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Art and awareness as a journey into ourselves Part 3

Beauty can be experienced as force. To achieve harmonic proportions and compositions in sacred buildings the old masters had a rope with twelve knots tied around their belly.

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Cube

There is still a remarkable tradition in the Indian sculptors’ city of Mahabalipuram: sculptures are hewn out of a granite cube, which is divided into eight fields. They often used the proportion of 3:5, which is the golden mean. According to this tradition, the universe is a cube with a flame in its core, in which a goddess is dancing. Of the five platonic bodies, the cube symbolises the
Earth.

Nowadays, there are a lot of art museums which are built in the form of a cube. Let’s hope that there is a real goddess dancing in them! However, the image of the cube, in which a fire burns, became a symbol of alarm in the nuclear power plant of Fukushima, in which the clear form of the cube was unable to tame the inner sun force, which was then unleashed on the earth – it became a destructive energy.

**Twelve knots**

In the temple complexes of the Egyptians, the Sun and Moon Pyramids in Mexico, the old stone circles in Stonehenge, and the sacred buildings in Asia and Europe, we find harmonic proportions and compositions. The old masters did not build according to their gut feeling. Rather, they had a rope with twelve knots tied around their belly, by means of which they were able to measure everything. From this twelve-part length, they developed, amongst other things, the proportions of the Pythagorean triangle (which has the proportions of 3 : 4 : 5), the golden section (5 : 8), and the double life flower with its equilateral and interpenetrating triangles.

Living and shaping forces are active in these proportions. Wherever they appear, they bring human nature into a harmonious and animating resonance with itself, which will heal and bring joy. Beauty consists of a dynamic balance of components.

Beauty can be experienced as force. The fact that it was and is always misused, does not change the reality that in its true appearance it is an expression of a harmonious balance of contrasting forces.

In its effect it can neutralize dissonant disturbances.

This universal shaping force has been critically questioned in modern art, and so has often been ignored as a limiting guideline. Steps to challenge universal qualities are necessary, so that we are able to appreciate their value all the more clearly and comprehensively. The truth is that no divine law will restrict the human being - rather they will lead him beyond his limitations.

Nowadays, many artists have become representatives of individual freedom in the vast “ghettos” of arbitrariness, which are regulated by supply and demand. For others this is not satisfactory. It is necessary and possible, based on our individual freedom, to dare to take the necessary steps towards a consciousness
which will enable us to be open to the divine, without falling back into old belief systems. It is about an inner attitude, an orientation and purity of motive, which may suggest the attitude of the iconographers.

**Icons**

Iconographers are monks who live and paint with a spiritual orientation. They paint pictures of saints on carefully chosen wooden boards and according to a strict canon. In the lead-up to the painting, they prepare by entering into a meditative attitude. It is a festive preparation for the ‘entrance into the holy.

In icons, the face is not depicted as a personal portrait, but it is an expression of human development - a development which enables people to have access to it through art. Filmmaker and author, Andrej Tarkowskij, who made a film about the painter-monk Andreij Rublinow, suggests that this is not in the sense of a set of rules, but more as an appropriation of world values, a depiction of forms of insight into the way the human being seeks to know the ‘absolute truth’. He writes in his book *Die versiegelte Zeit (The Sealed Time)*: “To me, it is without doubt, that it is the aim of any kind of art which does not want to be simply ‘consumed’ like goods, to explain the sense of life and of human existence to itself and to the world around it. It will show people what the reason and the aim of their existence on this planet is – not perhaps to explain it to them, but to put these questions before them.”

**Central perspective**

The icon painting, like the art of Islam (marvellously described in the book by Orham Pamuk: *Rot sei mein Name - Red Be My Name*), had its origins in the development of the Renaissance.

The Russian scientist, priest and philosopher Pavel Florenskij, who died in his Siberian exile under Stalin, writes that the human being lost his access to the divine world when he raised himself up to be the cardinal ruler of his life. To put the human being into the centre - which Florenskij sees expressed by this central perspective - contains the danger of self-glorification of the egoistic I.

The artists of the Renaissance must also have been aware of this problem, since they first used the central perspective in the sense of a spiritual orientation. The Pythagorean heritage, with the secrets of proportion and harmony, flowed into the compositions of, for example, Raphael’s “School of Athens”, and opened the
chance of artists to develop a free individuality with their own point of view concerning the divine. Turning away from the divine was not necessary.

The divine, the spiritual, or whatever you want to call it, was not challenged in the beginning. In Leonardo da Vinci’s famous The Lord’s Supper, which witnesses an unimaginable complexity of proportions, artistic composition and content, Christ is almost exactly in the middle of the central perspective. But only almost - so this imagery refers to a principle, which is behind the visible Christ and is active through Him: the divine mystery.

The Renaissance was a pulsating, form-creating forcefield, in which high spirits were able to develop. From the universal genius arose the archetype of “the complete man”: one person as architect, painter, sculptor, poet, scientist. For example, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael prepared the transition from the collective consciousness to the individual I-consciousness, and represented it to a high degree. However, the way Florenskij describes it, the invention of the central perspective through Brunelleschi became a visual symbol for the enthronement of the I, as a kind of deification of the human being in its further development.

(to be continued)