

## New Manifesto on the Arts

I have decided to join forces with those dear friends of mine who are anchored by artistic roots, albeit different from mine, because, in the end, I understand that art is only seemingly divisible.

In fact, if we accept such a point of view, almost all of us, and I first of all, are—in so many words—incomplete artists, mostly capable of developing and deepening a single aspect of what perhaps the art would require (in truth, it has never asked anyone anything and only gives to those who know to ask . . .). At any rate, on second thought, it happens almost the same with all things: do we not use, for example, too little of the body and mind compared with how much we should and could? And, perhaps, objectively, is our knowledge not limited about every doctrine and the world?

If I think of a doctor, I realize that he will only know one branch of medicine well. It is not by chance that he will tend to specialize in that particular direction. Furthermore, will he not always remain a capable doctor, if out of necessity, he deepens other aspects of his discipline?

Therefore, I think, real artists follow similar criteria: they are an artist because they possess the fundamental characteristics to be one—sensitivity, intelligence, creativity, curiosity, innate or acquired technical tools, talent, and so on. But they will soon decide, for one reason or another, to devote themselves to a peculiar aspect of ingenious human activity, which finally will increase wisdom by beauty or beauty by wisdom, leading to them identifying themselves with the role of a novelist, a painter, a sculptor, a musician, and so on.

I came to these conclusions when I realized that all the arts belong to me more or less equally, or, at least, I felt that I belong to them equally. More than twenty years ago, I approached the principles that lead humans to seek the exact word for poetry and prose; but now I realize that I can perceive the other aesthetic expressions that the world proposes and that I have learned to recognize deeper and deeper.

I feel the music pulsating in my chest like a broken beat and I confess that I have to keep away specifically from musical instruments, because it would be sufficient a spark to make me devote myself to the keyboard (or to another instrument), permanently, and, putting it bluntly, it would subtract from my writing. In truth, time is already too limited even for this sole art that crept furtively into my flesh, leaving there its deadly mark, when the air of the woods was yet to weigh on the shadows that crowd my dreams.

Therefore, I am aware of the temporal limit that makes difficult the idea of trying to learn something else to the level that I would like—so as to be able to express myself, rendering honor and glory to the art, without disaster, as, in this new millennium, humans seem to have often decided to do. At the moment, all this suggests to me is that I should let it go, so that I am not kidnapped, except for by curiosity about what I do not have, avoiding mixing the cards, and, in this case, at the risk of not being able to tell, in the future, in the highest and most effective way, what I care about.

However, I confess that the temptation is strong and if my life had not been the life of a wanderer, forced to work three times more than many others who I could define as being more fortunate concerning material goods, then, perhaps, I would give free vent to the development of new impulses. I think I could also express myself better than I do in letters using brushes and chisels (just like when I was a child, in our carpentry, to which I always return): I realize this when the soft madness assails me and if I see colors, a canvas, or scattered chips, so that already in my mind a thousand overlapping shades bloom, capable of giving voice to the immensity of a clear inner mirror.

I tremble if I see someone dancing or singing or designing an object—because design is an art, though many people say just the contrary—and a thrill assails me in front of a photographer or a director who sees everything differently from how other people deceive themselves to see. I just close my eyes and realize that, in myself, there would be sublime visions to be transposed on the scene, if only I learned to operate a camera, to create an effect, to light a candle with a *ciack*, or to make a swing move without a push.

I confess I perceive an unbridgeable void before the arts that I did not learn and I do not promise that one day I shall not find myself wearing “cloaks” that are different from the ones I am now wearing. But, even if I will never do it, just as reason suggests to me, I know that the Artist is the person who knows he or she can wear all such cloaks with dignity—those colorful cloaks that we usually wrap ourselves in to escape the sun, which would like to dissolve us in a single color or in the cold, which would turn us into statues for a sea museum without salt. He or she would be called a “Total Artist,” or an “Artist” with a capital A; in other words, he is someone who is capable of describing the picture using every single musical note.

For example, rather than writing about the torment of this evening, I would like to play it in a cathedral or paint it on a wall in a desert, although I never learnt to knead a color or to spread the paint or to blend it and dilute it. At the end, while my window almost succumbs to the hail of January, I would like to give breath to all the instruments of creation to express the sweetness and pain that I have inside—and maybe they would not be enough to tell you all. At the moment, I nearly faint for the emotion in confessing it to myself: I need every art to be able to vibrate as I should like, to say as I would like, to represent it as I feel and see. The poet (that is a synecdoche, in this case) being sufficient for himself, has not yet probably understood what is necessary.

The greatest painters I met were debating in verses, playing violins, and dancing in the street, so the great musicians hid their paintings and sculptures; one could speak also about the novelist who became dedicated to a virgin stone in order to discover the burning eyes for love that had escaped from the worn out cards.

Thinking about it again, all this happened frequently years ago—when I already had the fortune to be welcomed by authentic masters, although I had not realized it yet far away from the wisdom of the person who showed the route. But, today, having some white hair, everything is suddenly, terribly, and wonderfully semi-clear. On one side, this condition excites me, and on the other it throws me into a strong feeling of discouragement. The discouragement comes from thinking that one life cannot be sufficient to learn all that I would like, and I cannot breathe because I feel like a prisoner of my temporal limits or of the vastness of the field.

I return to the figure of the doctor I have boldly borrowed: I often wondered, in past times, how a doctor could choose his specialization, radically abandoning the other areas of the body. Now I know: it is a painful choice, which is perhaps necessary for excellence, before joining forces with other fields . . . And if this also applies to art, then, it will be this union that gives us the Total Artist we are looking for!

This thought consoles me a lot: to choose a specialization means to create sectoral eminences, allowing us to give the best of ourselves to other people, considering the lack of time; and nothing will prevent us from giving this to the world, although we are not satisfied with all our personal impulses that, perhaps, in art, unlike in other spheres, still have a reason to be.

However, we have to add that, in truth, even in the same artistic branch, we feel different needs: it is not by chance that we frequently remain within the literary environment, we write poetry, then theater, essays, aphorisms, and so on. I wonder, in return, why we do not specialize, then, in only one subgenre, thereby following the same logic of the limits that the mournful woman with her prompt scythe imposes or in the practical concerns of specialization.

In the latter case, we let ourselves go: we follow the instinct and the impulses that lead us now in verse, now in prose: yellow, black, or pink prose. Perhaps, this happens because, in the cases mentioned, one has less time to devote oneself to learning different things that only a short jump requires: in these circumstances, one move one's attention to subjects that have a common etymology. What a thorny issue! The war between my own hands.

In fact, the enthusiasm arises from the awareness that every journey has a coveted destination, but the path that leads only there may be equally precious. Someone who reaches a destination without travel, following a recommendation, will find themselves suddenly in a place in which they do not know how to remain; they will not understand how precious it would have been to have had to move every stone in order to find the way that leads to the top, arriving there without suffering the dizziness that accompanies the climb, and with awareness of having acquired the map that is necessary for the almost inevitable descent.

Therefore, you must not be voracious, but enjoy the dish using all the senses, perhaps discovering new ones in the process. The arts that we know are the food that makes us gluttons, of which we sometimes taste small bites that in every palate generate explosions . . . No, I shall not be voracious and as I do not allow childish despair, I do not taste it due to lustfulness.

I will have to be patient and settle for that part of the world I can see. And I will practice patience if I need to return to those same places: I learn to look at them and find in them other mythical details. This is the saving magic of the art that allows us to “satisfy” every palate even just with our favorite dish, the one we chose or the one that occurred by chance and that we have learned to love and, above all, never want to give up. These are partial, vaguely consoling answers.

I feel small and powerless before my gigantic urges that inevitably push me towards other shores. But it is still the willingness to be content, all the same, to continue the journey knowing that, at any rate, the intermediate stage is a place in which to stay and, although still, to be able to go on digging, wandering everywhere, creating, dreaming . . .

Moreover, the same universe can never be known in full, although we would like, and we do not feel prostrate faced with such an unbridgeable lack. We must abandon any conviction about how to grasp the unambiguous and objective truths of a vision. Every truth contains fragments that are not possible to grasp, because they are always observed from subjective points of view and, therefore, are unique and unrepeatable since space and time will inevitably be different for anyone wishing to repeat the experience.

There is also a reflection on the type of art that is developing in our society, considering the changes to communication and new artistic proposals that are often extravagant and tend to level down. If we accept, as I have heard said by many around me—and not only by members of youthful artistic movements—that everything can be “poetry” (critical judgment of absolute beauty, which is applicable to every single art), then “poetry” risks being downgraded. Poetry would no longer be the same subject of study as it was in past centuries, but would become a set of suggestions and effects that are, in truth, fruits far from what the god of the artists demands—as it is said in the rigorous gospel that inspired people have transmitted to us over the centuries.

And then, would the poetry we want and need really be so unwise? Perhaps, once again, we should start from the classics instead of giving credit to new fashions that tend to impose their vision of art; sometimes these are the children of extemporary intuitions that do not have solid bases, and, at other times, they are the child of the arrogance of those who wish to rule by birthright.

People thought the new millennium would bring wealth and peace. It has proved to be very problematic: we are living through a tremendous historical period in terms of communication (I avoid going into other fields, where the drama would be considerable . . .). Social networks—the real revolution of which will not be to have arrived but to be got rid of—are the masters and they gave voice to those who had little or, more usually, nothing to say, in return, silencing the wisest men and those richest in spirit, inhibited by the general chaos.

Our societies appear in too many aspects neo-medieval, as evidenced by the immeasurable army of those who, while having the good fortune to have a fairly stable job, fail or barely manage to sustain themselves economically to the end of the month (this is to say that our states are self-styled and not really civilian). One should enter every field; but here we clearly limit ourselves to debating poetry, as we are aware that, after all, artists have to strive to locate the path. But, therefore, what is poetry, now understood as a literary text in verse, so that it is possible to propose it for our contemporary scenario? Fundamentally, I said, it would start again from the classics, once again and always. In every art, those who try to innovate forget tradition, creating a mostly ephemeral revolution that is often less innovative than the one lived by artists in previous centuries. However, artists who have absorbed their forebears' teaching try to improve aesthetic products either to distort them or to create new ones, knowing that people in previous times were in truth better able to innovate than those who proclaimed the need for a *tabula rasa* (for example, thinking of the Futurist movement and comparing it with the early twentieth century imagist movement).

There is, in fact, no innovation without knowledge and the continuous struggle that every proposal requires to subvert an institution. The lyrics in verse—but this applies to all the arts—must be compared with the modern phenomena of globalization that has made available to everyone a wider knowledge of places, traditions, and languages . . . All this must be considered. The new poem will easily feed from the texts of others because of the immediate possibility of “possession” today.

For example, let's think of Eugenio Montale and how he was influenced, probably not in innocent good faith, by the concept of “impersonality” or the technique of “the objective correlative” by T. S. Eliot. Montale knew that Eliot's innovative compositions were fresh off the press and up for translation, so Professor Mario Praz enthusiastically showed them to him, sitting at the Giubbe Rosse literary café in Florence, just when he came back from one of his numerous trips to the island of Albioni.

It is impossible to “hide” work nowadays, to let it be sufficiently decanted to show it, as one's own, to the eyes of the world; therefore, it is right to acknowledge and transform all this into a general advantage, or disadvantage. Poetry written in our present time is full of influences (other than simple *anxiety*) that never happened in the past. Above all it is full of casts of new elements just printed by the artists who sometimes live on the other side of the globe and who, maybe, do not know our language and cannot imagine who will instantly appropriate those verses, disguising them as their own. But it is all right. Be aware of this, and have the courage to say that this is happening!

But let's discuss basic needs. Poetry needs a fabric of experience as well as imagination and feeling; but above all, it requires study. We cannot stand, at any rate, poets who have nothing to say and even less to teach but who continue to pour onto paper insufficiently linguistically reworked fantasies that are often taken from sterile daily experience without any artistic value—that is to say, without those primary requirements that poetry and art all together underlie.

Especially, poetry needs a well-cultivated talent from intense study that is able to exalt it. There is no art that comes from nothing or, better yet, there is no art or talent that you do not take advantage of through preparatory exercises and constant study.

I also propose a reflection on a question that arose with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the singer-songwriter Bob Dylan: it would be “easy” and ungenerous to say that it was not a happy choice, although I confess I did not share the view of the committee. However, perhaps we should take note that the most likely reason for the attribution of such recognition to a lyricist is to be sought in the modesty of contemporary poetic production. But let's leave aside these considerations and look again. Antonello Pelliccia, who with me conceived this interdisciplinary journey among the arts, adds in the next paragraphs the following consideration to indicate the clear path that the Contemporary Centre of Arts wants to trace and also to clarify the reasons that have animated him.

\* \* \*

Starting from a reflection on Wittgenstein's statements on the "representative theory of language" (the pictogram-graphic conception of language), I opened a new process of my thought, of my idea of contemporary art in its complex articulation and relapse in the world and in society.

I think it is appropriate to clarify my position as an artist and as a man just as responsible subjects, aware of the changes in tastes, fashions, and expressive languages. Art has always influenced the social climate, identifying, suggesting, and anticipating possible solutions to the problems of living and living together.

My research focuses on the definition of a new artistic interrelationship, with particular attention to sustainability and visual culture, as a reference and connection with the theses by Wittgenstein on the interpretation of the aesthetic result, maturing the refusal towards the formalistic reading of the work of art and leading me, finally, to the election of a multi-disciplinary approach as an essential methodology of reading art history.

In recent years, the interest of the new vision of practitioners and visual cultures have focused on a reflection of and an observation on doing—in other words, individuating in the artist the role of a director but also of a mediator among the various arts through the artist's work, contextualizing the historical and cultural background of the epoch. It is a journey through the labyrinth of new media, theatre, performance, landscape design, poetic reading, video, cinema, music, multimedia installation, and related arts; an attempt and temptation to get out from ordinary frames; a direct confrontation between the artist and the visitor, in search of freedom; the concept of opposing, overlapping, and inviting a response and the responsibility to keep alive the memory of the world; an investigation of the new potential of mass communication, internet technologies and new forms of interaction, connections with photography and the world of design, as well as the relative socio-economic repercussions.

I believe that the role of the artist in social reality today is to empower artists towards researching the definition of their place in civil, cultural, and intellectual society, so as to trigger networks of co-development related to solidarity between artists and productive interaction not only between artists but also with other types of professionals that can encroach on many areas, from the introduction of cutting-edge lifestyles to the organization of events, from art galleries to artisan laboratories.

\* \* \*

What my fraternal friend expresses seems to me to integrate my thoughts and I think it will make me feel less lonely, on pilgrimage among the labyrinthine paths of art and days. But here I am getting to the conclusion of this discussion. I thank all those respected artists and far-sighted people who have joined this new project.

Today, my friends, I come with you to the Contemporary Art Centre of Vallo della Lucania. Perhaps, this place will clarify my ideas better and, above all, it will tell me, I hope, who I am and how I want to express myself or, maybe, it will just make me crazy with the desire to play with what I do not know and my wishes, just like a child who craves cotton candy or a balloon.

Finally, forgive me for the longing and for this bold philosophizing. Maybe, I will tell you better later on, when the matter may be clearer to me so that I will be able to argue otherwise.

Meanwhile, to conclude, it will be the task of the Contemporary Centre of the Arts to attempt to discover where the Total Artist hides himself.

Menotti Lerro  
Antonello Pelliccia