

The Acropolis

Philosophy for today



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Spring Edition Philosophy - Art - Reviews - Mythology and more





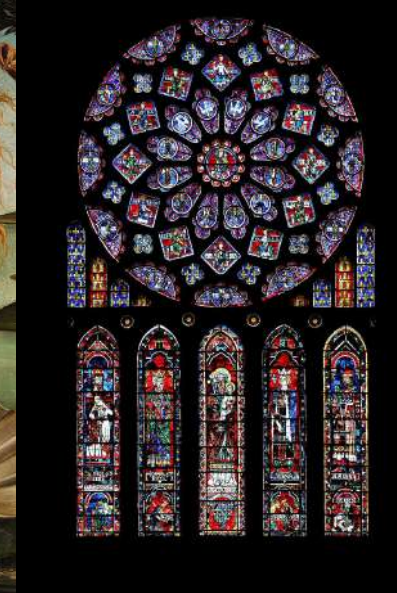
What is The Acropolis?

In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people. The founder of New Acropolis International, Professor George Livraga, chose this name to capture the key objective of philosophy; that we as individuals build a new high city within, that we discover the heights of our own potential, so that we may externally build a new high city, a new and better world, together. The Acropolis magazine is motivated by this objective and aims to share inspiring content, combining all the major endeavours of philosophy, art, science, education and culture.

About Us

New Acropolis is an international organisation working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society.

For further details please visit: www.acropolis.ie



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Editorial:

The Virtue of Beauty

There is much ugliness in the world today. It is a world, in fact, which seems to celebrate it. Harshness, loudness, aggression. All the abrasive forms of psychological violence which characterise the modern age suggest an almost oppressive state of ugliness, pushed on us from all directions. Anxiety, isolation, hostility, and fear all play out as human realities in the face of such a distorted landscape. Much of this is reflected in our culture through music, cinema and other art, often representing the lowest in human expressions and the basest of human desires.

As the various articles in this edition of *The Acropolis* will explore, the classical approach to art was an aspiration for that which is essential, what can elevate the soul and connect the human being with what is universal, in them and in nature. It served as a path to higher sentiments, greater understanding and was always a channel of expressing the archetype of Beauty.

The search for Beauty through Art as a means of bringing harmony to matter was well understood in antiquity. But beyond material expression, the philosopher has always understood that Beauty, as an archetype, is a timeless virtue which can be expressed through moral behaviour as a means of transforming oneself. In the Art of Living, we are both sculptor and sculpture, working with the same dedication and attention to detail as any great master craftsman, to slowly translate the ideal image of ourselves into the concrete reflection of our daily selves. In other words, the daily work of perfecting ourselves as ethical individuals.

To understand this concept of Beauty as a Virtue, it is important to remember that virtue is not a saintly achievement of perfection. Virtue, from the Latin root *vir*, means strength. We can say from experience that true Beauty is a tremendous source of inner strength. The endless beauty of nature, captured in a work of art or a rousing piece of music that stirs us from the depths of our being, or the beauty of inspiring words, helping us to silence the noise of a confused mind - all these elements can give us the strength to Be.

Other virtues such as courage, generosity, benevolence and patience can perhaps be more easily understood in daily life but it is also fundamental to understand that we can express the virtue of Beauty in our behaviour. A simple act of kindness can be a reflection of Beauty, an encouraging word to elevate another, a supporting hand in a time of need to alleviate a weight of suffering. Beauty in behaviour, just as in matter, comes through proportion, balance and harmony. According to Plato, discordant music wasn't beautiful, even though it may be popular and perhaps today we still confuse what is commonly accepted with what is beautiful.

Yet we can see how disharmonious discourse, in waves of slander, gossip and vindictive pettiness produces horrible ugliness in people, regardless of how popular it may be. Modern moral conventions do not seem to tilt towards Beauty. This may challenge our conception of beauty being in the eye of the beholder, often wheeled out as a justification for each individual's right to their opinion. Of course there are subjective elements of what one may consider pleasing but it seems, as advised by the great philosophers of history, there is a timeless measure of Beauty which we can follow in order to reflect that harmonious, universal model of what is beautiful, good and just.

Theosophist and philosopher N. Sri Ram wrote an article on *The Beauty of Virtue*, illustrating how all virtues require an action. The latent potential of the human being, which he calls the spirit, can be allowed to flow when we channel it through virtue. This is the inner Beauty which the human being can express, to give beauty to their actions and to the external world, a world in need of the artistic hand of kindness and harmony.

When the harmony that is innate and latent in the unconditioned or spiritual nature is manifested in a form of beauty, we may call it the beauty of the soul, and it is more beautiful than any exoteric beauty. [...] All the beauty that we see around us, in things external to us, are but fragments reflecting the beauty that is within. That inner beauty, as it comes into manifestation, translates itself into life and action, ever-changing but always presenting an aspect of that harmony which is its basis.

When we give, and give without calculation or expectation; when we wait, and wait patiently with trust and not anxiety; when we act, and act with courage and determination, rather than out of fear and insecurity - in short, when we practise virtue in our day to day lives, we bring a depth of Beauty to what we do and help shine a ray of hope in the darkness for ourselves and for others.

Sri Ram also reminds us: *Virtue is not like knowledge of the ordinary sort, which can be conveyed by words. It is in the same class as taste, as a feeling for beauty, and other innate graces that cannot be taught. They have to be learned by other means.*

He explains that love is the means, the connection we forge is by way of the heart. Virtue is not intellectual, it needs to be experienced, to be lived. Beauty is not intellectual and its expressions in the world should not be either. Let us become Artists of the Heart, that we may craft a more beautiful world.

Aidan Murphy
Director, New Acropolis Cork

A Spring in the step

Over the course of 2023, The Acropolis Magazine will publish our four quarterly editions delving into the four essential aspects of culture as understood in antiquity; Art, Politics, Science and Religion.

For Spring, we celebrate the ideal of Beauty, a new cycle filled with Youth and possibility. What better way than exploring the power of Art to bring that sense of timeless beauty to the human being.

We hope you enjoy!

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The National Gallery of Ireland (wikimedia)

National treasures

- The beauty of the National Gallery of Ireland

What is beauty? Philosophers have debated aspects of this question for millenia. For example, is beauty objective or subjective; is it inherent in an object being viewed, or is it subjective, “in the eye of the beholder”? Or is it both?

The Greek philosopher Plato had a unique view of beauty and its role in the world. According to Plato, beauty is not just a matter of personal taste or preference, but is instead a universal and objective reality that exists independently of individual opinions. He believed that the idea of beauty is an archetype or form that is separate from the physical world of appearances, and that all instances of beauty in the physical world are merely imperfect reflections of this ideal form. In his theory of Forms, Plato argued that the ideal Forms, including the Form of Beauty, exist in a non-physical realm that is separate from the physical world. He believed that these Forms are the only true realities, and that all objects in the physical world are merely copies or shadows of these ideal Forms.

Plato's view of beauty was also closely tied to his philosophical views on morality and ethics. He

believed that the pursuit of beauty and goodness were interconnected, and that the appreciation of beauty could lead to a deeper understanding of truth and the good. In this sense, beauty was seen as a path to the attainment of knowledge and wisdom. Plato's view of the archetype of beauty was a unique and influential contribution to the Western philosophical tradition, and it continues to shape the way that people think about beauty and its relationship to reality.

The contemplation of beauty causes the soul to grow wings. - Plato

Beauty can be appreciated in many forms: in the natural world, in architecture, in music, dance, in literature, and in the many expressions of art. Fine arts such as painting and sculpture exemplify how works of beauty can be created by skilled practitioners. Artists create works of art for many reasons: to create a sense of aesthetic beauty; to communicate political, philosophical or spiritual ideas; to challenge orthodoxy; to provide pleasure; or to elicit a strong emotional reaction in the viewer.



Extensive refurbishment of the Historic Wings, the Dargan and Milltown Galleries, originally constructed in 1865 and 1903 respectively was carried out and opened to the public in 2017

What better way to appreciate fine art paintings and sculpture than a visit to an art gallery?

Art galleries play an important role by fostering art appreciation among audiences, as well as by showcasing and promoting the works of artists. The value of art galleries can be seen in several ways:

Education and appreciation: Art galleries can serve as a space for education and learning about art, both for the general public and for art students and professionals. They can help to foster an appreciation of art and its cultural significance.

Conserving cultural heritage: Art galleries also serve as important cultural institutions, preserving works of art for future generations. They can help to ensure that the cultural heritage of a society is passed onto future generations, and that works of art are protected from damage and loss.

Providing a cultural oasis: Galleries provide a relaxing environment to spend time away from the stresses of daily life. Viewing art is a contemplative experience that encourages people to slow down, catch their breath, and be fully present. While viewing images of artwork on our phones or laptops can be rewarding, it cannot match the experience of being present in the same space as the work.

Promoting artists and their work: Commercial art galleries provide a platform for artists to showcase their work and reach a wider audience. This can help to establish their reputation and increase the value of their work.

Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. - Pablo Picasso

The National Gallery of Ireland (NGI) is a museum located in Dublin that is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and display of art. The museum was founded in 1854 and has since become one of the

leading art institutions in Ireland, with a collection that includes over 14,000 works of art from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. The NGI is particularly well-known for its collections of Irish and European painting, including works by artists such as Caravaggio, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Monet, and Yeats. The museum also holds a number of important collections of Irish decorative arts, including ceramics, silver, and furniture, as well as an extensive collection of drawings and prints. In addition to its exhibitions, the NGI also offers a variety of educational programs, including guided tours, lectures, and workshops, making it an important centre for learning and cultural engagement. The museum is a popular destination for visitors to Dublin, attracting over 500,000 people each year. Entry to the gallery is free of charge.

Overall, art galleries play a vital role in the art world, fostering the appreciation of the beauty of art, conserving cultural heritage, and providing support and recognition for artists. They are valuable institutions that play an important role in shaping our cultural landscape. Whether you are an art enthusiast or simply looking for a fascinating day out in Dublin, the National Gallery of Ireland is well worth a visit. With its extensive collections, engaging exhibitions, and educational programs, it is a valuable cultural institution that provides visitors with a rich and immersive experience of art and culture.

Let's take a look at three iconic artworks housed in the NGI.





The Taking of Christ by Caravaggio (1571 - 1610)

A painting called 'The Taking of Christ' by Caravaggio is arguably the NGI's most popular exhibit. Painted in 1602, the work was thought to have been a copy by another painter. It hung for many years in a house on Leeson Street, Dublin, owned by a Catholic Jesuit group. Only when the painting was sent for cleaning was it discovered to be an original work by Caravaggio himself. The painting depicts a dramatic biblical scene: the arrest of Jesus by soldiers after his betrayal by Judas. The work represents some of the classic motifs of Caravaggio - a close in view of a dramatic, emotional scene, with expressive figures, rendered in strong light-and-dark contrast. Lit by moonlight, the reflections of light on the soldiers' armour is particularly striking.



Hellelil and Hildebrand, the Meeting on the Turret Stairs by Frederic William Burton (1816 - 1900)

Irish artist Burton's inspiration for the painting came from a mediaeval Danish ballad (a sung poem), which tells the story of a forbidden romantic relationship between an aristocratic woman named Hellelil, and her bodyguard, a knight named Hildebrand. Her disapproving father discovered the relationship and ordered Hellelil's seven brothers to kill Hildebrand. The scene on the stairs depicts the couple's final moments together, before he goes out to engage in battle, leading to his inevitable death. Hellelil, broken-hearted, soon also dies.

The painting, a watercolour, is rendered in meticulous detail. Eschewing the temptation to depict the violence of a battle scene, Burton instead created a scene that highlights the higher values of love, courage, loyalty, chivalry, honour. The painting also suggests a stoic acceptance of the consequences of their love, including family disapproval and their ultimate deaths. As a result, the scene is charged with emotion.



Lady Writing a Letter, with her Maid by Johannes Vermeer (1632 - 1675)

Vermeer was a Dutch painter of the 17th century Baroque period. He specialised in interior scenes of domestic life in the houses of the middle-class. In this painting, the scene depicts an elegant lady, seated, writing a letter. Her maid stands behind her, gazing out the window, perhaps waiting for a delivery boy to convey the message. Maybe it is an intimate letter, to be conveyed to her lover? The work illustrates Vermeer's mastery of strong contrast in light and shadow, as well as the use of the primary colours: red, yellow and blue - both typical traits of the Baroque style. Scenes lit by natural light coming through a window were also a characteristic motif of Vermeer's work.

Tim Leahy

Art of Stone

- The Gothic Cathedral

“Art mirrors the spirit of the age. Of all the arts, it is architecture that returns the truest image.”

*John Anthony West,
The Traveller’s Key to Ancient Egypt*

“Architecture has always had something significant to say about the time and place in which it originated.”

Hans Jantzen, High Gothic

Looking through the expanse of time, the architecture of different civilisations has left us in awe and admiration. People make pilgrimages to the pyramids of ancient Egypt, the Indian temples, the mounds in Newgrange, Ireland and others to experience these works of art. There is something beyond the structure of these sites that captivates us, they are a mystery but at the same time we recognise something in them. They are one of the paradoxes of life.

The Gothic cathedrals of mediaeval Europe are unique but they share some of the characteristics of what is called sacred architecture. Mircea Eliade described the sacred as the movement to what is essential, and sacred architecture can be defined as a building designed to create an inner movement to experience what is essential. Another way to describe this is that the building allows one to be in tune with the music of life, in harmony with the laws of life and this article hopes to shed a glimmer of light on these magical structures.

The Gothic cathedrals did not emerge out of a vacuum. It took existing building innovations such as flying buttresses, arched vaults and pointed arches and used them to create a new form called Gothic. The earlier Romanesque style of architecture was bulky and confined but the new Gothic style introduced a vertical movement, an upward motion that gave an experience of elevation. It was also the intentional use of light that truly set Gothic architecture apart from the heavier, darker Romanesque predecessor.

The Gothic cathedrals were created by a Christian culture but there was also something non-Christian about these buildings. Other Western traditions informed these structures such as the Platonic tradition and the sites of some Gothic cathedrals were built on pre-Christian sites. Chartres cathedral had a legend that the site was a Druidic shrine and a spring sacred to a virgin goddess. According to historians, Notre Dame of Paris was built on the ruins of an earlier religious site, a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter. The pointed arches, which the Gothic cathedrals are famous for, originated in Islamic culture. It is thought that this knowledge was taken back from the East during the Crusades. Gordon Strachan in his book *Chartres Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space* dedicates a chapter of his book to this interesting finding.

Gothic cathedrals and churches were built in mediaeval Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth century. They were the tallest buildings of their time, some reaching one hundred and sixty one metres in height. The Gothic style first appeared in France and spread out to other

countries in Europe. The Abbey of Saint Denis near Paris was the first abbey in Gothic style, with the rebuilding of the ‘ambulatory’ (aisleway) and the west facade of the Abbey church by Abbot Suger. The first Gothic cathedral in France was Sens cathedral which began in 1135 and consecrated in 1164. The style quickly appeared in England, where it was called simply the French style. In Ireland, Christ Church Cathedral is a mediaeval example of both Romanesque and early Gothic architecture combined. It is Romanesque by the rounded arches and windows, thick stone walls and circular shapes and Gothic by pointed arches, flying buttresses, pointed turrets and a rose window.

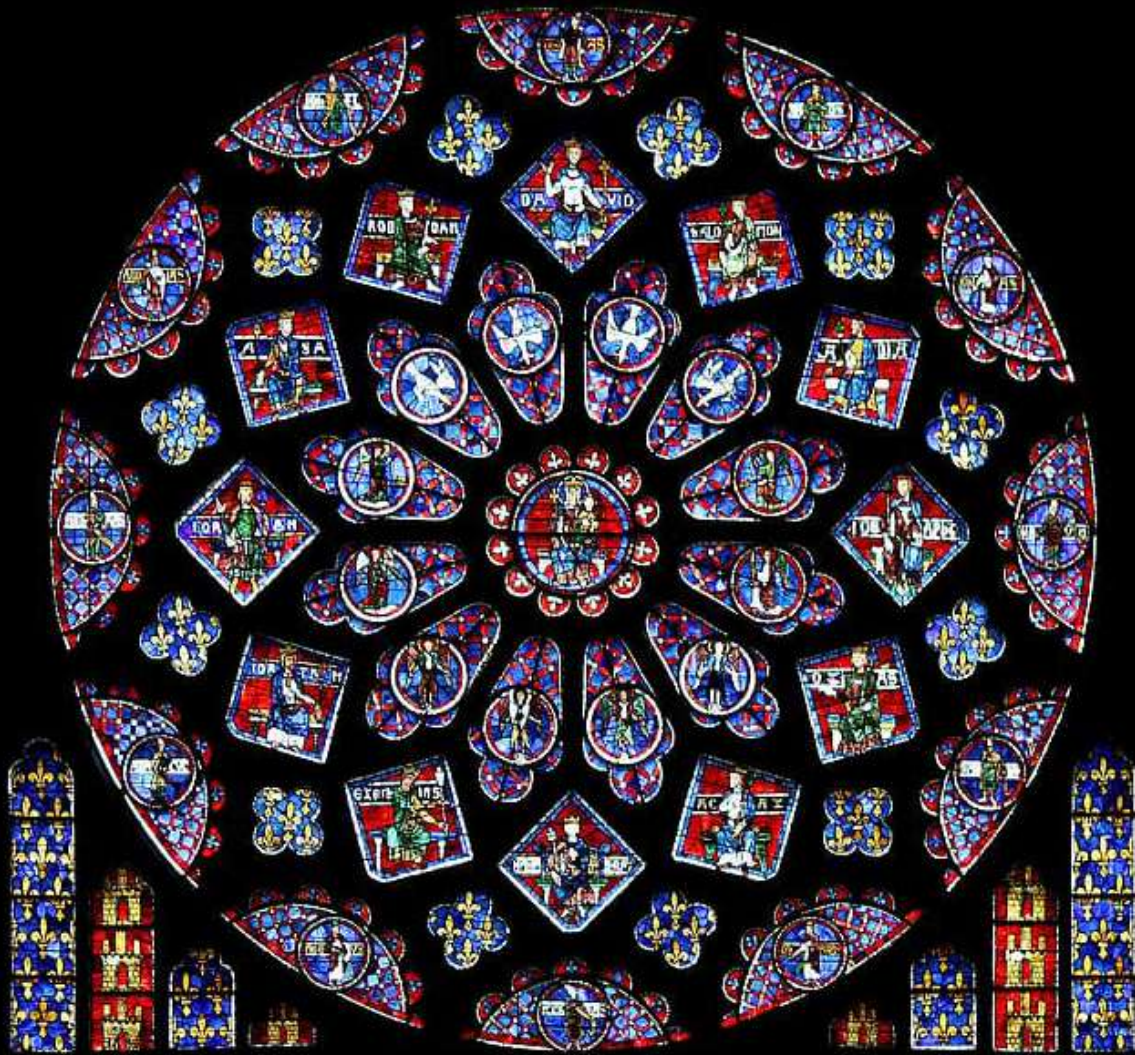


Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth (Wikimedia)

Where did the term Gothic come from? The Italian artist Georgio Vasari (1511-1574) debased the Gothic style when comparing it to the classical forms of Renaissance art of his own era. He called it Gothic, to refer to the Goths who had invaded Rome a thousand years previously and were considered at that time as barbaric.

When entering many Gothic cathedrals one is struck by a labyrinth that is inlaid in the floor paving, one where visitors of the cathedral can follow its path to its centre. The labyrinth is a very old symbol that predates Christianity. Why would Gothic cathedrals contain such a symbol at the entrance of the building? Surely it has a significance above the aesthetic. The significance of the labyrinth is associated with the ancient Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, where the hero Theseus faces the Minotaur, part man and part beast, at the centre of the labyrinth and defeats it. This is a story and symbol of the inner journey of the human being to know, understand and master oneself. The architects of the cathedrals used this symbol to represent the journey of the human being and in a Christian context, it is a journey to know God.

The builders of the Gothic cathedrals carefully chose their measurements and proportions, they had



North transept rose window, c. 1235- Chartes Cathedral, (Wikimedia)



Allegory of Alchemy - Notre Dame (Wikimedia)

significance and were not chosen at random. Certain proportions were used that correspond to what is called “sacred geometry”. Sacred geometry proposes that certain geometric proportions and geometric figures exist in nature and the human soul is drawn to them as they reflect a higher order and beauty.

One example is the Fibonacci sequence which shows up in nature. It can be found in flower petals, pinecones, tree branches, shells, spiral galaxies, and also used in art and graphic design as it is pleasing to the eye. It is said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder but can this personal experience also have a collective component, that despite our personal preferences there is a universal dimension that we all are attracted to and inspired by? Sacred geometry suggests this and it is one of the reasons Gothic cathedrals have such a magical effect on people who visit them.

Another aspect to the Gothic cathedral was its didactic purpose, whereby through art it helped to convey a spiritual message. Through its sculptures and stained glass windows it transmitted biblical stories and other symbolic images. This approach was known as “poor people's book” as many at that time were illiterate.

The Allegory of Alchemy, on the central portal in Notre Dame cathedral in Paris symbolically represents the journey of consciousness through the different ascending rungs of the ladder with the aid of knowledge via the open and closed books of nature. There is also a sculpture of the weighing of the heart on the central portal, west façade which is an ancient symbol that goes as far back as ancient Egypt. The heart of the deceased is weighed on the scale against the feather of the goddess Maat, who personifies order, truth and what is moral.

As the epigraphs at the beginning of this article pointed out, architecture reflects the spirit of its age. The scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell gives a very interesting insight into this. He said:

“It takes me back to a time when these spiritual principles informed the society. You can tell what’s informing a society by what the tallest building is. When you



Weighing of the Souls - Notre Dame, Paris (Wikimedia)

approach a mediaeval town, the cathedral is the tallest thing in the place. When you approach an eighteenth-century town, it is the political palace that’s the tallest thing in the place. And when you approach a modern city, the tallest places are the office buildings, the centres of economic life”

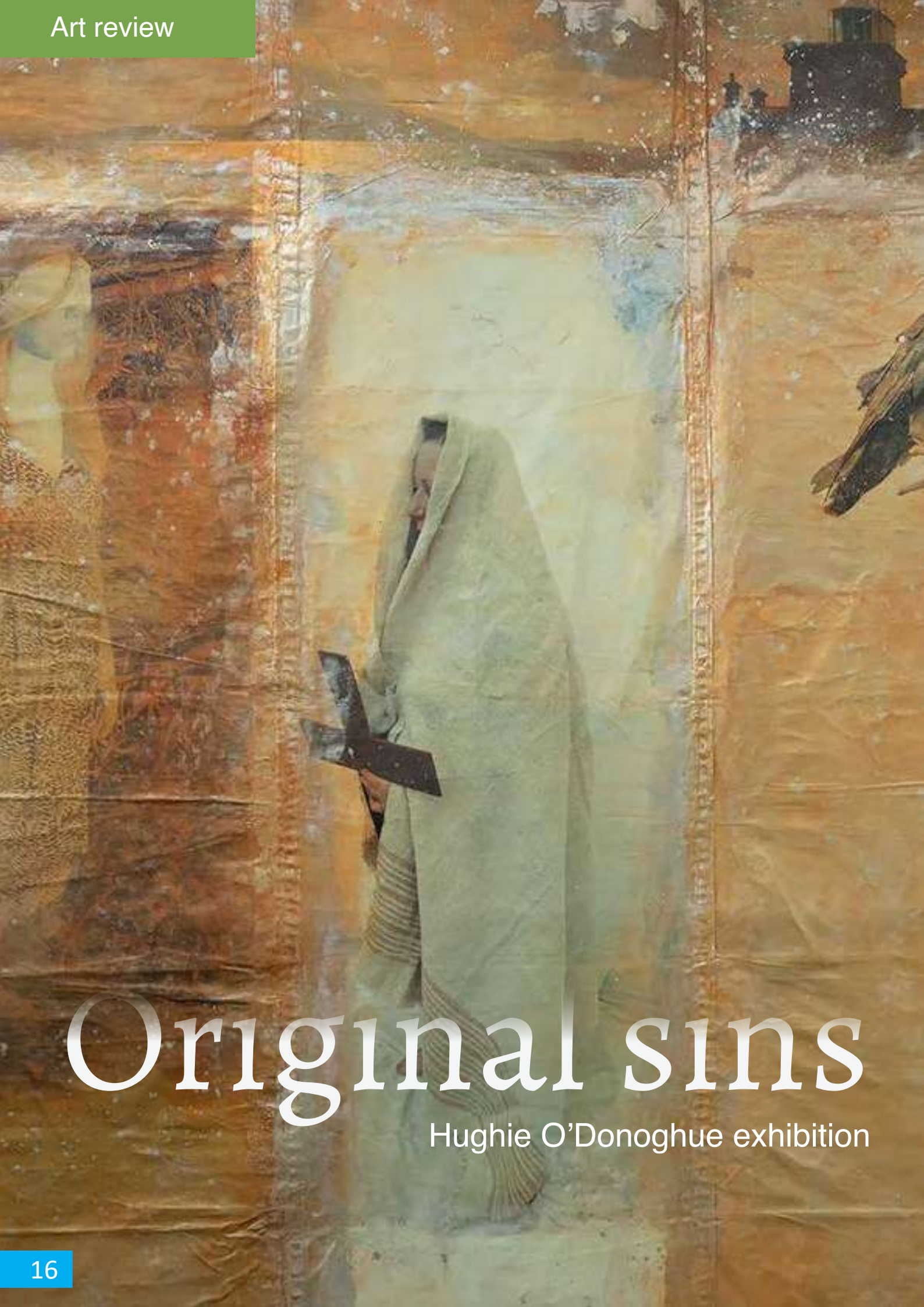
What was informing the age of the Gothic cathedral was a society who sought a new art and architecture to connect back or re-remember that which is within the human being. Plato said “we are gods but we have forgotten it” and this sentiment was present during the construction of these buildings.

In conclusion, what does the Gothic cathedral say about art? The writer G. K. Chesterton has left us a witty reflection on art:

“Art in the Middle Ages was ‘art for God’s sake’; art in the Renaissance was ‘art for man’s sake’; art in the 19th century was ‘art for art’s sake’; now art in the 20th century is ‘no art, for God’s sake.’”

Whether one agrees with this statement or not, what it does convey is the change of focus of art over time, a change of intention. Gothic architecture can be understood as a combination of all these elements at the same time, an art that unites what is universal and timeless with the human being. The Gothic cathedral was and is a place to have an experience of something transcendent, and whether one follows the religion or not, the building helped put the human being in tune with something spiritual, which has always been the function of symbolic art.

David Murtagh & Michael Ward



Original sins

Hughie O'Donoghue exhibition

Art can frequently be used as a vehicle for the consideration of historical matters and collective memory. This is true of the latest exhibition by Manchester-born artist, Hughie O'Donoghue. *Original Sins*, currently hosted in the Shaw Room of the National Gallery of Ireland until 21 May 2023, concerns the relationship between England and Ireland.

Part of the Decade of Commemoration which marks the centenary of Irish independence, this exhibition concerns memory, history and questions of identity through the prism of artistic imagination. O'Donoghue uses six different characters from various periods of history to explore these themes. The result is an exhibition which is thought-provoking as well as visually striking.

Hughie O'Donoghue was born in Manchester in 1953 to an Irish mother and a father whose parents were Irish. In 1982, he graduated with an MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London. He was subsequently appointed artist-in-resident at the Drax Power Station in Yorkshire. This was followed by a two year residency at the National Gallery in London. His first exhibition was held at the AIR gallery in London in 1984 and his debut solo show, *Fires*, was exhibited in 1989 at the Fabian Carlsson Gallery in London. Since then, his works have been exhibited at numerous galleries such as the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, the Imperial War Museum in Salford, the Galleria Donatini e Donatini in Florence, the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague and now, the National Gallery of Ireland. In 2003, a stained glass window designed by O'Donoghue was unveiled at Westminster Abbey to mark the 60th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

O'Donoghue's abstract figure paintings take their lead from American Abstract Expressionism. A characteristic trait to his work is the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated ideas as can be seen in the present exhibition. He frequently incorporates photographs into his paintings and will paint over the pictures to give the effect of a series of layered images.

He has stated that he does not believe that the artist can wholly control the meaning of their work. Ultimately, Art is understood as a conveyor of interpretations, memories and questions of individuals and collective identity, about issues such as, in the case of *Original Sins*, the relationship between Ireland and England.

For this exhibition, O'Donoghue has presented six historical and mythological figures; three English, three Irish; three women and three men. The works are presented on large sheets of tarpaulin, 12' tall by 9' wide, ensuring that the paintings make quite the impression when one visits the Shaw Room. O'Donoghue combines paintings with photography which elevates the works as being studies of the subjects, rather than simply portraits. The Shaw Room is also home to Daniel Maclise's *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* (1854), a 17' wide canvass which depicts the riotous 1170 wedding of the Anglo-Norman lord Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, commonly known as Strongbow, to Aoife Mac

Murrough, daughter of Diarmuid Mac Murrough, King of Leinster. Mac Murrough had made a military alliance with Strongbow in order to regain his throne and agreed to recognise Strongbow as his heir, by marrying him to Aoife. This arguably commenced the beginning of the centuries-long English colonisation of Ireland. O'Donoghue uses this painting as his starting point. While it may be famous for its depiction of chaos and mayhem, the story behind this painting is considerably more complicated.



Original Sins, currently hosted in the Shaw Room of the National Gallery of Ireland until 21 May 2023

In the figures of St Deirbhile, a sixth century Irish saint and Wuffa, an Anglo-Saxon King who was said to have ruled in present-day East Anglia, we are invited to consider the importance of myth in shaping narrative. O'Donoghue then moves forward to the XI and XII centuries to depict William the Conqueror and Aoife Mac Murrough. These are two individuals who should be considered pivotal figures to the period in which they have lived, but have slipped to the peripheries of history. In depicting them in his exhibition, O'Donoghue could be regarded as humanising them, lifting them from the history books and allowing them to regain a voice. The last two figures are from the early twentieth century. Michael Collins, the Irish independence leader and Emily Davison, the English suffragette, would seemingly have little in common, but the conflicting narratives that surround them show how individuals can mean different things to different people, not unlike perceptions of beauty in art in times of chaos.

Original Sins succeeds in rehabilitating individuals who have slipped from the history books while also inviting us to reconsider the legacy of figures with whom we thought that we were familiar. The paintings may not conform to conventional ideas of beauty. However, the unusual manner in which they have been executed ensures that they make an instant visual impact and a closer examination of the themes explored can make an impression on the mind and emotions of the viewer. This must surely be the epitome of a work of art that succeeds in its aims.

Andrew Hudson



The Quest for Roots - The Art of Saodat Ismailova

Modern art is often an experiment in the subjective. Depending on our perspective it can range from an egoistic portrayal of the artist's own passions and ideas to a pointed and impactful commentary on modern society. Themes of violence and ugliness are often central, with an emphasis on the psychological more than the spiritual. As such, modern art rarely aligns with the archetypal concept of Beauty. This may be a point of contention but it need not be a criticism, art is always a reflection of the era which produces it and in a time of deep confusion, of systemic violence and of perpetual psychological malaise, should we be surprised that we produce and promote such artistic expressions?

And does this invalidate all art today? Are we awash only in ugliness, cynicism and egotistical pretension? Where can we look in a modern context for fresh and meaningful perspectives, drawing from traditional inspiration but with a modern twist? Numerous examples can be undoubtedly discovered, for to plumb the depths of our culture is to inevitably reveal pearls worth admiring.

One such pearl is the work of Uzbeki artist Saodat Ismailova. Born in 1981 in Tashkent, a decade before the end of soviet rule, Saodat was part of a nation that had

undergone immense cultural upheaval. Over the course of nearly a century the alphabet of Uzbekistan had changed from Arabic to Latin, then to Cyrillic, and then back to Latin. The impact of language and its use can't be underestimated and this back and forth disrupted the natural transmission of knowledge. Generational fissures emerged as each subsequent generation became disconnected from the written works of the previous. Perhaps as a result, Ismailova's work is largely of a visual medium, combining images, music and filmmaking to represent the traditional values and myths of her people and land.

Creativity seems to have been an early influence as both of her parents were artists. She was also strongly influenced by her grandmother. In her own words:

"She was an amazing storyteller, this is what she was able to infect me with, with the difference that my stories use image and sound, and this became my profession, while for my grandmother it was a natural manifestation - to tell. I was raised by my grandmother, a woman with a strong character and an immense love for life and people. Throughout my childhood and youth, I listened to fairy tales and legends, her memories of the past



years. [...] I realise that life values were different then, and I'm afraid we have replaced them or they have been replaced for us. Definitely, the distance crystallises the connection with the house, through the tunnel of memories, and, interestingly, a predatory curiosity about one's roots appears. A person integrates over time into a new environment, but I must thank my grandmother for imbuing me with love for the origins and giving me an unshakable foundation of loyalty to them."

Her Work

Ismailova explores these themes of tradition, history, myth and ritual through key motifs rooted in the land. The Amu Darya River, central to life in the region, is prominent. The Turanian tiger, which became extinct due to large-scale hunting also recurs. The medium of filmmaking as a documentarian led Ismailova through sweeping journeys across Central Asia - from the Kazakh steppe to the Pamir highlands and beyond - to Azerbaijan, in her quest for knowledge and understanding.

Bibi Seshanbe 2022 (The Queen of Tuesday)

A film about the female ritual practice of the same name. Rooted in deep Persian origins with fire based

rituals tied to Zoroastrianism, the ancient rite consists of a female only practice of recounting the tale of Bibi Seshanbe while performing various domestic chores like cooking and grinding flour. The movie shows the intimate interweaving of the sacred and the mundane as the story is told. From her relationship with her grandmother, Ismailova had a deep connection with folklore but the curious thing of this tale was its striking similarity to the western fairytale of Cinderella. Bibi Seshanbe describes a young girl trapped in an oppressive family who discovers a golden shoe, leading to her being saved by a prince. While at first the apparent simplicity of this story did little for Ismailova, as she studied the local history and observed the ritual and the women taking part she learned that the symbolism of the Queen of Tuesday held more significance than it initially seemed. Filled with images of fertility, shamanism and feminine strength, Ismailova sought to capture the beauty of the ritual in this film.

Stains of Oxus Whisper 2016

The title of this piece refers to a Rorschach test, alluding to the interpretable nature of dreams. Inkblots can provide different subjective associations and dreams, too, should not be seen as an exact science. They give us the means to find meaning from unconscious

content. Twentieth century psychology developed this understanding, which all the traditions of antiquity grasped in their own way. For the Uzbek people, living alongside the river Amu Darya (also known by the Ancient Greek name Oxus) the regular morning ritual was to tell your dreams to the river so that the running water may carry them away and purify them.

With its source in the Pamir Mountains in the Himalayas, the Amu Darya ran for thousands of kilometres until it ended in the Aral sea. Generations of irrigation have reduced the powerful river to an arid desert. In this video installation, on three screens, Ismailova is captured following the river down the foothill of the mountains collecting the dreams of the people living along the riverbanks. The piece is a cumulative work of great heart and simple reverence, as people humbly share the dreams they can no longer tell the river.

“It was one of the most impressive experiences in my life, when you move with a river on foot, descend from glaciers, mountains and see how this ancient river is born, grows, grows fat, becomes mature, bold and serene, like life itself. And then it dies by drying up in the desert, eventually never reaching the Aral Sea.”

Chilltan #1, 2020 Installation with 40 chachvons and neon.

One of the numerous cultural interventions of the Soviet Union in Uzbekistan was to ban the chachvon - a coarse, heavy net, woven by hand from horsehair. This standard attire for adult women was outlawed in a soviet political campaign of 1927 known as the hujum. Being forced to remove their veils created fractures in the traditional society, disrupted families and in some cases led to women losing their lives.

Ismailova was fascinated by this near forgotten relic of her culture's past. This installation contains 40 such chachvon veils from her personal collection. The title of the piece, Chilltan, refers to the 40 elemental spirits of local myth who work to protect humanity. They are invisible yet they were believed to have a huge healing impact on the natural world. Tradition explained that if the world spun too fast, the Chilltan would unite and spin in the opposite direction to restore balance. Ismailova named each of the veils in neon lights to represent the life of a woman, that their story could live on.

The tradition of the Chiltans vary as they are represented in other cultures, like the Uighers in Iran and in certain regions of the Caucasus. In many cases the Chiltans are described as elemental forces that can take numerous natural forms, from mineral to vegetable to animal. It presents a beautiful image of the natural world, filled with unifying and benevolent phenomena typified for the artist in the sacred feminine.

18,000 Worlds, 2022-2023

The mystical tradition of Sufism had a considerable effect in Ismailova's culture and in her own inspiration. In the work of twelfth-century Persian philosopher and mystic Shihab al-Din Yahya al-Suhrawar-di, he writes that our world is only one of 18,000 worlds. Such philosophers of the time worked to reconcile the duality of light and dark, the apparent contradictions of life and death, spirit and manifestation, and their teachings and religious poems are part of daily life in Uzbekistan.

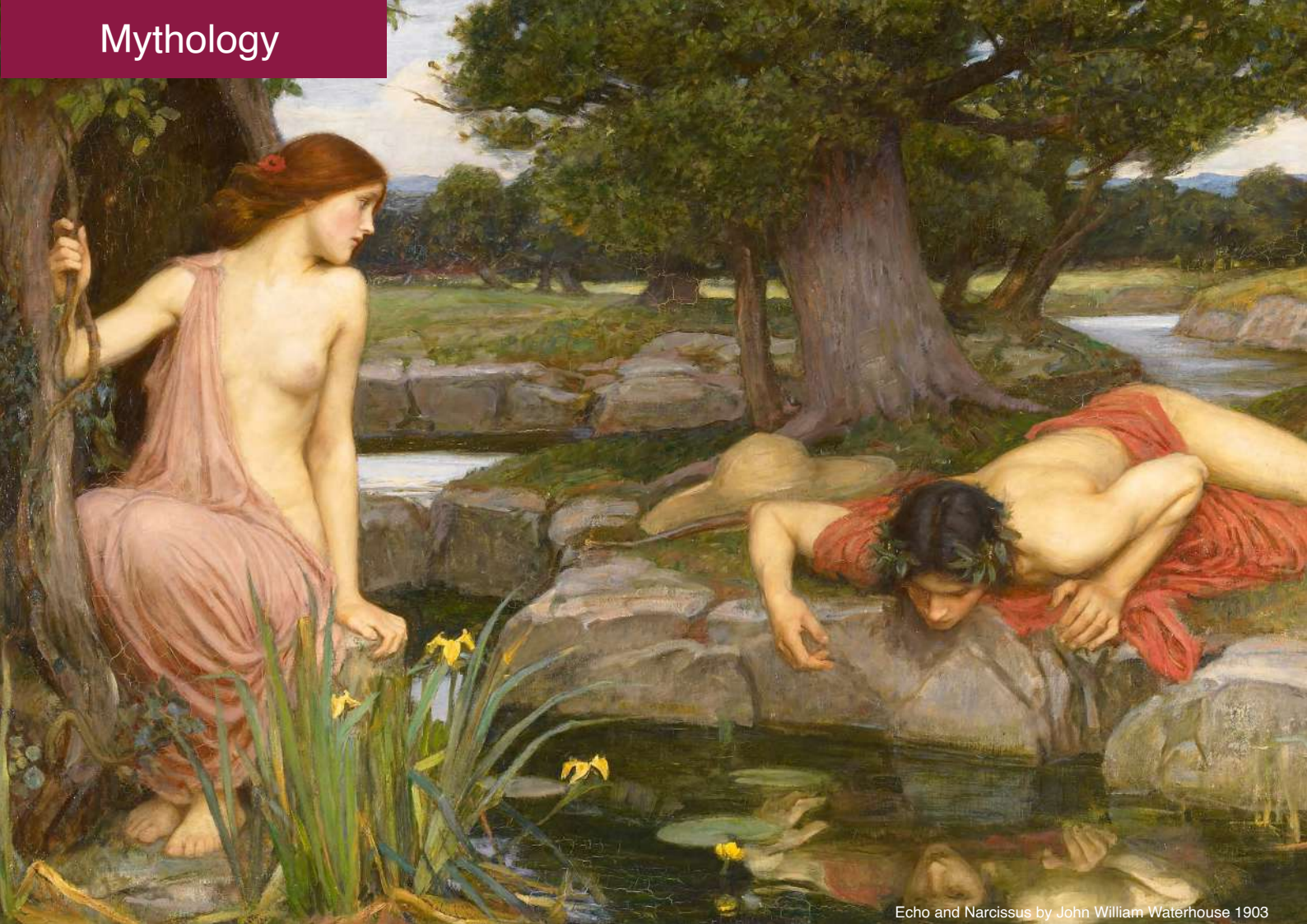
Inspired by this, Ismailova compiled a magnum opus of her own work, digging out fragments of unused pieces, extracts of edits from her films. She created a thread that linked all the stages of her life, her art, her heritage in one video composition to simultaneously fragment and unite the themes of her work.

She has described the film as a talisman in the form of a video. It is a love letter and a cautionary tale, highlighting the fragile beauty of tradition and the danger we face in losing contact with our roots, our ancestors.

“Collective memory works at the level of deep emotion. This is a quivering sensation that cannot be recreated artificially. I think that we have a natural ability to forget the difficult, so as not to pass the trauma on to the next generations. If we turn to epics and myths, then something bright always wins as opposed to difficulties. At the same time, memory has a preventative function that protects future generations from previous mistakes.”

Modern art can take excessive licence in how it interprets what is valuable and what is beautiful but the work of Saodat Ismailova suggests that when timeless values are at the essence of cultural expression, when we connect where we come from with where we're going and when we seek to inspire rather than just titillate, then regardless of the medium, modern art can indeed be beautiful.

Aidan Murphy & Violeta Bitca



Echo and Narcissus by John William Waterhouse 1903

Cautionary Tales - Beauty in Myth

Beauty is counted among the ultimate values of goodness, truth, and justice, and it constitutes one of the most enduring and controversial themes in philosophy. The nature of beauty and the debate about its objective and subjective quality is one of the fundamental issues in philosophical aesthetics.

Perhaps one of the Greeks' most complex contributions to modern society is the conception, understanding, and evaluation of beauty. The ancient Greek word for beautiful is *kalos*, referring to a very broad value also used to describe what is morally good, providing fertile ground for more extensive discussion of ultimate values. The earliest theorisation of beauty comes from ancient Greece, philosophers at the time believing that beauty consisted of three components: symmetry, proportion and harmony. However, even these Greek philosophers held different perspectives of what beauty encompassed, some took an objective view of beauty, others a more subjective view.

The Pythagorean School focused on order and symmetry as an indication of beauty, therefore aligning on a more objective evaluation. Other philosophers like Socrates,

Plato, and Aristotle believed that proportion and harmony were essential to beauty in different ways and found a strong connection between beauty and mathematics, as a form of order. Pythagoreans suggested that ugliness was the expression of disorder and a lack of rational proportions, while beauty was considered an objective expression of cosmic truth. In contrast, because beauty is a significant component of human experience, it is often linked with pleasure and so it is also seen in a more subjective light. The association between beauty and feeling suggests that beauty is also an emotion evoked by the object in any given subject.

Aphrodite in the arts (Venus de Milo)

It is the connection between beauty and pleasure that drives the human desire to be beautiful and obtain beauty. This attraction to beauty is universal and impacts personal choices and cultural developments. The ancient Greeks initially upheld a standard of divine beauty associated with the ideals of symmetry, proportion and harmony. The Greeks considered these three properties as intrinsic to all beautiful things.

These standards of lasting beauty from ancient Greek culture apply to a broad variety of fields from arts to physical beauty. One example of a lasting, artistic beauty standard is the Venus de Milo. The Venus de Milo is an ancient Greek statue of the goddess Aphrodite and is one of the most famous works of art in the world.

The name of the statues derives from the goddess Venus, the Roman name for Aphrodite, and the Greek island where the statue was discovered in 1820, Milo. Because Aphrodite is the goddess of love and beauty, the statue serves as a representation of physical perfection and a symbol of female beauty. The Venus de Milo, as shown in figure 1, is an example of Greek sculpture from the Classical era, which was considered the peak of Greek art. Because the Venus de Milo is still considered one of the most beautiful sculptures in the world, it serves as a lasting beauty standard.

Aphrodite and Hephaestus

The myth related to Aphrodite's marriage clearly positions beauty as a double edge sword and intertwines that value with jealousy, revenge and ugliness. Aphrodite was the most beautiful being on Earth and Mount Olympus as she was the Goddess of Beauty and Love. Her consort was Hephaestus, the ugliest of Zeus' children, even disfigured in some myths. The story of this unlikely marriage can be traced to the origin of Hephaestus, deformed at birth, and cast off Mount Olympus by his own mother Hera (wife of Zeus).

He fell into the ocean and was raised by Thetis, the mother of the Greek hero, Achilles. He was incredibly gifted in the art of metal forging and, despite his deformity, he could produce almost anything using any material. He grew up bitter towards his mother so he devised a plan to enact revenge against Hera. Leveraging his amazing smithing abilities, he created a golden throne and sent it to the Goddess as a gift. But the generous gift was a well crafted trap and the throne would lock the Goddess onto the chair leaving only Hephaestus in the position to free her. All the Olympians begged Hephaestus to free his mother but he categorically refused, saying that he had no mother. Hephaestus was, at last, brought back to Olympus by Dionysus, another Greek god, who intoxicated him with wine, but he would still refuse to get Hera out of the trap that he laid for her.

As a token of peace, Zeus offered two things to Hephaestus for his troubled upbringing: a seat among the Olympians as the God of the Forge and a marriage with Aphrodite, his sister. Zeus offered Aphrodite's hand in marriage to Hephaestus as a peace offering, but also to resolve the dispute caused by the beauty of his daughter, since all the Gods and the mortals would want her for themselves.

A lot of fighting between the Gods and the mortals occurred for Aphrodite's hand and it was causing casualties. Especially because Ares, God of War, was in love with Aphrodite and killed the mortal Adonis when he



Venus de Milo at the Louvre. (Wikimedia)

found out that he was interested in his sister. To Zeus, marrying Aphrodite, the most beautiful, with Hephaestus the ugliest, would cause the jealousy among everyone to stop, and would ignite hope for anyone to find beauty as an element of harmony, no matter their circumstances. Aphrodite was appalled for being diminished to a mere gift and to be forced to marry someone as hideous as Hephaestus but she could not oppose her father's will. Hephaestus accepted the generous terms, freeing Hera from the chair, and from that time on became the God of the Forge.

Narcissus

In Greek mythology beauty might be a curse for men as well, as shown by the story of Narcissus, a youth of incredible beauty who fell insatiably in love with his image reflected in the water. Narcissus was the son of the nymph Liriope of Tespias and the river god Cefiso.



Hephaestus the god of fire and of craftsmen, a painting by Peter Paul Rubens (Wikimedia)

The famous seer Tirésias predicted that he would live for many years if he did not see himself. The prophecy seemed easy to circumvent and mirrors and other objects that might reflect his face were banished. At sixteen years of age Narcissus was a handsome young man, becoming the object of desire of all the nymphs and maidens in Greece, but these advances were never reciprocated.

Also a nymph named Echo known for repeating what others said, was among the many young women injured by his cold attitude. She fell in love with him, but she was

punished by the goddess Hera, the wife of Zeus. Hera realised that Echo's talks were an attempt to cover up her husband's unfaithfulness so she cursed her voice to be only able to repeat the words of others. Ashamed and unable to communicate, Echo locked herself in a cave deep in the forest.

Moved by her deep love for Narcissus, Echo furtively followed him through the woods to make him aware of her feelings; however, her curse made this undertaking impossible. So she used her attunement to nature to make the animals tell Narcissus that she loved him deeply.

Narcissus mocked the declaration of Echo and rejected it outright. Echo withdrew into the caves to spend the rest of her life alone, sad and broken-hearted. Before death she prayed to Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance and divine justice cursing Narcissus to fall in love only with his own reflection.

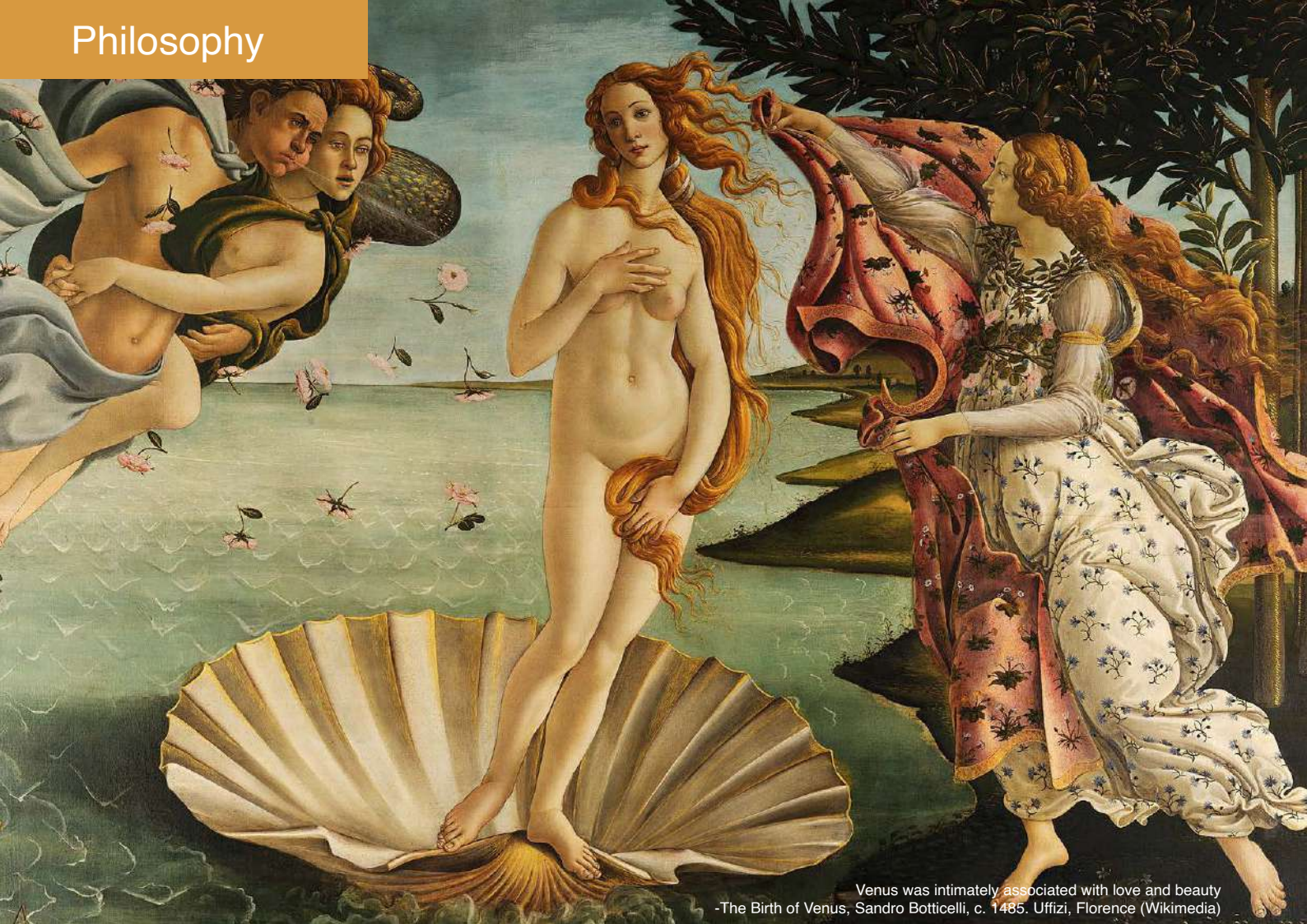
One day, the young man went to the Stygian River and he saw his reflection in the water. Like Echo desired, he fell in love with his reflected image. His obsession with his own beauty was so great that he stopped eating and drinking just to continue looking at his reflection. Such compulsion brought Narcissus to his tragic end as one day he got so close to the water that he ended up falling and drowning in the river. The nymphs wanted to bury him but could not locate the body anywhere. A beautiful flower with white petals appeared at the shore of the river where Narcissus last stood and to preserve the memory of this handsome young man it still bears his name.

Even in the underworld Narcissus remained spellbound by the image that he had so admired in the black waters of the Styx lagoon. To this day, the term narcissism is used to define an excessive admiration for oneself.

Conclusion

In this story, as in many others across Greek mythology (e.g. Helen of Troy) beauty is often the cause of jealousy, war and tragedy. The ideal nature of beauty as one of the key universal virtues clashes with the imperfection of the real world eliciting emotions in humans leading to behaviours far from exemplary. The lessons extrapolated from Greek mythology suggest caution in taking beauty as an absolute principle or goal. Modern society's fascination with external beauty through media and imagery suggests that the debate about this principle is far from concluded and it will probably give rise for philosophers to try and reconcile for years to come.

Marta Terrile



Beauty: the Philosophical Value of Art

Walking in an exquisite gallery, entering a majestic church, listening to a remarkable violinist performing or visiting an elegant palace, we often hear people around us whisper "beautiful" among themselves to define those experiences. Thus, it comes naturally to associate the concept of Art - in all forms, from poetry to architecture - with the idea of Beauty. Beauty has always had a crucial importance in philosophical terms.

In his Phaedrus, Plato suggests that Beauty is an essence that shines with its light and illuminates what our privileged senses, sight and hearing, perceive. Beauty is an instrument that allows men to ascend from their particular sensible reality to the World of Ideas, the Hyperuranion.

This realm is reached through contemplation and stupor, that feeling that connects us to metaphysics without involving logic or reasoning.

It is interesting to note how in Ancient Greek, Beauty (καλός, kalos) and Good (ἀγαθός, agathos) are often interchangeable. And according to Plato, alongside Beauty, Good and Truth are the other paths that bring men closer to the perfection of the Ideal. This gives Beauty an ethical and moral connotation reflecting on

the Arts as symmetry, the physical form of equity and justice. It's no coincidence that the Golden Ratio, or the divine proportion, is observable in most of humanity's masterpieces.

In the Symposium, this concept is further explored and given an elitarian position from a cognitive point of view. Plato, in his dialogues, proves how Beauty allows abstraction and complex thinking.

Plotinus also remarks how Beauty wields a transformative power on the human mind by clarifying with its light, concepts and thoughts that would be obscure and difficult to comprehend without it.

What universal element correlates those objects if we consider a body, a painting, a song, a dress or a book equally "beautiful"? That abstraction, an intelligible universality we cannot explain with our logos (λόγος, reason) or with geometry and arithmetics, consents humanity to progress and create without renouncing the essence of Beauty, despite the inability to define it.

Whether a natural landscape or a painting by Caravaggio, the importance that the fruition of Beauty can play in the human experience is immediately evident.

Even the Gods in the Homeric portraits are volatile, erratic and immoral. Laocoön and His Sons, Late Hellenistic, Vatican Museum, Vatican City (Wikimedia)

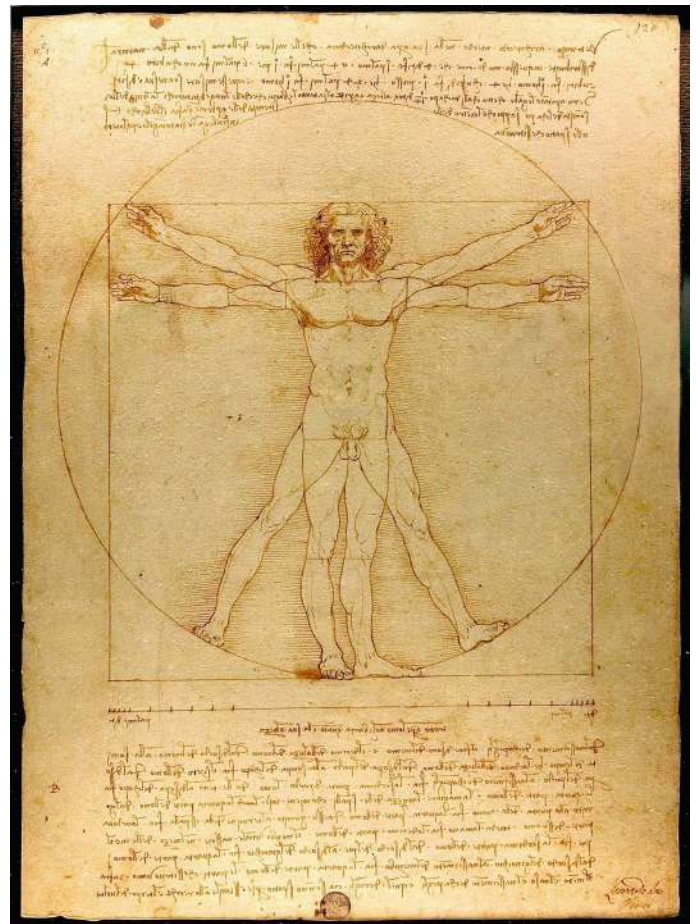


Nevertheless, in his Republic, Plato strongly condemns Art as a form of Beauty, adducing two main arguments: moral and ontological. Plato argues that Art - in particular referring to Homer's Poems - displays examples of moral corruption, and even the Gods in the Homeric portraits are volatile, erratic and immoral.

Further, according to the philosopher, Art is a mere copy of a copy. It is twice as far away from the idea that originated in the Hyperuranium and, as such, deceitful. Plato implies that a painting reproducing a table is just a copy of the table produced by an artisan, which is also a copy of the original concept of "table" existing in the World of Ideas.

For these reasons, there is no place for artists and poets in the Platonic Kallipolis (Καλλιπολις, The Ideal City). Some contemporaries argue that Plato's tendency to construct elegant dialogues and his poetic capabilities, united with his habit of using symbols and metaphors to explain concepts, contrasts with his condemnation of Art.

On the contrary, Aristotle points out that this mimetic (to mimic or reproduce reality) power of Art allows men to experience catharsis. By being exposed to an idea through Art, even as a copy of the reality derived from the World of Ideas, men can rebalance their emotions or passions and elevate themselves while processing subconscious information.



Vitruvian Man, Leonardo Da Vinci, c. 1490, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice (Wikimedia) - Example of 'Golden Ratio' study



Dante shown holding a copy of the Divine Comedy, next to the entrance to Hell, the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory and the city of Florence, with the spheres of Heaven above - Domenico di Michelino 1465 -wikimedia

Certainly, this problem and its origin puzzled the most brilliant minds for millennia. Gardamer, following Aristotle's footprints in the mid-1900s, illustrates how Beauty has always been regarded in its relationship with the Kosmos (Κόσμος, Universe) — the celestial vault, but also the Divine Order.

As such, the imitation proposed by Art is not an escape from reality but a compliment to the intelligence governing Nature. Philosophically, making Art means identifying mankind in relation to space and time and exploring the question, "Who are we in the world?". Humanity investigates its existence within the tangible and the intangible through games of light and shadow, solids and voids.

It is apparent that for over two thousand years of philosophical history, Art has been considered, positively or negatively, for its mimetic qualities. The advent of the Enlightenment and later Romanticism started bringing a new paradigm to light. Art slowly became an expression of the ego, the artist, in an effort to underline an individual's point of view or state of mind.

With this transformation, Art becomes a vehicle of feelings. Burke suggests that Art is an instrument that is able to express unspeakable emotions, such as love, hate and ambition by surpassing reason. Art allows men to perceive and absorb complexities intrinsically, sometimes more simply and directly than logical reasoning can do.

Kant further explains that through Art, we explore ultrasensitive worlds, such as Paradise and Hell in Dante's Comedy, circling back on the totality of our existence and experiencing transcendence.

Hegel brings the subjectivity of Art to an extreme by commenting that Art is superior to Nature itself, as the Genius - the artist - can overcome the rules and dictate new terms through his artifact.

Since the 1700s, Art has become an emotional product and a vehicle of experiences. And as Baumgarten comments, with all of its facets, Beauty is perfection perceived by the senses rather than the pure intellect. Art is then considered as an expression of freedom in our times.

The artist sees themselves now free to equally depict the Beautiful and the Ugly, the True and the Disgusting - with its deformities and imbalances - provoking intense and pungent reactions that challenge the observer. By experiencing the excessive, paradoxically, people can appreciate the value of balance, of harmony and measure.

After centuries and centuries of debate, philosophers are still discussing concepts and ideas such as Beauty and Art. After all, going back to the origins, we find maybe the most complete and timeless definition in the writings of the philosopher who in the Western world is considered as having initiated it all. When Plato in the Symposium asks the priestess Diotima of Mantinea what Beauty has to do with Love, Good and Truth, she explains that "it is a divine affair, this engendering and bringing to birth, an immortal element in the creature that is mortal" (206). Art is, in the end, the product of mortals who can generate and feel the Eternal.

Alessandra Diotto



Philosophy Culture Volunteering



Philosophy

To be a philosopher is a way of life which is committed to the best aspirations of humanity.

Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational.

It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves.

Culture

The practice of human values is the basis for a model of active and participative Culture, which brings out the qualities of each person, broadens the horizons of the mind and opens the human being up to all the expressions of the spirit.



Volunteering

Volunteering is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, and a commitment to strive for the common good.

It is by practicing the universal values of philosophy that we can deeply transform ourselves and turn our ideas into action.

The practice of philosophy develops self-confidence, moral strength and resilience to face the difficulties and crises of life. It allows us to become an actor of change in our lives and around us.

Our introductory course in practical philosophy offers a series of theoretical and practical classes to progress in self-knowledge, to practice taking advantage of every circumstance in life without forgetting to develop solidarity with others.

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