

INTRODUCTORY PROPOSITIONS

The honor of being invited to present my own art alongside that of my brothers in NEW SACRED ART (Àṣẹṣẹ) came as a surprise, and gave me “food for thought”—all the moreso as this exhibition opens only three days after MUSON’s own inaugurating ceremony, and at the MUSON building itself. Here, I will outline my reflections on MUSON’s open-handed gesture of welcome to our activities, which are seemingly so different, but which are really parallel to their own in nature and in origin.

MUSON involves the numinosity and sacred symbol-reality of the para-æsthetic motive forces of music (Western or otherwise). It has shouldered an intrinsically humane, socially beneficial responsibility—a socially helpful act—of converging sound forms. In this way, MUSON provides access to the unsurpassable pleasure of “mystical participation”¹: metaphysical involvement with the spiritual process of pure sound formation in the performance of music.

We in the Òṣogbo Groves create shrines and monumental sculptures which are themselves shrines. We build them as a refuge for Òriṣà (THE GODS), those exquisitely individuated, sacred motive-forces and spiritual fecundities whom we know individually and personally with the inner mind of the senses.² SACRED ART (Ère) literally *houses* the god: Òriṣà might otherwise be homeless, having been evicted from their former homes by “progress.” By authority of Ori/Logos (and not by logic), one is placed into one “inescapable dimension of time.”³ Our mind, proportioned according to one distinct order of one era, is modern. This order defines ritual and art, which can be performed and experienced only in the framework of our indispensable perception of our time. The spiritual compartments of the mind are furnished with “modernity,” which concerns us as well as the gods. Their individual truth forms cannot be anything other than actuality. While rituals are defined by the reality of ancient myths, even these myths must be accented in the language of the present, just as trance (and hence “trance-formation”) cannot occur anywhere but in the present moment. River and time never flow back to their source, but follow time’s inescapable dimension. Life is motion, simultaneously both IN time and BEYOND it. As culture mirrors life, culture is thus in motion, too.

Let me quote from Baruch de Spinoza, the Spanish-Jewish philosopher of the 17th Century, whose transcendental intellect worthily represents one aspect of sublime Western thought to us—even here and now—in its strikingly realistic presence:⁴

Affectus qui passio est
desinit esse passio simulatque eius
claram et distinctam formamus ideam.

*A vital experience which causes suffering
ceases to do so when we can form
a clear and distinct idea of its meaning.*

In our present time, before our eyes, all social, cultural and racial gaps—which seemed to be established and accepted forever—are dissolving like some *corpus delicti* deposited in caustic lime.

¹In the phrase of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, also used by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

²The great English poet William Blake sings that “One must know God with the senses.”

³In the words of Teilhard de Chardin, a Catholic philosopher of our time.

⁴The Yorubá word *láéláé*, literally translated as “in the distant past”/“in the beginnings of time”/“since forever,” accurately accounts for the dimension which I have called TIME-SPACE-PSYCHIC DEPTH-RELATIVITY. This concept applies to equally to myth, ritual, art and dreams, all of which are phenomena of the psycho-mystical sphere.

Every true work of art is a pilgrimage to the wilderness—altar of multidimensional beginnings in psychic depth, where both artist and artwork go, hand in hand, seeking each other’s guidance. The work creates itself if the soil—the author’s inner perceptiveness — is fertile. Art is ritual. Ritual is “reactualization of enduring beginnings” (Mircea Eliade). As testimony of truth, creative thought and art cannot be weighed on a scale.⁵ Truth has many faces, but is ONE. All the various religions are, summarily, THE RELIGION OF HUMANKIND. Over the doors of some Tibetan monasteries one can read “1,000 monks, 1,000 religions.”

There is an ancient, preeminently sacred species of forest tree called *àgbàáyín*. In our Groves, they are priestly trees. *Àgbàáyín* is sacred to Ori/Logos/the Holy Spirit. His leaves are exceedingly tiny; when he sheds his garment annually, they fall in a cloud which responds to the slightest breeze, so sensitive is Logos. A Yorùbá proverb says:

Ọmọ kẹkẹrẹ kò lẹ ka ewé Àgbàáyín; *No child can count an Àgbàáyín’s leaves;*
 àgbàlàagbà nàà kò lẹ ka ewé Àgbàáyín; *not even an elder can count them.*

Our projects may be such tiny leaves on the TREE OF LIFE, sacred to Logos, the source of life. Who indeed can count the faces of truth? Mankind may perhaps learn to live with that wisdom.

Sane anthropos—whose ethics have not yet gone down the drain of greed, ambition, gluttony, desanctified sex and primitive prowess to multiply their own stupid kind—sane anthropos is worried. As humanity is part of the indivisibly complex phenomenon of nature, in substance and in essence, man in his intrinsic humanness is vexed by regrets and appropriate anticipations. “Prophecy is a quality of the soul.” This is a plain statement on inborn clairvoyance by Aristotle, that sober, ancient Greek whose consent seems to be indispensable to modern philosophy. So we must now endure the preview of unavoidable consequences from the widening devastation of “progress” (which may well be progress into hell-on-earth). This greed-born, man-shaped snowball may release avalanches of disaster, in view of which even stubborn mankind opens its eyes and SEES. Some of us now know what ancient Yorùbá wisdom and religion knows, namely that it is the spiritual essence which gives motion to the substance. The innate perfection of great musical works, Western and otherwise, is the transcendental consonance of primary-sacred number symbolism (which is how Aristotle defines rhythm); science rediscovers rhythmically inclined frequencies, which are the “reactualization of unending beginnings.”

Perfect form and perfect performance open up new horizons to life. All over the world, extending to the farthest horizons of the human genius, can be found altars of perfect sound-formations: these are the great composers, both known and anonymous. The primary motive-force of their brains sounds through eternity. It emanates spiritual fecundity. They do not want to force us onto them; they give themselves to us freely. There are with us men and women of unsurpassable spiritual and physical beauty. They are old. They never teach us, they do not want to form us. They do not tailor their splendid wealth to fit our shapes. They will take their phenomenal wisdom into their graves, and into the beyond-reservoir from where they pour it into our mind’s genius. Logos is like Phœnix: he rises from his own ashes.

⁵I am not using the term *art* to describe the trade in aesthetically superficial wall-decorations and purchaseable status symbols.

SUSANNE WENGER ON SUSANNE WENGER

She was born in one suburban garden city—still country-like at that time—in a “villa” with a garden where stood some very tall fire-trees, bright red in the early morning sun when their resident squirrels would whisk from top to top. These fire trees and one very old linden were her “first universities” (Gorki). Every afternoon, her coffin-like pram was placed under that linden. Even though she could not see the surrounding world, the multiply coordinate diagrams of branches expanded over her, set against all sorts of light, focused into the future and resembling the arterial systems and coordinate orders of multidimensionality in her paintings and sculptures of today.

She was born to fine parents, both of them gifted with talents and inborn wisdom, both of them frustrated by the typical kinds of bewilderments and shortcomings which befall those with talent although they cannot understand why. Her childhood—otherwise gay—was overshadowed by, or stood in the abstracting light of, instinctive and vehement compassion with her parents, who loved each other but who heaped mutual tortures of self-reproach onto each other’s fussy commotions of utter despair. While still very young, she felt a compassionate commitment to restore equanimity to these floods of despair, indefatigably again and again. That was another motive force which formed her character. As compassion is primarily a religious phenomenon, she started to have religious concerns—rejecting all she was taught as a slander against Jesus, whom she thought of as an elder brother. Through all her individual transmutations into “being an artist” and being human, the eminently dynamic and eucharistic motive force was and is the CREATIVE SUFFERING OF FRUSTRATED SACREDNESS. Parents are sacred to the child.

The abovementioned quasi-countryside afforded playgrounds which were really retreats. There she lay under all sorts of trees, as she still does, relearning and learning anew to know WHAT HEAVEN REALLY IS.

That suburb adjoined the city of Graz, whose central quarters are still now unaltered and ancient without interruption—a breathing, living prechristian survivor, an archaic power-spot. This old center core holds and draws an enormous mountain-like rock into some kind of mystical embrace. As she went to school in Graz, trusting in its social aspect, she occasionally traded her classrooms for that rock and those trees, renewing acquaintance with the squirrels. She became mistrustful of some of the things taught to her in school, which she had been eager to know about, because of the superstitious interpretations which were imposed on the child.

In her teens, before and during her artistic and manual training in the Art-and-Craft school, she did pottery and earthen sculpture—which is really what she is doing now, as she calls her shrines *amū* (pots which hold sacredness). In summer or winter, spring or autumn, she would go away to the mountains, often for weeks at a time, without warning. She went alone. From a peasant she got the key to an unused cowherd’s hut, such as can be found high up, well above the woods, where the rocks have undisputed supremacy over the terrain. The vegetation up there is subject to natural restrictions. There, she felt accepted and became communicative, as still now she speaks with nature. These near-empty huts possess—and convey—the intimacy of an animal’s burrow or a nest. A kerosene lamp and some provisions were brought in on her back. In the winter she used skis, a somewhat unstable means of locomotion. Her sense of orientation is unstable, too, as she sees, thinks and paints in ever-new angles as dictated

by the diagrams of beloved nature. All is always the detecting of the new. The inner mind of the senses has rhythms and frequencies in common with stones, earth, animals and plants. She accordingly has a lot to do: a rock or a tree is never the same again, as there are always new interferences by other trans-creatural participants in that game. She never got lost. She had no accidents. Seeing no humans, she did not miss them. She saw eagles and chamois and quietly learned something about their ritual play.

She was always contentedly or forthrightly involved in her living context, be it the Alps, Vienna or Paris; city-wilderness, slum or concert hall. She never turned away from such involvements. Others called her. Life lives itself. Her mind's meta-intellectual compartments thereby became saturated with natural units of sacredness. Like the organism of a swimmer struggling in floodwaters, a soul must know how to swim in sacredness, or else vanish. Her religious independence—she is devout to all religions' inner source, belonging to no one—this freedom which she still retains was brought into her life paradoxically by the uncouth midwifery of some self-righteous Christian-oriented lessons. The tiny “ever-laughing Susi” had to endure torrents of an inner drama fathomed by nobody, undergoing a mystical takeover by a personal god-image, to reach the ELEMENTARY SACREDNESS OF BEING. This wide room can contain her unbearably dynamic religiosity.

PAINTING

A storehouse of memories accessed through the senses became the cognizance of a pre-linguistic child, beyond time, of her future paintings. That occurred under the tutelage of some eminently powerful GURU who was a tree, and was made possible by her ambivalence towards time and her spiritual cohesion with nature.

But is it really that multi-levelled variegation of colourful light pattern, vibrating through its skin and breathing through its texture: the sky beyond the linden's branching structure? Is it on the same moving wavelength that these paintings, completed several decades later, are selectively deduced from the SUMMARY OF ALL COLOURS IN THE LIGHT? Are these paintings, these multiple happenings struggling dramatically for balance, REALLY derived from Q̄batalá's complex ethical perfection, perceived through the senses of a child's All-One-Some-ness (lonesomeness) in the seclusion of that coffin-like pram under the linden?⁶ Is the celestial perspective envisaged in a pram or in a coffin that of some inter-linked convergence of individuals (namely hers and the linden tree's) upon each other? In this sense, are the experiences of the torqueing-downward locomotions of the linden's pale-green winged blossoms really the helix of torqueing lines in her paintings?

Her answer: why should I submit to such rational nosyness? It would never get close to the truth, *laélaé*, the “inescapable dimension of time” whose coincidence is comprehensible without any contradiction whatsoever. It is also linked in meaning to Q̄batalá's having “walked on Earth *laélaé*”—as indeed all Òriṣà claim to have done. They are now a living parental phenomenon, preternaturally perceptible through the inner mind of the senses, on the brink of timeless physicality.

⁶Q̄batalá is the pre-eminently sacred godhead in the Yorùbá “pantheon,” present also in the white light and worshiped in the dawn of day.

SCULPTURE

She meditates with her hands while sculpting. As she does not accept any kind of rigidity, she believes in the ongoing process of PURE-FORM-FINDING. This process, she claims, emanates coordinated ritual forces and fecundities which liberate her and free the tentacles of all nature in herself, in this way making her a WILDERNESS-ALTAR. Her own impetus of love-and-compassion becomes a root power, transformed into meditation. She cannot submit to meditation in any other way; she admires the Oriental and other “classical” traditions as something which must be done by others. Her form-meditation is embedded in the sacred dimensions of all that adheres to and embraces MOTHER EARTH, who has been ill-treated to the point of exhaustion. Compassion, in that sense, is a religious phenomenon, and it is her religion.

She believes in the spiritual fecundities of silence, replenished by sympathy. The groups of sound forms, borne on the river or the wind, underlie silence. She translates all these perceptions of silent sounds into form elements in her sculpture, which portrays the gods’ images and their dream-reality. As a conglomerated iconogram, a sculpture takes its inner form and its organization of force from “sacred medicine bundles” (Ruth Benedict). These ordered conglomerations are free to come and go, as they are convergent on themselves. Reality has ever-new mind-dimensions, and many faces, but it is one: *Vulto mutabilis veritatis*.

She does not worship the river, she is part of it. Art is total involvement in another unit of life, and the form of this involvement’s contented manifestation. She gratefully accepts and answers the call to be in the same priestly orders as all the life which is in the river and on its banks: the spiritual fragrances of trees, animals and the organisms of all other vegetations. The potent breath of EARTH and AIR forms her sculpture. So does the nearness, spiritual and physical, of the “waters of life.” Every living thing is begotten by and born from this river. So is her art. Everything that lives here is its “other realization,” just as the pot is the other realization of the room for whose sake it came into existence.

But, as time and river never return to their source, she and her work go on with a to-and-from, ideographic coming and going, like breath. She moulds the form’s forecast and memory in a swinging pendulum, integrating her own life-force with the materialized idea. For more than ten years now, she has been working contentedly on this complex sculpture near the river, under the trees. These trees, their inhabitants and their vegetable entourage are all her GURUS. The swarms of monkeys come and go; they have accepted her as one of them. Snakes mate or shed their skin nearby. “Maybe my body’s vital frequencies have approximated theirs.” There are many kinds of birds, some of them “sacred” to her in their cries or in the way they fly. They are all mirrored in that sculpture-complex. So is EARTH. So is AIR.

Her architectures are sculpture. They are icons; like the mask-costume (*agō*), they must act on behalf of ancestry. The path to her work’s dome of treetops and their swinging shadows is “not open to the public.” Here the rocks kneel their wise bodies unembarrassedly into the river. On a rare exception, a friend cried “But that’s all tree!” To this she replied, “Sculptures frequently resemble their author, like an old dog resembles its owner out of faith and love. My sculptures are done by the trees. I myself am partly tree. Nearly half of me is human; all the other fractions of my identity are tree, earth, animal, rock. So, nearly half of that sculpture asserts its humanness.”

BATIK

Her batik, like all her art, is of the iconic order, but it never submits to historical, geographic, social or racial ideocentricities. As life lives itself, she has been increasingly well placed in her vital involvements and in her first hand physico-spiritual experiences with the social situation regulated by Òrìṣà — the gods themselves. Thus, quite naturally, it came to be that all her batiks and sculptures bear the impact of Òrìṣà, notwithstanding her awareness of the interhumanitarian character of all that is sacred. They all represent Òrìṣà. These colourful personalities, or individuations of primary force, are ever-involved in primary clashes of root force, staged and dramatized by the fluctuating convergence of forces and energies upon themselves. She knows that she partakes of Òrìṣà with the inner mind of the senses, guided by her psycho-spiritual constitution and choice. According to the ritually and systematically defined pattern, that means that she is an *olórìṣà*. Being an *olórìṣà* imbues a state of spiritual and emotional inclusion in the physio-somatic totality of one Òrìṣà's trans-creatural community (*egbé*). One's psycho-spiritual and symbolic reality reacts to that particular god's ideal ancestry-beyond-time. As creation is not a historic event, one's hierarchic situation is also of a metaphysical order. For an *olórìṣà* there is no time, no mood in which one could or would lay aside one's sublime quality (*egbé*). Nor is there any time or mood in which an artist could ever live without this inborn heirloom of creative power, this material which governs his psychic totality. These pre-concerts, owned by both sides of the equation, interchangeable in origin as well as quality, are primary in the artists's impulsive choice of his own fate pattern, which fluctuates in latent or creative response by means of trance-formation, creatively controlled and ritually applied. Ritual is art; art is ritual.

If one appreciates these statements as factual, one may well sympathise with the artist's blunt assertion that her art is naturalistic, in that each work accounts accurately for one event, experienced by her naturally and spontaneously. "They represent a sort of metaphysical snapshot," she says. She even goes so far as to ascribe some realism to this, because the gods ARE REAL in that one dimension of reality which manifests itself in all religions on earth. And then, since matter is fluctuating force, the force one experiences is certainly real.

As to the tragic intensity of the myths represented in the batiks, she points to the "forces of defenseless truth" (Pasternak) in a world maddened by greedy preoccupation with "success" and by indoctrination with superstitious prepossession of man's GOD-given supremacy, as if he were the only GOD-chosen vessel of intellect. This arrogant presumption forces man into a deluded idea of GOD's anthropomorphy and anthropopathy, deducing a human likeness to GOD. This truly dangerous delusion excludes man from "mystical participation" and from the natural complexity of sacredness, which the Yorùbá tradition has personified in the plural divisions of Òrìṣà. Òrìṣà is certainly an archaic precinct of hierarchical ancestry beyond time (*láéláé*). It can be understood to be shared by all creatures: its source of inspiration may be a tree, an animal or a rock, according to the perceptibility of the sacredness of all that is created.