

The Evolution of Art through Time and Space

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Abstract

Art is different depending on the epoch (time) and the place (space). As time and space are concepts, they do not cause its evolution, but they help us understanding why art is a beneficial mediator.

Keywords: *Aircraft Girl Art; Anachronism; Avant-Garde; The Picasso Phenomenon*

Introduction

Given that time is not a phenomenon and that space has no materiality [1], how can art change by time and by space? The art History provides a great deal of information: as an anthropological phenomenon, art results from Society, but it also reflects society, telling us a lot on life and on humanity.

Time and space allow analysing origins, specificity, value, criteria, involvement, of art. Far from a simple inroad, the two concepts are systematically underlying throughout this non-orthodox approach that we have exemplified by non-elitist examples as well as avant-garde examples.

Origins of art

Art is considered a human invention. It is partly wrong because many people just don't care; some don't even know what it is about. In addition, countless animals have an artistic behaviour: bird trying to seduce a female by parading as long as necessary (time) all the feathers out (space), after a thorough cleaning of his personal home (space); male fish carefully building a geometrically perfect sand rosette (space) intended to receive the eggs; no rush, he will be ready on time (time).

The aurignacian flutes (c.60.000 years ago) (time) [2, p. 15] is the first physical trace of art in humans. The oldest parietal¹ art outside or inside caves (space) is approximately dated 30,000 years ago (time) for Chauvet Cave in Ardèche - France (space) [3].

¹Parietal: on wall.

Art is a broad subject matter because it includes fields as diverse as architecture, sculpture, music, photo, theater, poetry, literature, cinema, dance, drawing, engraving, painting, fresco, glass, stained glass, ceramics, book binding, lacquer, book illustration, classic cars, landscaping, etc. Each field intersects with various schools, trends or styles, through fine art, folk arts and traditions, decorative arts, naive art, sacred art, primary arts, brut art, avant-garde, and so on, that make art polygenic² and innovative in relation to time and space. As an example, the sacred dimensions (space) of religious buildings.

The formal garden (Jardin à la Française) is based on Euclidean geometry and rectilinear intersections of paths between decorative elements (space); but in use (time), these preconceived paths are not respected. British landscape architects manage space and time differently: they set up accesses and various decorative elements such as bushes, basins, sculptures, entrance; and they lay lawns everywhere. After a few weeks (time), the paths appear (space): they are considered final and the ultimate works can be completed. Each solution, implemented by a landscape architect, results from the topiary³ art in force in the country, as a tradition in accordance with a collective psyche.

The painting is a 2D image (two-dimensional) until the perspective effects, which enrich the representation of space thanks to 3D image (tree-dimensional), start appearing on Pompeii Frescoes from the 1st century CE⁴ onwards, and spread and flourish during the Renaissance. The sculptors of the Benin Kingdom (Nigeria XVe- XVIe CE) found another solution: subordinate people are supposed to walk behind the monarch; on the relief bronze plaque, they stand beside with a size smaller than that of the monarch (London's British Museum): salience⁵ (space) symbolizes power. These technical solutions to represent the perspective took a lot of time and effort from painters and sculptors.

The decision about what is art or what is not art is certainly conventional. Art mainly results from the artist's research, interpretation, conception, representation, know-how, of an object, of an idea, of a project. Art also results from a consensus omnium⁶ in favor of unusual art forms found in brut art or in folk art, in which Psychology would play a major role. Illustrated advertising blotters (Figure 1), posters or enameled advertising signs, that are information spreaders and reminders, amplify social and economic history; they are now more and more involved in the objectives of museums exhibitions.

Art is geographically localized (space) with a limited lasting (time), by reason of the relation to lifestyle as well as by the artist's need to create. Tuareg nomads do not collect classic cars, instead they have an accomplished know-how to decorate metal and leather. Current architects do not work like the French architect Viollet-le Duc (1814 - 1879). Current artists do not paint like Renaissance painters. Advertising blotters were used by school kids and doctors mainly in western countries (space) during the first half of XXth century (time).

"Paintings the art historians have missed" [4] and that are known by very few people, concern the American aircraft girl art. After Japan attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. US Air Force deployed in Europe and on the Pacific Theater (space) military aircrafts that crews have spontaneously decorated with unorthodox⁷ ornamentation: pin-up girls painted onto

²Polygenic: from the Greek genês (origine).

³Topiary: from the Latin topiaria (art of the landscape architect).

⁴CE: common era; BCE: before common era.

⁵Salience: from the Latin salio (which stands out).

⁶Consensus omnium: acceptance by all.

⁷Unorthodox: from Greek orthos (straight) and doxa (opinion).



Figure 1: French blotter for the Marshall Plan (13 x 20 cm) (1948).

the skin⁸of Flying Fortresses and printed on crew leather jackets. The phenomenon originated in the airbrush paintings of the American George Petty (1894 - 1975) and the Peruvian Alberto Vargas (1896 - 1982), whose works were well known by readers of Esquire magazine founded in 1933; it lasted during World War II⁹ and the Korean War¹⁰ (time) [4].

The airmen, who were exposed at death everyday, customized the side of their aircraft with soothing but salient patterns for psychological motivations, in order to make it different, to strengthen crew cohesion, and by the way, arouse the surprise from enemy pilots.

However, it comes to localized and short-lived art, the paintings of the Flying Fortresses are now highlighted in scenography of Air Force Museums and private collections.

Involvement of art

“The ultimate goal of art is delight” says the French painter Nicolas Poussin (1594 - 1665) [5, p. 111]. Analysed through time and space, art is not universal because it appears as a local and a provisional manifestation of thought which partly depends on the socio-cultural specificities; but not only, thanks to avantgarde researches. For example, the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi (1852 - 1926) replaced orthostatic structures by loxostatic¹¹ structures.

⁸The french word is carlingue.

⁹(1942-1945) B17 Flying Fortress, B24 Liberator, B29 Superfortress.

¹⁰(1950-1953) B29 Superfortress.

¹¹Loxostatic: from Greek loxos (inclined); opposite: orthostatic.

Early in the 20th century, some artists transformed the standard representations of spatiality: in 1909, the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky (1868 - 1944) painted the first abstract non-geometrical composition for a poster advertising the first exhibition of the Munich New Artists' Association.

In 1906, the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973) made the preparatory drawings and paintings (one of them is displayed in the State Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg) for the first large cubist painting: *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907 (244 x 234 cm; 96 x 92 in) which is depicting with a 2D view, female prostitutes in a brothel located calle de Avinyo in Barcelona. It is now the property of the Museum of Modern Art of New York City.

Cubism is a geometrization of space for representing reality otherwise and for uncovering unknown aspects of the subject: the portrait of the art publisher Ambroise Vollard painted between 1909 and 1910, now in the Pushkin Museum of Moscow and the portrait of the gallery owner Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler painted in 1910, now at the Art Institut of Chicago, show an outstanding mastery of space. In 1909 Picasso made the first pre-cubist woodcut and the first pre-cubist sculpture with the head of his wife Fernande Olivier, the first cubist sculpture, *La guitare* in 1912, property of the Museum of Modern Art of New York City and during the same year with Georges Braque (1882 - 1963), the first *papiers collés*.

Picasso never stopped finding out new representations; he used to say "I do not seek, I find". The work of Picasso remains as an unprecedented example of creativity and abundance, with an exceptional mastery in painting, drawing, engraving, lithograph, sculpture, ceramic, costumes and sets for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (*Parade* 1917, *Le Tricorne* 1919, *Pulcinella* 1920, *Cuadro Flamenco* 1921).

The French-American painter Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968) has initiated the kinetic cubism with *Nude descending a staircase* painted in 1912 and now the property of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In the painting titled *Le Temps d'un Buveur*¹² (time of a drinker) done in the thirties by the French artist Marie-Thérèse Sarrade (1903 - 1987), time and space are rendered through an amazing representation of the movement (Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Le Temps d'un Buveur* by Sarrade (49 x 30 cm; 125 x 77 cm).

¹²Author's collection.

In each case, it led to scandal and protests for not observing the academic obligation to represent shapes and colors in a meticulous way, respecting the usual conventions. But it was a revolution in the organization of pictorial, sculptural and architectural space; in short, a complete overhaul of 20th century art.

However, we do not know the signification of abstract signs, parietal art was inspired mostly by the animals that artists were encountering. Installations and accumulations carried out by contemporary artists seem to be inspired by objects in numbers, as we find many in nature.

Nature presents a lot of naturalia¹³ having the appearance of artifacts¹⁴, as exemplified with a 3 cm high stone looking like an ostraca¹⁵; nature has taken thousands of years to carve this outline (Figure 3).

Anachronism in art

Anachronism results either from error in chronology, or from incompatibility with the era, or from rewriting of History, or from down-times in art.



Figure 3: A strange profile carved by nature.

¹³Naturalia: from the Latin naturalis (natural part).

¹⁴Artifact: from the latin artis factum (done from a know-how).

¹⁵Ostraca: from the Greek ostrakon (shell).

Right after the death of pharaoh Tutankhamun (c.1345 - c.1327), his name and that of his father pharaoh Akhenaten (c.1353 - c.1334) who had replaced the ancestral polytheism by a Solar monotheism, were deleted from genealogical list; and the solar city Amarna, built by Akhenaten, was destroyed following the revolt of the priests. Fortunately, the tomb of Tutankhamun escaped destroyers and thieves for 3300 years (time); the treasure is now displayed at the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo (space).

Presumed portrait of pharaoh Khephren (c.2600 BCE), the sphinx of Giza was damaged in the 14th century by an iconoclastic¹⁶ Muslim.

In Poetic Art, the Latin poet Horace (65-8 BCE) noticed that “Painters and poets have always had the right to dare everything”; a legitimate right denied by the alienating ideologies of autocratic powers; each era has its destroyers.

Ideologies are wary of artists. Dictators fear artists as well as art. Artists are seen as threats to their power. History is manipulated, to the point of erasing from official photos the people who have ceased to please, like Trotsky (1879 - 1940), in Soviet Union. From 1934 onwards, Socialist realism began to crack down in all fields of Art. As an example, the Communist party accused the composer Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 - 1975) because his music was incomprehensible to the masses, etc. Subsequently Shostakovich was ostracized and physically threatened; he narrowly escaped the gulag. Stalin did not read the Roman historian Tacitus (c.55 - c.120) who warned: it is easier to smother thinking and studies than to bring them back to life [6].

The two giant Buddhas (55m and 38m) of Bamiyan in Afghanistan were totally destroyed in 2001 by the Taliban.

In Germany, the Degenerate Art Exhibition was organized by the Nazi Party in Munich in 1937. Its aim was to condemn avant-garde movements like Expressionism and Dada and promote an official art in line with Nazi ideology. Dictators devastate the social, cultural and economic space, during the time when they rage.

During World War II, the Jewish properties have been systematically confiscated. The great art dealer Rosenberg has been spoliated because he was a Jew. Kahnweiler, the discoverer of Picasso, has been spoliated twice, during World War I and World War II, because he was German and Jewish.

Let us mention anachronisms done by some famous painters

Jesus child in adoration before the Cross by Le Nain brothers (c.1645). Adam and Eve commonly represented with a navel, by Dürer (1504), Titian (1550), Cranach the Elder (c.1513), Masaccio (1527), Jean Breughel the Younger (c.1650); by the Flemish Hugo van der Goes (c.1435 - 1482) who painted The Original Sin in 1470.

According to the tradition, Moses might have lived during 13th century BCE. Well Rembrandt (1606 - 1669) represents the Table of the Law with a text engraved in Hebrew, however the consonantal Hebrew appeared during 9th century BCE [7].

The Spanish painter José Ribera (1591 - 1652) represents the Tables engraved in Greek writing, while the Greek consonantal writing derived from Phoenician writing during 11th century BCE [7]. Given that Moses was born and lived in Egypt (space), the Tables should be engraved either with Egyptian hieroglyphs (c.3000 BCE), or with hieratic Egyptian characters (c.2400 BCE), or with Ugaritic cuneiform characters (14th - 13th BCE).

Time and space allow one to make the appropriate corrections.

¹⁶ Iconoclastic: from the Greek eikon (icon), klastein (break).

Art and value

Art is abundant, diverse and accessible in cities and in the country, with museums, monuments, churches, depending of what is needed by people: interest in art History, return on investment, encourage young painters or avant-garde movements, explore the unknown, looking for original approaches of culture, or simply decorate the dining room. The involvement of art is diverse: an anthropological indicator, the improvement of quality of life, a research path for artists, a profit for some.

The commercial value and the artistic value have different criteria. For example, the rating of a contemporary painter depends on the promotion done by the gallery, on the collectors interest for his work, on public expectation, whether he is fashionable or not. The artistic value is related to art History, to contemporary History, to the influence of the artist on art, to the quality of the work instead of its age (time), etc.

It is to be emphasized that the commercial value is an effective protection against forgetfulness and physical destruction. The art History is full of examples of changes in commercial value: Vermeer was a cursed painter; his genius was not discovered until long after his death. In the mid-1930's, the works of Picasso done between 1898 and 1905 did not sell. Modigliani was poor all his life long. Paul Rosenberg emphasizes that he made a fortune, being forced to keep almost his life long, works by Picasso, Braque and Juan Gris, that were not selling, and that suddenly became priceless. During the thirties, Henry Ottmann (1877 - 1927), André Favory (1889 - 1937) and Tsugouharu Foujita (1886 - 1968) were very successful, then they fell into oblivion (time). In 1988, Paul Fachetti, the discoverer of Jackson Pollock, advised me not to buy paintings of Alex Smadja, one of the theorists of Lyrical Abstraction, because he was not an "international painter" (space); until an inexplicable spark changes everything (time).

Are there criteria for choice and possession of an artwork? The favorite (*coup de cœur*, in French) is definitely a bad advice; the worst of all advices, because a serious collector must be a connoisseur: the artist and the artwork he is interested in should be thoroughly documented. It means reference to art History, pedigree of the artwork, feeling of beauty, quality of the work, artist rating, among the most basic criteria. The pedigree is about the provenance (space) from a famous collection or from a museum, exhibition in a museum or in a gallery, record in the catalog raisonné dedicated to the artist, books and articles published (time and space). As the saying goes "caveat emptor" (let the buyer beware). The buyer should beware of counterfeiters and check the physical condition (sold as is).

Art collectors contribute on a large scale to the enrichment of museums, through four main ways: the artwork donation (*don* in French); the contractual artwork donation (*donation* in French): the donation Levy resulted in the Museum of Troyes; the artwork donation in payment of taxes (*dation* in French): the dation of Picasso family resulted in the Picasso Museum; the philanthropic patronage to finance the purchase of artworks.

It takes time (time), but the best artworks are inexorably moving towards museums (space).

When an art object enters a French museum, it is final (time and space): the policy is to keep everything, contrary to that of American museums.

The wealthiest collectors HNWI (high net worth individuals) buy between \$1M and \$5M per year, often with an expected return on investment. In 2019, global art and antiques auctions reached \$64 billion according to La Gazette Drouaut of May 29, 2020, what is negligible compared to the global value of stocks traded in 2019: \$60,359 billion (source: World Federation of Exchanges Database) and compared to the global market capitalization: \$86,432 billion (source: Bloomberg Equity Indices). Cardinal Mazarin (1602 - 1661) was one of the greatest art collector worldwide. At the end of his life, someone heard him talk to his paintings: "Soon (time), I will have to leave you (space)". This is the way it is.

Conclusion

Time and space remain major cultural indicators, to the point that without these two concepts, the art History would probably not exist. It is observed that in reference to time and space, art History is far from being a long quite river. Art never stop evolving by reason of its rooting in the socio-cultural space and the pressure of avant-garde movements, as Ptahotep prime minister of pharaoh Isesi asserted about 2400 BCE: "The limit of art have not been reached, no sketch is perfect" [8, p. 61]. Artworks are abundant despite the destruction during disasters and wars; they move between collectors and dealers, until the best of them reaches a museum.

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