

Arturo Schwarz-Meditation and imagination.

Many art lovers consider works on paper-whether watercolors, drawings, or original etchings-of secondary importance, preferring the medium of oil on canvas. When looking at a work of art, the last consideration that should come to mind is the technique adopted by the artist. If an artist chooses, among all other available media, a certain means to express himself, it is because he feels that it is only through this particular medium that he will be able to bring most faithfully to light his inner feelings. It should therefore not be necessary to remind that a Hendrik Goltzius etching, a Paul Klee watercolor, or a Gerard Titus Carmel drawing can have as great an impact as any oil canvas. What Andre Breton remarked -when discussing the different exegetic systems employed to interpret a work of art-could just as well be said for the medium used by the artist, namely that all media should “be considered as nothing but tools on the carpenter’s work bench”, adding “one ought to be permitted to have recourse to that instrument that seems the most adequate in each circumstance”(Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto).

The prejudice against works on paper is so deeply rooted that Eisenstein felt the obligation to make it clear-in the catalog for his 1994 exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem-that his “works [diluted acrylic on paper]do not belong to the category of preparatory drawings or sketches for a painting; rather each drawing constitutes a creation in its own right, a direct, untrammled statement” . These last words are most important since they point to the basic difference between a watercolor and an oil painting. While the latter can be altered endlessly, in a watercolor the trace left by the brushstroke cannot be modified in any way; it thus becomes the seismographic faithful record of the artist’s unconscious feelings.

The deeply moving works selected by Eisenstein for this exhibition are, again,diluted acrylics on paper or canvas, each of which is an echo of the artist’s meditation on nature. By choosing nature as his inspirational subject matter;by expressing himself through watercolor; and by adopting the alchemist’s saying *meditatio et imaginatio* as his guideline, Eisenstein demonstrates a superb independence of thought in the choice of his model, his medium and his dictum.

Freedom,as far as the model is concerned, because nature has lost all its appeal, for modern art in particular, and modern man in general. Indeed, we have reached the point that has led us to poison the air we breathe, the water we drink, as well as to destroy our planet’s flora and fauna. Eisenstein demonstrates the same liberty of thought regarding the medium, since watercolor has become an unconventional technique almost completely abandoned by contemporary artists. And just as unusual is his spiritual guideline, because meditation is an effort that no longer belongs to the spirit of our age. Even eating, nowadays, is governed by the habit of fast-food. Eisenstein is a poet who feels-like another poet of the last century-that it is “A poor life this/If full of care/We have no time/To stand and stare” (William Henry Davies).

I mentioned above that each Eisenstein drawing is an echo of the artist's meditation on nature. Indeed, Eisenstein writes that every work of his is, "based on a close observation of nature, followed by a rigorous withdrawal from the observed object for the purpose of achieving a drawing based on the *memory* of nature—a "sight-memory" (op.cit. but my *italics*). It might be of interest to note that memory (*zachor*, in Hebrew) is a capital virtue for the Jewish people, a virtue to which they are indebted for being the only people of classical antiquity to have survived to this date. Just think that these uncommon individuals still mourn—every Summer, at Tisha beav—the destruction of the first and the second Temple which took place about 2000 years ago. Viewed in this light, Eisenstein's *memory* of nature takes a dramatic committed dimension which accounts for the appeal that his work exercises on the onlooker.

In the above-mentioned introduction, Eisenstein also clarified that "the paper surface is not only the background of the image, but a 'location'—its margins marking the boundaries of the 'sight-memory' ". I am tempted to replace the word "location" by its Hebrew equivalent, *makom*, because the latter term has an esoteric semantic dimension, designating, earthly, heavenly or imaginary locations. This would justify my viewing Eisenstein's drawing sheet as a mirror through which the on-looker must pass, like Alice, in order to discover the wonderland that is hidden in the endless depth of the drawing.

Eisenstein's work has this profundity because he shares Paul Klee's same ambition, "to make visible the invisible", in other words, to capture the invisible and mysterious aura emanated by the model. Greek philosophy would call Eisenstein's work a *phanein*, namely, an event that appears and represents that which is not. To capture the invisible aura of the model necessitates appropriating it, becoming one with it, in other words, establishing a loving communion with it, in harmony with Sanskrit aesthetics which demand that the artist identifies with his model, nay, *becomes* his model, if he wishes to understand and reveal its inner essence. This fusion implies the discovery of the holistic character of all things. The condition of unity between artist and model mirrors the relationship between macrocosm (in our case, nature) and microcosm (the artist).

For Taoist thinking, this identification of artist and model is an ontological experience thanks to which objective and subjective reality are fused in a single entity. The artist will then no longer be concerned with the physical aspect of his model, rather his purpose will be to listen to what the Taoists call "the spiritual resonance of the model". Wang Wai, a painter of the 5th Century, stated that if an artist is not capable of perceiving the soul of his model, the work will be inevitably passive. Thus the work of Chang Tsao was highly esteemed "because when he painted he left mere ability or measurement behind him, his thought vanishing in the night of creativity. What he created was not the result of the knowledge of the eye but of the Spiritual court" (Chung-yuan, Chang, *Creativity and Taoism*...New York; Harper & Row, 1970, p.207)

I believe that Eisenstein's hand is not led by his eye but by his ear which has learned to listen to "the spiritual resonance of the model". He belongs to this rare category of visionary artists for whom meditation leads to imagination, with the latter, inevitably plunging the artist in the bottomless dark light of creativity.

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