Note to Our Readers

The Editor

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wave that broke, from the death of Cézanne to the eruption of Dadaism, upset not only art and taste, but challenged the interpretation of abstract aestheticism. Picasso, Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp, these three names establish the break with traditionalism. At the same time, non-figurative painting appeared. Artists like Malevich and Magnelli, the Delaunays, Kandinsky, Kupka, and Mondrian come to the same conclusion: not knowing of one another, separated by sometimes hostile traditions, endowed with apparently incompatible temperaments.

Magnelli has told us of the isolation in which he lived in Florence during the years 1913-19, when he produced his first of his works in which figuration disappeared: no reviews, no reproductions, no contacts. If his relations with the Futurists were friendly, they were disturbed by the lack of understanding of Marinetti's group towards growing non-figuration. By their adherence to epidermic modernity. Now we must remember that Magnelli who began to paint late, self-taught - he liked to say that had fresco painters for masters: Giotto, Paolo Uccello, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca. His last pre-figurative work realized this transposed influence; it may be seen in "Théâtre Stenterello No. 3", which is reproduced. The Arezzo frescoes revealed to him composition in a surface, made him understand, he said, the interplay of empty space and fully occupied space. Beginning with Piero della Francesca, he felt that his art, his, pictures, "would always tend towards the architectural". He rediscovered flat tint and removed the anecdote from the anecdotal. He was not far from thinking that the taste for movement's taste, for machinery, proper to the Futurists, was regressive. That was happening in 1914. After a brief stay in Paris, Magnelli returned to Florence, where he was at the outbreak of the war. The studio that Apollinaire had kept for him in the French capital remained vacant and free of occupation. What is happening is meeting the friends of the poet, Picasso, Léger, Jean Gris, did not change his mind. "One had the feeling that art should return to creation instead of being an imitation of something. Even cubism, which is magnificent, which is formidable, saw its creators start from an idea of reality; they distorted the object, they transformed it; they wanted to see its four sides. Whereas, for my part, one fine day I wondered is it possible that I must make the character when I can have the freedom to create a canvas according to the forms that I need within the rectangle of the canvas. And then I completely removed all that was real, even imagined, and I created canvases, the first abstract canvases."

For forty years painters were to exploit this change in art that would be the great adventure of the first half of the century. Magnelli, like other inventors of non-figuration, would see his work plagiarized for the benefit of followers, who often did not go beyond fraudulent imitation. This is one of the characteristics which gives way as quickly as styles. There remain only those who have added to the development of knowledge. Magnelli is eminently one of those. A plastician, he constructed his work strictly, felt repugnance at facility, built with the sobriety of brick that fixes, with a sobriety of thought that is useful to relate these characteristics to the work of Malevich in Russia. We note that towards 1909, the creator of Suprematism colored oils with a conclusion akin to those of Magnelli in 1913. Both, thus seem to reach constructivism by a similar method, by the purification of forms, as it were, by a classic approach contrary to Kandinsky, who reached the informal by expressionist lyricism. The route followed by Mondrian was different again. An imperturbable logic led him to an absolute geometricism by the deepening of forms. But the most uncompromising men sometimes have unexpected repentance. First Magnelli abandoned his haughty seriousness: the war came to an end, and was more. Enthusiasm exalted him. A more sensuous effusiveness was manifested in his compositions, a tumultuous song overwhelmed him. The end of hostilities liberated in him a generous taste that overexerted colour, impassioned form, which to this point had been so strict. He called a "lyric explosion" the work of "the internationals", the pulsation of forms that preceded a questioning of the very meaning of the work of art. Magnelli was to hesitate in the exploration of the possibilities opened by his own approach: he experimented by applying to his research the work of the Futurist, Cubist, and Surrealist painters, without ever giving in to their formulation. A powerful temperament kept him from adhering to whatever was not his fundamental intuition. He experienced these teachings, then moved away from them.

In 1928 he reached an impasse: he stopped painting. With difficulty two years later, he began to draw again, and was reconciled with painting by discovering in Carrara, the language of unpolished marble: with their transfiguration into a series of canvases "Les Pierres", lyricism materials, for the abstract work of the Tuscan painter. Beginning in 1937, the creative tumult was mastered, Magnelli's work reached a state of serenity that even the upheavals of the second world war were not able to shake. "If one wants to produce something absolute, one must be able to choose what is necessary to realize this vision". As early as 1912-1913, Magnelli deliberately crossed the threshold of tradition, breaking it. He directly created his own way, reinvented a new plastic vocabulary, which the Futurists he remains on the fringe, keeping his distance towards geometricism. A suppleness of form which is not softness, assures his freedom. "The straightest straight line is that produced by the maximum straightness of interaction", says Closon. This remark by Closon applies exactly to Magnelli's works. If the rhythm is architeconic in its discretion, it is shaded with a sensitivity which suits an ambiguous structure. The strength, the firmness of the construction bring dayligt to the poetic tumult.

This pictorial language new in its apparent treatment, was related by the obscure routes of heredity, the places he lived, the Tuscan landscape, and Florence, to the sources that Magnelli knew all about: Uccello, Piero della Francesca. We could even go beyond that and follow Arp, who thought that "the black, brown and blue of Magnelli's canvases made one think of the colours of frescoes of the first Grecan eras. His works could furnish an equivalent of these majestic and serene decorations". Crete, the Etruscans, Florence, the Tuscan landscape, the most important abstract painter in Paris..."

With his death, the last man (Sonie Dalaunay being quite alive) of the initiators of the new art foreseen by Apollinaire passed away. His kindness, his gracious humour, were mediating between the elders, the explorers of virgin lands, and the generations which, successively, were to profit from their adventure, one of the most original known in the history of art. Magnelli surely occupies a prominent place which history reserves to those who change it.

NOTES


TRANSLATION BY YVONNE KIRBYSON

NOTE TO OUR READERS

We deeply regret that circumstances beyond our control prevent our not providing translations of the four following articles on La Danse au Québec, Robert Savoie, Beauceron de la gestation, and Anti-racism. We trust our readers will understand and accept our apology for this inconvenience. — The Editor.