

FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO MODERNISM AND THE BIRTH OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The defeat of Story in Painting-Ornament in Architecture

In this paper the main focus is on the phenomena of «Painting» rather than icons, book illustration, images and pictures created by other techniques. And just before the invention of oil-paint we must admit that the plastic and spatial values of painting start with Giotto (1266-1337). And from Giotto to the Twentieth Century the art of painting developing itself always had a content and story that was comprehensible. Narrative in a painting was paralleled in architecture by ornament. Modern art or «Modernism» amongst many of its oppositions, like opposition to history and tragedy strictly turned against story in paintings and ornament in architecture. In that sense modernism claims to story its own history from zero. And this never goes further back than Cezanne.

Modernism placed purity and function against story and ornament. And when modernism came on stage before the society of the 20th Century it had claims to change the society through art. The emergence of manifestos and increasing theoretical introductory texts is typical of «modernism» and the «Avant-Garde». The pre-modern literariness is transformed into literature by leaving the canvas and taking its place alongside the work of art. And the theoreticians and critics of the «Modern era» have a chance to create artistic verbal texts alongside non-verbal paintings. And one of the significant pre-requisites of modernism is to create a sense of «presentness» and the «purely immediate».

On the other hand the «Avant-Garde» flourishes in the era of modernism finding its roots within the context of disillusionism. The Avant-Garde starts with Dadaism in Cabare Voltaire in Zurich with a lot of noise and manifestos.

In another part of Europe: «But we will hear no more about the past, we young, strong futurists.» both Dada and Futurism question the basic values of western society and what has been accomplished in the name of humanity. The society

had to demolish itself and start anew, the easel painting was a symbol of the previous society and a meager commercial product. And there were more political off-shoots of this movement like the Berlin - Dada group.

About the same years, in Russia, K. Malevitch having quit his earlier folkloric and figurative paintings in the name of pure geometry, states: «I want to evacuate from my paintings all the feeling of tragedy.» «Kurt Schwitters is doing his «Merz» collages using newspaper clips where the physical presence completely minimizes the literary content.

If we look back on this phenomena half a century later we are reminded that «Modernism» tried to give a new and total form to contemporary society whereas the «Avant-Garde» expected the birth of the new from complete destruction of the past. And strangely enough this has all become art history. At this point we must quote Harold Rosenberg, the New York art-critic: «The idea of the short life of a work of art (as opposed to eternal presence) belongs to the epoch of the Avant-Gardes. But instead of being destroyed the work is salvaged by art history. This violates its Avant-Garde essence and compels it to deny itself».

The story goes when in the sixties with the appearance post-modernism not as an art movement but as an anti-thesis, Neo-Dada, Pop, and Post-Avant reappears this time out of art history having lost its original mission and ideology. Modernism and the Avant-Garde tried to change society, could not succeed, so, instead, «formed a society of its own»: museum curators, galleries, rich collectors, owners and editors of art magazines and the esthetes of big metropolitan cities. Harold Rosenberg states that «The final confirmation of the split between aesthetic and political radicalism came at the 1968 Venice biennial when a crowd of radical students denounced the advanced art presented there as «Art for dealers and the rich.» Consequently the Avant-Garde was finally freed of its political and ideological responsibility which had already been petering out.

If we throw a glimpse at Turkish and American art in the light of modernism and the Avant-Garde we see certain resemblances. One common point is that «modernism» was exported