

DO WE STILL NEED ART TODAY?

Elena VELIKOVA



Art expresses those material and spiritual values for which there are no boundaries and over which time is not master. The dimensions of art are determined by the presence of harmony and perfection. That is why art does not have a particular country of residence.

Do we still need art today when the philosophy of getting rich leads to the loss of mercy and compassion? When the image of Mona Lisa “decorates” towels, bottles and packages? When the language of beauty is replaced by newspaper jargon and clichés? The answer to this question does not need many arguments. We have needed and will always need art. Without art the world would be a worse and uglier place, it would be without the most important thing in its existence, the joy of living.

The great Russian writer A.P. Cehov wrote: “in man, everything must be wonderful, his face, his hands, his ideas and feelings.”

Art is an attempt to save beauty. That beauty that is a natural and spiritual need and rethinks the human existence, the beauty without which the world loses its moral support. The German poet, Schiller said that only it can save the world and the Russian writer Dostoievski said that art existed only for this purpose.

In the nature that surrounds us everything has a very well determined place and everything is subject to a well determined universal order. Man bears in his soul a little part of this Godly perfection but also the gift to create beauty. He is a creator and his mission is to transform the world to be

more beautiful. How appropriate Shakespeare's words are even now: "The world has chased away all beauty, it has become harsher and worse, it is practically unrecognizable." Today, more than ever, people need art. The aspiration towards beauty rethinks the human existence and if we forget this it means we have forgotten to be human.

We, those who handle art professionally, do not ask ourselves the question: "Do we still need art today?" We carry out our professional obligations as it says in the Law we "preserve, spread, educate etc."

But for example educated people, philosophers, culturologists, sociologists and others ask themselves this question and seriously study it. One of the great thinkers and writers of the XXth century, the Austrian Robert Muzil includes in his conception of the future of Europe, the problem of the spiritual values of this process. The parameters of these values will determine the dimensions and future of European civilization: after 100 or 1000 years, maybe someone may actually want to discover this civilization and to preserve the memory of it. The problem he raises is from what will this memory be rebuilt, if either from the spiritual or material memory of man. "I doubt," he writes, "that the world can change under pressure on his soul; the engines of actions are of a brute structure."

As a counterpoint (pretext) for these fears the "Rebuilt Europe" exhibition was proposed which was held in the halls of the Ruse Art Gallery beginning on the 10th of April until the 10th of May 2003 and in June in the Art Salon in the National Culture Palace, in October the exhibition moved to the Klangerfurt University, Austria. The idea for this exhibition was an answer to the challenge of the educated Austrian, Manfred Mozer, in fact the one who initiated it, and which is founded on the philosophical essay of R. Musil "Helpless (defenceless) Europe. He invited the Bulgarian participants to create "perfect, concrete shapes" which would be kept in an archive or in a museum in the idea that if in 100 years Europe were to disappear off of the political map of the world they could rebuild on the basis of these aspects the European culture.

Each participant interpreted the theme in its global aspect but also very subjectively.

Maia Kubratova and Zlatka Stoikova built a house shaped construction made of pipes painted in white and red and under it they seeded a piece of earth with sprouted wheat as the symbol of life as can be found in Bulgaria but also in other European countries. The “Helpless Europe” construction is very flexible and easy to transport in “Europe and outside it.”

The “strange line that separates” West from East , made by Gosho Gheorghiev and Iva Staneva, is more pessimistic, through which they announce (claim) that “this little garden is on the one hand very easy to cross but on the other hand this garden will always exist”. Zornita Vasileva prints on a transparent cloth the figure of “a man without qualities”, the lead character in Rober Muzil’s story. From the symbolic centre of the universe (Dian-tien) a tree grows, like a spring of knowledge with its branches cut. This is a challenge for contemporary Europe where people have so many qualities, are so educated, there is great competition but he who has a strong spirit succeeds. In the video projection “against my window” there is protest against the false architectural shell and the limited living space.

Gheorghi Pasev wants to keep even in one hundred years the everlasting elements of “faith, hope and love”, but these Christian symbols are intersected by the material world of today’s consumer.

The work of Tvetan Krâstev, “Personal Salvation Package”, is in direct connection to the motto of the exhibition. It contains a part of the minimum most important spiritual and material things required for the survival of man (in) after apocalyptic conditions. The 10 divine commandments, the four basic elements: air, water, earth and fire; salt, bread, wheat and grape seeds, to be sown in favourable earth.

Ivan Kâncev creates a museum for the blind. His ceramics, with delicate relief, including Braille writing, will be useful for all blind people in Europe and the world. We pray that such a museum will be created before the passage of 100 years.

But before 100 years pass, the Bulgarian will have to spend a long time “frying on his own barbecue”, Alexandru Ivanov warns us from his iron chair. The marks from the chair-barbecue cannot be seen on the body but they are “impressed on our souls and turned into coals.”

With slight irony, Nikolai Buzov invites us for a walk through EUROLAND. According to him, Europe in the future will turn into a fun fair, into a huge museum.

In the “Fortified House” of Krasimirei Kirilova the idea that in “this museum” each village should maintain its own identity is expressed. The incorporation of Bulgaria into Europe cannot be done without the basic materials: stone, wood, cloth.

The artists have succeeded in showing their point of view regarding the European Union. In its reconstruction the artists have also found a place for Bulgaria. This reconstruction was achieved with the help of art, showing the need for it, today more than ever. I see this little experiment like a counterweight for the levelling trend of globalization values. The invention of innovative codes of modern art with its distinctiveness, the combination of the systems of values from the borders, a flagrant defiance of taboos, the creation of “new objects of desire”, ironic quotation, playing on a number of levels etc.

These are the “methods” of the modern artist to attract and keep interest in art.

Klagenfurt



