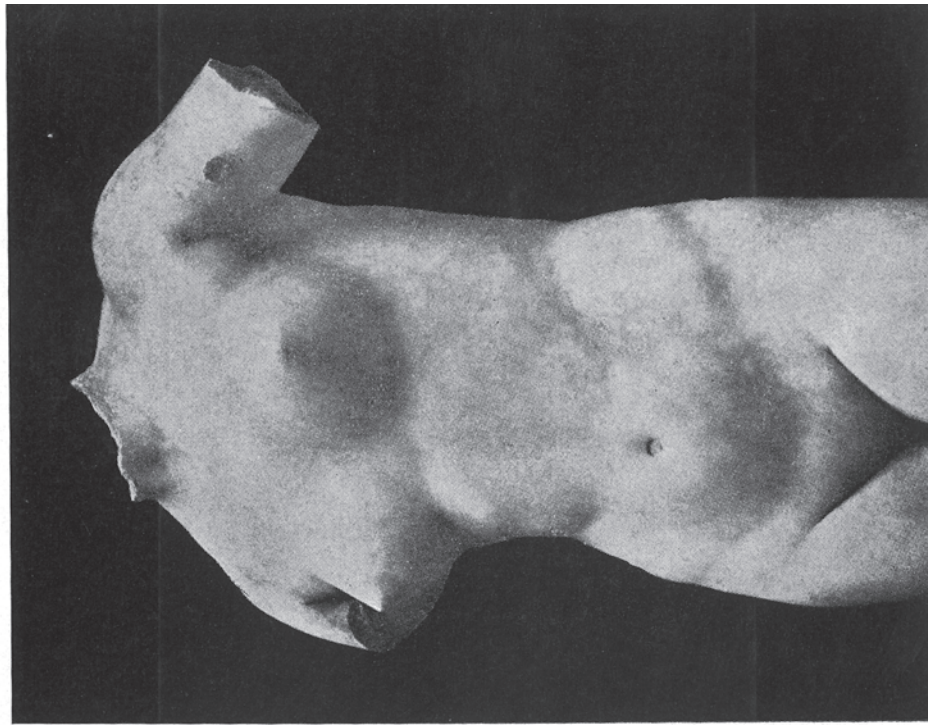
Madame SUGGIA
AUGUSTUS JOHN
Tato Gallery

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



TORSE
VIANI
Musée d'Art Moderne. N.Y

ART HUMANISTE
hellenistique



VENUS DE CYRENE
Musée National Romain

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



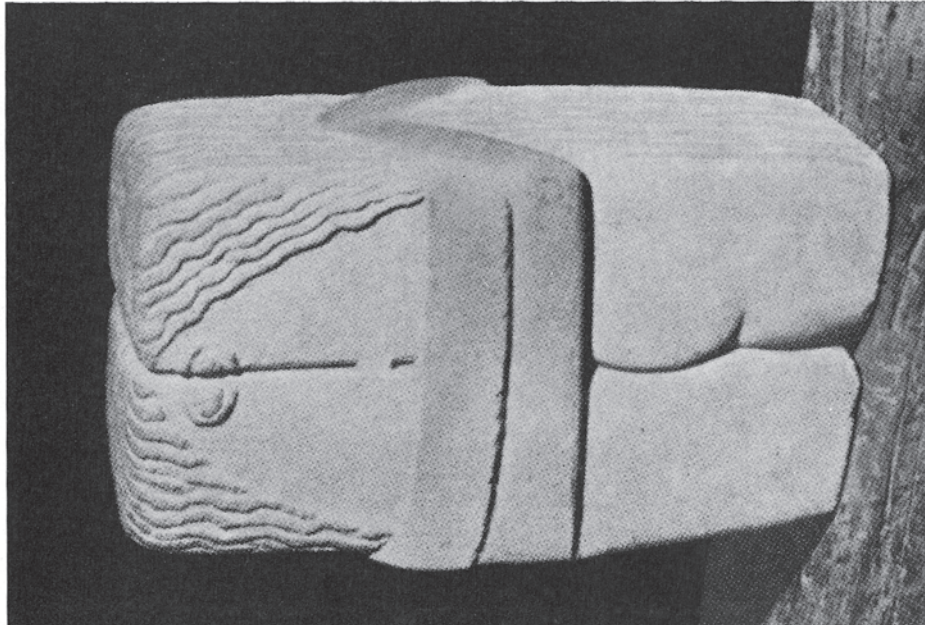
OLYMPIA — NU
DUBUFFET
Coll. privée, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XIXe siècle



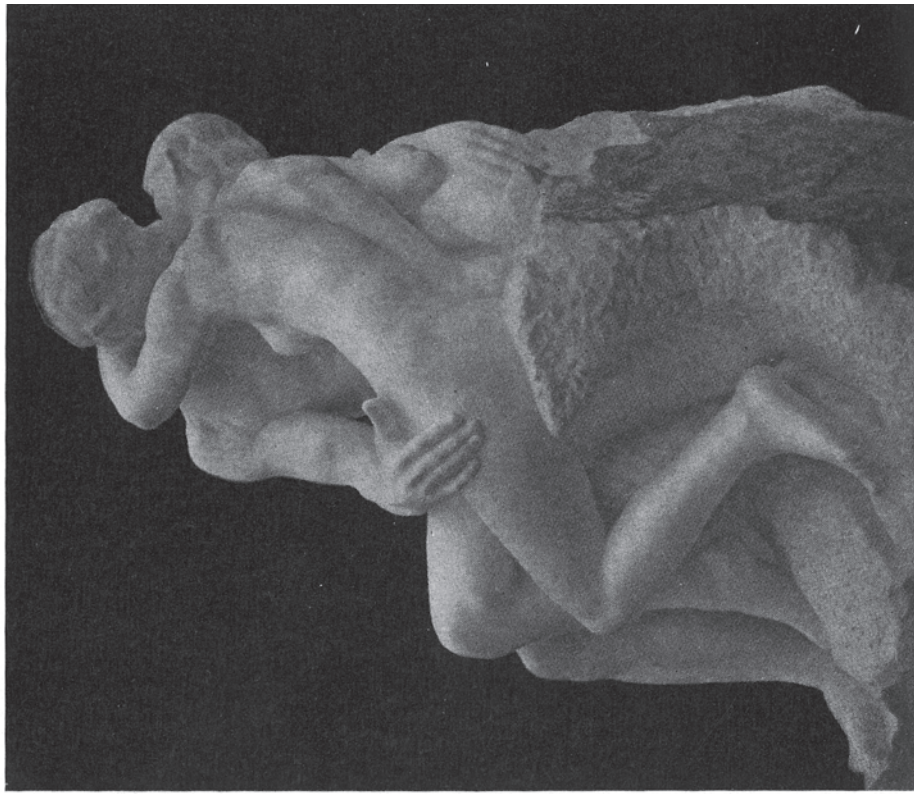
LA MAYA NUE
GOYA
Le Prado

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



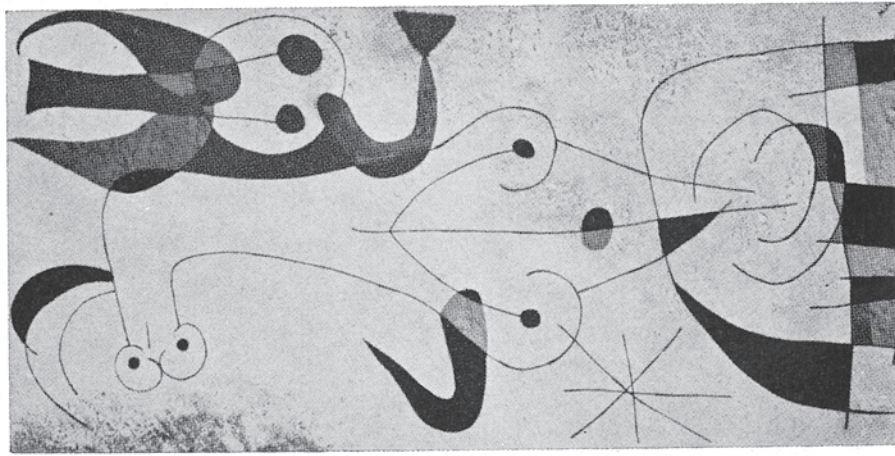
LE BAISER
BRANCUSI
Musée des B. Arts, Philadelphie

ART HUMANISTE
de ce temps



LE BAISER
RODIN
Musée de Luxembourg, Paris

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



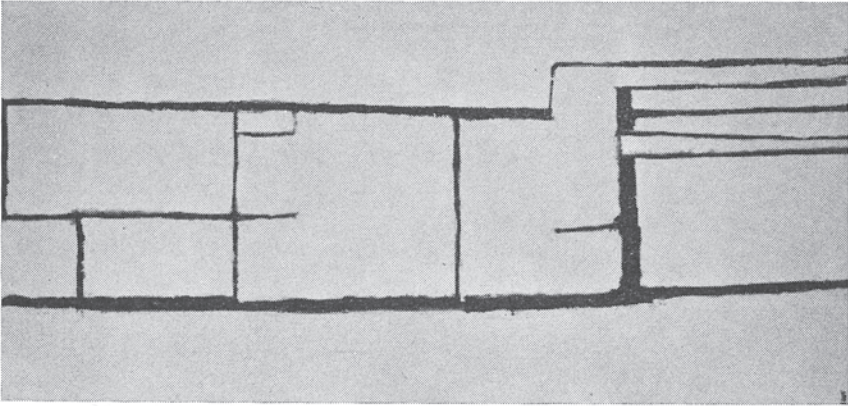
L'AUBE PARFUMÉE
MIRO
Coll. privée, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XIXe siècle



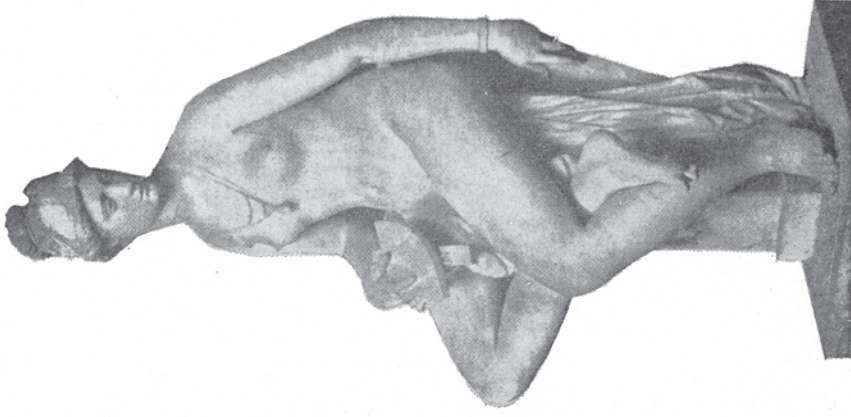
MATINÉE
COROT — Musée du Louvre

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps

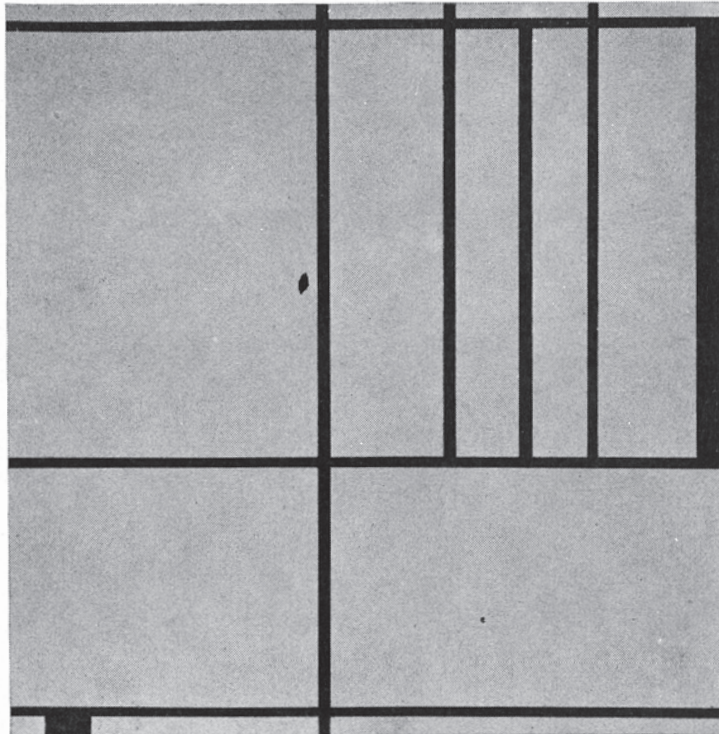


PERSONNE ASSISE
SCOTT
Coll. privée, N.Y.

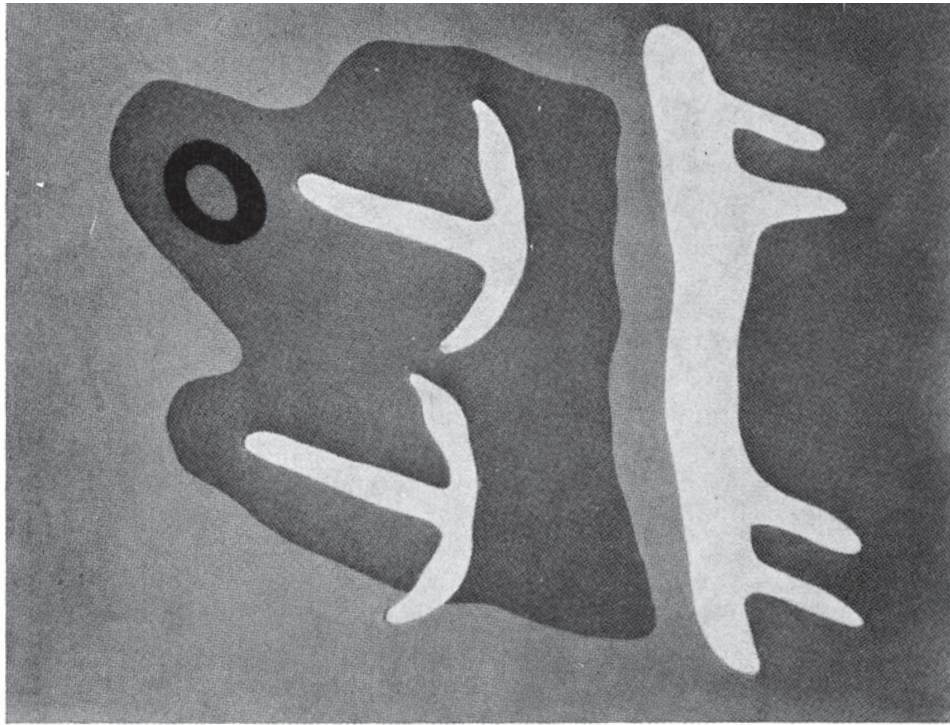
ART HUMANISTE
du XVI^e siècle



PERSONNE ASSISE
(L'architecture)
JEAN DE BOLOGNE

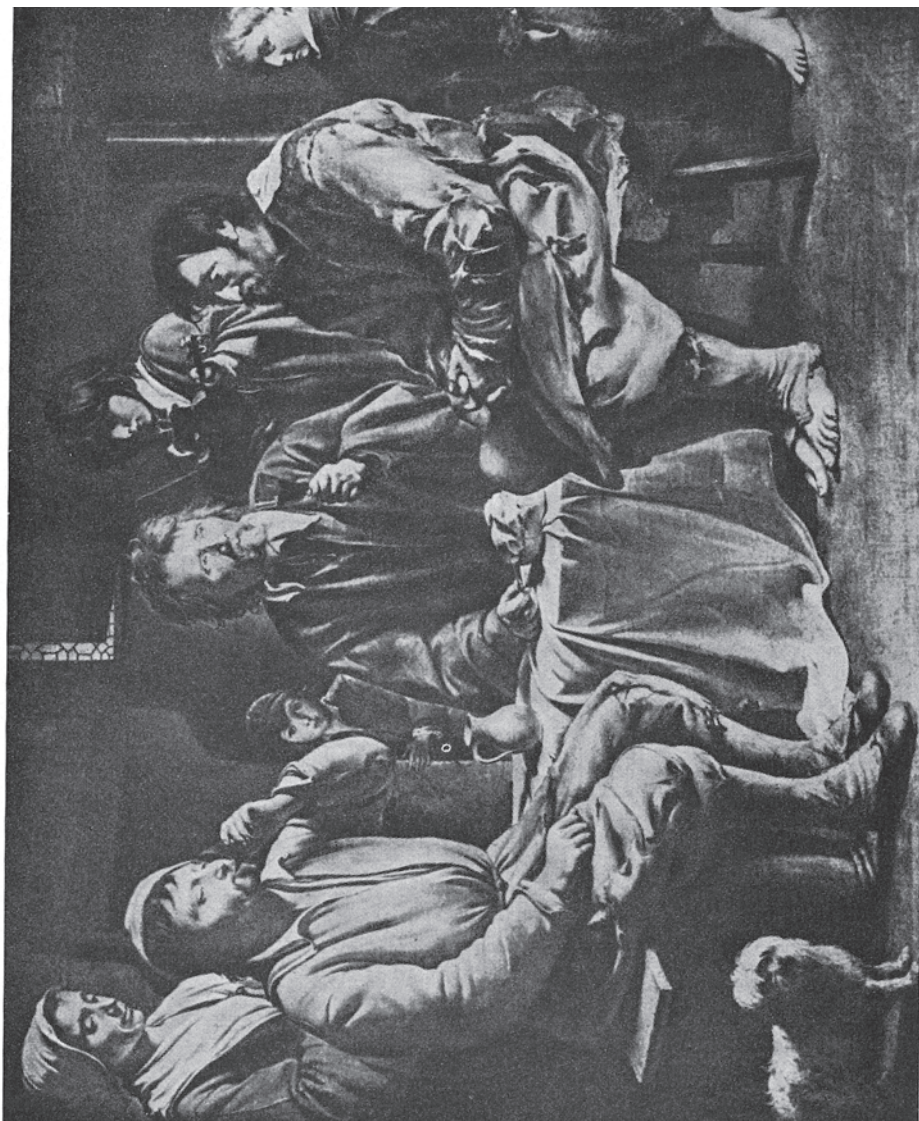


COMPOSITION
MONDRIAN
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.



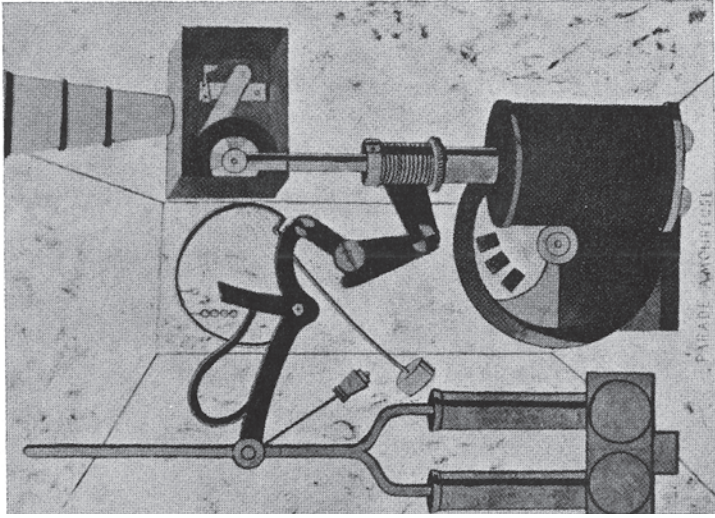
MONTAGNE, TABLE, ANCRES ET NOMBRIL
ARP
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVIIe siècle



LE REPAS DES PAYSANS
LOUIS LE NAIN
Musée du Louvre

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



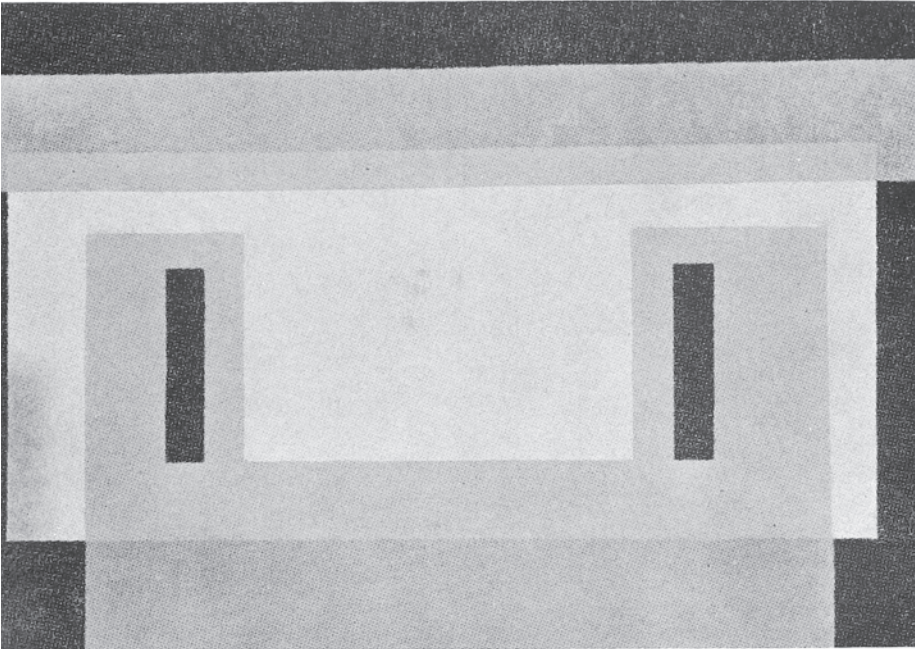
PROCESSION AMOUREUSE
PICABIA
Coll. privée, Paris

ART HUMANISTE
du XVIIIe siècle



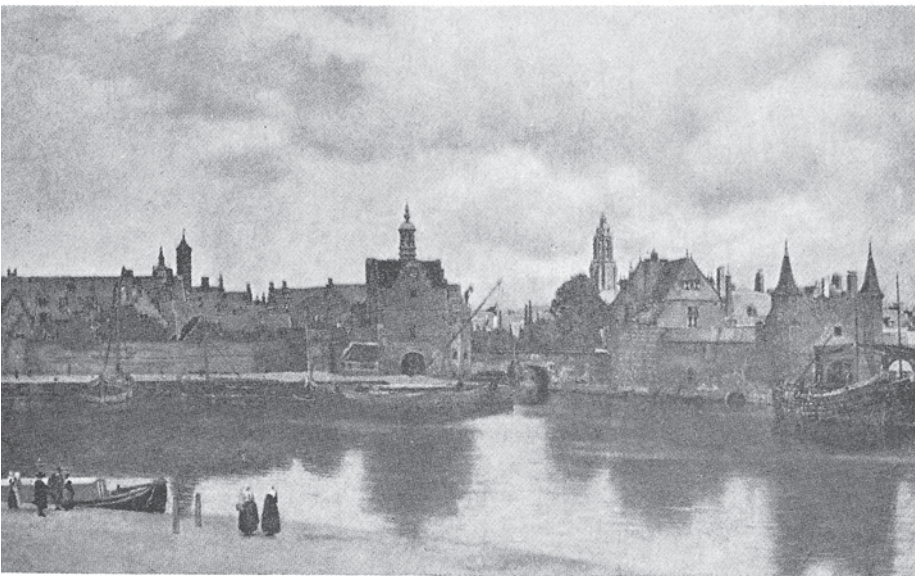
L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHERE
WATTEAU
Musée du Louvre

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



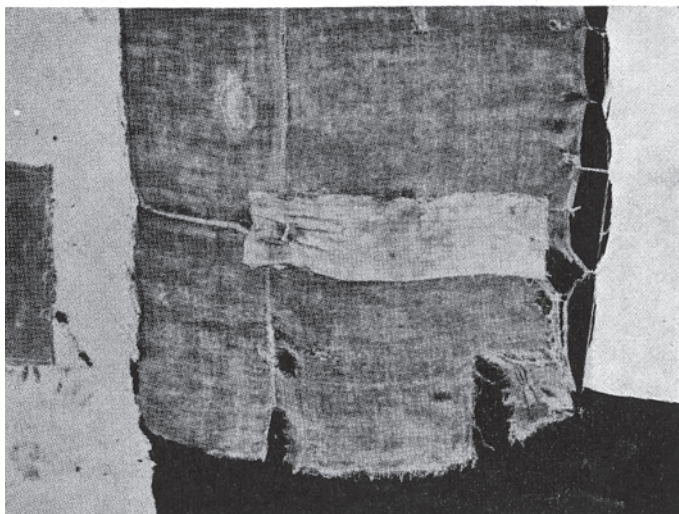
LA MURAILLE ROUGE
ALBERS
Coll. privée, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVIIe siècle

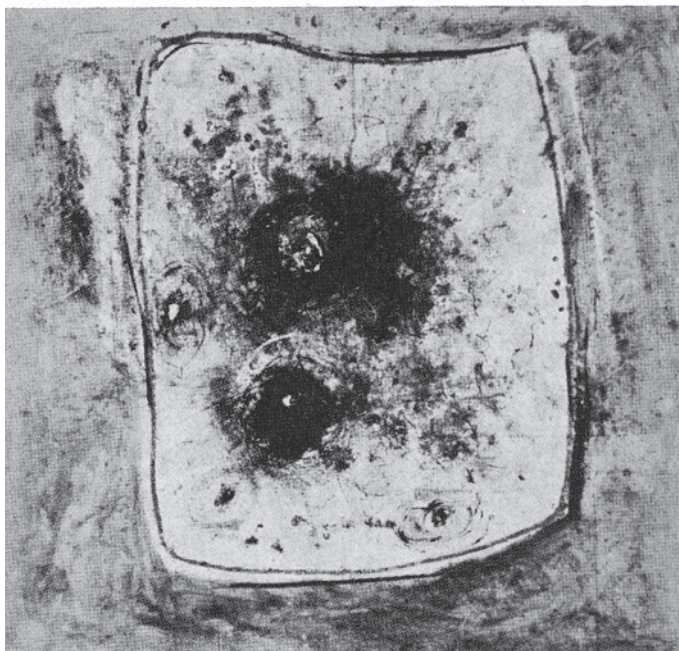


VUE DE DELFT
VERMEER DE DELFT
Mauritshuis, La Haye

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



JUTE ET COTON
BURRI
Coll. privée, Italie



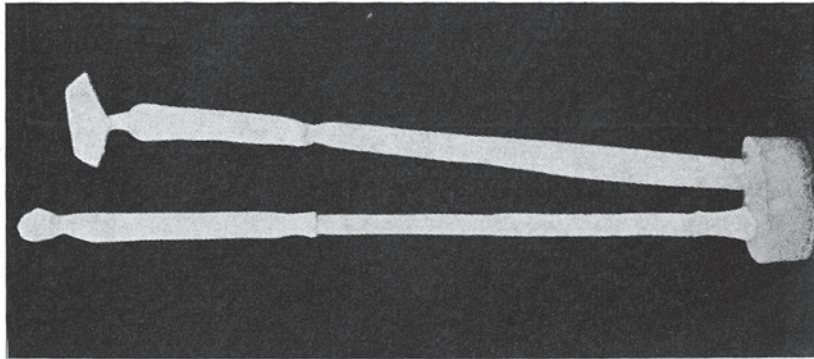
PEINTURE
WOLS
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVI^e siècle



FRANÇOIS I^{er}
J. CLOUET
Musée du Louvre

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



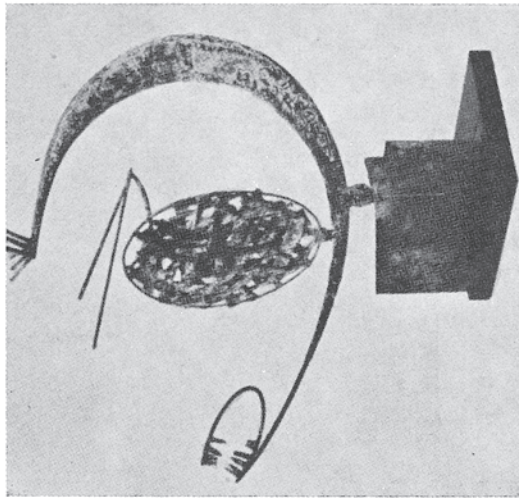
ASPERGES LUNAIRES
MAX ERNST
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVII^e siècle



LA FECONDITE
J. JORDAENS
Musée de Bruxelles

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



TETE
GONZALEZ
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XIXe siècle



AUTO - PORTRAIT
E. CARRIERE
Coll. privée

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps

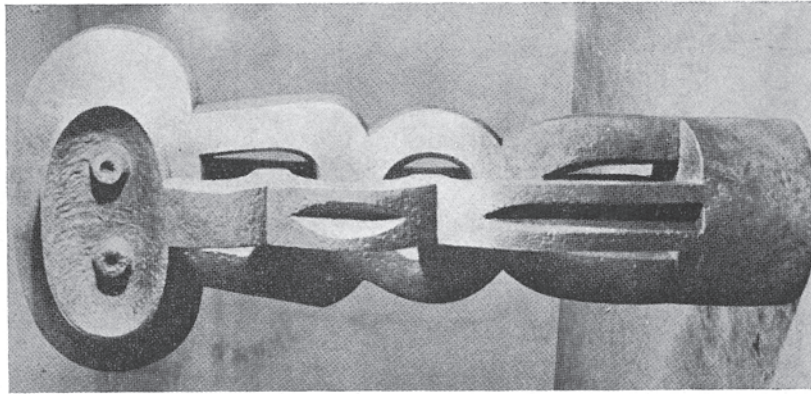


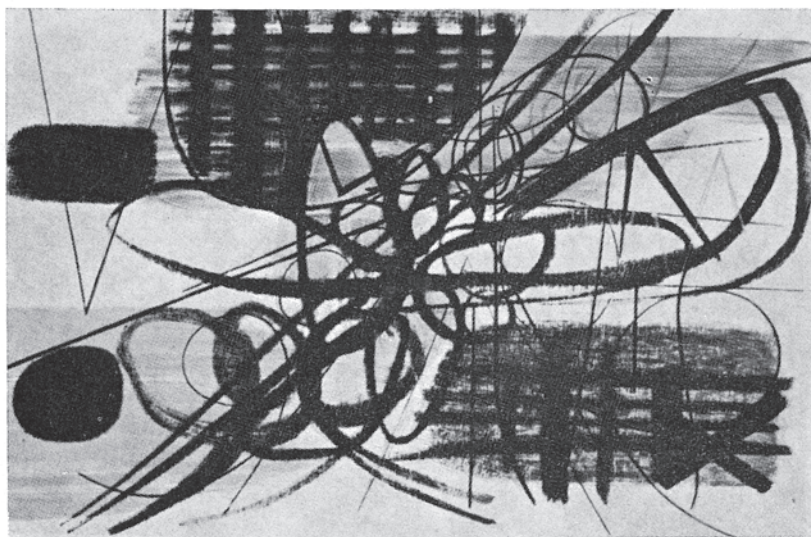
FIGURE
LIPSCHITZ
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVIIe siècle



FIGURE
Détail de « L'extase de Ste-Thérèse »
BERNINI
St.-Pierre de Rome

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



PEINTURE
HARTUNG
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

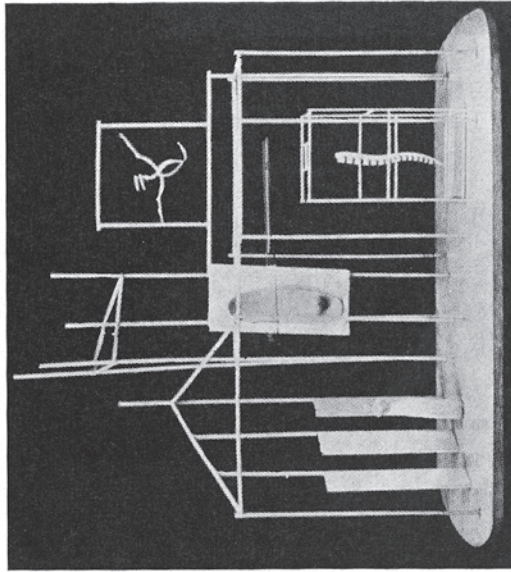
ART HUMANISTE
de ce temps



PAYSAGE DE PROVENCE
V. VAN GOGH
Coll. privée

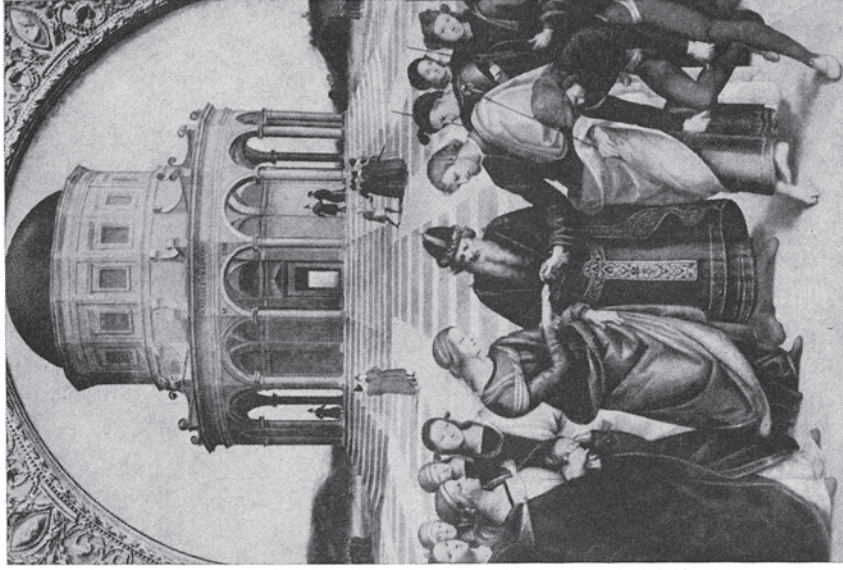
ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps

66



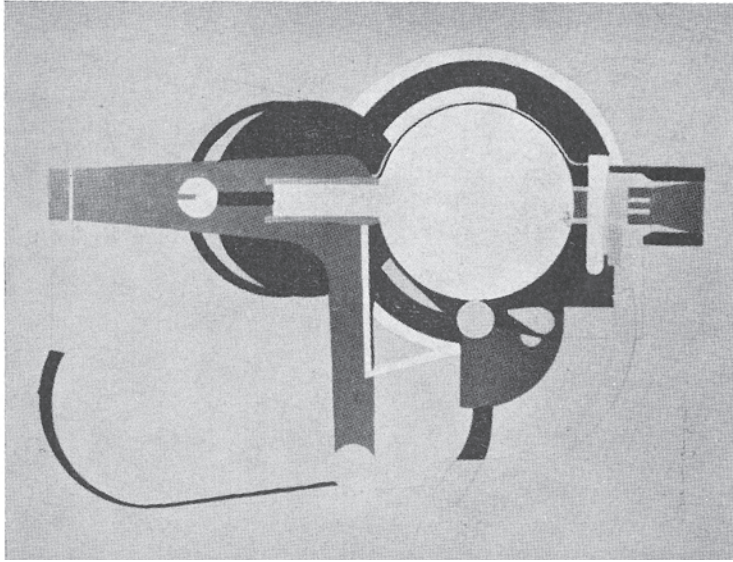
LE PALAIS A 4 P. M.
GIACOMETTI
Musée d'Art Moderne, N.Y.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVI^e siècle



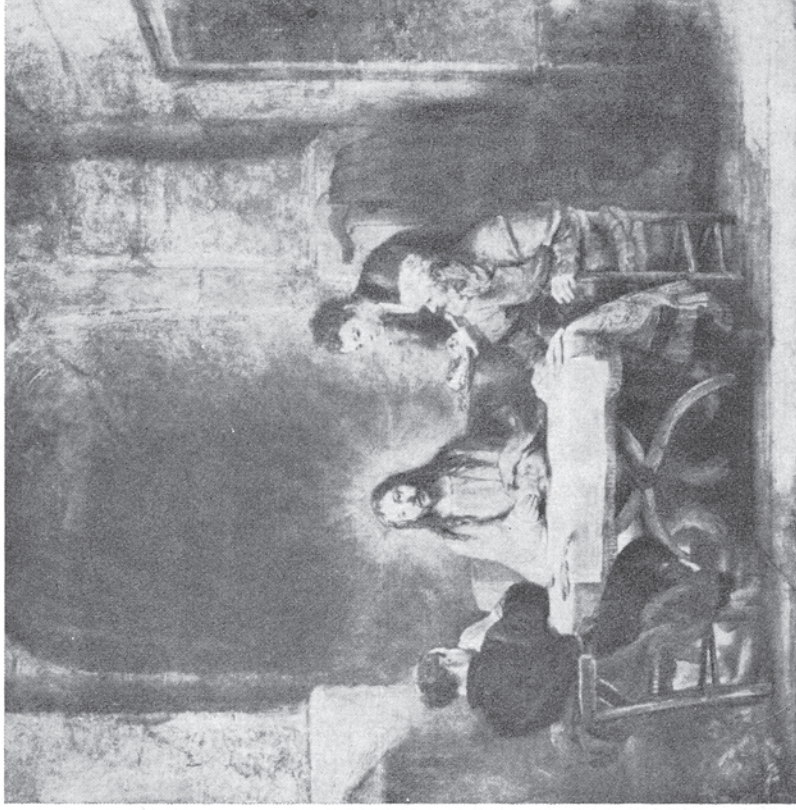
LE MARIAGE DE LA VIERGE
RAPHAEL SANZIO
Musée Brera, Milan

ART DIT « PROGRESSISTE »
de ce temps



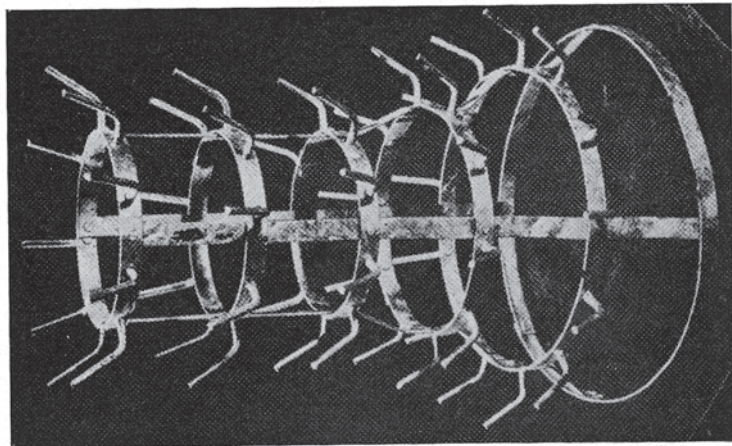
MACHINE
SCHAMBERG
Yale Art Gallery, U.S.A.

ART HUMANISTE
du XVIIe siècle

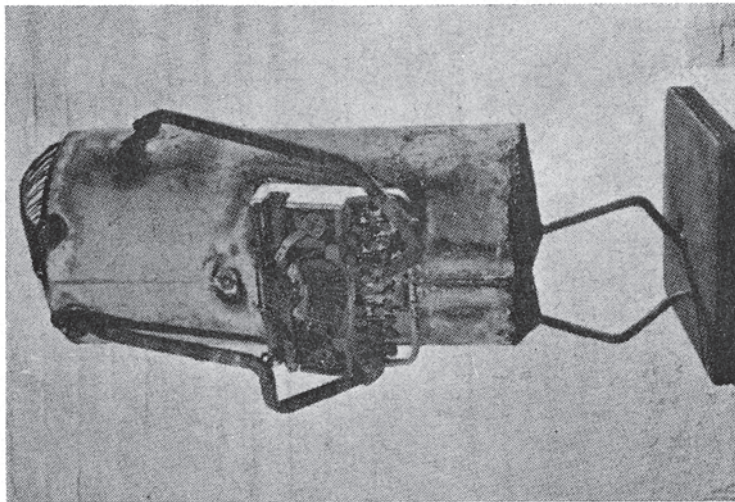


LES PELERINS D'EMMAÛS
REMBRANDT
Musée du Louvre

ARTS DITS «PROGRESSISTES» de ce temps

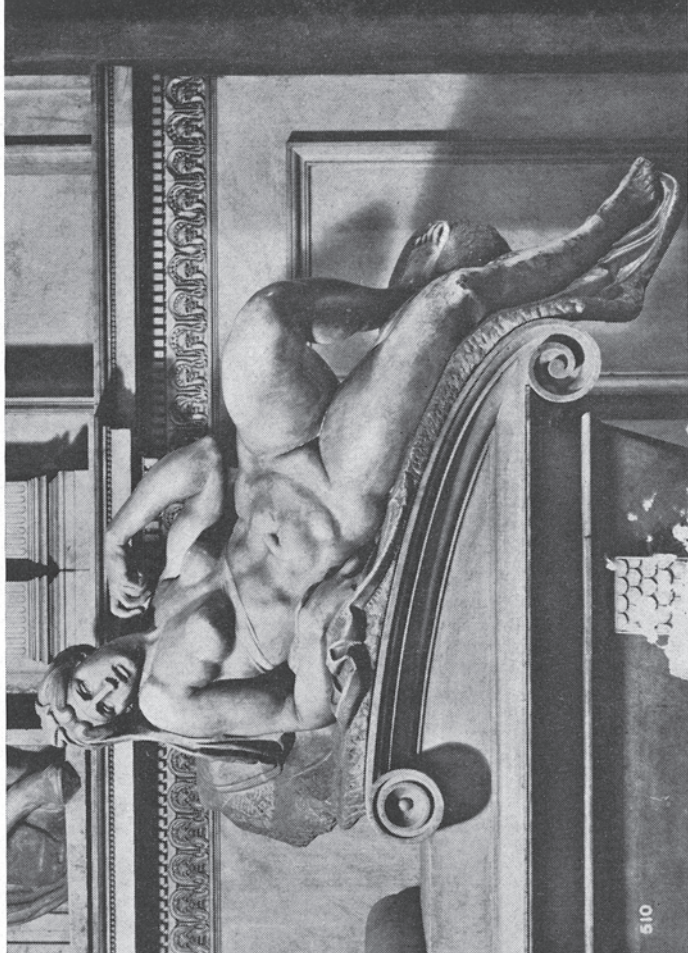
**TOUT PRET**

(Porte-bouteille vides)
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**STATUE**

« Composée de pièces prises au dépotoir »
déclare son auteur : **STANKIEWICZ**

ART HUMANISTE
du XVI^e siècle



L'AURORE
Tombeau des Médicis (fragment)
Michel - Ange
Florence

ACHEVE D'IMPRIMER
EN NOVEMBRE 1966 PAR
« DAR AN - NAHAR »
B.P. 226 - Tél. : 250960
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GEORGES D. CORM

ESSAY ON

THE ART

AND

CIVILIZATION

OF THIS ERA



LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON [detail]

PICASSO

This essay was published in 1960 by the Lebanese review *Al Chirah* [No. 19, December 2]. In this volume it is complete.

Beirut, October 1, 1966.

The Art and Civilization of this Era

One cannot understand the evolution of the Arts and Letters since the beginning of this century without first studying the evolution of our civilization, for Arts and Letters are nothing if not the unperishing quintessence of the civilizations whose ascending and descending curves they mark.

The Fine Arts, engendered by the European Renaissance, expressed with admirable eloquence the ideal of Christian humanist civilization. Similarly to those that had preceded it, this civilization could neither have been born nor flourished but for the moral, social and religious disciplines that favored the development of the spiritual and reasoning faculties of the human being, and that constructed levees around his animal instincts to channel their energy in the service of his creative activities.

To the elements of grandeur it received from preceding civilizations, the Christian humanist civilization of the last four centuries added a principle of extraordinary civilizing power in affirming the sacred nature of the human being, of his free will and the right to the development of his personality, to the spreading forth of his faculties in the human radiance of a transcendent Christian truth.

Perfused by a faith thus instilled both in himself and in his glorious destiny, if not here below, in the world beyond death; compressed like a spring of fine steel by the disciplines imposed upon him, this human being of a Europe renescent felt himself lifted up by an irresistible conquering force, either completely animal, or spiritual, or a blend of these two natures.

He went forth to the conquest of unknown continents, of material and spiritual riches unexplored and considered inaccessible; his creative genius took all initiatives, unleashed and nourished evolutions and revolutions.

Within the space of four centuries his cultural empire extended over all Europe and overflowed it, and his territorial empire over the five continents.

The Holy Books, Fount of Spirituality

And all throughout this epic, the Bible and the Gospels never ceased to weigh with all their spirituality upon the revolts of a human animality always quick to employ brutal force or guile to sate its appetites.

From the Gospels above all proceeded instruction in the spiritual values and moral riches to which one accedes by disdaining material contingencies, by loving one's neighbor, by respecting the truth, by modesty and by resignation to physical suffering as to reversals of fortune. All disciplines were rendered effortless by faith in a life of eternal bliss beyond terrestrial life.

These same disciplines were manifest in the Arts and Letters. The animal passions, sordid sceneries, the vices and virtues of individuals or of societies were transposed onto the plane of noble tragedies or pleasant comedies and expressed in a modest and restrained language without losing any of their evocative and emotive power.

Music for its part radiated, in waves sweet and light or grave and powerful, always harmonious, the fervors of Faith, the dramas of the passions and the joys of souls in bloom, evading all sustained dissonances, all disorganized movements, all atonal or inexpressive phrases.

As much and better, perhaps, than the other Arts, the plastic arts expressed with an eloquent fidelity the birth, development and blossoming of this civilization. They kept alive the memory, in glorifying it, of the man of the Renaissance in his faith, his dramas and his comedies, in his great feats just as amid his material and spiritual riches and, often, in his hardship.

To the drawings, naïve and gauche but effulgent with mystic fervor, of the Primitives, to the rare colors, pure and luminous, which they put to their

use with an enchanting art, the artists of the Renaissance added little by little their knowledge of exact natural forms, of perspective, of value and of the nuances of a palette that has not ceased since to mature. These complementary sciences imposed on the artist a long apprenticeship as well as disciplines that permitted him, subsequently, to fix on the canvas or in stone, with ease and eloquence, the beings and spectacles of his age, the visions and conceptions of surreal worlds and creatures.

The Sap has Dried Up

But at the end of the last century the generous sap that had nourished, for four whole centuries, the most extraordinary civilizing expansion in History, seemed to have dried up. The people who had been its glorious laborers no longer aspired but to the calm enjoyment of goods already acquired.

In the meantime other forces, of European origin but nourished and developed on extra-European soil, made their apparition, attacked the immense edifice of this civilization and struck it such rude blows that in less than fifty years they managed to demolish its territorial empire and place its cultural empire in peril.

We mean to speak of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and of the United States of America.

Apparent antagonists because of their opposed ideologies, these two powers arrive by different paths at the foundation of a materialist reign in the world – voluntarily for the first and unconsciously for the second.

It is Karl Marx, a European, who supplied the ringleaders of the Russian Revolution with the ideological weapons that let them install their materialist dictatorship within the borders of their country and plan their clever moral and social sabotage within the borders of other nations. Europe included!

It is the dynamism of the European pioneers gone forth to conquer the riches of North America that, with these riches acquired and the Monroe Doctrine overrun, pursued along the paths of Commerce and Industry its conquering march in all directions of the world, Europe included!

Although there is no doubt that the heads of state and the spiritual leaders of the United States remain firmly attached to humanist Christian ideals and that the majority of the nation continues to lay claim to them, it is no less true that the activities of this majority tend toward the destruction of these ideals by focusing them in the service of the gathering of riches and of material comforts.

Freud Enters the Lists

In parallel to the invasion of this materialism, a no less irresistible and devastating operation is carried out in the United States on character and mores, on account of the so-called repression and complexes of Sigmund Freud, a European.

The harmful conclusions that American psychiatric science drew from these ideas would unleash a vast movement of liberation from the disciplines indispensable to individuals as well as to civilized societies.

License was given to children to behave in conformity with their instincts as young animals. Which freed parents, as a corollary, from their secular role as educators and led them to lose interest in the doings of their progeny.

License was given to the parents, thus freed from their paternal duties, to change partners, husband or wife, at the first conjugal difficulties or according to variations in their desires, which they now had to keep themselves from repressing, for fear of complexes.

The hearth and home, unifying the members of one family in a moral, sentimental and material community, then disintegrated and, by this very fact, the civilization of which it is the cornerstone. The watchword became: each for himself, in other words a return to the law of the jungle.

The hardest constraints ever imposed on the human being were, incontestably, those of Christianity. But far from giving him complexes or enfeebling his vitality, they favored the condensation of his energies and led them toward spiritually and materially creative activities. These constraints had their safety valves in the confession and discussion, by the individual, of his intimate problems and torments with directors of conscience, disinterested religious workers, versed in the knowledge of human weaknesses and the proper means of transforming these torments and problems into interior peace and radiant force.

Modern science, issuing from Freudian theories, has replaced the confessors and directors of conscience with professional psychiatrists, delivering their counsels in doses and price-fixing their treatments.

And one has never seen, in all the history of civilized peoples, as many psychic unbalances as one sees today thanks to the liberation of the instincts, yoked to the accelerated rhythm of industrial and scientific progress.

Whereas our civilization required, from the individual, honesty toward

himself and toward the other and a respect for the truth; whereas it preached a horror of lies in all their forms, Stalinist Marxism and American commercialism have placed the lie in the front rank of their weapons of invasion and conquest: political for the first and economic for the second.

Commercial Advertising

In the form of commercial advertising in the United States, the lie is served by a swarm of specialists versed in the science of jam-packing the brains of consumers, of the immense mass of citizens of all countries: such and such an American drink is a miraculous source of vitality, and of prestige, etc... such and such an American film which is probably nothing but a vulgar turkey is presented as a colossus of cinematographic industry and the masterpiece of masterpieces; you cannot win your beloved except by using a certain beauty cream, a certain soap, etc... etc...

This same genre of advertising has been applied by specialized dealers, and the critics in their pay, to the introduction and diffusion of avant-garde painting produced on an industrial level.

The American lie, the lie of advertising, based on monumental exaggeration and radiant optimism, aiming at nothing but the diffusion of industrial products, would only give rise to a smile and would merit nothing but a shrug if it did not set the tone for less inoffensive exaggerations and if it did not bring harm to the ethics of a people.

Infinitely more redoubtable is the lie of Stalinist Marxism! because it attacks the most sacred notions of our humanism and aims at the enslavement of individuals and peoples.

Adapted to the circumstances and mentalities of the nations locked in its sights, this lie has worn the most diverse and attractive forms and colors. Through it, the Kremlin has not ceased to proclaim itself the champion of the virtues that are most cruelly lacking in it, and to denounce with outrageous verbal violence the speck in the eye of its adversaries, while there are beams in its own.

It has not ceased to proclaim itself at the avant-garde of civilization because its scientists have accomplished wonders in their respective domains, because it has deprived man of the privilege of his soul and of the use of his spiritual faculties whose aspirations it has stifled, because it no longer accords this man anything but the utilitarian value of an intelligent animal, receptive to its propaganda and ready to sacrifice - this readiness being the only existence

it recognizes in him – to the construction of the materialist world conceived and preached by Marx. In the eyes of the disciples of this latter, man in the humanist sense of the term does not exist!

In the United States of America, this humanist man runs the greatest risk, for there he is bent, adapted and standardized by the simple mechanism of the onrush of the masses, of which he is a part, toward power and material comfort.

The crushing weight of this double materialism gravely menaces our humanist civilization, its Arts and its Letters. It demands belief in the triumph of the materialist Arts and Letters to which it has given birth, and which are of its very substance! Liberation from the traditional disciplines, primacy of instinct, utilization of modern methods and techniques of commercial advertising. The necessity, for the artist, of following fashions and trends, constantly renewed in the same way as feminine fashions or industrial products are created – however far these trends and fashions might lead from his own ethos.

Music which, in the last centuries, favored meditation and spiritual exaltation, today pleases itself to awake and excite the animal instincts of man, his sensorial and nervous system, with the call of black tom-toms, the syncopated, moaning and rending howls of the inhabitants of the jungle: men who enter trances, beasts at bay, by way of bluntly explosive monotone shrieks, etc... It has created, to this effect, the magnificently appropriate jazz “battery” to replace the violins, violoncellos, violas, harps, flutes and pianos that composed the well-tempered Orchestra of European humanist civilization.

The Infernal Round

Ballets, minuets, quadrilles, waltzes and other classical dances, gracious and measured, have given way to the dances of tropical tribes: dull and obsessive stamping, swaying, simulated falls and catches, unhinging the neck, the legs, the belly; erotico-epileptic furies, all is there, down to the slobber just added by a young American quickly idolized by certain categories of youth!

Poetry is now nothing but an unintelligible concatenation of syllables and sentences dictated by an obscure instinct and addressing itself to the obscure sensibilities of the reader or of the listener to whom all license is accorded to assign them significance, if this reader or listener holds them to bear significance at all.

Literature no longer knows any refinement of language, tasteful word choice, elegance of style; the torments of love and cases of conscience are no longer in play, nor the passions, virtues and vices of individuals and societies still

impregnated with notions of honesty, moral cleanliness and justice! but, in raw and precise terms, in a direct and brutal language, it flaunts the free play of instincts and the material power of appetites, of sexualities cynically affirmed and exercised.

As for the Plastic Arts, their disintegration was accomplished under the cover of research by several authentic artists anxious to find a form appropriate to the expression of their sensibility and, above all, in the guise of the misadventure of Impressionist painters, unappreciated and mocked at the end of the last century. It was accomplished by tradesmen of genius, served by sick or anarchic painters rising from the four corners of Europe, as well as by devious fabricators of paintings where the bizarre, constantly renewed, and obtained by abandoning, one after the other, the constitutive elements of painting, was the sole and prolific preoccupation.

Incapable of adding, as their predecessors had done, new riches to those that artistic language already acquired, they dislocated this language and deprived it gradually of its grammar, of its syntax and, finally its vocabulary! reducing it thus to nothing but a series of incomprehensible onomatopoeias.

After having abolished the precision of line, that is of forms, they caused Perspective, Value, the Model and, finally, the Subject to disappear. There was no longer anything on their canvases but some spots of color assembled at the whim of sensorial reflexes or indulged by slick intelligence!

The Plastic Arts that had required ten years of study before the artist could permit himself to show his works to the public in various annual Salons, today, thus reduced to mere colors, require nothing but a few weeks of initiation, so that it is possible to the first comer to validly exhibit in one of the thousand Galleries placed at his disposition by the brotherhood of merchants and to be proclaimed a "great original artist" by these latter and by the press and the specialized critics that they command. No principles of evaluation can any longer be applied to these works, no criterion if not the individual sensorial reaction of the spectator to various associations or dissociations of colors.

It fell to the artist in the past to consecrate dozens of preparatory studies and a full year to the conception and execution of a single work. The works of the new Schools are executed, for the most part, in a few hours, or even in several quarters of an hour!

Century of speed, century of industry and commerce, century of disdain for spiritual values and for the light of reason!

Since the beginning of this century these Schools have succeeded each other at an accelerated rate. To cite only the principal ones: Cubism, Dadaism, Neo-Impressionism, Fauvism, the Post-Impressionist Nabis, Expressionism,

Vorticism (the School of the “point of maximum energy, representing in mechanics the greatest efficiency”! (sic), extract from the official manifesto) Art Informel, Abstract art ...

Kilometers and tons of literature have incessantly presided over the promotion of self-styled revolutionary works that pretended to recreate the plastic arts according to the progressivist vision and sensibility of the day, to give to this new world an art worthy of it.

That they have given it an art worthy of it and worthy of figuring in the Museums of Modern Art, as witness to the evolution of this epoch, there is no doubt! given that the Arts of a people can only be in the image of its ideals and its mores; but that they have given the world a new Art, there is nothing more false than this!

Some Truths

To believe them, one would have to be totally ignorant of the History of the Plastic Arts or have lost sight of this History.

Indeed: to only consider the 3 most important new Schools of Modern Art that claim originality, Surrealism, Art Informel and Abstract Art, we have proof that they have, all three, applied arts as old as humanity.

Surrealism: It formed a part of the Iconography of all religions from the most ancient times: Horus, Osiris, Anubis, etc. were surrealist figures of pharaonic mythology.

Pegasi, Centaurs, Sirens, Cerberi, Fauns, Medusas, etc. were the creations of ancient Greek and Roman mythologies.

Shiva with his multiple arms belonged to Hindu mythology.

The Angels and the winged Demons of Christian Iconography are none other than surrealist figures, etc. etc.

In the 14th century lived the greatest surrealist painter of all time: Hieronymus Bosch.

Art Informel: This art had always been practiced by the classical painters who resorted to it in the form of preparatory studies. These studies were called Painted Sketches. They were for the painters what rough outlines or drafts are for writers.

No one thought then that these sketches merited exhibition and, still less, being put up for sale. It required the mercantile genius of this century to make of them a form of autonomous art, shrewdly named Art Informel!

Abstract Art: This art could only be Decorative Art! – as it has been applied from the earliest antiquity by decorators who modestly kept their anonymity. We find its models everywhere in Nature in millions of combinations of lines and colors. Lines and colors in a slab of striated marble, in the wing of a butterfly, in a peacock's tail, in the leaves of certain plants, in the roughcast of a wall, moldy, in a sheet of metal, rusted, in anatomical plates of the intestines, etc... and ad infinitum.

Motifs for abstract paintings have been created by the millions by painter-decorators in the service of fabricators of printed fabrics, from antiquity to our day.

It must be recognized, however, that a large proportion of present abstractionists are no longer worried about decorative harmony and indulge themselves solely in the rapid, instantaneous confection of spectacular *Freudian rebuses*.

To summarize, and as there is nothing new under the sun, except in scientific matters, the new Schools of painting, patronized by merchants, have contented themselves with imitation, whether of nature or of ancient decorative works.

Furthermore, they have had a ball plagiarizing the uncouth and grimacing statues of the primitive tribes of the five continents, and the same with the drawings and colorings of children and schizophrenics.

Making copies or knockoffs of stone or wood fetishes, crude or grotesque, becomes, thanks to these Schools, the supreme expression of the plastic arts and their progress. And never before have we seen so many civilized people going into ecstasies over the hideous images of totems and other Negro or Aztec idols.

The reactions of the public, its explosions of indignation, its displays of incomprehension and the flagrant proof this public thrusts, upon the artists, of the kinship of their works to those of barbarians, smoke-and-mirror frauds, the unbalanced, children, primary schoolers, primates and certain single-toed ungulates, cannot erase their triumphal invasion, thanks to the prodigious orchestrations of publicity organized by the merchants, thanks to

the complaisance of a certain international intelligentsia, thanks to the snobs and to the upstarts of all countries, as well as to auctions forced and rigged.

What is remarkable in this evolution of the plastic arts is that at the same time that the materialist powers were suffocating the human soul, the expressionist School, Picassoism, and Art Informel were, in their works, dislocating human forms, were dismembering and disintegrating them, in anticipation of the day when the abstract School would make man and his works entirely disappear.

Degradation of Man

We would like to speak of this man endowed with a soul, of this small ephemeral entity that is, however, the sole creation on this planet capable of taking the measure of the infinity of creation and of the mystery of his pitiable destiny; of this being who is, by his intelligence and his sensibility, the highest created value of the Universe; of this man in his physical and moral realities who was at the center of the preoccupations of the humanist arts, called "classical." This man has been crossed out from the Marxist dictionary and erased from the works of the so-called avant-garde.

What is tragic in this conflict that opposes our civilization to the barbarous powers that pound it with their heavy artillery, is that these last believe themselves at the leading edge of civilization, because they have accomplished wonders in all the domains of science, because they have created more and more advanced machines to make human life more materially comfortable, while caring nothing for the acute psychic discomfort into which they plunge this human life, having forgotten it seems, moreover, that A CIVILIZATION CAN ONLY BE OF A STRICTLY MORAL AND SOCIAL NATURE.

They believe themselves at the avant-garde of civilization because they have multiplied free schools and universities provided with all the modern comforts, but where humanist studies and the classical disciplines are replaced by the utilitarian sciences and sports.

Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed who were the greatest civilizing minds of humanity, would not have accepted instruction at any school and would not have benefitted from any material comfort such as they are conceived and vulgarized today. Christ gave us his Gospels while in the most complete material destitution.

The only study that impassioned them, that monopolized their intelligence and their solicitude was, in direct contact with life, that of the human being, of his contradictory nature, of the torments of his fate, of the physical

and intellectual inequalities between individuals that engender painful conflicts and the exploitation of man by man. It is to palliate and remedy these natural injustices, these cruelties of the instincts, that they established and preached moral and social laws and disciplines at the same time that they proclaimed the existence of one or several divinities who dispense reward and punishments, and to whom humans must give an account of their acts.

To the gospels of love and to the tolerance of Christ, who stood at the foundation of humanist civilization in Renaissance Europe, the Marxist doctrines oppose the imperatives of the hateful and murderous struggles between social classes, the reclassing of the human being in the strictly animal category, all while conserving the privilege of his cerebral faculties whose exercise is not authorized except in the utilitarian scientific domains or in the promotion of Marxist might.

The humanist Europe of the four last centuries, which extended its light and its empire over the five continents, seems today deprived of its defensive reactions and its bold initiatives. It does not manage, one might say, to repel the barbarous invasion of enemies, among which science has liberated – at the same time as the animal instincts of man – the atom, which they hold suspended over humanity like a monstrous and universal sword of Damocles.

It is therefore a fatal matter that the Arts and Letters, which present themselves as the expression of ultimate progress, no longer proceed but from the instinctive and too often anarchic faculties of man; that they no longer address themselves to his intelligence and to his spiritual sensibility, his most noble faculties, but only to his senses, which they please themselves to flatter or to excite – and finally, that they are condemned to constantly renew themselves according to a more and more rapid industrial rhythm, and thus utilize, for their circulation, the formidable machine of publicity, tuned up and developed by American commercialism.

Setting aside several very rare exceptions owed to authentic and prestigious artists, the immense majority of works of painting and sculpture, which profess to be at the leading edge of artistic progress and before which the snobs and the sheep of Panurge swoon, are in reality nothing but “formless” and “abstruse” works when they are not simply grotesque or do not smell of the mechanical industries. Now they express nothing but this degradation of the intelligence and of man’s aesthetic sense, which they are dead set on hastening, and to which we give in and habituate ourselves a little more each day, and which many end in finding natural, beautiful and even desirable!

By virtue of frequenting, despite himself, an ugly woman, the aesthete ends by no longer noticing her ugliness. By virtue of living, compelled by

circumstance, in a hovel, the aristocrat ends by no longer feeling any discomfort. The one and the other can even end up loving what had made them suffer. When they reach this point, everyone joins in to applaud their own fall from grace!

Reason to Hope

Thank God! the Europe that for almost a half century suffered the uninterrupted assault of these new Schools, has still not seen the end of its story! Its civilization still possesses, in the vast world, immense wholesome forces, to this day more or less indifferent to the cacophonous works and proclamations of the materialist powers.

The evolution of the Arts that issue from the invading forces of materialism has led them by a process of continuous disintegration into an impasse from which they will not be able to escape except by returning to the traditional disciplines, that they might express intelligibly the joys and anguish of this era.

The needs of understanding and the spiritual needs of humans are as solidly fastened to their nature as the animal instincts. These needs form, with the latter, the two opposed poles between which this nature ceaselessly oscillates. And it is when it has occupied one extreme that it feels the most strongly attracted by the opposite extreme. History has furnished us numerous examples of this.

Do we not today see, everywhere where free rein has been given to the instincts of children and adults, Society calling for a return to the traditional salutary disciplines?...

Is it not a mystic, of the empire of wholesale materialism, who has led Marxist Russian youth to consent to the sacrifice of their terrestrial life – the only life in which they believe! – in order to build, with their privations and sufferings, a better world that future generations will enjoy and from which they are excluded?

Nowhere as much as in the United States of America, this gigantic hotbed of industrial power, does one see leaping so high – though so often localized, and more smoke than fire – the flame of spirituality and, just as ardent, the need to believe in a God of peace and loving-kindness. Among a hundred examples, it will suffice us to refer to the number of religious vocations materializing there, to the Trappist monasteries founded there and the Trappists that people them and who, these last years, have far surpassed in number the monasteries and monks of old Europe! It will suffice us to cite the innumerable adherents to the multiple religious sects founded, from the beginning of this

century, by exploiters and illuminati. Nowhere else have spontaneous, voluntary contributions to charitable works, giving aid and succor to the unfortunate and stricken of the entire world, been so prompt and generous.

Our civilization with its radiant virtues will not disappear, even if the progress of science manages to strip our Christianity of its divine context. The teaching of Jesus of Nazareth remains and will remain the highest expression of human civilization, because it works upon the virtues of the heart and of reason to establish social harmony and justice, to create spiritual beauty and reestablish peace between men and in the hearts of men.

In the conflict that opposes the Marxist doctrines, the materialist clamor and the unleashing of the instincts on one hand to the disciplines of our civilization, Europe, which has lent the enemy powers their ferment, will not fail – believe us – to give to the world the seeds of a new humanist civilization, issuing from its own civilization, and adapted to the needs and conditions of this industrial and atomistic era. A civilization whose Arts and Letters will drive back, to their proper place, the Letters and the Arts, absurd and anarchic, of all-invading materialism.



Since 1960 several Schools, called avant-garde, including Pop and Op Art, have made their appearance.

The works issuing from these Schools, like the immense majority of the works of abstract art, have done nothing but consecrate the rift, set underway by Cubism at the beginning of this century, of their activities from the Fine Arts of the great Civilizations.

These activities are now nothing but artisanal and sometimes even bricolage, where the BIZARRE is the principal objective and FROM WHICH ALL SPIRITUALITY IS EXCLUDED.

The artists, painters and sculptors of all the great Civilizations - occidental as well as oriental - have shared the same ideal:

To create NATURAL FORMS as perfect and harmonious as possible, animated by their own emotions, passions, dreams and conceptions, as well as by their religious ideals.

AN ITINERARY

Dr. Georges G. Corm

*“Resume your proper place, ambitious atom!
Do not disturb my sight, with your unsteady light,
Of the infinite harmony and the serenity
Of all this universe, my fleeting kingdom!”*

G. D. Corm

AN ITINERARY...

Everything predisposed Georges Daoud Corm to an artistic career. Even so, his life was a difficult route, though patient, to keeping intact a faith in Art and therefore in Man.

Born in Beirut into a lettered family from Keserwan, Georges Corm was the grandson of Semaan Corm, who had distinguished himself as preceptor to the sons of Emir Bashir, and the son of Daoud Corm, one of the pioneers of Lebanese painting, who brought himself fame as much for his religious canvases as for his very fine portraits of Lebanese, Egyptian and Roman notables.

Daoud Corm's roots were well anchored in the Lebanese 19th century, which had seen the decline of the traditional aristocracy; he died, say his biographers, *covered with honors*. Georges Corm found himself, then, having to secure the difficult role of an artist, as son of another, well-established artist, and this in a society that had begun a process of rapid change.

He had first to choose between the diverse talents endowed him by nature and by his familial environment. The numerous notebooks of youthful poems he left behind [of which one, *Among the Lowly*, was published in 1915] bear witness to this choice. His passion for music and the evenings of chamber music that he organized and accompanied as pianist in turn-of-the-century Beirut, along with his efforts to set the Conservatory of Music on its feet, are another testimony to his complex artistic capacities. Likewise his numerous activities in diverse artistic domains between 1922 and 1930 are another sign of his attachments to the diverse forms of Art, and also of an unflinching desire to develop the Lebanese arts.

As to why painting won out, perhaps only the artist could respond. The shadow of his father, no doubt, in a society still profoundly marked by patriarchy; but also the feeling, inspired here as well by his experience with his father, that painting would allow him to ensure the minimal material conditions of existence better than music or poetry.

In reality, Georges Corm was destined to undergo, throughout his life, the bitter experience of the artist's condition in a society that, in rapid movement, could not preoccupy itself with Art, and still less with its artists' social status and conditions of existence.

This experience made itself felt in some of his work when, living solely on his painting, he had to sacrifice many of his spontaneous pictorial impulses to the confection of certain overpolished portraits of personalities in *polite society*: portraits made manifestly to please their capricious models, who occasionally had the unfortunate tendency to haggle.

One is not surprised that from the 50s on, as the artist's material conditions of life deteriorated more and more, the sumptuous still lifes of the 30s, or the Lebanese landscapes, so fine, of the 20s, disappeared from his work – then the Egyptian landscapes of the 30s and 40s, and again the Lebanese landscapes that had followed.

On the other hand, and as if in compensation, certain of Georges Corm's rare landscapes from 1950 on would often have an element of the fantastic and of hidden symbolism, discernable in the forms of rocks [like those overhanging a view of the bay of Jounieh] or in those of stalactites [in canvases representing the interior of Jeita Grotto] or again in *Man in the Planet* or *The Swan*.

In the same way, numerous paintings of female nudes from this period, their sensuality and sometimes eroticism manifestly contrary to the artist's mystic romanticism, place themselves in vengeful counterpoint to all the aestheticized faces of society ladies.

As it happens, Georges Corm never succeeded in being wholly a man of the 20th century, neither in adapting himself to the social game of the new Lebanese or Egyptian elite. True, on the occasion of his marriage to Marie Bekhyt – daughter of Youssef Bekhyt, a wealthy cotton broker on the Alexandrian Exchange – when he moves to Alexandria in 1928, there is no doubt that he is seduced by the brilliant cosmopolitan life of this Levantine city. Here he will produce remarkable portraits, and splendid still lifes, and highly nuanced seascapes. He also founds an association for the promotion of Arts and Letters in Egypt, called *The Atelier*. However, art alone does not at all suffice to support a growing family, and with the depression of 1936-39 in Egypt, the commercial ventures he initiated will become an additional subject of torment for him and his wife.

In 1948, Georges Corm definitively abandons all commercial activity and will live on nothing but the meager proceeds from his portraits or the sale of his landscapes and still lifes, along with, after his return to Lebanon, some painting lessons. But in 1948, he goes to live in Cairo.

However, in a state of permanent nostalgia for his native soil, and feeling at sea with the social and cultural changes in Egypt at this time, he retreats definitively to Beirut in 1956. In fact, from the beginning of the 50s, still faithful to his first vocation as promoter of the Lebanese arts, he renewed his unflagging efforts for the promotion of the arts in this country. Thus in 1953 he presents a plan to the Lebanese government for putting in place a National Institute of Fine Arts, an idea he had already voiced in 1921. Faced with official inaction, he addresses himself to the American University of Beirut to which he proposes the creation of a department of fine arts – a project that would not take solid form until much later.

In 1960, he proposes the establishment of a Museum of the City of Beirut that would take account of the rich history of the capital from Antiquity – a project that still has not seen its day, as no one took it upon himself. But the Lebanese State after independence, though it did not avail itself of him after his return from Egypt, unlike what had happened in the 20s, honored the painter and his struggles for the development of art in Lebanon by awarding him the Order of the Cedar in May 1958.

In addition, confronted by the seduction of critics of Lebanese art by foreign painters installed in Lebanon or those who came there to exhibit in the 60s, he reminds his fellow citizens in numerous newspaper articles of the importance of their national pictorial heritage and of the high painterly quality of the works of the first generation of pioneers who went to study in Europe, like Daoud Corm who left for Naples in 1875 or César Gemayel or Khalil Saleeby or Khalil Gebrane or Joseph Hoyek.

The archives of the painter,¹ published by the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in 2009, bear witness to all the battles he led for the arts in Lebanon, but also to the vigor of his pen and the beauty of the French language in which he expressed himself so well.

One finds in these archives, among other things, the long correspondence Georges Corm held with his father Daoud, from Paris between 1919 and 1921, telling how his artistic life in Paris was unfolding after the city's emergence from the First World War, about the condition of Parisians impoverished by the war, and what new things his professors were teaching him in relation to the instruction he had received at the hands, and brush, of his father. He speaks here also of his visit of the Maronite Patriarch in Paris at the time of the negotiations at Versailles – a historical document of great value.

¹ *Les archives du peintre Georges Daoud Corm entre 1915 et 1971. Combats pour les arts et la culture au Liban*, Kaslik: Publications of the University Saint-Esprit of Kaslik (PUSEK), 2009.

In 1964, when the painter was forced to abandon his atelier and small garden at Khandak el-Ghamik – constructed in 1922 under his own guidance on his father Daoud Corm's large property – his health declined rapidly. A surgical intervention in 1966, performed urgently in Paris, gives him a respite of five years. That same year, he exhibited two portraits at the Salon de Printemps in Paris, earning him several commissions that he could not, however, fulfill due to his state of health.

In 1966, his *Essay on the Art and Civilization of this Era* – republished here by the American University – is a violent indictment of the corrosive influence of Stalinist Marxism and American commercialism on contemporary art, and a denunciation of artistic fashions launched with the help of publicity campaigns. In this essay Georges Corm expresses, with vehemence, all his nostalgia for the classical humanism in which he was wholly steeped, but also his faith in the emergence of a new humanist civilization, adapted to the needs of this industrial and atomistic era.

It was his only public cry of rebellion against the civilization of his century, which had bruised him on more than one level – a cry that today, at this beginning of a new century, does not fail to find strange resonances in the resurgence of mystico-religious fundamentalism in the Middle East, but also in the Western countries. After this frisson of revolt, voiced despite his natural reserve, the artist lived the last years of his life in silence and meditation, so much was he conscious of the approach of his great departure.

Only a few faithful students, like the very devoted Joseph Matar, continued to surround him with their affection; he also had the pleasure of meeting once again that other great solitary, Omar Onsi. He passed away serenely on the evening of December 13, 1971, *carrying away with him all the sweetness of a romantic Lebanon*,² today gone forever.

It is unquestionably Marie Corm his wife, so modest yet at once so present in his life, who best defined this artist who straddled two centuries and thus two societies, and who nevertheless had never compromised. *He was, she says, pure, authentic. It is true that he suffered from the incomprehension of those around him. But above all, he remained himself and, until his last hours, continued to fill others with the beauty he carried in him.*³

Georges Daoud Corm, in his writings as in his pictorial works, has left us a message on the universalism of beauty. Unfortunately, like many other Lebanese messages, it was for a long time covered with a veil of opaque and

² Christiane Saleh, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, December 29, 1971.

³ Ibid.

blood-soaked dust, by the very people who, in their vanity, believed themselves to be building the land of Lebanon as a symbol of universal humanism. It is for this Lebanon that the artist, gone almost a half-century, wrote in his youth:

*O my country, to you the most beautiful songs of glory,
the most beautiful songs of love.*

His life and his work have, in any case, fully and faithfully fulfilled this promise.

In concluding I owe it to myself to thank the leadership of the American University of Beirut for the great interest they have taken not only in the pictorial work of my father, but also in his writings, from which his manifesto on The Art and Civilization of this Era has been translated into Arabic and into English under the care of the AUB Art Galleries.

My thanks go particularly to Octavian Esanu, Curator of the AUB Art Galleries, who has prepared this exhibition with such great care and given an account here of the views of the painter on the function of art in the life of societies.



**A LEBANESE RAPPEL
À L'ORDRE: GEORGES
DAOUD CORM [1896-1971]**

Octavian Esanu

A LEBANESE RAPPEL À L'ORDRE: GEORGES DAOUD CORM [1896-1971]

I

Once there was a great empire. It was a spiritual empire, a moral kingdom whose subjects lived in contentment, peace and prosperity. Even though its greatness began in the distant past – at the site of the sacrifice of the Son of their Lord – it saw its steadiest rise during one particular epoch called the “Renaissance”: a series of cultural movements that spread over several centuries across several realms [mostly in the Western part of this empire]. It was during this Renaissance that this moral kingdom reached its highest peak. But the learned priests and *umanisti* of the empire regarded the Renaissance only as an episode – though of the most significant kind – in a long-lasting struggle of man against nature, a struggle that man has waged since his earliest days on earth. In man’s ongoing battle to overcome his animal nature, his most efficient weapon proved to be the Arts and Letters: a range of disciplines and sciences developed over centuries but which also reached their highest degree of precision during the Renaissance. The Arts and the Letters brought order into chaos; they imposed the most refined cultural forms upon the world, fixing crude sensual reality within a firm regime of signs, images and sounds. Music transformed natural noise and wild cries into the most pleasant dramas of the passions, and the plastic arts – by far man’s most formidable weapon in overcoming his animal condition – represented man in the image and according to the greatest ideals of the spiritual kingdom. In those days the men of the Arts and Letters were not simply artists but magicians and priests—they did not simply paint pictures but sought pathways into the higher realms of the spiritual, the noumenal and the transphysical. Their work was not easy. New sciences discovered during the great epoch of the Renaissance conditioned these artist-priests to long years of training and discipline. But their hard work was spiritually rewarding, for it opened completely new possibilities for representing in stone or on canvas – and with a degree of plastic sensitivity never since surpassed – the divine spectacle of Life in which the dignified Human Being stood at the very center.

And then one day, all of this ended.

What began as a few bold intellectual ideas and adventurous artistic experiments by a few reformers – mostly out of frustration at not being taken seriously by the spiritual elites of the moral kingdom – gradually began to have disastrous effects. The enormous amount of work that had been done by generations of artists-priests over the centuries – spreading, together with the borders of the empire, over the five continents of planet Earth – now began to be discredited and ridiculed. The empire was assaulted from all sides by

its enemies, assembled under the banner of materialism. Under its spell the youths of the empire and its colonies began to think only about satisfying their senses [as in the dark days of the state of nature], or about how they could dismantle the established social and cultural system [demanding social revolutions and class equality]. In this assault on the cultural empire, a certain brand of artists – called “progressives” or “modernists” – played a particularly destructive role. They disparaged and denigrated the highest and most enduring cultural ideals, proposing instead cheap tricks and hoaxes that they – along with their supporters in the art markets and certain unscrupulous critics – called “modern art.”

But not all is lost. There is still hope that the empire can be saved. This hope is particularly strong at the peripheries of the empire—in some of its former colonies that the empire has recently granted the status of independent states. There is hope that the elites of these lands will become the new guardians of the human soul, of the Arts and Letters; that they will continue to examine the spiritual landscape of the Human Being, the most perfect creation of God Almighty.

II

This fable of the rise and decline of the European humanist tradition [for this is the moral empire of which it tells] is inspired and informed by a far more complex vision, one held by the Lebanese painter, writer, poet and cultural activist Georges Daoud Corm [1896-1971].¹ Corm’s ideas – his critique of modernism and his belief that the Middle Eastern Orient that had given the world its major religions must step forth once again to be the guardian of the humanist heritage² – will be discussed in more detail and in all its seriousness below. For now, this tale of a humanistic empire should be considered as a performative act, as the inevitable reaction of a modernist to Corm’s brand of humanism. His humanism today can only be taken with a grain of salt, not only for its arch-conservative stances and its language [full, by today’s standards of “politically incorrect” stereotypes] but also because we are dealing here with a very unusual form of humanism, one that is informed by the intellectual history of Western Europe, yet also draws from the energies of the Middle Eastern cultural context. To put it in other words, Corm’s critique is universal in

¹ Georges Corm – the son of Daoud Corm [1852-1930], considered one of the first professional painters in Lebanon – was born in 1896. From 1919 until 1921 he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the late 1920s Corm played an active role in the establishment of the first independent Lebanese art institutions [a museum, an art and music school, the medals of the new state]. In 1930 he emigrated to Alexandria, Egypt. Upon his return to Beirut in 1956 he reintegrated in the cultural life of his country, exhibiting and publishing. Georges Corm died in 1971 in Beirut.

² See Georges Corm, “Un itinéraire” in *Georges Daoud Corm: Un Peintre du Liban* [Beirut: Édition Librairie Antoine, 2007], 32.

scope – a critique of modernism as a product of twentieth-century European culture – and particular in its application, since it is first of all a critique of the impact of modernization on former European colonies and above all in his native Lebanon, as well as in Egypt, where the painter spent a considerable part of his life. These two countries were, indeed, at the forefront of artistic modernization in the Middle East. In fact, one can even go so far as to say that Corm's critique of modernism and modernization is in itself a form of modernism—though a conservative one, taking the shape of a Lebanese *rappel à l'ordre* that would hold the mainstream modernism of its time accountable for its disrespect for tradition. It is, in a way, a Middle Eastern *arrière-garde*: an unavoidable, perhaps dialectical component without which the processes of artistic modernization in the Middle East would have been incomplete or even improbable. Moreover, Corm was not alone in holding such views, for he belonged to an entire generation of artists [some of the most renowned being Moustafa Farroukh and Omar Onsi] who during the 1950s and 1960s felt alienated from the cultural processes taking place in their country.

As a true humanist, Corm is a universalist. His humanism forms the very core of his painting, but it also manifests itself more clearly in his literary, critical, and journalistic writings, in his poetry and cultural activism. His vision of humanism – in retreat before the forces of the modern world but still able to be preserved intact in the Orient – receives particular prominence in his *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*, one of his most controversial texts. Written in two stages during the 1960s, the *Essai* clearly articulates Corm's aesthetic, political and civic positions, and can be called a manifesto of "Lebanese painterly humanism." Here the author delivers a harsh critique of modern times in general and of modernist artistic currents in particular. Corm critiques the very ideology of modernism, its "make it new" mantra, its obsession with radical gestures, its formalism and dehumanization of art, its obsession with new techniques, styles, idioms and media. Written at a time when the ideology of modernism had begun to catch up with the imagination of young Lebanese artists, the *Essai* reads today like a desperate warning to his countrymen of the coming modernist inferno, where decadence and anarchy in the fine arts dance their *ronde infernale*, their infernal round. Reading the *Essai*, one has the impression of a last-ditch attempt to prevent artistic modernism from entering the Levant or the Middle East, an attempt to resist the institutionalization of modernist ideology and its transformation into a cultural norm, as had been rapidly occurring in Western Europe and the United States since the end of World War Two. Perhaps Georges Daoud Corm imagined Lebanon as one of the last outposts of the cultural humanist empire, of the great European civilization—a garden, or an island-state [like that island of Utopia once invented by another humanist]; perhaps he imagined a lonely peak amid a flooded world, after a sudden meltdown of the classical ice-caps, an island of pure spirit upon a swampland ruled by commercialism, consumption and political unrest.

From today's position, and regarded against the background of twentieth-century radical thought, Corm's brand of humanism tends to strike the reader as extremely conservative. In the 1950s and 1960s, his views provoked various polemics in the local press, and even then his ideas felt a bit "old-fashioned."³ His grammarian's beliefs in the rules and norms of the Arts and Letters, as well as his belief in a rational and centered subject, in a soul well-shaped by culture and civilization, in a morality determined by religious faith, in a genuine knowledge of good and evil—all of this stood in sharp contrast with the radical thinking of the "progressive intellectuals" [in quotation marks, as Corm himself would have written it]. It is difficult to imagine Corm's humanist thought against the background of the major twentieth-century anti-humanist thinkers—all of those who proclaimed the death of man, of the autonomous subject, of metaphysics, of God, of the soul. Corm's belief in a subject in full control of its destiny and of its freedom and moral judgments is a far cry from the fashionable ideas of the modern world, from the existential and phenomenological doctrines of Being according to which the Self is abandoned in or *thrown* into the world, from the structuralist and post-structuralist subject caught in the overarching web of social systems and structures, from the psychoanalytic subject whose freedom and life itself is predetermined and pre-conditioned by irrational drives and repressed unconscious forces. Corm's humanism can hardly even be placed next to those twentieth-century theorists who at one point or another have been branded or have regarded themselves as "humanists"—to thinkers, for example, like Georg Lukács, whose aesthetic realism sought its basis in the ideal of human solidarity and class struggle, or like Emmanuel Lévinas, whose "humanism of the other" is informed by the sense of responsibility that we as humans carry towards the world, or like Edward Said and his self-criticizing "democratic humanism."⁴ Corm's humanism seems quite rigid, and hesitant to compromise. These hesitations are manifest when he speaks about artistic norms, when he refuses to accept a world in which man is *not* the measure of all things and is not anymore at the center of the universe, in his Luddite mistrust of machinery and gadgetry, and in his distaste for psychoanalysis, Marxism and the American "way of life."

A critic embarking upon a close study of Corm's humanism and of the *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* faces many challenges, challenges that often have to do with what one might call intellectual honesty or integrity. It requires something of an effort of will to navigate untroubled amid his ideas and his language, especially encountering certain of his opinions about jazz,

³ See for instance, B.R., "Georges Corm contre l'homme moderne," *L'Orient*, 13 March, 1967, in Georges G. Corm ed., *Les archives du peintre Georges Daoud Corm entre 1915-1971: combats pour les arts et la culture au Liban* [Kaslik: PUSEK, 2009], 82.

⁴ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006]; Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2004].

tribal art, women, surrealism, or abstraction. One must chart a narrow course, while refraining from hasty conclusions.

So why read Corm today, and what can we learn from his brand of artistic humanism—one which draws exclusively on the achievements of European civilization while seeking application within his immediate Middle Eastern context?

As I suggest above, Corm's humanism can be regarded as a reaction to the advance of modernism in the Middle East. In light of his prolific critical and political writings and engagement with questions of art theory and aesthetics, he might very well be called the captain of the Lebanese artistic *arrière-garde*. If one fails to see this quality in his conservative art theories, to recognize in them the avant-garde's dialectical backlash, one cannot form a wider picture of the unfolding of artistic modernization in Lebanon and the Middle East. Moreover, Corm's understanding of the history and nature of art and his critique of modernism offer an opportunity to look at a series of questions – concerning aesthetics, the history and philosophy of art – outside of their traditional American-European context. The present text also seeks to blend artistic attitudes pertinent to the Middle East with established European theories of art; it aims at placing such attitudes and beliefs in relation to certain aesthetic and artistic philosophical systems.

Before proceeding to the *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*, we should look first at Georges Corm's views regarding the origins, nature and history of art, as well as the background on which the *Essai* will later be projected. My interpretation here is inspired by, and assembled from a variety of his articles written during both his Egyptian and Lebanese periods, from a loose collection of reflections, perceptions and actions and the ways they resonate with those of other thinkers. But in the process we can also hitch rides, so to speak, on certain influential theories of art, on the way to a better understanding of what George D. Corm was up to. We will take a particularly long ride on Hegel's running-board, as far as his train of thought permits.

III

Georges Corm believed that art has its origins in the necessity early humans felt to transcend their animal nature and reach the light of consciousness. He elaborates some of his broader views on art – that is, art in its long-term, transhistorical perspective – in a conference presentation dedicated to the art of portraiture, delivered in Cairo in 1952.⁵ Here, Corm embarks on a journey

⁵ Georges Daoud Corm, "Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges" [conference presentation at the Circle of Youth, Cairo, Egypt, April 18, 1952], in *Les archives du peintre Georges Daoud Corm*, 56-66.

through the history of art, through epochs and civilizations, and as a humanist he designates art – more specifically the art of portrait painting, which he often calls a *paysage de l'âme* [a landscape of the soul] – as the main motor force in the historical transformation of the human race. For Corm, art lies at the very origins of the evolution of the human, setting what had been little more than animals on the path of humanity and civilization. His views on the origins and evolution of art sound somewhat familiar, bringing G.W.F. Hegel's thoughts about art particularly to mind.

In the beginning – in Hegel's philosophy of art – man lives in a fully sensuous state of existence. His ultimate goal is the satisfaction of the senses, of the appetites and instincts. Humans live in packs and their behavior, though somewhat more complex, is not much different from that of animals. It is at this stage that humans first begin to impose, on the nature that surrounds them, something of their humanity. "Man as mind begins to reduplicate himself," by impressing on nature the seal of man's internal being.⁶ Above all, as early man seeks to surpass his animal nature, the first "artworks" that appear are representations of bison, horses, mammoths, or reindeer, on the walls of caves or carved from animal bone.

In Cairo, Corm shows slides of such early art. He deploys the critical vocabulary of his time, insisting that these drawings and figurines were unsurpassed in their fidelity to living movement, their precision of form, their sobriety of expression.⁷ He believes that it was in these early artworks that the soul [Corm's key conceptual and ethical category] first started to emerge from the dark animal realm of instincts and reflexes. It was this new kind of man-made object, in which man mimics or symbolizes his fear of the natural world, that was the first step towards the brightness of human consciousness, and even today [in 1952] artists continue a battle that began 30,000 years ago—the battle for the human soul.⁸

Hegel also helps us understand the historical stages that will eventually lead early art to modernism. For Hegel, when early humans begin to make art they do something radically different than what they did in their pure animal state: they impose upon their surrounding reality something that had not been there before. By carving or depicting a bison or a horse, they form a completely different relationship with these entities: they no longer attempt, for example, to chase or eat them. The animal depicted on the wall of the caves or carved out of ivory is not a particular or concrete bison but an idea

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. B. Bosanquet [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993], 35-36.

⁷ Corm, "Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges," 58.

⁸ See Corm's description of early art on pages 58-60 in *Ibid.*

of a bison, a universal concept, and as a universal it is an abstract product of mind.⁹ The emerging universality of the carved bison, its transition to concept, is the beginning of knowledge, or as Corm would have said, of the soul. At this early stage of the soul, art is the most efficient way of overcoming the foreignness of outside reality, of overcoming man's fear of nature, as well as his sensuous desires. Through these new kind of objects that we call "art" today, man began to disinterestedly contemplate the phenomenal world. In Hegel's words, man begins to produce himself within the medium of external things, and the product of this external self-reproduction is what constitutes art or beauty.¹⁰ Through art, humans also began to mediate their fear of and relation to nature. There is, however, a price to be paid for these discoveries. The emergence of consciousness brings about a distancing, an estrangement of humans from the natural world, from their initial habitat, in a dialectic of progress and alienation. This is the beginning of humanization, of civilization or [as Freud would have said] the beginning of man's discontent caused by the clash between his animal drives and the repressive attitudes of this civilization.

In Cairo in 1952, Corm projects a figurine carved in ivory about thirty thousand years ago.¹¹ He asks his audience to look carefully at the face of this Upper Paleolithic woman:

Look at it closely, this prehistoric ancestor ... I know nothing more sincere, more eloquent, nothing more poignant than this face. Look at this low forehead, these eyes sunken in their sockets and apparently lacking lids, this elongated nose hardly rising free of the face...look at this formless mass of the mouth and chin: almost, you could say, the muzzle of an animal.¹²

For Corm, true art begins at the moment when the prehistoric "artist" attempts to represent the human figure, and above all the head and the face. This is part of a broader humanist conviction that the human face is a window into the soul, the anchor of subjectivity and the most significant aspect of identity. In a sense, the face is not even part of the body, like the head, but something separate—a map of subjectivity.¹³ In other words, the depiction of the face is the beginning of representation, and of humanity—if indeed animals do not

⁹ See M. Inwood, "Commentary," in Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, xv.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 36.

¹¹ The list of slides projected in the Cairo conference are missing from Corm's archive. It can be only presumed, according to the description, that he was speaking of the Venus of Brassempouy—the High Paleolithic female figurine found in the south of France in 1892.

¹² Corm, "Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges," 58.

¹³ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [London and New York: Continuum, 2004], 168.

have a face [an idea associated with Emmanuel Lévinas,¹⁴ perhaps following Heidegger's notion that an animal does not have a hand].

This early representation of the human face discussed by Corm in Cairo – its features no longer animal but “not yet those of a human being”¹⁵ – again resonates with Hegel. Recall that Hegel sees the history of art as unfolding in three main art-historical stages: Symbolic, Classical and Romantic. These three terms refer to different sets of relations between Idea and form. For Hegel, the Idea [*Idee*] does not refer to something static and subjective that exists in our individual minds but to an objective state of the universe at a particular historical period; the Hegelian Idea is an ongoing objective process and also an *act* of overcoming the divide between subject and object. Beauty, along with art, is the product of the unification of form with this Idea, or as Hegel famously put it—art is the sensuous semblance of the Idea. In other words, a work of art is something like an Idea imbedded in sensuous or objective form. There are other concepts that Hegel, and his numerous critics and interpreters, have used to describe this relation between the Idea [or sometimes the “Ideal,” as with the Idea of beauty] and form: as that between content and form, for example, or message and medium, or in some cases between signifier [form] and signified [Idea].¹⁶

The art-form in the Symbolic state – the stage that Hegel associates with Oriental, Egyptian or Indian art – is where the content of art [the Idea] is not yet in perfect harmony with its form. In this stage humans are at the very beginning of their intellectual inquiries about themselves and the world around them. Here then, art most often deals with the natural world, animals, their human hunters, and so forth. The Idea is not yet clear and determined; neither is the human mind yet fully conscious of itself. The content of art, for this reason, still operates for the most part symbolically, attributing religious or supernatural meanings to natural forms. The main task of the symbolic artist is to “fit” content into form or adjust form to content [adjusting a stone, for example, to look like a bison]. This art is not yet representational, in Hegel's sense of the word.

Corm draws very close to Hegel's Symbolic art-form in his discussion of the Paleolithic figurine in Cairo. When in symbolic art, according to Hegel, as the Idea enters the form [in this case a piece of ivory] it produces distortions; it

¹⁴ See Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas” in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* [London: Routledge, 1988], 171-72.

¹⁵ Corm, “Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges,” 60.

¹⁶ For form and Idea as signifier and signified, see Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 57. For Hegel's use of the term “Idea” [*Idee*] see Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary* [London & New York: Continuum, 2010], 112-15.

creates a kind of formal distress. The Idea, or content, does violence to the form. Corm, with his description of the “distorted” face of the figurine – its mouth resembling an animal muzzle – gives an example of the distortion produced by the incompatibility and disharmony between Idea and form. It is not just that the form is not yet ready to accommodate the Idea, but that the Idea itself is not yet fully determined: humans haven’t yet completely overcome their animal urges and impulses, and they haven’t yet fully realized their true essence as conscious and self-conscious beings.

For Corm, at this stage man does not yet have the “fully-formed” or “redeemed” soul that will begin to emerge with Christianity. And at Hegel’s Symbolic stage, again, the question “What is man?” remains unanswered, and for this precise reason Idea cannot yet harmoniously correlate with form. Form and Idea are alien to each other. Corm’s discussion of the ivory figurine also brings to mind Hegel’s encounter with the Sphinx. For Hegel, the Sphinx – half animal, half human – is the perfect illustration of the Symbolic stage, showing the distortions caused by the encounter of the indeterminate Idea and form. The Sphinx is also an illustration of the pain that the human spirit must overcome as it begins to transcend its animal nature, making the transition from what Corm would call the darkness of the animal condition [the state of “pure being”], to free self-conscious reflection. This struggle for liberation plays out on the face of the ivory figurine, as an extension of its soul—but at this stage it is still not clear what the human really is, and much less whether the Venus of Brassempouy or the Sphinx are human, animal, or something else.

It is only at the next stage that these questions begin to be answered. For the Lebanese humanist Georges Corm, Ancient Greek civilization with its classical art is the epoch of both human gods and godly humans; it is the time when the soul makes peace with the flesh, and corporeal perfection reflects a perfection of the soul—the two are in perfect harmony.¹⁷ Here, the soul finds true expression in sensuous form: content and form, message and medium are now perfectly suited to each other. In the Classical art-form, says Hegel, the Idea enters of its own free and complete accord into the form without distortion or equivocal meaning. The spiritual can now be fully revealed in the sensual because the soul, or in Hegel’s words, the Idea has finally found itself. Now, the Greek artist can take the Idea, or content, of art directly from what Hegel calls the “national religion,” that is, a set of ideas, beliefs and myths shared by an entire community of people. At the same time the Classical art-form now conveys what is essentially and Ideally, or beautifully, human—the perfect shape of the human body. There is no more indeterminacy, there are no muzzles, no hints at man’s animal nature. Man comes to realize that his essence is adequately revealed in this perfect human body, and that he is now also

¹⁷ Corm, “Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges,” 61.

capable of raising and answering such questions as “What am I?” or “Where do I come from?” and “Where am I going?” The classical artist has read Plato, Aristotle and other great thinkers of Greek antiquity, who have reflected on human nature and on how man can understand the universe by understanding himself. The transition from Symbolic to Classical art is a transition from a set of abstract ideas struggling to enter sensuous material and producing formal distortions, to a new art-form in which the content of art concretely realizes the true individuality and nature of the human being. In other words, where before the artist struggled to express something he did not fully grasp, now all his ideas are clear, for he understands himself.

However, in the conference in Cairo, as the parade of Greek sculptures progresses, Corm soon appears to depart from this dream of perfection: “Look at them,” he says, referring to a man and a woman of the 3rd century BC, “they seem to have woken from a heavy and gloomy dream.”¹⁸ Corm finds these sculptures, perfect and beautiful as they are, lacking: there is no real personality or subjectivity in the classical “human gods,” and for Corm – the portraitist and painter – art is primarily about depicting the landscape of the soul, the inner life; art is about revealing the inner spiritual complexity of the epoch-making heroes. He writes:

We have all read and interpreted Homer, at the very least when we were schoolchildren; we all know that Homer was the great poet-storyteller of the Greek heroic period. But Homer the man would have remained, for us, an abstraction, a name without a face, without concrete reality, if an unknown sculptor had not immortalized, in a bronze bust, the physical and spiritual features of the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey.¹⁹

What is missing is the individual’s uniqueness, the emotional and behavioral manifestations of the individual—and this is precisely what, for Hegel, distinguishes the Classical from the Romantic stage of art. For Hegel the Classical art-form – unlike the Symbolic – does show evidence of individuality, but this is expressed *externally*, in human corporeality, and not as internalized or *inwardized* experience. The Classical art-form lacks, in Hegel’s words, the “actuality of self-existent personality, the essential characteristic of which is self-knowledge.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid. 61.

¹⁹ Ibid., 61-62.

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Art: Being the Second Part of Hegel's Aesthetik, in Which Are Unfolded Historically the Three Great Fundamental Phases of the Art-activity of the World*, trans. William McKendree Bryant [New York: D. Appleton, 1879], 87.

It is only with the arrival of the Romantic art-form that one can truly speak of the artistic expression of self-knowledge, self-consciousness and self-understanding. Art can now express human essence not in the physical shape of the perfect human body but in the internal states of the personality weighted by self-conscious thought. This had never happened in ancient Greece, partly because the Greeks, Hegel believed, had a very different attitude toward death: they did not fear death in the same way that those in the Christian era would. And for Hegel, the expression of personality, of *Subjektivität*, and the fear of death are intimately related.²¹

Georges D. Corm believed that the true pinnacle of art in all of history was the Renaissance. It was during this revival that artists fully revealed the complexity of the spiritual landscape, the manifestations of the soul: mystical impulses, enthusiasm, goodness, simplicity, purity, modesty, and so forth.²² But where does the Renaissance fit into Hegel's schema? There is a difference of opinion among Hegel's numerous interpreters as where to set the boundary between the Classical and the Romantic stages. While some believe that Hegel intended the Classical art-form to reach well beyond the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and end with Romanticism, others see it ending much earlier, during the classical antiquity of Greece.²³ This difference of opinion is significant, for this is also where Corm's and Hegel's views begin to diverge. For Hegel, the Classical art-form represents the youth of art and of the Spirit in general—with the Symbolic period as the childhood and the Romantic period as the old age of the human spirit. The further humanity strays from the Classical art-form, the harder it is to find the most harmonious or ideal relation between the Idea and the sensuous form.

For Corm, it is the Renaissance revival of Classical form that is the true standard of artistic excellence. The Renaissance is the epoch where the soul and the artistic means of expressing it have both reached the highest stage of perfection. Corm's high esteem of this epoch is based precisely on his conviction that here artists have gained the very skills that permit the representation of human personality or subjectivity in its full complexity. It is the epoch where "une simple et bonne bourgeoise," like Mona Lisa, was depicted by Leonardo to convey, in its rich particularity, the general spiritual qualities of the human beings of that time.²⁴ Hegel also acknowledges that

²¹ Ibid., 91.

²² Corm, "Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges," 61.

²³ For the view that the classical art-form lasted into the Renaissance and beyond, see Michael Inwood, "Commentary" to Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, xxx. Jack Kaminsky, on the other hand, argues that the classical art-form ended in Ancient Greece, and that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are part of the Romantic art-form. See Jack Kaminsky, *Hegel on Art: An Interpretation of Hegel's Aesthetics* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1962], 46.

²⁴ Corm, "Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques, à travers les âges," 58.

in Romantic art [if we agree with those who regard the Renaissance as part of Romantic form] the personality is expressed in its self-conscious inward intelligence, in its fullest and most complex internality—rather than in the sensuous externality of the human body, as in the Classical period. But unlike Corm, Hegel does not see this as a necessarily higher form of art; for him, there is a crisis of the Romantic art-form, caused by the fact that with the advance of Christianity, the Idea has attained such a degree of complexity that it cannot be easily or accurately translated into plastic form. The absolute inwardness of the self-conscious subject, and its relation to the divine or Absolute, can now only be properly expressed through poetry, religion, or music. This is what opens the way, eventually, to the scandalous Hegelian thesis of the “end of art.”

At the Cairo conference, as Corm reaches the end of the nineteenth century, he makes an abrupt stop—as if to suggest, in his last three sentences, that art has essentially ended.²⁵ And it has ended exactly at the beginning of modernism, which will be fully addressed in the *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*.

IV

For Hegel, the latter phase of the Romantic art-form carries within itself the seed of art's own dissolution. Over time, the Idea, or content, of art has attained such a degree of self-reflectiveness that it can no longer be accurately translated into sensuous form. The artistic form is now meaningless and helpless before the Idea, before the spiritual complexity of modern subjectivity. Then with the advance of the post-Romantic phase of art, that of modernism in the twentieth century, sensuous form – dropped, forgotten or abandoned, as it were, by the Idea – begins to take on a life of its own, becoming increasingly preoccupied with its own properties and materiality. In twentieth-century art criticism, such tendencies are often described as “formalism.” On the level of Idea, on the other hand, this crisis in art is manifest in such concepts as “dehumanization,” “despiritualization,” or “denaturalization.” Corm's critique of modernism touches upon some of these issues.

Corm's *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation* [1966] brings to Lebanon and to the Middle East a dispute that, for centuries, had divided the great moral empire—a battle between tradition and progress. Written in French – the *lingua franca* of Lebanon's Christian Maronite intellectuals – the *Essai* addresses a broad set of issues while aiming toward the local context, for like Corm's other activities [artistic and cultural, political and social] it unfolds around one central concern: the cultural identity of the newly-formed state of Lebanon. In some ways, the text can be regarded as an attempt to assert an artistic program, a cultural

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

policy or a “state aesthetics,” one that would truly rise to meet the aspirations of the Lebanese elites at a particular moment in history.

The *Essai* was written during Lebanon’s so-called “golden age,” in the 1960s and early 70s.²⁶ In this period the country witnessed the most rapid modernization in almost every sphere of its social life, and Beirut was regarded as a dynamic cultural center, attracting Arab intellectuals from many countries in the region.²⁷ Radical transformations were also taking place in the arts. For instance, in 1964 [two years before the publication of the *Essai*] abstract art, for the first time, completely dominates the fourth edition of the Sursock Salon, and does so again in 1967.²⁸ The yearly program of the Baalbeck International Festival – an institution that has significantly contributed to determining Lebanon’s cultural identity since the late fifties – gives an impression of these changing artistic sensibilities. Initially very conservative, folkloristic and classical, from the early seventies the Baalbeck program displayed such names as Anton Webern, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, André Masson, and Louis Aragon.²⁹ Its emerging new cultural vision stood at the opposite end of the spectrum from Corm’s [and that of other painters of his generation such as Moustafa Farroukh and Omar Onsi] neo-classicizing painterly humanism. Suddenly, these older artists felt alienated from the cultural life of their country. The manifesto-like quality of Corm’s *Essai* can be regarded as a counter-reaction to this rapidly changing cultural landscape, a voice among many others within a complex context shaped by various discourses: Arabism and Europeanism, Lebanism and Phoenecianism, secularism and sectarianism, West and East, socialism and capitalism, materialism and spiritualism, traditionalism and modernism.

Corm’s position in the pages of the *Essai* is more fully elaborated across other articles and letters, and on the whole amounts to an outline of a modern utopia. He imagines Lebanon as a classically-arranged, high-walled garden that might preserve the Arts and Letters from modernist intrusions. Like his father Daoud Corm half a century earlier, Corm sincerely believes that the Orient might in fact become a sanctuary for the great humanistic heritage that Europe has brought to its full perfection and then unexpectedly abandoned.³⁰ This

²⁶ The *Essai sur l’art et la civilisation de ce temps* was first published in 1960s in the Lebanese journal *Al Chirah* [or *Al Shiraa*] and then re-published in 1966 as a separate volume by the Beirut publisher Dar An-Nahar. See Georges Daoud Corm, *Essai sur l’art et la civilisation de ce temps* [Beirut: Dar an-Nahar, 1966]. Corm’s *Essai* was translated into English by Catherine Hansen [2013] and into Arabic by Nisrine Nader [2013].

²⁷ See Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 44-48.

²⁸ Sylvia Agemian, “Georges Corm au Musée Nicolas Sursock” in Georges Daoud Corm; *Un peintre du Liban*, 18.

²⁹ See for instance *XIX Festival International de Baalbeck* [Beirut, 1974].

³⁰ See Georges Corm, “Un itinéraire,” 32.

sanctuary, however, was more exclusive than some might have liked. Corm, for instance, was reluctant to admit the Arabic artistic heritage, for the simple reason that the arabesque – a significant Arabic contribution to visual culture – does not concern itself with anthropomorphic representations, and accordingly it cannot truly express the complexity of the human soul.³¹ For Corm, the arabesque is as decorative and ineffective for the perfection of the soul as abstract art. Muslim art, according to him, stopped evolving five hundred years ago, and art that does not evolve is condemned to perish.³² If the government is to succeed in turning Lebanon into a touristic destination, for example, it must establish a “Service des Beaux-Arts” that would deploy Beauty, Taste and Harmony to develop this country and the city of Beirut.³³ We can only infer that such a bureau would never have accepted the value of abstract art, or jazz, or contemporary music, poetry, and dance, which again, cannot be admitted into the classical garden for the reason that these forms are given their impetus by “primitive” cultures, by what Hegel would have called Symbolic art-forms at their very early stage of the spirit.³⁴ It is only the advanced tradition of Western art, as expressed in the art of the Renaissance, that can serve as a model and guide for Lebanon. Corm’s defense of the norms and rules of the Arts and Letters formed the core of his brand of painterly humanism, which we call here “Oriental” or “Lebanese” because he envisioned this region as a protected area, a park where these European norms and rules would be safeguarded against the contamination and incursions of international modernism.

Corm begins the *Essai* by asking what it is that has brought down the great Christian humanist civilization—“the most extraordinary civilizing expansion in history”? What happened to the moral empire that reached its pinnacle in the nineteenth century, when its glorious laborers no longer aspired but to the “calm enjoyment of goods already acquired?”³⁵ The answer is “materialism.” The descent began with the writings of Karl Marx, who provided Russian revolutionaries with an effective ideological weaponry to carry out a materialist revolution and sabotage the social and moral structures established within the borders of the Russian Empire. This led to the creation of the USSR. The second force that toppled the humanist empire – also with roots in Western Europe – originated much earlier, when certain Europeans crossed the Atlantic in order to conquer the riches of the North American continent. This led to the formation

³¹ Georges D. Corm, “L’Art Arabe et le Liban.” *Le Réveil*, 25 March, 1922 [25], in Corm, *Les archives du peintre Georges Daoud Corm*, 25.

³² Ibid.

³³ Georges D. Corm, “Lettre d’un chrétien libanais à un musulman libanais” [unpublished], approx. 1970 in Corm, *Les archives du peintre Georges Daoud Corm*, 103.

³⁴ For Corm’s views on jazz, contemporary dance and music, see Corm, *Essai sur l’art et la civilisation de ce temps*, 76.

³⁵ Corm, *Essai sur l’art et la civilisation de ce temps*, 74.

of the United States—a country governed exclusively by the laws of Commerce and Industry imposing their harsh market-determined rules in all directions. For Corm, Soviet dialectical materialism is by far the worse ideology of the two, and if he had had to choose between the two antagonistic forces of the Cold War, he would have chosen what he perceived to be the lesser evil, the United States. Here, at least, American elites remained firmly attached to Christian ideals, as were the large majority of the population, though still struggling daily with the temptations of capital accumulation and material comfort.³⁶

Alongside these major forces, the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud is another factor that has contributed to the fall of the moral empire, with its enormously detrimental impact on the morals and the manners of the masses, especially in the United States. Corm writes that psychoanalysis encourages children to behave in accordance with their animal instincts, and that it encourages their parents not only to ignore their parental duties, but to change spouses with the first conjugal difficulty. The modern family – the institution that served as the cornerstone of humanist civilization – is also disintegrating. All this warns of a return to that primary animal stage that man has worked so hard to overcome over centuries of humanist civilization.

Finally, the last factor that Corm believes contributed to the fall of classical humanist values and to the rise of modern art is American advertisement, imposed on the mass of citizens in countries all over the world. A false optimism forms the basis of American advertisement—“such and such an American drink is a miraculous source of vitality... such and such an American film [...] is [...] a colossus of cinematographic industry and the masterpiece of masterpieces ... you cannot win your beloved except by using a certain beauty cream, a certain soap... .”³⁷ But even its worst lies are, again, much less dangerous than the Marxist-Stalinist lie, because the latter dares to deny the very concept of the soul, the very thing that human beings have been struggling for the past tens of thousands of years to perfect.

In their wake, these combined forces bring what Corm calls the “triumph of the materialist Arts and Letters.”³⁸ The rapid modernist takeover of the arts – supported as it is by art merchants and a certain clique of intellectuals³⁹ – has led to the complete disappearance of the human being from the work of art. For a humanist, this is of major significance:

³⁶ See *ibid.*, 75-76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

What is remarkable in this evolution of the plastic arts is that at the same time that the materialist powers were suffocating the human soul, the expressionist School, Picassoism, and Art Informel were, in their works, dislocating human forms, were dismembering and disintegrating them, in anticipation of the day when the abstract school would make man and his works entirely disappear.⁴⁰

The human being – the highest and most perfect of God’s creations – is erased from the arts by the so-called “avant-garde.” This is the same assault carried out by Marxists of all sorts, mercantilists, psychoanalysts and the mad men of Madison Avenue, leading to the complete abolition of the human subject from modernist art.

About four decades before Corm published his essay, José Ortega y Gasset had drawn attention to this very situation, noting that modern artists had ceased to represent human forms in their works. He called this phenomenon the “dehumanization of art.”⁴¹ For Ortega y Gasset, the process of dehumanization has nothing to do [directly at least] with materialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis or advertising, but rather with a contradiction at the heart of modern art. In the twentieth century, it becomes imperative that modern art not use its content to make spiritual or transcendental claims, but instead attend to, or develop in accordance with its own nature or essence.⁴² Ortega y Gasset asks his readers to imagine that they are looking at a garden through a window:

Our eyes adjust themselves so that our eyes penetrate the glass without lingering upon it, and seizes upon the flowers and foliage. As the goal of vision towards which we direct our glance is the garden, we do not see the pane of glass and our gaze passes through it. The clearer the glass, the less we see it. But later, by making an effort, we can ignore the garden and by retracing our focus, let it rest on the window-pane. The garden disappears from our eyes, and all we see of it are some confused masses of color which seem to adhere to the glass. Thus to see the glass and to see the window pane are two incompatible operations: the one excludes the other and they each require a different focus.⁴³

Here, the garden represents art’s claims and content, and the window pane

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹José Ortega y Gasset *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968].

⁴²The idea that painting must not, like literature, deal in narrative images has been around for a while. Lessing’s essay *Laocoon* [1766] was among the earliest to draw attention to the differing economies of the arts, where the visual arts are spatial while poetry, literature and music are temporal arts. In the 20th century Clement Greenberg defends abstract art as a painting that attends to its own nature and essence, which is to say its colored flatness and not narrative, in the influential 1940 essay *Towards a New Laocoon*.

⁴³Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, 68.

art's nature or essence—another set of terms for the Idea and form discussed above. Dehumanization in art begins when the pane of glass becomes dirty and opaque, and when artists, instead of cleaning the window – through which the “classical garden” was once visible – become obsessed with the smudges and smears, with the countless finger-prints left on the surface of this medium over the centuries. The confused masses of color that seem to adhere to the glass are what make up the modernist painting, and the main task of the modernist painter is in fact to challenge the old and widespread belief that a picture is—as Alberti once believed—a window onto the world [just as the face was a window into the soul]. While some artists – Corm among them – kept peering through the window to depict the garden, the world or the soul, others preferred to “smudge” its surface, doodling abstract patterns, meaningless scribbles, and other non-representational fantasies. All of this was done, of course, in order to make the spectator realize that there was no garden on the other side of the glass, and perhaps nothing at all, if not the gardener's own beliefs and views presented as “natural” and “historically given.” But the problem was, as Ortega y Gasset suggests, that the great majority of people simply could not readjust their focus to look at the surface of the glass, the painting, or of the world around them, preferring instead to look “through” it. This looking “through” is often called ideology.

This inescapable incongruity between garden and window, or between Idea and form, is what sometimes is understood as the “death” or the “end of art.” Of course, the “end of art” was never about artists ceasing to make art. It was about the moment when art could no longer help us understand ourselves and the world around us. Both the world and art had changed: the world no longer needed art to tell it what it was or what it wanted anymore, and art, realizing this, decided not to follow the world but find a life of its own. If one is to believe Hegel, art had lost for good that special status as well as the “world-historical” relevance that it had once enjoyed in Ancient Greece or during the European Renaissance. Some have argued that the “end of art,” as Hegel foresaw it, was entirely about the end of art as a means of representing the world, where art had finally to renounce “the normative *authority* of nature.”⁴⁴ It is this renunciation that has led to the divorce between Idea and form.

On the level of form, critical discussions of this separation solidified into the discourse of “formalism,” with its eternal search for “pure” form [that is, form preoccupied with its own physical properties and appearance] according to such themes as “painterliness,” “flatness,” “sculptureness,” and so on. One could even say, at the risk of oversimplifying, that at the “end of art,” both Idea and

⁴⁴ Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005], n. 1, 282.

form acquired permanent resident status in different and mutually hostile political systems. While in the West, and in the post-World War II United States in particular, “progressive” art chose the path of formalism [without, of course, completely abandoning content, which to a great degree was channeled into advertising]—on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in the Soviet bloc, Stalin’s chief ideologues welcomed the Idea, the content, of art. The Stalinists, late-blooming classicists, were constantly blamed by the opposite side for using art as a weapon of “propaganda” and “ideology.” In turn they responded that the capitalists were using form, or formalism, as disinformation or advertising to sell their latest ideological product marketed under the brands of “liberty” or “freedom.”

As we have seen, Corm’s list of factors contributing to the rise of modern art differs quite significantly from those offered by other critics. According to Corm, it was both the Soviet ideologues and the American businessmen who had put in peoples’ heads the idea of abandoning the search for the soul and for spiritual perfection. All that was now left was “materialism,” either in the form of the “communist utopia” or the American “way of life.” Though Corm’s *Essai* streamlines and often over-simplifies the situation, his arguments still faintly resonate with those of other critics, particularly as he lays the blame on materialism for bringing down the humanist empire. We can treat his faults gently – especially in his harsh diatribes against Marxism, psychoanalysis, surrealism, jazz, contemporary art, “savages,” and the American “way of life,” to name a few – and focus instead on what he designates as the *causa prima* of the fall of the moral empire and of the traditional Arts and Letters. Of course, unlike Hegel and his interpreters, Corm would never go as far as to claim that the human soul, the Idea or the human quest for self-understanding have reached such a level of complex inwardness that they can no longer be translated into images, or that natural representations cannot express the depth of the modern human soul. Corm would also have never supported the idea that modern artists had turned away from nature to abstraction [or non-figuration] because the act of representing the garden beyond the window had lost its significance, or that in a world of mechanical reproduction, nothing is left for the artist than to turn his or her painterly gaze inwards. For Corm, the abstract artists are still working in relation to nature. As a traditional painter and as a tireless gazer into the classical garden, Corm did not understand or see in the experiments of the modern formalists any of their so-called “painterliness,” nor did he recognize the “essence” of painting or its expressions of freedom trumpeted around that time by the champions of American Abstract Expressionism. What he saw, instead, in modernist abstraction were representations taking the form of decoration: modernist artists’ “models [are] everywhere in Nature in millions of combinations of lines and colors... in a slab of striated marble, in the wing of a butterfly, in a peacock’s tail, in the leaves of certain plants... in anatomical plates of the intestines [...] and ad infinitum.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the surrealists and the exponents

⁴⁵ Corm, *Essai sur l’art et la civilisation de ce temps*, 78.

of Art Informel plagiarize “the uncouth and grimacing statues of the primitive tribes of the five continents, and the same with the drawings and colorings of children and schizophrenics.”⁴⁶

In other words, he saw in abstraction a representation of nature, but of a nature that does not truly express the complexity of the human soul. Instead of a landscape, there is just a slab of marble, instead of a human being, just the intestines, and so on. By materialism and by “materialist Arts and Letters,” Corm also means “formalism”—which for him is despiritualization, dehumanization, the complete abolition of the Idea or of representation, and the sole fixation on “formal” or *material* properties [“just paint on a flat surface,” as Clement Greenberg would have said].

V

In all the battles waged above, Georges Corm falls squarely and consistently on one side. He is on the side of the Idea, of content and message. As a convinced humanist, he could never have agreed that artistic content or the soul might one day become inexpressible in artistic form or even irrelevant for human self-understanding. He could not have seen how one could still call oneself an artist without looking right through the window pane at the flowers, foliage, leaves and the gardener—in other words, at the world. A modernist might say that he had become stuck in Hegel’s Classical or early Romantic phases, or that he was using an outdated artistic language to reflect upon contemporary phenomena. For many [Hegel included] this was not a wise thing to do. In each art-form there is one genuine relation between Idea and form. In the Classical phase, the Idea enters form *freely*, of its own accord. But that magnificent song has “been sung once and for all.”⁴⁷ In the post-Romantic period, resorting to an earlier art-form to convey a contemporary message runs the risk of turning art into an ideological vehicle.

It was Georges D. Corm’s fate to arrive on the stage at a time when Lebanon was coming to terms with its identity as a country. Perhaps Corm’s love for classical form, as outdated as it may have looked in the mid-twentieth century, was [through him] Lebanon’s own way of formulating a cultural reaction to the advent of modernism. This had happened some decades before in other countries that, at some point, had sought a “second” or “third” way out of history: in Soviet socialist realism, in German national-socialist realism, in American public and social realism during Roosevelt’s New Deal Works

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ G. W. F. Hegel and Thomas Malcolm Knox, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 p. 608.]

Progress Administration. Why could not Lebanon have its own modernist anti-modernist reaction?

Hegel would have said that all such classicizing tendencies have been consigned to the proverbial dustbin of art history because Idea did not enter form of its own free accord – as it was in ancient Greece – but was coerced, pressured, by larger political forces. This, naturally, resulted in distortions, deformations, and visual aberrations. In other words, when classicizing tendencies are enforced in Soviet, and today still in North Korean socialist realist art, when the Idea or the “fundamental nature of the universe” is forced to relate in one fixed way or another to sensuous form, this produces distortions similar to those produced in the earliest stages of the soul, in the Symbolic art-form.

In the cultural life of his country, Georges Corm’s art and writing was an expression and a result of these struggles. He was the painter of the emerging Middle Eastern modern bourgeois subject, a subject he envisioned and cast in those established, idealized forms that had reached their technical heights in a glorious but distant epoch of the moral European empire. In other words, Corm’s work today could be seen as a kind of Lebanese “socialist” or maybe “bourgeois realism,” a certain necessary and unavoidable reaction to international modernism, a modernist-counter-modernism – which we have decided to call: “Lebanese Painterly Humanism.”



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CHRONOLOGY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHRONOLOGY

- 1896 Georges Daoud Corm is born in Beirut, second of the four children of the famous painter Daoud Corm and his wife Virginie Naaman.
- 1919-1921 Studies at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.
- 1921 Gold Medal in painting at *La Foire* - Exhibition in Beirut.
- 1922
- Winner of the competition to design a model for the Lebanese Medal of Merit.
 - Appointed member of the jury choosing the project for the War Memorial Monument of the Levant army.
- 1923-1924 Promotes, then is appointed member of the Executive Committee for establishing the National Museum of Antiquities in Beirut, and financially contributes.
- 1926
- Appointed Secretary of the International Archaeology Symposium held in Beirut.
 - Appointed member of the jury choosing the Lebanese national anthem.
- 1926-1927 Promotes the creation of the Lebanese National Conservatory of Music, and is appointed member of the jury for final examinations. Grants from his own funds three yearly prizes: one for excellence in piano performance and two for excellence in musical composition.
- 1928 Member of the jury appointed by the government to grant drawing prizes at the Craft Works Forum of Beirut.
- 1929-1930 Moves to Egypt after marrying Marie Bekhyt in November 1929.
- 1934 Founds, with some artists and writers, L'Atelier, a group for promoting and disseminating Literature and the Arts in Egypt.
- 1936 Officer of the Academy of France.
- 1937 Medal of Honor, Lebanese Order of Merit
- 1950s Completes several drawings as illustrations for the Arabic novel *Bourj Babel* by well-known Lebanese writer Najeeb Akiki, published by Dar Al Ma'aref, Cairo [no date].
- 1953 Promotes a project to create a Museum of the City of Beirut.

- 1955 Elected member of the British Royal Society of Arts.
- 1956 Returns to Lebanon.
- 1958 Awarded Order of the Cedar.
- 1960 Creates detailed project for the creation of a National School of Fine Arts
- 1971 Dies in Beirut, on the 13th of December.

Exhibitions

- 1935 Galeries Fouad, Alexandria.
- 1936 Exhibition of the “Essayistes” dedicated to Corm’s paintings, Cairo. Two paintings bought by Anvers Museum, Belgium.
- 1937 Salle Chérif, Alexandria, Egypt.
- 1950 Adam Gallery, Cairo, Egypt.
- 1954 L’Atelier, Cairo, Egypt.
- 1958 XIV Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1961 Ambassador Hotel, Bhamdoun, Lebanon.
- 1964 Phoenicia Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1967 Exhibition on the premises of *L’Orient*, largest French-language daily newspaper, Beirut, Lebanon.

Posthumous Retrospectives in Lebanon and France

- 1981 Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1994 Salle des Pas-Perdus, UNESCO, Paris, France.
- 2007 Nicolas Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon.

Primary Writings of Georges D. Corm

- 1916 *Chez les humbles* [poem], published by La Maison d'Art, Beirut.
- 1916-1918 Notebook collections of unpublished poems and personal thoughts.
- 1922-1966 Numerous articles in the Lebanese press concerning the need to develop the arts in Lebanon.
- 1926 Article on the French painter Claude Monet on the occasion of his death, in *L'Orient*, December 9, 1926.
- 1937 *De la peinture, de ses lois fondamentales, des marchands et critiques d'art actuels*, published in *L'Orient* in Lebanon and in Egypt in both the Francophone *Le Rayon d'Egypte* and *La réforme* [January 27-30, 1937].
- 1951 Article on the famous Egyptian painter Mahmoud Saïd on the occasion of one of his exhibitions, *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 30, 1951.
- 1952 *Sur le portrait dans les arts plastiques à travers les âges*, a lecture given in Cairo on April 18, 1952.
- 1960 *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps*, published by Dar An Nahar, Beirut.
- 1960-1970 Several articles in Lebanese newspapers about Lebanese painters and assorted political issues.

All published writings of the painter, including letters to his family during his studies in Paris, have been collected in the book devoted to his archives [see "Books and Writings on Georges Corm," below.] The same book contains all published writings concerning the painter.

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