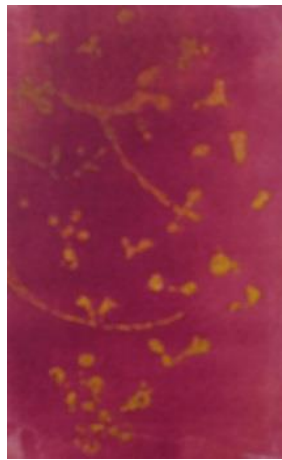


The Ecology of Art

Essay on Visual Art Today



par Anna Jeretic

As we travel from one place to another, we follow the path of time. We move into new landscapes as if we move into new seasons of the year. Just like time that pushes ecosystems to evolve into new ones.

In this essay, I will attempt to dismount the moralism in ecology and bring it to the level of nature itself. The same for art: there are so many things that come into mind when we speak of art. We scramble to find the fundament of it. And only truly find it when we speak of nature. Isn't this where primordial enchantment lies for humans, and who knows, for animals as well? And art, a mere offshoot of this wonder?

An artist's purpose may be remodeled in light of the environment crisis. How many young artists would be happy if they knew the strong role they could play here? When they find out how they can promote the magic of nature through their skills and talents, and thereby inspire others to protect what wilderness is still left for us. And deviate from paths of subversion, perversion and provocation to reach a realm where all is possible once again.

A Second Spring

I'm travelling from Saint Petersburg to Vitebsk, Belarus, writing as I the train chugs along. I would love to commemorate Russia one way or another, after the several times I've travelled here. Don't we owe something to a country when we travel there, beyond our financial contribution, something of another more profound order? I associate trips to Russia with a certain personal struggle. Struggle especially with its language made out of honey. I enjoy seeing Russia as profusion of nature, untrimmed trees and uncut grasses leading to hidden away sumptuous palaces and monasteries, light blue cupolas and stars on them in between the branches, the victory of child-like fairy tale aesthetics.

I'm thinking of the Vitebski Vakzal where I have boarded this train. The train station is colorful landmark, although remote and undiscovered in an unvisited quarter of the city. Isn't only true art hidden? Perhaps true experience of beauty only occurs when it is uncovered by the viewer alone, without mediation. Every detail of the railway is art nouveau, bearing the glories of the last tsar. Vines are sculpted into every colonnade, as if to de-mystify the industrial revolution, and bring it

to the level of earth's finest beauty. Chandeliers, paintings and mosaics, stained glass windows with flowers and foliage, participate in this festivity, and every corner and curve is clean and pleasantly restored. The train whistlers wear long coats like in Anna Karenina's time, and we drink tea in our cabins out of glass cups with gilded tin holders. The boiling water comes from the heat of the train.

I relive my days in Saint Petersburg.

The city's inhabitants are so weary of the endless winter, with absolutely no signs of spring. We're almost the first of May, and in the branches of Saint Petersburg, I am not able to see the slightest sign of even tiny leaves embedded in the branches.

On another train toward the bay of Finland where the 19th century painter Ilya Repin used to live, I see a house made out of carved wood with lattices and different color windows crouching into the ground, resigning itself to nature. This house becomes a picture in me. Then I visit a favorite palace, Oranienbaum, and witness the first emblems of spring's coming, such as crocuses and little spirally maple tree sprouts neon light green against the damp dark earth. I'm not able to enter the Chinese pavilion this time, to see a particular Italian ceiling painting with vivid green and orange that marked me in a previous trip with my family, because everything is under heavy restoration. But from the window I could see a part of this painting I love in spite of all of the reflections, as well as the intricate marquetry on the floors. Another time, with a loved one, I'll come back. We like to revisit favorite places just as we can also go back to favorite thoughts.

Under the grey city skies, for the orthodox Palm Sunday, older women are selling pussy willows outside all the metros and in front of the Alexander Nevsky monastery.

Now from my window in the train I see them growing all over in the marshes, along with the birch and the pine. Unlike those in the city, they are beginning to blossom, some are almost yellow-green. The trees are living in water like mangroves.

And I remember the inside of the monastery. A series of paintings of saints with plants around them date back to less than a hundred years ago. A few of the saints are virtually surrounded with green, and these paintings recall medieval tapestry. A few doves lie in the grasses. It is a rare thing in religious art to find such a profusion of plant life. A tree is hard to come by except to be used as a prop in a composition, and animals, apart from a symbolic cow and a mule and a dove, or someone on a horse killing a dragon, are scarce. For religion is interested in human nature, or the spiritual, and not so much in sprouts coming out of the earth or four-legged creatures.

From his travels in Europe, in particular Amsterdam, Peter the Great brought a passion for science, among other riches, to the city he built, Saint Petersburg. This marked a turning point for Russia, entrenched in medieval ways. The inclusion of nature into art began at this period, a refreshing new source of inspiration. In fact, whenever in the history of art artists return toward nature, there is a revitalizing effect, the beginning of a new movement, such as in the Renaissance, or the American wilderness paintings, Turner or Corot, and then the Impressionists, Art Nouveau...

I look out the window. At thin birch trees clothed with aureoles of late evening sun. There are marshes everywhere, the trees live in the water, and then extended parcels of land without a single tree, wooden houses tumbling down, burnt ones as well, and others at a slant. Hopefully there is no shale gas below. Debris lies here and there, such as dislocated slabs of concrete. As we make it into villages, abandoned factories allow the glories of nature to take over. No one will buy these up for a while, it seems. We stop at a small village, Saltsi, where my young neighbor gets off. She is well-dressed, the owner of all possible electronic devices, and I imagine she leads a double urban and country life. I have time to draw a majestic birch tree, or just part of its white bark. Some of black inscriptions on the white are in the shape of crosses, as well as triangular forms. An unknown language, but possibly more sophisticated than our own.

The telephone poles on the side of the train tracks have been sinking into the ground, and toppling over a little.

And I arrive after midnight in Vitebsk. This is where I take a bus in the afternoon to the Berezinski reserve. But since the town is Chagall's birthplace, I decide to stay a day and look at the town he painted, with people floating in the sky. Are these people flying in the sky because they feel above it all? Two people in the sky express a haven from the world's problems. For human love can come as an answer to everything, a freeing relief.

I am greeted by grey and black Indian crows at the airport in Saint Petersburg, and more of these wintry creatures occupy the streets in Vitebsk as I search for Chagall's house. And then as I contemplate the view from the bridge, which is a scene Chagall painted quite a few times, there are some trees with black pine cones, and also new pink ones. A golden bird comes down to nibble at them. A father and young daughter come by to ask me what type of tree it was. I'm filled with hope. The golden bird, as well as the human a desire to know about this frail example of biological diversity, is an encouraging messenger. And the pink pine cones are sure signs of spring. The light-green baby pine spikes are cutting through the twigs. And this is the second full sunshine I have during my trip.

The Berezinskaya reserve is a more unadulterated version of what I saw from the train since Saint Petersburg. Birch and pine in water. The leaves are popping out of their buds now. The birch trees have a brownish orange hue from their catkins, and light yellow-green illuminates the tips of their delicate branches. Below are white wood anemones, blue fairy flowers, yellow and green flowers.

I look at the map and observe with horror the road I take from Vitebsk to Minsk runs straight through the reserve.

In every place humans bring with them their contradictions. Next to the refuge, a saw mill, with its many noises during the day, compete with the birds. This web of incongruities seems to characterize the human condition, and I'm as much part of it as everyone else of my species. For I'm very happy to use these very planks for my paintings of birds and plants.

As I spend time in this reserve, I come to the realization that I don't give to others enough when I travel. I wait for people to give to me, and this may be an error as a tourist, always desiring the best of services. The Byelorussians are kind, softer it seems than the Russians. Some of the men seem tough. If you take the time to talk to them, however, their baby faces sometimes melt into baby smiles. Apart from the money exchange, perhaps there is another type of exchange I can try for, which has a lot to do with care in general for the world, our habitat.

This forest is as much horizontal as vertical. It is like a graveyard, where the dead is recycled for new growth. A whole forest floor is reborn on top of a tapestry of fallen trees that no one picks up, flattened with time, with miniature gardens of little flowers growing in the moss, alongside taut colorful mushrooms.

I have a new little bell, a "calokol", from a tourist stand in Saint Petersburg. It is supposed to be just a joke; to scare away a bear, if ever I were to find myself face to face with one! This is just a dream. Instead of the bear, I find little mauve flowers in the shape of bells.

In Minsk I visit the art museum. I find paintings resembling scenes from the Berezinskaya reserve. Such as Shishkin's "forest graveyard", or Grabar's birch trees. How many paintings, between the Minsk and the Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg, have I seen of "ottepyel", which means "thaw", or beginning of Spring, the onset of warm weather turning the snow and ice into reflecting puddles of crystal cold water and greenness? At least ten or so.

It is Orthodox Easter in Minsk the day I leave the pastel-colored perhaps over-restored city. I ask the taxi driver about Easter, and it means nothing to him. At breakfast the tables are decorated with an assortment of colored eggs. This doesn't necessarily bring on good cheer: a couple in front of me sit away from each other: they must have had a bitter argument. And outside as we drive by, the people crowd around the church, newly painted in peach.

The old Easter traditions, only half-heartedly respected, no longer bring on the flavor of rebirth. We look elsewhere for this sentiment, essential for continued inspiration and desire.

Aboard the train again, we head westward toward Poland, and more and more foliage and flowers appear as if time were accelerated. In these new places, the fruit trees are in full bloom, their petals are velvet and outstretched. At the Brest train station, a border town of Byelorussia and Poland, dandelions in flower and lush grass grow between the tracks, as well as shapely black and white apple trees show their authority along the quays where people wait for their train.

And into Poland the wheat grass has grown high. Spring has made its way in, and the paroxysmal moment of when spring first appears is now over. I am lucky to witness it a second time after the one before my trip to Russia in my home in France, like a second Easter, a second hope.

This is when I begin writing a story called “The Waterfall”, with the movement of the train into the realm of spring.

Suffering can be a vector toward art. For if no inner struggle takes place to overcome this pain, there may be no motivation for unity, nor would there be a need to go back home inside ourselves for solace. We wouldn’t reach for the light in our darkness. And ultimately, we wouldn’t be able to guide others out of their own sorrows.

As I go through my own distresses, this may be a good time to compose this essay, as a way for myself to arrive at unity and serenity. For this writing is all about art, ecology and its relationship to human love.

This is also a moment of stagnancy for many of us. It sometimes feels difficult to move forward toward change and light.

And personal affliction is analogic to environmental stress. Like our own souls, the earth needs care and protection. Life has a hard time circulating in certain parts because of our waste. Like with shale gas extraction: no life can occur in its stagnant waste water. This can also be the case inside ourselves!

So here again, we grope for healing through gentle care.

And we can let it come together, slowly. By letting nature take care of things softly.

Esthetics: In Search for the Organic

Throughout the history of art, the return to nature has been like a counterpoint. There is something both revolutionary and reactionary about it. This is why many artists who would prefer to remain on the forefront may steer away from it.

Nevertheless, in a world where we are losing more wilderness day by day, it’s not a wonder that certain artists try to regain the wild, or the “organic” in their work. In my writing I try to show that this wild component can be found in ourselves first of all, in the depths of our souls, and we need to find the way to have access to it. I can best describe it as a rough yet true style coming from raw early talent since birth, and sometimes tends naturally toward a more sophisticated version as the years go by, as we master our techniques, without it ever becoming tight, automatic or easy.

In 13th century Italy, Francis of Assisi introduced an esthetical ideal through his love of nature. Through his sensitivity to animals and plants, he inspired artists of his time, such as Giotto, Lorenzetti, to reproduce natural elements without deforming them, without weighing them down

with symbolic value, as this was considered to be primarily the case in medieval art. In this respect, he was a precursor of the Renaissance spirit.

The naturalistic way, developed during the Renaissance, and which reached full development during the 19th century, was conducive to bridging humans to the riches of nature, yet only in a certain way. The more realistic, the better, it seemed at that time. And artists enjoyed displaying their wondrous technique. Constable warned artists who liked to show off, however, how virtuosity can be an enemy to truth. He also professed a refrainment from an idealist approach of nature, and showed beauty in humble scenes. And Corot went further in extolling nature by developing a style that seemed to capture the full essence of trees without loading his images of them with minute reproduction of details.

During the Industrial revolution, machines appeared in paintings, sometimes as extensions of natural landscape. And then the development of art nouveau, although it was stylistic, announced a return toward the warmth of nature, a reaction against the heartlessness of machines.

During the course of the twentieth century the organic style sometimes took on its most extreme form, in that art seemed to renounce form itself, as if nature itself painted the picture or made the sculpture. The idea of “matter” and texture took on importance.

The development of electronics has allowed artists more access to new knowledge and a new visual wealth. The different shapes of nature, such as fractal images, images from outer space, as well as from microscopic particles, have been a true discovery for artists as much as scientists.

“Life” can also be found in the computer, thus reduced to mere concept. Artists play God as it always has been, here by bringing to life little artificial beings through electronics. But we do have to ask ourselves sometimes, what is now our priority? What does this earth most need from us? Refuge from our problems into artificial worlds? Or a crusade of protection? In any case, certain artists can propose to others a more tangible link to the earth.

After crossing off nature as boring or insipid, it would be a revelation to many to discover in her a great source of stimulation, even voluptuousness. To make its many forms appeal to the worldly is an artist’s task. With our diverse artistic depictions of nature, we can arrive at a certain intricacy, as well as something wholly pertinent for our times. In bringing new value to earth’s riches, the idea of luxury and glory can be shifted toward her.

Learning the Language of Nature

An artist needs to learn the language of nature in order to make way toward esthetic quality. In order to serve nature through art, as a spokesperson.

This is a job of a life-time. How do we know when we start understanding the language of nature?

Getting to know the language of nature may have something to do with understanding its order. What is order in nature? Heraclites says that perfect order can be found when throwing a handful of stones on the ground. The irregular spaces between the fallen stones can be viewed as nature's order.

How do we bring nature's order to our art? Not easy to say, perhaps through deliberate heterogeneity. Some feel the need to reproduce every bristle in an animal, or every leaf in a tree, as if each detail needs tender care. Others would think kinship and love of nature can be expressed by keeping technique loose, by not refining it too much. Whatever the case may be for each visual artist, the concept is a sophisticated one. And craftsmanship plays an important role, because anything we do with our hands implies care.

Whatever the artist ends up doing best, discipline can begin with a thorough observation of nature, and drawing from it, meticulously or not. There is no better way to train ourselves for visual art, no matter where we go afterwards, including conceptual art. After acquiring a certain ease in copying from nature, we also need to learn to draw like nature "draws", and step away, draw on our own with this same language, or at least, something close to it.

Leonardo, who said his only guide in his art was nature itself, wrote in his treatise on painting, about how stains on walls, clouds and embers in the fire, irregularly colored stones, can point the way toward invention, for future paintings of mountainous landscapes, fighting figures, wild expressions.

Asian art, it seems, embraces the language of nature as a primary aim. Painting in the East is traditionally not realistic. Su Tung-p'o says, "anyone who talks about paint in terms of likeness deserves to be classed with children". The search for nature's own expression, a hidden, highly refined language, rather than its likeness, is an arduous quest.

I like to think that Asian art was able to reach this maturity more firmly than Western Art thanks to its writing, for ideograms are traditionally so integral to its visual realm. Han Yu comments on beautiful calligraphy "like trees of jade and coral with interlocking branches". And indeed, branches can be viewed as nature's writing, as if a hidden language is there, ready for us to decrypt.

Grass resembles writing as well. All forms of nature take on codes.

The Japanese term "mono no aware" applies to No acting, when an actor is able to inadvertently crystallize a passing moment of truth and captivate his audience. It refers to absolute sensitivity to the ephemeral beauties of nature.

In visual art we have our own "mono no aware". It occurs at a moment of trance-like mindlessness and we find we are suddenly able to paint in nature's language. We are no longer thinking then; we are in a trance.

We would like our art to be magical, and can find the recipe in nature, in the order of its disorder.

Neuroscientists have found a hidden coherence in our thoughts, despite apparent disorder, which unites every one of us. It is in this special place that artists are most able to communicate with others, in the deepest way.

Even with all the technological advances, nature will never lose this inexplicable character; it will never lose this very mystery. And this is the same with art. There will always be something left to say, as we move on in the history of humanity and of the earth.

An artist's grace in all arts is also unfathomable. What makes something beautiful. And this very crystallization when it occurs is beyond the artist's control! I suppose true artists know that, and this can keep them humble: for they know they are only instruments of the underlying energies of nature.

Beauty has actually little to do with the individual. It is just the expression of the one great human soul.

In the Studio

We make a nice line, and see it appeals, so we consciously repeat it, but it hasn't the same flair the second time as the first. It has an "organic" look the first time because it is spontaneous, but the second time it becomes already affected. This slickness can be worse than rigidity. In rigidity, there is always hope for spontaneity to be restored, but no hope for habitual slickness to become artistic again, that is, if an artist becomes glued to a stationary stylistic language. In art, there should always be struggle, struggle with something new. Don't ever listen to art teachers; they're very often wrong about this idea of struggle: they are too busy worrying about getting their students' work to look professional and want to get rid of awkwardness. The reverse though can also be true: some artists affect awkwardness, because it can sometimes be heralded as a sign of artistry.

In the quest for the organic, that is, what does not appear refined by our own hands, the rough, it is as if artists want the viewer to imagine that it comes from nature itself. But there's a fine line between letting the flow of nature take over an artist's world, and sloppiness. If slickness is one danger, sloppiness is the second.

This is when an artist has to make a return to rigor, and return to the shapes and colors of nature. No one can learn it all in a lifetime, but we can retain spontaneity through regular drawing from nature. How the light hits the leaves at this hour of the day, and what shapes it produces. How light can bring an element of abstraction into a figurative painting. Beyond the crutches of realism, light, even invented light, brings the scene to life. For both light and abstraction open us to the unknown, the cosmos.

It is good to know classical drawing, perspective, light and shadow, master these techniques. This mastery should only fuel elasticity and control. It should only allow us to be bold and let go, be carried away by the forces of nature, that is, the unconscious. These skills should not rigidify and create barriers; they are framework for us to allow magic to come in.

As we artists search for this organic, rough yet refined quality, we sometimes hesitate. Hesitate between imitating a model or allowing personal expression and invention to take over. Perhaps the hesitation itself is crucial, because we are just lost enough to let the force of nature take over. Or sometimes the reverse is true: hesitation is also a moment of thought and choice, which can make us lose the thread of our dream. Whatever the case may be, this very hesitation is like a door to the unknown, as it has been analyzed in fantastic literature from the nineteenth century.

In order to show our love for nature, we search for realism, and bring about the sense of presence, and freshness. I see so many artists in this world reaching for this happiness! In spite of all the new forms of expression that contemporary art proposes. A photograph will not always do, because it doesn't show care for all the details. Each technique has its limits, so perhaps all techniques are needed in our mission to protect the quality of our water, air and earthly habitat.

One ought not to use good technique to disguise truth, or worse, to avoid truth. But the contemplation of nature is the only thing that effectively relieves us of this deceit.

If we keep to drawing something only out of love and not merely out of technical prowess, we approach this ideal.

I enjoy painting leaves and branches against the sky. Here I can find both intellectual stimulation and respite, because I alternate between graphics and abstract sources of light. I oscillate between artistic challenge and release.

In a surprising way, abstract art can be closer to nature than figurative art. When I look at the branches of a tree, I realize they have their own language which is abstract. They express abstract ideas in the manner music expresses ideas, both in their own invented language.

We cannot always control changes in color with paintbrushes. This fortuitousness can enrich the painting, and it doesn't necessarily make the work look careless. Manuals for painting say you cannot mix on the canvas, only on the palette as a sure way to control the colors, make them our own. But if the artist were to control everything, the dream world, the mist and the haze, the input from the spirits, may have trouble coming in.

Visual art this way takes on nature's language, that is, it takes into account the unexpected, the mysterious, and the indefinable. We open ourselves to small miracles.

Other art forms, such as print-making, are perhaps more conducive to bringing in the order of nature. In print-making I enjoy the sugar-aquatint technique, because there are so many possibilities for interesting effects, as the procedure unrolls. And so many different factors concur in the process; the weather, how thick the sugar is, how thick the varnish is on top, etc. Unexpected results occur regularly. So much so that when they don't, we are frustrated! My students say "where are the effects?" when the sugar pushes the varnish away too perfectly in the water basin. I say "you can't expect the unexpected each time!"

We let the work flow. If we force it in one direction or another, the result may show it.

For drawing and painting, and any other work with our hands for that matter, is like a performance, a build-up of many years of practice when an artist learns to draw or paint with the strict essentials. How a hand moves depends on its particular history, what has been consciously and unconsciously perceived over the years.

It is wonderful to arrive at a point to not be able to copy in a photographic way any longer. To veer off into a calligraphy of our own, naturally. There is both freedom and humility in this, ease and less showing off. Our value is not determined by virtuosity, but by how much we love doing what we do.

What did Hokusai say? That at 73 he was just beginning to understand the language of nature? He who saw calligraphy on the bark of trees and painted it without concern for photographic likeness.

In the Louvre I look at a Sumerian tablet from 4000 BC : one of the first witnesses of the birth of writing, depicting trees and branches. And as I drive through the Fontainebleau forest, the branches that dip down toward the road speak to me; I see them regularly, and they always have more to say to me. If I take the time to draw these branches, the car parked on the side of the road, I begin to understand what they have to say.

Learning the language of nature is revolutionary. Absolutely essential to celebrate its presence, and promote its protection.

The role of Science in Art

A lifetime is never enough to learn everything about nature, a primary source of inspiration.

The Renaissance artists were among the first interested in the phenomena of nature, such as Leonardo in water twirls. It's possible this thaumasia, this very fascination in life in all its forms, can fuel art today.

Nature brings emotion, maybe even more so in certain cases as it becomes more and more inaccessible to more and more people. At the same time the subject speaks to everyone, young and old, rich and poor, such as music does.

Studying and venerating nature means putting our silly artist's ego aside. Here we are learning from nature, not extracting from her, appropriating her.

Organizations, national and international, bring together artists and scientists together today as a path to help solve environmental problems. The scientists say, we need innovation, we need artists, and they are happy to become part of the art world. And artists are very often glad to be re-nourished by science.

If artists should produce projects so technologically advanced that many cannot follow, reaching out to scientist would be a drawback. Artists may feel like they are exploring new forms,

and feel empowered, but it also may create distance, enact separation. Possibly many do not take that into account enough. It seems some artists are content to satisfy the main players of the art world, and only intellectually, as if emotions are no longer important.

In general we feel we are delving further and further into a subject as we become more and more sophisticated in our approach. But we sometimes forget that this subject must remain accessible to the common viewer, if an artist wants to have an effect on others, and not only a select few.

This is all the more true if we are to address the problem of the environment.

For there's something in nature that is even more interesting than knowledge about it.

Reproductions of nature can be symbols of universal truths. For example, if you look inside a chestnut shell, you see the shape of a heart and veins, a microcosm of the world. The artist can relay these truths.

Or when I copy a twig, I put a magnifying glass on it and discover all the hieroglyphics hidden on it, telling the history of its growth.

But then I copy its shape, add some of the light and shadows, and realize I have to stop before including these interesting details. Here is the border between art and science. Because I reach the essence of the twig before I get to all of these little wonders, and its lightness makes it look alive. If I were to add more it would appear heavy, photographic, rigid.

An artist can play this very role: show the essence and mystery of nature, express to others that the path is infinite, and there is enough work there for everyone. And no reason to be down in life, because there is so much to do!

Philosophy

An artist's philosophy can be the foundation to build an inner world, as well as a visual realm. And this invented world of thought and its visual component, can reach supreme unity. It can become a shield, a protection from the outside world's opposing forces.

Lao Tzu, who lived around the 6th century BC, helped develop the unified thought of Taoism. Asian art is very much inspired by this philosophy. It is the way of intuition, of a search for a harmonious relation with the mysterious forces of nature. Artists also chose to be close to the materials provided by nature.

If the value of a bowl is in the empty space it encloses, then the value of mountains lie in the valleys they enclose. The name for landscape in Chinese is shan-shui, “mountain-water” picture. As if everything we do is to celebrate the great nothingness, the unknown.

In classical Asian paintings, we see mountains, trees, lakes, and human figures. These are comfortably installed in nature, painted with the same language of brushstrokes.

In Taoism, truth is not through logical thought but at a moment of sudden illumination, a realization that there is no separation of human beings and nature.

To show the difference with paintings of the West, we could consider such works as those of Caspar Friedrich, or 19th century American paintings of wilderness. Asher Durand or Thomas Cole for instance. The depiction of nature here is one of awe and drama, a kind of impenetrable quality. And the human figures gain value in their own contrast with it. The separation is crucial here in this art.

Understanding the difference between these two valid human expressions could serve as a basis for art today.

If we were to find that space of perfect unity, where all separation dissolves between humans and nature, we may be fighting not only for environmental protection, but ourselves as well.

Rather than reprimand that separation, we could even absorb our infringement of the earth, reposition ourselves somewhere in between, and allow for ourselves an even deeper unity.

I think often Saint Francis of Assisi’s alternative spirit. His philosophy expresses our possibility to live on so little, we need so little. For him, the answer is in birds in flight. Apart from a few beakfuls of food on the ground, they are free because they need so little to survive.

This way of thinking is actually the solution for certain artists, who do not want to wait for support from the world, in order to continue their path in a non-submissive way.

An Artist’s Profession

Defining the profession

It may be a strange thing to define the profession of an artist. Is this not an “anti-profession”, this search for beauty, this sharing of our talent? And isn’t our work, not really work, but the

greatest of all luxuries? I feel the luckiest of all mortals to be able to perform this profession. It is bizarre, a trick in life, a door to sure happiness. This keeps me pliable and tolerant, grateful toward my family, with a feeling of no right to complain about anything.

It is never said enough: an artist has to be free. Free from any institution, especially any set up by us! This non-submissiveness is absolutely essential, the basis of everything. And it is reflected ever so much in an artist's work.

For we find ourselves reaching out to others, every corner of our way, and may be more influenced by them than we are aware. And then they fuel our creativity.

This is when things go well. We even can find a certain amount of freedom within the constraints others may impose on us, and we in turn impose on ourselves, which we submit to without fully realizing it at times. And this feeling of relative freedom is how we justify not knocking down these secure walls and breaking free with the cry of rebellion. But the sun doesn't always come in fully to ensure our growth, and little by little we head toward poverty of expression.

It is so rare to find an artist who is completely free. We mostly find internal barriers within an artist's work. But once in a while we find it, sometimes in just a portion of an artist's work, one or two moments here and there, and it lifts us up, and gives the artist's course its full worth.

This cannot be confused with discipline and the balance an artist needs to find in his work, when to hold back and when to let go. Many get these two kinds of freedom mixed up.

If we are not free as artists, we cannot have a full sense of the subject we're treating, it is only partial; we cannot arrive at full sincerity. Our subject matter is what we identify ourselves with, like a self-portrait, yet one step further than a self-portrait. This "self-portrait" can be found in another person's face, a car or the branch of a tree. Our artistic rendition of it will then show a maturity, a "*dépassement du moi*", a more edified version of us. In this new form, where we have stepped beyond our own world, we are both naked and clothed. My true artistic life began when I realized I needed to be free from my own world.

An artist cannot wait for help. It is best to learn to do everything ourselves, even if it appears gypsy-like, amateur-like. Our pride should not come from the support we receive, but what we can do by ourselves. Because there are so many artists, and all are competing for support. It has been like this for centuries. For the definition of the profession has always been and always will be a cause for debate. But we will distinguish ourselves from the rest by our own inventiveness, how to sidestep this characteristic dependency.

I think of Gustave Doré's story. He painted saltimbanques because he felt akin to them. He was rejected by society for his very polyvalence, like Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*. The art world needs to categorize.

In our tendency to see something new in something old, to recycle, we are like these wanderers, we are marginal. We like to make exchanges, we like to be generous, thanks to a feeling of agapè, unconditional pervasive love, because it is in the spirit of profusion in our own art, and this only gives us pleasure.

Do young artists need to go to art school? Of course it helps for so many things. But they should not let the weight of the academic experience lay on them.

More important than diplomas and academic structures, artists should know how to live entirely like laypeople, as non-artists, know how to be nourished and molded by life and nature, and only revert to art as an extension of this.

We artists often fear to appear amateur-like. So we head toward society's support systems, and if we do too early on, we become submissive. We sometimes let ourselves be carried by movements in the art world. Without questioning ourselves. We may be evading difficulties inherent to our own art world, rather than confronting them. We are not freeing ourselves deeply this way, we are only pushing off these internal challenges.

We cannot rely on expensive equipment, perfect studios. An artist should be a good camper, be able to work with very little, create magic anywhere, even with a drawing on a rock, like Giotto.

By trying to control one's art, the direction it takes, is a paradox. Setting up barriers and set programs can rigidify the art, just like an excess of pragmatism. This is often when we lose the thread of our internal world.

Instead we have to build up strength from the inside, and when it is his time to move out into the world, we can be twenty as well as eighty years old, it depends on the amplitude of what we need to develop beforehand and timing. And then we are armed with inner strength. And we have the power to tame the outside world.

Yet another submission is falling into a specialization, and thinking wrongly we have to stay there in order to gain a name in the art world. Or once we've gained a place in the world for our name, we have to keep to our station. We stiffen, and only create within those constraints. Then we wonder why we have no more ideas at a certain point.

The world almost always gets caught up in its own games, its own challenges, and often forgets the importance of honesty. And art more than anything needs this openness to communicate to the largest possible range of people.

Once I visited the Edimburgh museum. I arrived with a virgin eye and saw the painting of a skater. The figure stood out in a dark coat against the light blue background. The candor of its composition gave it its strength. Afterwards I saw the skater on postcards, posters: so this was the masterpiece of the museum. I then understood the dignity of simplicity.

Ways to become free:

A contact with animals allow us to be free. Our relationship with them is pure from the movements of the world.

A love story points the way toward this essential freedom. Love cleans out all pettiness. We feel this is all we need; our cup runs over. A rich personal life, as complex as it sometimes feels, fuels an artist's profession.

And then an artist sees the need to search for absolute sincerity and truth. This will in turn affect his personal sphere, and may even be viewed as a "professional deformation", which is quite ironic. This only proves more than anything that the artist profession is an anti-profession. Some of this openness could shock others (how dare she share her intimate life so much! Well, she's detached from her own world), melt certain social boundaries, or make an artist appear unworldly.

I have learned that often the best art is completed in a climate of humility, when we doubt ourselves the most. I think there must be something to be gained from setting a priority to learn rather than show and look for recognition, even after years of experience. Originality is the child of this quest.

We can find lore in anonymity, a certain charm in living apart, a certain happiness in being hidden from the world. An artist may have to sacrifice ambition in order to ensure this purity, to arrive at the most untainted notion possible of what art is all about. But we are not often encouraged to focus on this very poetry, because this is so contrary to the code of the artist profession today.

It then seems absurd to think we are fighting to make a name, as a way to use up our time in life. Perhaps on the contrary the ultimate quest could be to rid oneself of self-importance, as hard as it is for us. For conceit in general only puts people ill at ease. And this is no good for the reception of our work. We want people to love it, not merely admire it. Because mere admiration creates distance.

Sometimes it serves an artist well to lose a competition, have a show that doesn't work. The feeling of failure is actually good for the soul. It brings us closer to the earth. And when we don't win a prize? This could conceivably make us happy for the other. For we're all from the same species, we are one. This way we sacrifice an onerous ego for others, for the love of others.

In people with grace and passion, the concept of competition should simply be beyond them. But they are often the most sensitive to it, paradoxically so, because they feel in their heart of hearts that they have a calling, and feel threatened by others' success, as if they have to catch up and get their own mission going. Others' work can serve as a call to action. Yet a retreat into their own world can also be presented to them as a haven from this battlefield.

We artists don't always need worldly recognition, although it does help, it can give us the strength we need to persevere. However, we ultimately shouldn't need it. We may ask ourselves, "With the wealth inside of me, where is there any room for the corrupt world?" And such artists, not necessarily talentless, who do not reap the riches reputation would give them, are inspired to live frugally in order to continue this poetic path.

Of course an artist has to show his work! This is a moment for sharing visions, for offering a visual experience to the public. But only to collectors and art lovers, only a select cluster of people? This is a true shame, and I think the notion of the artist show should continually be put into question.

That is why I once set up a show in the spring of 2007 in the boulevard Bourbon of Paris along the canal Bastille, a series of paintings of shadows. The paintings were on the ground, it was sunny, the shadows of foliage and branches, iron work and lanterns, were not too long nor too short, and the pigeons came to take a look, as well as a two or three passers-by. The show lasted no longer than 30-45 minutes before I hauled all the elements back into the car.

This is to say that if the number of people is low, this shouldn't discourage the artist. As long as at least one person or one pigeon comes and responds, there is exchange, and the exchange is complete!

I like to arrange the space where I show. This has been the case for the Davioud Pavillion in the Luxembourg gardens in 2011, and most recently, Assisi. The old pinacoteca is in the heart of the town, in the square, opposite the temple of Minerva. The public is interested in Saint Francis' thought, in Giotto's and the Lorenzetti brothers' frescoes. Pilgrims of all kinds flock here, including the birds, who appreciate splashing away in the fountain next to the old museum. The preparation takes place in my own studio and garden, without a set program. During the two months I have to get things together beforehand, I make it a point to wake up in the morning without ideas, just let things come to mind on their own, according to what I am living at that particular moment. For instance, my white cat is killed by a car, and when I go through my grief, he reappears on two of the canvasses (actually he was already on there...). We have a bronze-making workshop next to my studio. And many elements from this experience with fire also appear in the production for Assisi.

There must be a world of defiant artists hidden away from the public eye. This must be a phenomenon of today, where the power of money and discomfort of competition has many of us back away and say to ourselves: is this worth my life, is this worth my soul?

The moment of weakness, the fragility, the retreat from the crowd, are sometimes only signs of great inner strength. Art is a beatitude.

And as the dry wind blows in the summer, everything seems like teetering. I feel the frailty of the earth, its generous resilience as well.

An artist's role today

In light of the diminishing access to patches of nature, we can re-envision the artist's profession. An artist, young or experienced, can find a new purpose.

I think of shamans in groups of people living in the rainforest. They serve as intermediaries between the people and the mystic forces of nature. Can we look at our role like this somewhat today?

What does it mean to act as intermediary ? It means reintroducing nature in people's lives, restoring them a lost link. Some of the roles nature plays in our life, visual art plays as well.

Some of this has been throttled with contemporary art ideologies, but can be reasserted.

Such as bringing beauty. It can also be a healing agent; reinvigoration. An art show can lead others toward a rich visual realm. And as I write, I think of my white cat, killed by a car. He was deaf, and so much keener to the visual world than other cats. He was attentive to every movement and vibration, his ears perking up toward the sky as if to behold the each moment in history. A world without sound is sad and frightening, but in some ways more innocent and distilled.

Art can be an expression of care. We are entering an epoch where we all have to tend to the planet, refrain from extracting from it so violently. This attitude can be applied to our art. We can put care into our work, in the same way we need to care for a garden.

Each bit is a section of a greater whole.

There is a kind of destabilizing obviousness about it, an apparent simplicity, yet also a profusion, a wealth.

This way of life is healing. And healing can be both local and global: we sometimes have to go far to get the cure for certain physical maladies, like in a rainforest on the other side of the earth. The same is true for psychological illnesses. For example, Jung went to the East for cures in psychotherapy. I had to go to Africa to learn what my art had to be like. Or sometimes I find answers in my garden, in my room.

An artist can stay in tune with what an audience deeply needs. Much of this happens in the subconscious, and much of this has to do with talent, vision, and impatience. "There's too much of this, we're saturated with that, so let's make a change": this is also a way to arrive at originality.

For instance, as we happily and unhappily become more and more computerized, it can be an artist's role to remind others of a more physical link to the earth.

It is a good thing to find the delicate balance between being aware of our times, which does not mean necessarily joining the general current, and at the same time forging a personal path.

I go to visit a Rembrandt show. And look into the self-portraits' eyes of his later period. It looks like he's caring for us. In front of his majestic warmth, we are uninhibited; we smile at him and feel our own worth. I see others do as well. The fewer the brushstrokes, the less distance we feel from him. He has imparted his full self to us, communication is complete. We are moved, because from what we can see in his eyes on the canvas, he is also moved.

The Art World

I am about to leave my house to go see various art shows in Paris, the Salon du Dessin and the Art Paris, but a wave of nausea overcomes me. This keeps me home, next to the ground. And I

wander into my studio to just be there. And feel the peace it offers me. I suppose there are limits to being always aware of what is going on. Artists all over the globe are doing lots and lots of things; there is no lack of creativity. There is too much for any one person to behold, as if everything happening today in the human world is as extensive as the past.

Artists may find their inspiration in other artists, but the real breath of art comes from deeper sources, that is, nature, human nature and life!

There seems to be a basic underlying order. A kind of general grace, distributed among all the greater artists capable of producing beauty for us, but seen as well in the anonymous ones, hidden from the public eye, seen at moments of solitude, not shared among everyone, like an elephant in the setting sun, moving its trunk around in happiness and serenity.

Artists sometimes have to bow low to make a living. They are nourished with humility, because only humility is close to nature and the earth. This is the real stuff for an artist. Without this essential return, an artist will only repeat what he has done so far.

Often when the world looks hopeless, art can send out its sprouts.

The limits of contemporary art

According to contemporary art ideology, beauty in art has become a taboo. It's almost as if people are ashamed of it, like exhibitionism. It is a luxury a problem-filled world has no time for. But maybe this is exactly what we need to overcome these very problems!

I'm not sure contemporary visual art is quite able to have an effect on others in the way of environmentalism. Environmental art is eclectic and can be expensive, often paradoxically wasteful. Let us not forget the school of Barbizon. They were all both united visually and philosophically.

It is possible certain conceptual art can cut us from nature, enact dissociation, because the intellect pulls us upward from the earth floor, enters into our art and chills it. But when an idea is clear within a conceptual piece, it can be humorous and make us smile: it can provide a link to an ecological mission without harassing us. Nevertheless, when an art piece is a celebration of manual skill, there is so much more warmth. We feel its sensuality, its closeness to the earth. This work takes on an important role; it builds a bridge toward nature, one for both the artist and the viewers.

Another danger in contemporary art: monoculture. The art world wants to categorize artists, want them to repeat the same things in order for their buyers to recognize them, encourage them to

make series of the same type of work, and not go beyond what they did the previous time. Sometimes the artist feels the need to repeat the same thing in order to explore things fully, but sometimes it's merely about worry, not to be able to sell unless it was the same type of artwork that worked the first time.

I visit a gallery in the Marais district of Paris. I find some very large striking abstract paintings, and some entrancing tapestries. The space is glorious and at the end of a courtyard. I am wondering why these very well made abstract pieces do not move us in the same manner as those of Motherwell, Nicolas de Staël or Joan Mitchell. When an artist is bringing on something new to the world, exploring new territory, the work lends us a feeling of revolt and impatience, sometimes restraint and hesitation in front of its newness. In short, the artwork suggests a kind of inward struggle with the newness of the form. The painting vibrates with life, even 60 years later. Here in this gallery, the artists are all almost too sure of themselves, and I even catch them affecting this hesitation, this struggle.

I'm watching over my show in Nangis, a medium-sized town surrounded by fields. I send out my invitation to many of my contacts. They won't come, but at least they know I'm doing something over there far away in the boondocks. I am living the life of a provincial artist. What happens in my friends' imagination? This would serve me, an offshoot of my own creation.

Apart from these musings, I find myself utterly alone in this show on a Wednesday morning. No one comes in! But then a strong wave of happiness comes over me. The sun flies in, I listen to a violin concerto, I drink a coffee, I think of my love, and this raw emotion of pure joy overcomes by far the disappointment of not being able to share my work with others. This moment of void in communication is anyway only temporary. As if the secret foreshadows its own disclosure.

The arcane is the only the shadow of a great light.

As artists, we are confronted with the idea that everything has already been done. That we've exhausted the possibilities of human civilization. That we've solved all the problems of light and shadow. Since art has to do with form, the evolution of forms, new technologies have come to the rescue. And this has opened up a new world for artists. However, these new expressions have sometimes also created distances with the true sources of art. That is why we continually need to go back to the true sources, and attempt to adhere to people's primary senses, and not only to the connoisseurs. Times change, and so does art: there will always be something new to say.

And with each new thing to say, a new form may or not be needed. We may have to go back to old forms to say what we need to say. It is folly to need to express something and not be able to, because the art form in vogue only constrains us. This is particularly important for young people to know.

Art can show defiance, resistance, reticence. But within these reactions, there lies a thirst for what is obvious and certain. And the path there can be paved with suffering. And when this art does reach clarity, both the artist and viewer will sense this as a relief. An artist can relay in his work this feeling of respite after a bitter struggle.

The Artist's World : the staging of a united mind

The artist's world can be so complete, like a small ecosystem. Because of this self-sufficiency, an artist can allow himself to be marginal.

When do we know when we've arrived at this perfection, this world within a world? When we wake up in the morning and know what to do without thinking any longer. Just feeling.

There are moments of immobility and reflection, and moments of intense movement. There are so many things to do, but only certain times to do them. We always know what to do first. If a gallery is behind us asking for work, this becomes incorporated into our life.

The ups and downs of personal life can be incorporated into an artist's career; there can be a synergy. Any separation with any aspect of life can limit an artist's vision.

What is a perfect show for an artist? The staging of a unified mind. Our world is our haven, and a show is like inviting others into that very haven.

An artist's world is like San Damiano, the church Saint Francis rebuilt, while his family and the Assisi city-dwellers were so opposed. A secret to build up quietly.

Another analogy is a young plant protected in a green house, until it is robust enough to stand the winds of the outside, as well as other forces of nature. This art requires care in order to achieve resilience. For our little world is a fragile ecosystem. It is characterized by its vulnerability to criticism and to abuse by others. We get to the point where we are stronger than the outside pressures, and they only get incorporated into its growth. Our art becomes an act of insubordination, and is characterized by what we are withstanding.

Our insubordination involves paradoxically adhering to nature. We have to be willing to sacrifice reputation. If reputation does come, it won't be forced in the least. And attached to this pure reputation, this pure art, would be the name freedom.

The more we push off success, apart from what is needed to make a living, the more we can say, when we present our work, this is our World.

This is our personal world, and one day it hitches onto the rest of the world. The later the better, says Rilke. An artist is only human and feels good observing the world's systems. But art is like love, it also needs to find its own world, its own language, its own calligraphy. It is a microcosm of the world.

Anyway art is love, and love is art. But it has to be kept pure. Art overly influenced by the art world is like a weather-beaten love, which can no longer serve as a source of inspiration.

What draws us to invent? It's easier to behold our own world than to concentrate on merely responding to the outside world. Everything is beautiful to a full artist, nature, animals, plants, the sun, the clouds, the trees, people as well. We would be painting and drawing frantically if we had to paint and draw everything we loved. So we have to find a lighter task, which is to live and love, and share our inner resources with others rather than cut ourselves off from them. Our inventions are offshoots of our love.

Like the earth's resources, we cannot abuse our inner resources, become and create "too much", ask too much from the world in the way of attention, like a consumer who has done too much shopping. Instead we also need to love and live well.

The Chinese poet, Li Po (699-762), describes his existence on the mountain:

This is another earth, another sky, no likeness to that human world below.

This is not only a life in the mountains, it is the poet's world.

The Dream Studio

In 2012-13 I built a studio based on one I saw in a dream as far back as 2004. And when it was finished, I wrote a short treatise.

A little Treatise on a Dream Studio

The Dream Studio is a place of continuum between art and nature.

The conception of this structure came from a true dream, where a studio appeared in my sleep like a greenhouse in the middle of a wood. Inside a sculpture of a kangaroo leaning against a tiger in red clay was on a round table.

This dream which occurred in 2004, has been a subject of various paintings and drawings, of a diorama, and now has been built.

As an architectural plan, a dream is blurry, imprecise. But because it comes from the depths of imagination, it is actually the best possible model.

How is such a place built? Each day determines the nature of its construction, what material can be found that day, by both chance and design.

For such a building without precise planning is not limited to design. This anti-architecture lets nature participate, with its own voice, and the events that unroll during its execution. A rainy period, for example, will interrupt its builder for a time of reflection and orient the making of it in one direction or another.

This type of architecture is thus a product of natural forces, and breathes the passage of time, as well as the space in which the studio lies.

The studio is called the « Song of the Turtle », which comes from the King James version of the bible. It is located in a land called "Dodone", which is named after the one in Greece, where goddesses interpret the future in the rustling of oak leaves.

This workshop is a continuation of another installation, a glass house, built in 2002. Apart from its use for a show, like the glass house, it also is used to work in. This work is of the intermediary kind. Like shamans in animistic cultures, the role of an artist in such a place is one of an agent between humans and nature.

Its central horizontal beam, a spiral column, expresses its fluidity, its apparent mobility, but also its precariousness. To illustrate the artist's profession and personal life.

At the same time, the Dream Studio is structural. This assemblage of material expresses that after all, nothing is lost, a gift cannot be taken away, nor is the passage of time, for all firmly inscribed in history.

The construction of this Dream Studio turned out to be significant: at the time of its building, I didn't realize that I was also establishing a model for the way I needed to go about in my work. A painting also has no plan; it unfolds with the riches time gives us. Only then can it speak the language of nature.

When I stopped building this workshop, I moved onto something new, and developed the greenhouse idea, already revealed in the dream. I discovered a beautifully shaped greenhouse in an overgrown vegetable garden. I decided to recuperate its iron framework, before the new housing development was to take its place.

It is quite a story to bring this greenhouse over to my wild garden, less than a half a kilometer away. Everyone who looks at the old greenhouse and says no, I won't help you even if you pay me. But I do pay someone to cut the metal, which takes two hours, a robust Romanian, who was initially a woodcutter in his country. "We cut down the trees, so the little ones can grow!" I think about that one. And he has more to say. « We had to cross the forest by foot to get to school, and some kids were attacked by wolves. Now they have buses. We have to kill the bears that come in our yard to scrounge for food. Even the little ones: we kill them all! » This is a different type of life.

When the greenhouse was cut up into 7 pieces, I had to think about moving the seven bulky pieces to my place. The bulldozer's driver was impatient and said I had only until the next morning to get the pieces out of the way. He tried to move one of them into a corner with his great machine, and it got bent out of shape as it was dislocated. There may have been softer ways to move the

pieces out of their work area, like picking them up and moving them by foot with the help of another person, but this was not in the spirit of a true demolisher.

Right when I begin to despair, a few gypsies, Dan, Cosmina and Tshiprié come by to inspect the pieces of metal. I tell them it is mine, and with their hands out in prayer, they ask for some of it. I give them most of it but not the roof, and the shelves. I negotiate that they take all of that, and as an exchange help me transport it to my place.

And they are not afraid, like all the others. With good will they move the parts swiftly into a beat-up truck and maneuver them into my thorny garden.

I give them some money, some coffee, and some cigarettes. They feel I have come directly from the sky. This is the same way I feel about them! This mutual gratitude is in itself worth all the effort.

I go back with them to help them pick up more metal. And I observe the bulldozer driver. It looks like he is chasing the gypsies purposely, by pursuing them with the machine. And they make a stone wall tumble down right next to their truck!

Here I see the difficult reality of the nomads. Cosmina talks to me lovingly about her caravan. This greenhouse is my own caravan. I'll have to put wheels on it somehow!

Wheels or no wheels on my own glass and metal caravan, I see the connection between the gypsies and my own plight. Here we are two marginal types of people, and it seems as if we have a common language, so we make exchanges easily. The greenhouse takes on a symbol. As a sanctuary of nature, it would have been bent into pieces if had not saved it. And saving it means promoting new a philosophy that would work to save us in the years to come: repair, protect, restore, let live; instead of always thinking "destroy for something new" which is evidently the easy way out.

By staying close to the earth, a natural recycling process comes about with material. The same thing can come about in our mind. By staying close to the earth, our thoughts are continually renewed. We have no danger in losing our inspiration.

With every turn in history, the beauty of nature is presented to us as an antidote for suffering. The green in the leaves can calm it. Exposure to chlorophyll has the same effect as certain anti-depressants. And then during our walk, we distance ourselves from our personal dilemmas, so that we can even transform our melancholy into poetry. How is it possible we be unhappy with the beauty out there? The sun streaming through the branches in the morning, its rays hitting the morning dew, making it look like a scene from underwater, the stark daffodils outlined by brilliant yellow.

Exposure to nature helps me calm fastidious thoughts. And lead me into my work, and the world I've created for myself. An ecosystem of its own, subject perhaps to outside aggression, but for now, protected in a kind of greenhouse of thought, because I carry it within me, for no one can attack inner resources. What I've created, my artwork, is only a by-product.

Some artists show grimness and grotesqueness in their work as a kind of cathartic wash out. Through my work, I attempt to free myself and others from suffering and despair, much of which is

created by our own individualistic system. We need to acquire so much for ourselves, if not, we feel depleted, as if we were only living halfway. And we tend to put our interests first as a way to fill this void, sometimes aggressively so, without realizing what we're doing.

I wish to lift myself from this, and express this emancipation through the artistic process, just like nature sometimes can and sometimes can't. Art can give us a feeling of control over the ups and downs in life, that is, until we are confronted with new difficulties. Like love, it is meant to clean out the toxins of life.

But like the wind, the sun, the earth, the water and the fire in Saint Francis' famous poem, the Canticle of the creatures, I like to encourage in my own work a return to nature as a way to retain lightness.

Teaching

A few hours of teaching are when an artist leaves a world and enters a student's. It can also be incorporated into that very artist's world, as an extension of it. Teaching can allow a certain amount of sharing of our personal lives. The generosity we show to others will be the same generosity we show in our work.

And in teaching I feel the same way as my artwork. I sometimes think it is yet another trick in life, another high privilege, a second door to happiness, because I enjoy it as much as I enjoy my own artwork.

My high school art teacher said you can't both fully make art and teach, because you enter your students work too much to develop your own.

Instead, at this time of hopeful evolution from an egocentric to an empathetic philosophy, we can say more than ever that teaching only makes us aware of our symbiosis with other members of humankind. My art is my students' and theirs is mine.

An art teacher must help a student bring the best out of him. Not only in the way of skills, but in the way of self-realization. So many studios where I see the students emulating the teacher without going through this precious search! It involves arriving at a certain natural closeness with my students. I share with them my innermost thoughts about art and life, in an unforced way. Elliptic thought needs to take form. I may be mulling over such thoughts during the week, they become more and more precise, and come out spontaneously in class. This only brings out their own intimacy, their own things to say, which in turn emerges in their work and becomes personal as well, theirs, not mine.

There are two sources of knowledge, one that you capture with your intellect, the other with your subconscious. For an artist, the latter knowledge is priceless. And for a teacher of art, this type of transmission is subtle and powerful.

The ecologist's mission

And this subconscious transmission of desire is also essential for an environmental mission.

I have expressed in other essays the idea of urgency. And art takes so long! And does it help anyway? Could this all be delusion?

Whatever we do has an effect. And the tide is inevitably turning toward environmental and human care.

It seems the destruction of the environment has always been an issue. Goldoni, an Italian playwright of the 18th century had already complained about how people waste the beauties of nature, at a time when things weren't nowhere near as developed as today. But now this concern is on the forefront, in spite of some discussions still lingering for economic priorities and retirement plans, etc. ; it is exceptional. And embracing the topic deeply ought to engender a very original artistic voice.

Institutions bringing art and the environment together help a lot, yet should not keep to pragmatism. We need fantasy as well. The greatest art works in hidden ways. What the public sees can awaken its will to act.

Conclusion

The word ecology can be used in a kind of lay-out of ideas. It is revitalizing to see analogies everywhere, as if we were opening up a treasure box. A new horizon is laid before us, and infinite possibilities are now given to young people, and I'm seeing they are embracing them. These ideas then point to unity, as we see them reappear in all forms of life.

The system we have been living with and accepting is such that an artist needs to make a name, and be avid about it, specialize as much as possible, to be the best. But if we decide not to make these our priorities, and not necessarily specialize, another far richer world can open up to us in the studio.

When there is synergy in the arts, analogic thinking in all aspects of life and art, its offshoot, we arrive at a healthy global vision. The differences are still there, but a common pattern can be perceived, and our ego relaxes into a comfortable state. This new way of thinking must be frightening for those who have believed otherwise for so many years. The individual may lose its source of nourishment for ego enhancement because of this alternative way of thinking, but will paradoxically discover a new inexhaustible nourishment for the soul.

These thoughts only carry validity within a form. Ecology, the study of humans in relationship to their physical environment, is associated with complaint. We do disservice to nature's

cause by moralizing, and I find myself doing my own share, other artists as well. It is much stronger to carry the message within a compact artistic shape, just like the No actor who catches his audience when it least expects it. For concepts by themselves get repeated by different people, and lose their strength.

This essay begins as a description of a trip between Russia and Poland, and finds completion in Assisi. It's the story of the passage from a solitary life to a shared life.

It hopes to encourage others to dismantle certain constraints and make them others aware of an often absurd submission to certain world's systems. In order to arrive at love and truth.

This is the true order of nature, upon which we can found everything.

And care of our planet may have more to do about the care of our inner world than what we think.

As I prepare for Assisi, I let my wild garden around my house and studio, as well as the forest, speak to me softly. Softly covering scars from life's hardships, softly giving me the energy to create, transforming that inner energy into matter, something visible. For love of nature and for another is what helps an artist make the bridge toward the imaginary world.

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