

The Metaphysics of Armando's Art: Essence of Form and Parallel Continuity

Many generations of artists have looked into the mysteries offered by spiritual writings and belief systems. At the end of the 19th century interest in the occult and mysticism fused with the genesis of abstract painting. An astonishingly high proportion of artists working in the past one hundred years have been involved with these ideas and their art reflects a desire to express spiritual, metaphysical ideals that cannot be necessarily expressed in traditional pictorial terms. Armando Alemdar Ara's art fits in this category but one is faced with a considerable difficulty when trying to pinpoint any visual influences on his art. Perhaps the closest art style that could be correlated in terms of method is Futurism, although often a Surreal undercurrent is also sensed, largely due to the fact that the Macedonian Surrealist Vasko Taskovski was a great inspiration and influence during Armando's student days. However, a more fruitful result is found when one analyses the true influence on Armando's style of painting – his readings on philosophy, mysticism and theology. Armando's awareness of art theory has enabled him to be his own hardest critic and use his theoretical knowledge as a powerful tool for developing his ideas and visual conviction. He has acquainted himself with the laws that reveal art's universality, i.e., the formal elements of art, such as form, line, colour, and composition, as purported by Clive Bell. Sophisticated solutions of forms with hints of anatomical elements permeate through Armando's canvases revealing hidden possibilities, universal meanings and inner qualities. Without a doubt, his immersion in spiritual texts has established his rationale for abstraction. Armando's reading of theosophical and anthroposophical readings by Helena Blavatsky and Rudolph Steiner as well as the visual impression made by the illustrations to Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater's *Thought Forms* (1905) and *Leadbeater's Man Visible and Invisible* (1903) were the main initiators for experimenting with energy forms drawings, something he was able to further develop later in the 1990's when sketching ballet and contemporary dancers during their rehearsals. It is the writings of Plotinus, who is perhaps the first mystical thinker in Western philosophy, that have affected Armando's esoteric belief that human beings must aspire towards the infinite by reducing the finite, physical needs. Plotinus believed that visible forms occur at the lower stages in the material world and are but a distraction on the path to Truth. The insistence that true reality must be free from recognisable (visible) forms is indeed a theme that recurs time and time again in later mystical tradition. Armando does exactly this in his painting: he reduces the importance of recognisable form allowing 'higher', abstract form to come through. Concurrently, for Armando spiritual values are timeless and above the realm of subjective individual needs. It is these values, which are the basic principles of life, that he expresses in his art, not personal experiences and feelings. In the same way, through his art Armando aims to represent his inner experiences of a spiritual reality behind but not beyond corporeal forms. The beautiful is produced by an inner need that springs directly from the soul. Armando pictures are visual statements of thoughtful and creative imagination, but also of deep reflection into the true nature of reality and the

presence of Spirit. A sensation of depth prevails in Armando's pictures; a spiritual depth, as well as artistic depth, not unlike that tremendous sense of depth and perspective that we find in Renaissance art. These same qualities are perceived in Armando's pictures and yet he is not using any kind of obviously recognisable physical form. This is the unique quality that has captivated art critics and collectors, and which gives his new pictures such a metaphysical dimension. Some ideas drawn from Occultism have lent themselves well to translation into pictorial terms, such as the idea that actions and thoughts upon the normal physical level are paralleled on some kind of a higher level of nature – a spiritual plane. We can clearly see how Armando started to tackle the correlation between these two planes in his *Parallel Continuity*, painted just before the turn of the Millennium. A few years earlier Armando had spent several months living in the Swiss Alps, reading, among other things, the mystic philosopher Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*. Ouspensky, who associated the evolution of consciousness with the perception of higher dimensions, deeply affected Armando's outlook on religion, reality and Spirit.

As opposed to the total abstraction that artists such as Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich (who also read Ouspensky) achieved by gradual simplification and dematerialisation of form, Armando's abstraction never really disposes of physical form altogether. This is firstly because of Armando's essentially Renaissance belief that the human figure is 'a measure for all things'. A complete disposal of form in the process of abstraction would signify a sort of an aesthetic asceticism that for Armando can only lead to over-intellectualisation of an artwork. Secondly, as with other abstract artists before him, Armando is well aware of the problem that non-representational art can present in terms of the meaning of the artwork. Content can easily be lost altogether and that would be disastrous leap into the abyss of Postmodernity. Kandinsky describes this dilemma succinctly when writing about his process of abstracting form: "A terrifying abyss of all kind of questions, a wealth of responsibilities stretched before me. And most important of all: what is to replace the missing object? The danger of ornament revealed itself clearly to me; the dead semblance of stylised forms I found merely repugnant..." 1 Kandinsky's answer to the question of meaning was given by way of implication: "surely forms so laboriously conceived must be significant and meaningful even if they do not resemble or represent objects". 2 Kandinsky expressly equated the artist's inner aspiration with the content, which peremptorily determines form. It is this 'inner aspiration' that is both the inspiration and the driving force in Armando's creativity. His is a deep and sincere longing to share with the viewer what he has learnt in the process of creation, for it is never the process that we witness in Armando's art but the end result, the essence of form. Perhaps one of the most remarkable qualities of Armando's paintings, apart from the impressive usage of colour glazes, is the achievement of harmony between dynamics and tranquillity. For Armando the idea is not a flash of inspiration, not is it some kind of a sudden vision that must be put on canvas. Instead Armando's ideas are a result of long process of sketching impressions and conclusions drawn from life, from reading; in short, from anything that reflects his intellectual approach to painting. Armando's ideas are evolving, sometimes for months after being

initially registered as a sketch, until a day comes when a 'solution' is born in the artist's mind; a solution for further development, into a painting. In this sense, although works of art in their own right, Armando's numerous sketches are rarely final visual statements of his ideas. With *Job Transcending* (2001) and *Pyrrha* (2002) Armando achieves total abstraction; a result of a ten-year period of gradual filtration and abstraction of Realist, Futurist and Surrealist styles. It is a culmination that mirrors his inner striving to reach his own, authentic voice, a new contemplation of painting perhaps deprived of narrative but not deprived of an idea. In the same year followed other major abstract pieces, such as *The Red Man and the Green Man* and *The Transfiguration*. However, the figure is never completely lost; it comes back, albeit tentatively and subtly, in 2004, the artist always acutely aware of the German philosopher Hegel's dictum about the forms in most successful works art that 'tread into sensuality but remain self-contained'. For Armando 'treading into sensuality' means allowing the human figure, or the essence of it, to be recognisable in the finished stages of painting. Between 2002 and 2007 this has allowed Armando to maintain a parallel continuity between abstract and figurative elements, the two always evolving around each other, born onto one another in a constant play of inner and outer. In the finished picture we can sense the perpetual metamorphoses of the human figure and its energy.

Armando's pictures effortlessly withstand the test of time. It is with considerable difficulty that one tries to find a single living artist or a work of art today that can match Armando's originality and vision. His unique style of painting is a novelty, even after the 20th century wave of Modernism. If one may venture into evaluative analysis, Armando's art confirms the Art for Art's Sake qualities of Modernism, but also offers something more. It contains timeless, objective qualities of form, movement and depth, values that remind us of the universal spirit, the Oneness to which we all belong.

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