

TRIUMPH OVER CHAOS

Heidi C. Lange

16 April 2005

I. Introduction

Art is an idealization of existence, usually focusing on humanity or humanity's relationship to the world. To quote twentieth-century author and philosopher Ayn Rand, "art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value judgments." One form of expression in art is that which uses the nude human body as an artistic tool to express the artist's theme – whether in sculpture, painting, or more recently, photography, nudity has long been a part of artistic expression, and a tool for expressing the unashamed emotions of the idealized human spirit.

II. Art As Idealization.

The idealization of humanity is fundamental to art; in order to achieve accurate expression of a specific artistic vision, the artist must focus on the aspect of his subject which is most relevant to the task at hand. The competent writer, in telling a story, omits the irrelevant and mundane activities of the heroine; the talented musician does not attempt to write her concerto in all possible keys; the skilled painter knows that she must compose her painting so as to draw the observer's eye towards her focus; and the photographer depends on the makeup artist's talent to draw attention away from the model's flaws and focus on those aspects of her body which illustrate the artistic point at hand. In each case, the goal of the artist (whether musician, painter, writer, or photographer) is to strip away all the aspects of her subject which detract from her artistic vision. Art is more than simply a depiction of reality; as playwright Bertolt Brecht said, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it." Art is not about reality. Art is about humanity. Therefore,

the artist necessarily idealizes her subject, whether that idealization consists of focusing on the joyful and uplifting or on the fallen and despairing aspects of humanity. The artist strips away those aspects of reality which detract from the artistic vision at hand.

III. Art expressing the joy of self

The most traditional of artistic nudity is that which focuses on the joy of being human – that which displays subjects who exalt in their physical bodies as a means of expressing the beauty of their spirits. Aristotle wrote that 'the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.' In the case of joyful art, the exuberance of the rejoicing human soul is expressed through the work of art in question. The significance of a person's joy in life is demonstrated through a painting, or a piece of music, or a poem. In this type of "joyous art," nudity can be a very appropriate form for expressing the uninhibited human spirit. Artistic nudity, when well done, expresses a human soul that is neither guilty nor ashamed of its existence.

IV. Art expressing the despair of existence

A less common and more often despised expression of artistic nudity is that which focuses the human despair in existence. Nonetheless, it is as relevant as that expressing joy of the spirit – to put it in a clichéd way, how can we fully experience joy if we do not also experience suffering? Some observers find the darker side of humanity to be a more moving subject for art. If, as American novelist John Cheever says, "art is triumph over chaos," then it is appropriate to portray the chaos as well as the triumph. Here, as well as in art which is more positively focused, it is absolutely necessary to be able to portray the uninhibited human soul. And the uninhibited human soul is best portrayed by means of the uninhibited

human body.

V. Conclusion

In the words of New York artist Alain Arias-Misson, “The purpose of art is not a rarified, intellectual distillate – it is life, intensified, brilliant life.” Life, as well as art, is triumph over chaos. It is therefore appropriate and sometimes necessary to use the bare human body to portray the bare human soul – to portray humanity as a celebration of life and of existence.