

ARTICLES ON THE FINE ARTS

BY

Professor Silpa Bhirasri



PUBLISHED IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE CREMATION RITES
OF
PROFESSOR SILPA BHIRASRI

ROYAL CREMATORIUM, WAT DEBSIRINDRA

JANUARY 17, 1963



Silpa Bhrasa
Fine Arts Department
Bangkok Thailand

Bangkok
8th May 1962

My dear Malini.

In case of my death I wish
to be cremated, but without any
religious ceremony.

I thank you with my soul
for the many years of your affect
which has enriched the last part
of my life -

My best thought is to wish
you a serene happiness commencing
you always our long discussions
about the complex difficulties of our
life, particularly with regard of women.

Please write to Romano and
ask him to inform also Isabella & Dino
of my passing away without regrets
because I feel to have spent my life
for something ~~you~~ useful as a very
modest servant of my Art - Send them
my love and my wishes for their prosperity
and happiness.

If the spirits have power to protect and
bless the living ones I will do for you and this
is my best hope - Silpa Bhrasa Comandarescu

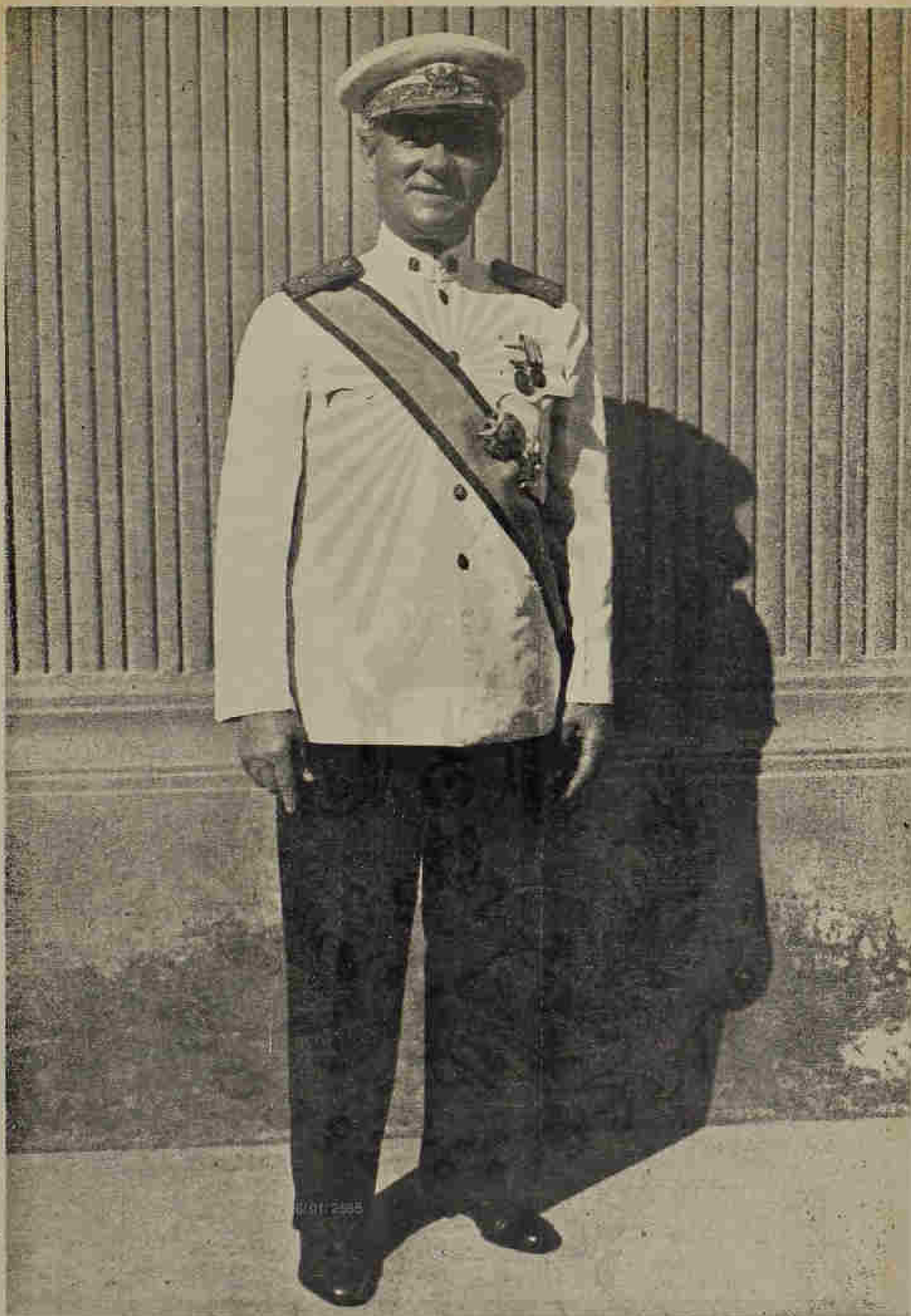
BIOGRAPHY

Professor Silpa Bhirasri (*C. Feroci*) was born in Florence, Italy, and graduated from the Royal Academy of Art of Florence. He entered the Thai Government service (Fine Arts Department) in 1924. He has to his credit a multitude of outstanding works chiefly in bronze such as the statue of King Yodfah at the Memorial Bridge and that of King Vajiravudh at Lumbini Park. As Dean of the Faculties of Sculpture and Painting, Fine Arts University, he was the principal mainstay and livewire of art study in Thailand. Professor Bhirasri devoted himself for over thirty years to the study of Thai art and is universally acknowledged as an authority. He did much to introduce Thai art to the world by writing extensively and with insight on the subject and by organizing a warmly received exhibition of Thai painting, modelling, bronze casting, etc. in London in 1947. He also initiated the Bangkok annual art exhibitions.

He died in Bangkok on May 14, 1962 at the age of seventy. In honor of his accomplishments and his service to Thai art he has been awarded the Knight grand Cross (First Class) of the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand, and the Dusdi Mâlâ medal. Professor Bhirasri will always retain an honored place in the affections of his many students, and his friends in Thailand.

Farewell, my old friend. Your works and your deeds remain deep in our hearts. If there is rebirth, as I believe in my faith, may we meet and work together again.

D. Yushe



ศาสตราจารย์ ศิลป พีระศรี ป.ม., ร.ด.ม. (ศิลป)

Professor Silpa Bhirasri



พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว โปรดพระราชทานกระแสพระราชดำรัส
 ในวันเปิดการแสดงศิลปกรรมแห่งชาติ ครั้งที่ ๑๓ ณ หอศิลป์ กรมศิลปากร เมื่อวันที่ ๒๐ กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ. ๒๕๐๕
*His Majesty the King delivering the inaugural speech of the
 XIII National Art Exhibition at the Silpakorn Gallery, Fine Arts Department
 on the 20th February B.E. 2505*



ท่านผู้มีเกียรติที่ได้รับเชิญมาในงานเปิดการแสดงศิลปกรรมแห่งชาติ ครั้งที่ ๑๓
Dignitaries present at the inauguration of the XIII National Art Exhibition.



พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวและสมเด็จพระราชินี ทอดพระเนตรศิลปกรรม
ในงานแสดงศิลปกรรมแห่งชาติ ครั้งที่ ๑๓ ณ หอศิลป์ กรมศิลปากร
*His Majesty the King and H.R.H. the Princess Mother at the Silpakorn Gallery
on the occasion of the XIII National Art Exhibition.*



ศาสตราจารย์ ศิลป์ พีระศรี กำลังกราบทูลถวายคำอธิบายเรื่องเครื่องปั้นดินเผา
*His Majesty the King and H.R.H. the Princess Mother given information
about ceramics by Professor Silpa Bhirasri.*



ภายในห้องปฏิบัติงานของ
ศาสตราจารย์ศิลป์ พีระศรี
ซึ่งเป็นทั้งห้องทำงาน สถานที่
ให้การศึกษ และห้องอาหาร
ของท่าน

*The interior of Professor Silpa
Bhirasri's office.*

ศาสตราจารย์ศิลป์ พีระศรี
พานักศึกษาคณะจิตรกรรม
และประติมากรรม มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร ไปศึกษา
โบราณสถาน ที่วัดใหญ่ไชย
มงคล จังหวัดพระนคร
ศรีอยุธยา

*Professor Silpa Bhirasri and students of the Faculty of Painting and
Sculpture of the Silpakorn University visiting Wat Yai, Ayudhya.*





ศาสตราจารย์ศิลป์ พีระศรี
ไปชมโบราณวัตถุสถาน
ณ วัดหน้าพระเมรุ
จังหวัดพระนครศรีอยุธยา
๖ มกราคม ๒๕๐๕

*Professor Silpa Bhirasri
contemplating ancient
monuments at Wat Na
Pra Meru, Ayudhya.
6th January, B.E. 2505*

*Farewell, my old friend. Your works and your deeds
remain deep in our hearts. If there is rebirth, as I believe
in my faith, may we meet and work together again.*



IS ART NECESSARY ?

ART AND RELIGION.

ART AND MORALITY.

LITERATURE AND ART.

A CRITIC ON TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SURROUNDINGS.

MEANING AND PSYCHOLOGY OF COLOURS.

NUDE — ART OR OBSCENITY.



IS ART NECESSARY?

Man has always striven to free himself from the fetters of physical matters. The human mind longs for lofty and sublime things and to such an ideal many great philosophers, scientists and artists dedicated their entire lives. Philosophy, science and art are complementary to each other, all forming together what is referred to as civilization. Science is the principal factor in relieving Humanity of physical suffering and helping it on in its material quest. On the other hand, art, like religion, inspires Man with high thoughts and gives him emotions which refine his mind and spirit.

When we say art we mean music, poetry, architecture, painting and sculpture in their manifold manifestations, and because any kind of competitive interest is absent from pure art, being truly universal, it is the very means to unite Mankind. In fact, when we behold the masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance, we feel a great sympathy for the Italians; when we listen to German music, we love the German people. Again, when we see the wonderful paintings of the Ajanta Caves, or the art of China or Japan, or read their literature, we have the sensation of being brothers of the same family. Indeed, this is a real fact, because art-expressions belong to the spirit and the spirit has neither political nor racial boundaries. Art is so aloof from our material miseries that even during the wars, when our lowest instincts dominate all human senses, art remains unaffected by such horrors.

Thus, everyone who thinks that art is the production of some lunatics is either mentally blind or has not yet overcome the primitive instinct dictating to Man only his physical preservation and enjoyment.

Art has such a tremendous effect on the human mind that it may completely change the manners of people. For instance, dress up an urchin and you will see that, for a while at least, his manners and behaviour will be much better than his habitual ones. Again, nobody would throw banana peel on a carpet of a beautiful room—some strange force forbids him to do so. Unconsciously he would feel as though he were breaking an unwritten law—the aesthetic law of order and beauty. In passing through a fine street flanked by beautiful buildings one walks more erectly and enjoys the pleasure emanating from the same law of order and beauty.

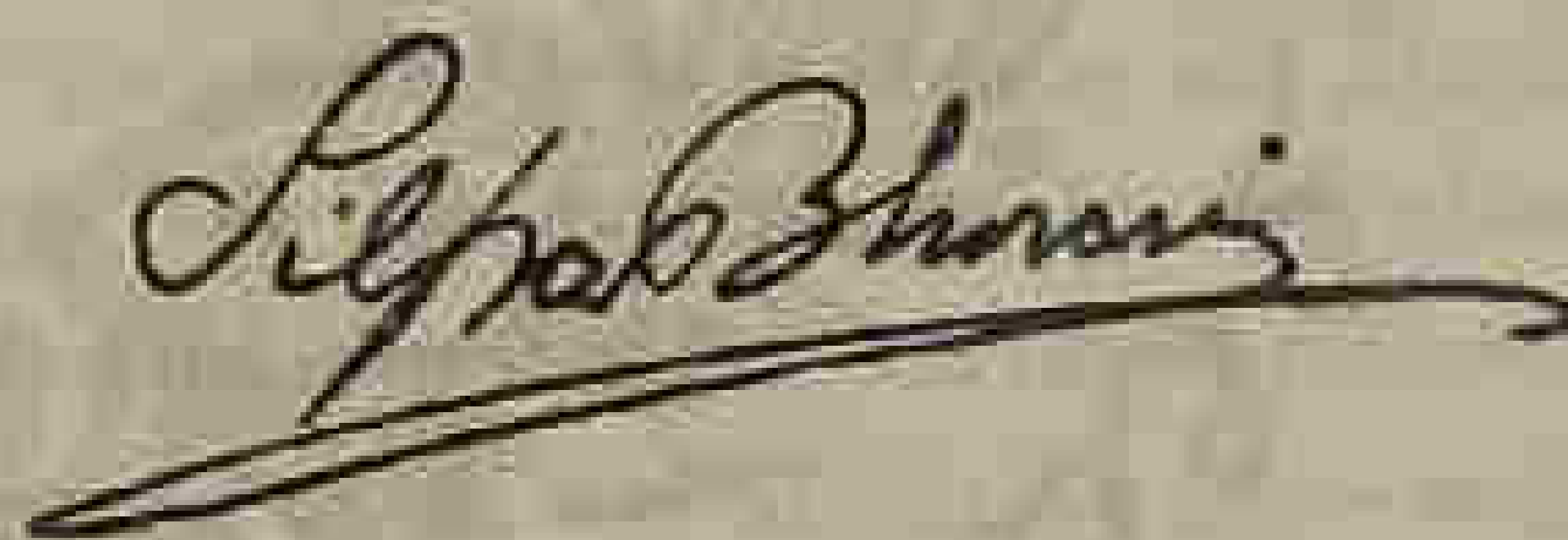
Accordingly, art is the herald of civilization—it shows the degree of a people's culture. The word 'culture' is not synonymous with 'progress'. In fact, primitive man may well learn to drive airplanes and powerful motorcars—he may be very skilled in mechanical application, but his culture remains primitive. High culture is the result of a complexity of factors, the principal ones being religion and art. Religion is the fundamental educational power forming the mentality and customs of a people, while art is the expression of its inward feelings. Because these inward feelings are greatly affected by the surroundings, so art expression changes accordingly. To understand this fact better, one should compare the mental and psychological reaction of an artist

spending all his life amidst natural surroundings with another living in the Bangkok of our time. The art of the two artists would inevitably be quite different. Thus art is inspired by our daily life and records the emotions an artist receives.

He who understands this truth, realizes the urgent necessity of helping our modern artists to work to their fullest capacity in order to speed up the movement of Thai contemporary art.

What the contemporary artists express and in what manner must be entirely left to the individual feeling and judgement of each artist. They are Thai and as such their art will be Thai also, even if the eyes of laymen cannot yet discern such characteristics. The urgent need at present is to have many artists who create art. From a large artistic output we might select those works which, sent abroad to international exhibitions, would represent Thailand with honour.

The Fine Arts Department is doing its best to stimulate interest in contemporary art, both through annual exhibitions and by the establishment of the University of Fine Arts. But the Fine Arts Department alone cannot succeed in creating a large movement in modern art. We need the warm and practical support both of the authorities as well as of the public. Indeed, the Thai people are very much interested in art. Each annual exhibition has been crowded by thousands of visitors. Every Sunday a great number of our public go to the National Museum. They seem to be thirsty for beauty. Why not build a permanent building for art exhibitions with a gallery of modern art? This would have three great benefits: first to give a chance to the Thai people to appreciate modern art; second, to arouse emulation among Thai artists, and third, to show to foreign intellectuals that Thailand also has finally understood the importance of contemporary art.



Bangkok
March, 1958.

ART AND RELIGION

While looking at a statue of Buddha, my memory recalled a lively discussion I had with a friend of mine about the Byzantine iconoclastic period, in which time all sculptured images were destroyed. I supported the theory that the plastic representation of an accepted religious or dogmatic idea is but the tangible realization in sculpture or painting of the same religious principles and, consequently, in denying their plastic representation, we also deny the veracity of the same religious ideas.

My friend, not only disagreed with my theory but that plastic images are the reminiscence of a primitive instinctive "*idolatry*"—he thought that an intellectual man had to conceive such abstract forms through his imagination.

In my opinion my friend was so prejudiced by his subjectiveness as not to understand the great difference existing between "*idolatry*" and "*spiritual inspiration*".

Idolatry belongs to a low level civilization; it is the consequence of FEAR arising out of the belief that a sculpture, a painting or an object is the abode of the god, or of the devil as the case may be. Quite conversely, the highly evolved man does not ask from the image any special or favour; in it he finds inspiration to conceive lofty thoughts. Thus art is the means to awake in us our spiritual imagination.

When we erect a statue to a hero it is to stimulate man to do brave acts: a statue to a great scientist serves to remind us of the sublimity of the human mind and at the same time to stir emulation. The statues are not meant as *individual representations* but are meant as SYMBOLS whence we may draw inspiration for our progressive development.

2500 years ago Buddha forbade his disciples to represent his images: the Teacher was afraid that man would worship Him as a god, a thing which would have precisely cancelled just the highest principles of his philosophy. It was about four hundred fifty years after the passing away of Lord Buddha that man could resist no more the temptation to chisel in marble the image of their venerated Teacher. This happened in Gandhara in the beginning of the sixth century B.E. Was this sin with respect to the wish of Buddha?—was the image made for "*idolatry*"? No, it was made because of the great veneration man had for the Enlightened One, it was on account of the irresistible necessity to have a tangible symbol where the mind could be inspired to holy thoughts.

The image was not conceived by primitive people, but by men imbued with two of the highest cultures humanity has ever produced; the Greek and the Indian.

Accordingly, a statue of Buddha is but a Symbol on which to concentrate our mind. In fact, we may meditate by closing our eyes or we may meditate by focussing our sight upon some venerable object connected with our meditation—in our case the venerable object is the image of Buddha.

True Buddhists know well that Lord Buddha did not allure man with terrestrial or celestial rewards or help. Nobody but ourselves may build the destiny of our future lives or give peace, or unrest, in our present one.

He who understands this reality knows that the statue of Buddha is neither his portrait nor it is endowed with magic or supernatural power. It represents simply the spirit of the Doctrine. With its calm posture and suave expression the statue reminds us of the futility of our anxiety to reach ephemeral goals. "Be not vain, be pure in thoughts and actions and you too will feel completely serene, your lips too, will bear the sweet smile reflecting the inward contentment". This is what the statue teaches us and only for this purpose was the statue was created.

The influence that an image may have upon our spirit may be understood by the following anecdote which I wrote about ten years ago in a London Buddhist journal. There, I related that during the second great war, a German lady who had two sons in the army, used to come to my house where I had a fine head of Buddha of the Sukhothai period. That lady, overwhelmed by sorrow, would stay silently in front of the head for a long while, afterwards she would come back in to the company once more, her face showing serenity, and her spirit much relieved.

One day I dared to ask the lady what did she experience in front of that head. She said "the complete serenity of those features, the suave smile, and those semiclosed eyes which seem to calm our restless feelings, give me peace and more confidence in the destiny of life. Because the lady was not a Buddhist, we surely cannot speak about "idolatry". It was one of the innumerable cases of pure spirituality, providing that art, by interpreting a philosophic or religious idea, is the source of emotions apt to heal our moral and even physical pains.

Thus between idolatry and spiritual inspiration there is neither a point of comparison nor any confusion such as existed in my friend's mind.

Aesthetic and spiritual emotions belong to a degree of intellectual evolution where idolatry or belief in the supernatural power of objects or persons has been banished. This is the very reason that Buddhism, as taught by the Lord Buddha, stands firm against modern philosophic and scientific criticism.

Buddha taught man to reason; only by reasoning, he said, should one accept or reject his doctrine. The same doctrine which for more than two thousand years has inspired Eastern artists to create wonderful statues.

THE IMAGE

As we have said, the first Buddha image was made in Gandhara. The Greco-Indian artists conceived a very fine statue indeed, but it was yet too Hellenistic. In fact the rich treatment of the robes, the postures and the whole appearance of the statue, although artistically magnificent, was not a satisfactory interpretation of Buddhism-it did not symbolize the very idea of "Renunciation". Renunciation means to conquer our own self by subduing desire and vanity; that is to say by abandoning the egoistic part of our instinct for which we struggle, sowing the seeds of our own and others' suffering. Hence a statue representing the Enlightened One must be plain, serene, almost ethereal, because the goal of Buddhism, as the Teacher experienced", is to detach ourselves from physical matter.

The process of Indian idealization took more than three centuries. From Gandhara the center of Buddhist sculpture passed to Mathura and thence to Amaravati to reach its classic period in Gupta time.

Almost static, serene, harmonious and suave, with the folds of the robes reduced to lines adhering to the large and simplified anatomical forms, the Gupta image is the real representation of Buddhism. Nobody but the Indian could have interpreted the very essence of the Doctrine.

GUPTA ART.

With the exception of the Buddhist statuary of China which was influenced by Gandharan art, the art of Dvaravati (in Thailand) that of Cambodia and that of Java (Srivijaya art) originated from Gupta sculpture. We may state also that the statuary of the Hindu faith, although more dynamic and stronger than the Buddhist art, on account of the different philosophic idea, aesthetically followed the character of the Gupta sculpture.

CREATIVE AND IMITATIVE ART.

In every race, followers of Buddhism created in their best periods images bearing the peculiarity of their individual feelings and artistic talents. Of the innumerable number of Buddhist images made in two thousand years, the masterpieces are not many. The majority of them are worthy of historical reference and not for artistic qualities.

As examples, we could cite many of the large Buddha images of the Amaravati period lacking understanding in modelling and expression. Again, the later type of Buddha image of Burma, which is generally well known outside that country, is but a product of a period of decadence as was that of Ayudhya (Thailand) after the 21st century B.E.

The artistically creative period of a race for religious subjects is when religion is felt in its highest spirituality and magnitude.

The Italian Renaissance produced works of art truly imbued with the spirit of Christianity for about something more than a century, afterwards the love for Hellenistic "beauty" banished the Christian expression from sculpture and painting. This could not be otherwise because Greek art represented a culture quite different from the Christian one.

The Greeks too, maintained their classic idealism for about a hundred and fifty years in so far as the Greek mythology and philosophy were still undiscussed beliefs of the Greek people, — afterwards, realism crept in, affecting the purity of the Greek expression.

SUKHOTHAI.

In Thailand the golden age was that of Sukhothai (circa 1790–1920 B.E.), the first important kingdom of the independent Thai. Up to that time, Sukhothai had been a Khmer town and, as such, art and religion were Khmer. With reference to the religion of that period, Hinduism, Buddhism and animism overlapped each other creating confusion in religious conceptions.

The Thai, rulers of Sukhothai, feeling the need to be illumined in their spiritual creed, invited some holy men from Ceylon to come to Sukhothai and teach Buddhism in its orthodox form.

In Buddhism the Thai found the illumining Faith which since then has been the inspiring source of their thoughts and actions.

THE SUKHOTHAI IMAGE.

Having been for so long a time under Khmer rule, it would have been quite natural for the Thais to follow the representation of the Buddha Image of the Khmer type, as their countrymen of Uthong did in the same period. But the Thai of Sukhothai, inspired by the warm preaching of the Ceylonese Monks, thought the Khmer statuary too severe to satisfy their artistic-religious feelings. To understand the Sukhothai type of Buddha image better one should also keep in mind the material they used for their statuary, namely, bronze.

It is well known that to cast a statue in bronze, it must first be modelled in wax (the technique of *cire perdue*). By using this technique from the very beginning of their artistic production, the Thais were able to infuse their artistic temperament into the soft material and, still more important, their profound religious feeling too, far more effectively than they could have done using stone.

What the old masters of Sukhothai conceived was a statue embodying the very ESSENCE of the Buddhist Doctrine. The image was to inspire the beholder with absolute serenity.

The relaxation of the muscular system of these statues conveys perfectly the idea of the absolute mental repose. The vibrating, soaring undulation of the outline suggests the detachment of the Enlightened One from earthly matters, the statue appearing as an ethereal vision.

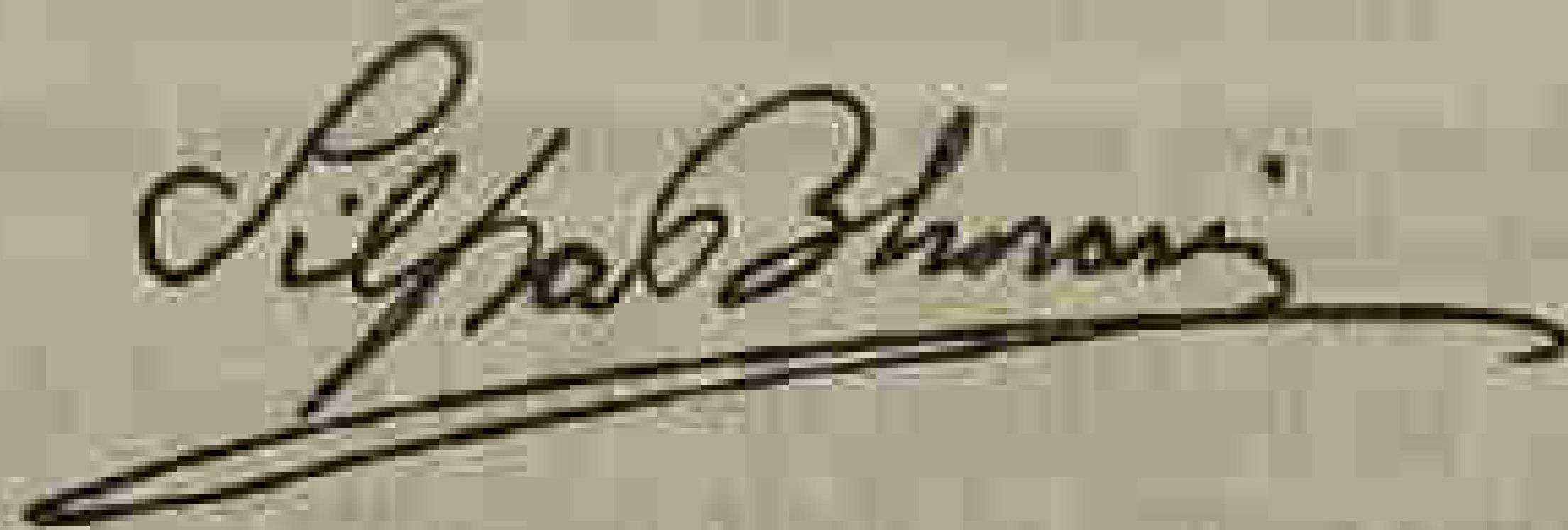
Also the rhythm of the fine facial lineaments have the same undulating peculiarity which is so apt to enhance the serenity as experienced by the Lord Buddha after having come to the end of his long quest.

In comparing the images of Sukhothai with those created by other races and also other Thai periods, we note the extremely delicate forms which at first may appear somewhat feminine. To explain this peculiarity I will quote a passage from "Thai Buddhist Sculpture," written for the series of pamphlets on Thai culture published by the Institute of National Culture.

"Some critics have pointed out that the Sukhothai type of Buddha image looks somewhat feminine. Here, in our opinion, there is matter for praise rather than anything else. The Thai artists were so deeply impressed by the purity of the Teacher's words that, in representing His image, they did not dare to emphasize masculine forms, lest the image would lose its spirituality. We could support such an idea by comparing this art with that of Beato Angelico.

Besides, does not Buddhism mean renunciation of the attachment to real or illusory physical matters? If so, is it not a perfect realization of this conception that the Thai of Sukhothai achieved with their statuary?"

Five hundred years ago,—to day, and in the time to come, these fine images were, are and will be the source of deep and lofty inspiration; They will be a source of serenity and a refuge during our turbulent, ephemeral earthly passage.



ART AND MORALITY

Not a few persons are doubtful about the utility of art and particularly they do not know whether art has a social and moral influence over the people.

As a principle, art has a moral and spiritual purpose in the life of every race. Art expressions vary very much from one to the other; some are comprehensible, others, being too advanced, are difficult to understand, but the goal of every artist is to do works which are intellectually and spiritually beneficial to Mankind. These works may be moral, amoral and even immoral. The word 'immoral' sounds rather discordant with its antonym 'moral', but it must be understood that sometimes artists use an immoral subject to correct us from vices and defects. Through 'evil' the artist shows us the right path we have to follow.

For instance, if we look at Lautrec's painting 'Au Salon De La Rue Des Moulins' depicting women of bad fame, we may think Lautrec painted an immoral picture. On the contrary, in portraying those unlucky creatures Lautrec, who, on account of his physical deficiency understood suffering more than a normal man, points out to us with his pictures one of the most shameful flaws of our modern society, and as a reaction, while we feel a great pity for those unhappy women, we are conscious that our duty is to eliminate the roots of such misery.

Again, in our days by reading the Decameron we find it rather discordant with our morality, but when Boccaccio wrote those licentious novels he was quite moral and his works were *socially functional*. In 1348 Florence was stricken by the 'Black Death' which killed seventy thousand inhabitants out of one hundred thousand. The survivors were under the spell of a fateful end; Boccaccio's writing brought life again to those depressed citizens stimulating in them love and joy. Accordingly Boccaccio's immorality had a moral purpose.

The same can be said about Indian erotic art. In Indian temples we notice sculptured divine couples embracing each other with passion and even copulating. Is it immoral? Not at all! Also those sculptures were carved for a moral and social purpose. In olden times epidemics wiped out the majority of the populations: to counterbalance Nature both art and religion had to stimulate and encourage procreation.

This is not inclusive of Indian religion, religions all over the world embodied the idea and consecrated it through theological commandments. Of course, today it is the reverse, because science has checked Nature and accordingly what was moral in other times appears immoral in our days.

A painting showing a group of drunkards depicted in their postures and gestures so peculiar to them and so disgusting to sober men, may have the good effect to correct people addicted to alcohol by pointing out to them how miserable they are when intoxicated. The same may be said about a picture depicting naked women in vulgar attitudes. Indeed, it has the appearance of an immoral painting, but the repulsion we have at the sight of such materialism teaches us not to indulge in too low animal instincts, because matter without the support of spirit is repelling. When we refer to nudes we should not confuse the above-mentioned repulsive representations with statues or

paintings inspired by the sublime and pure human forms. Greek sculptured nudes appear divine more than human. Indian sculptured or painted nudes are the representation of healthy and beautiful givers of life to the human race. The painters of the Renaissance, particularly of the German and Netherland schools, painted the 'Virgin Mary' breast feeding the baby Jesus and nobody can deny the high spirituality of these painting. When artists do works with a pure feelings art cannot arouse any low or vulgar thoughts. Of course, there are works of art really 'immoral'; they offend our healthy human feelings. But such works cannot be classified as 'art'. They are made by unscrupulous artists only for the benefit of money. The buyers are unhealthy people who need the stimulations of vulgarity to enjoy life. We repeat, such works should not be considered art because they represent expressions *opposed* to the *finality* of ART.

Morality means to abide by the social laws which are laid down to protect different ethical groups and accordingly each group has its peculiar moral laws. But over these self-protecting laws there is one morality which belongs to the whole Human Family, it is the law of good conduct, of pure thoughts and pure aspiration, a law taught both by religions and art. The difference between religion and art is that the former affects our soul if we believe, the latter affects our soul if we feel.

* * * * *

Art expression is divided into two kinds: one treating subjects of history, ethics, religion and even politics. It is educational and for this reason has an important role in the social affairs of a nation. This art inspires social advancement, love for the nation, teaches right living and in the whole stimulates an appreciation of beauty. In stating that this kind of art is comprehensible to the majority of the people it does not mean that such an art has a commercial character. Between art and commerce there is an enormous difference. The former engenders high and noble ideas and aspirations, the latter is only pleasing. For instance, a monument to a hero may be understood by the majority of the citizens and serves to inspire them to emulate the hero honoured, while a monument to a poet inspires intellectual activity. On the contrary, anyone may be pleased to see a nice book cover, a nice piece of furniture, a nice vase, but these objects have not the power to influence the human mind in noble conceptions.

The other kind of art is the one termed Art for Art's sake. Usually this term is misused and misunderstood because in general people think that in this case the artist is free to do what he likes without the consideration of its usefulness to the human family. If the case was really so the artist would become a parasite of his society. But the real fact is that no artist works for himself, on the contrary, he firmly believes that his work will be very useful for the progressive development of Mankind.

When we say art for art's sake, it means that the artist produces art according to his own judgement and inspiration, disregarding whether the public will like or dislike his work. Under these circumstances the artist materializes in colours, lines or volumes his abstract conception. Generally this kind of art is understood only by a minority of people because, as a rule, it is the herald of some new ideas. The life of Van Gogh is a very good example of what we have mentioned. During his lifetime Van Gogh did not sell even one picture while a few years after his death one of his pictures is worth hundreds of thousand of ticals. This example, as many others we could cite, suffices to realize that in many cases it is not the artist who is wrong, but the public who, being accustomed to a kind of traditional art, did not understand Van Gogh's new expression.

Of course, what we have mentioned does not exclude that among so many artists there are some who, although sincerely thinking they have created a work of art, have failed altogether.

* * * * *

Morality means good conduct, to abide by the principles of our social civilization. To attain this good conduct education is the most important factor; and art is one of the principal educational mediums in every civilized country. Art forms the right mood of feeling and thinking of man. People born in slums grow with bitter feeling and disregard any moral principle because their surroundings lack order, the main factor for our good behaviour. Disorder engenders disorder, hatred, despair and mental deficiency.

On the contrary, people bred in orderly surroundings, in well planned towns with their fine streets flanked by beautiful buildings, gardens decorated with statues and fountains, museums, etc. are bound to absorb 'beauty' since their childhood. Slowly, but continuously, beauty forms their aesthetic sense. A child gets accustomed to see fine things which later on become a necessity for his life. The astonishing effects beauty has over our nature is to refine our thoughts; through art we become better and behave according to those moral laws which Lord Buddha laid down two thousand five hundred years ago.

As we see, art and religion have the same spiritual finality: one teaches us to become good through philosophical understanding, the other makes us good by the means of harmony and beauty.

* * * * *

For the term "art" we have to understand poetry, music, painting, sculpture and architecture including their unlimited major and minor expressions. Sculpture, painting, costumes, houses embellished by some works of art, nicely decorated shops, fine public and private buildings, motorcars, monuments, furniture, fountainpens, book-covers and everything of daily use is due to art. The more beautiful an object the more attractive. Once we have tasted fine things we need them and this need *represents the grade of our civilization.*

Primitive people, scattered from one another, living amidst trees, mountains and waters do not need to erect imposing railway stations or other public and private buildings, but when man crowds in hundreds of thousands, or millions of inhabitants, then ART under all its aspects becomes indispensable for the progress of civilization. One very simple example suffices to understand the necessity of order and beauty in towns. If we eat a banana when walking in an open country we may throw its peel on the ground without affecting the harmony of Nature, but if we throw peel in the middle of a clean street, we notice that the harmony and order of the street has been affected.

To deny the utility of art in social affairs is like renouncing the privilege of our human intelligence; it is to confess that our feeling and aspiration are less than those of the savages who with colours, with feathers of birds, with flowers and shells, deck their bodies and their huts for the sake of beauty.

LITERATURE AND ART

The most important factor in development of human mind is knowledge. The mind records facts and ideas and by the means of words or writing these facts and ideas are taught to others who may improve such conceptions and in their turn transmit them to later generations. Ever since man could talk and then write about legends, myths, philosophy, history, poetry etc., literature became the basic cultural heritage of each race.

A writer, himself an artist, conceives real or unreal events, places, character etc; and through the perusal of these writings the reader should visualize the real or unreal world described by the writer. But not all people have the imagination to follow the conception of the writer, hence the necessity to depict those conceptions in painting and sculpture. Accordingly, painting and sculpture are auxiliary arts of literature, and by the means of these arts the illiterate could also understand the meaning of the writing. Sometimes the effect that art has over the mind of people may be stronger than words or scripts. For instance, in order to admonish people not to sin, a holy man may threaten the sinners by picturing to them the tortures of Hell. The same subject, or better the same literature illustrated by painting will, in many cases, be more impressive than words. The beholder of the painting will be horrified to see human beings tortured by fearful torments, fellows creatures burnt over the eternal fire, others devoured by monstrous animals and still others punished by hideous devils whose duty is to inflict pains. The beholder of such terrible scenes will be so impressed as to correct himself in doing wrong.

Again, in beholding an image of Buddha one finds serenity of spirit, while a Christian looking at a Madonna will feel protected from the sufferings of life.

With the exception of historical subjects which may derive from writing or from the imagination of the artist, the remainder of art created up to modern time was inspired by literature or was an illustration of it.

In primitive periods the artist would illustrate word by word the literary description and for this reason the works of the primitive periods are impregnated with the very spirit of the religion. With intellectual progress a classic era starts and the artist does not any longer follow faithfully the literary work. Although respecting the subject, the artist of the classic period will create works having different characteristics from those of other artists treating the same subject. As said, in primitive periods art is faithful to literature and so the works of the primitive artists present similar peculiarities.

Greek philosophical and mythical literature dominated the spirit of Greek art for more than three hundred years; afterwards, through the influence of foreign ideas Greek philosophy changed and art changed accordingly. Civil Roman art recorded historical events while religious art followed the Greek Hellenistic literature.

After the fall of Rome art declined. Illustrations (illuminations) of holy script were the only art expression.

With Renaissance Europe life was reborn. The Greek philosophical idealism was replaced by that of Christianity and art following the new religious literature became humanistic. Thus a spiritual realism supplanted both Greek idealism and Roman realism.

For a period of about hundred fifty years, the art of the Renaissance represented Christian ideas, while in what concerns civic art it illustrated contemporary events. Afterwards, because of too much veneration for classic literature (Greco-Roman), Greek aesthetics affected deeply the intellectual life of Europe, and artists illustrated again subjects from the Greco-Roman literature which, of course, in the period of the Renaissance did not convey the European culture of that period. For this reason art became a school expression.

In the first quarter of the 19th century, Romanticism started to replace Neo-classicism. Romantic art was inspired both by national sagas (epics) by history and by real surroundings. Romanticism was very much affected by literature or by historical events dealing with subjects which had happened after the fall of Rome.

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, we note that art begins to be independent from literature, that is to say from illustrating literary works. Impressionism took inspiration from real life. Any real subject was worthy to paint or model.

From the first decade of the 20th century, artists reacted against the idea of getting inspiration from literary works, preferring to conceive the subjects by themselves. In fact modern art has become so individual that the artist cannot follow anymore the idea of a writer.

In general, painting and sculpture inspired by literature means to illustrate it. This is just what modern artists try to avoid because they want to be original also in the conception of their works.

Following this idea one may conclude that modern artists may create art without literature. This is quite opposite to real facts. In order to imagine important artistic conceptions one must be thoroughly educated, and education means literature in its vast field of expressions.

Philosophy, history, poetry, descriptions, novels etc; are all sides treated by literature, Hence nowadays literature has become a most important factor in the creation of art.

In the past, with the exception of great artists who had a profound knowledge, the average painter and sculptor knew only about their religious or mythical literature which they illustrated faithfully, but they could not conceive anything else because they had not sufficient knowledge.

Consequently, although a modern artist does not like to illustrate literary works, the knowledge of these is indispensable for anyone who wants to create art.

All the great works of art of India and of the countries of farther India have been inspired either by philosophical literature or national epics as, for instance, the Mahabharata.

In Indian artistic expressions such as the Ajanta cave paintings and some sculptures we also note subjects related to real life recording royal events and also facts of common life, but the great majority of Indian paintings and sculptures was inspired by the poetical scripts of Buddhism and Hinduism.

As in India, China and Japan have a very important literature which has influenced art deeply. Also there is a large art production related to realistic or mundane subjects and having peculiarities not to be found anywhere else. For instance, Chinese landscapes were inspired directly from Nature, but the picture represents a Nature reflecting the poetical sensitiveness of the artist who in many case was also a poet. For this reason many Chinese painting were complemented by the addition of short poems.

In Japan, religious literature inspired masterpieces of art from the seventh century up to modern time, But besides this kind of art and that inspired by Nature, like the Chinese, the Japanese developed very much an art depicting mundane subjects. They refer to social life, to royalty, to the middle and common classes. Thus in what concerns subjects, the artistic production of Japan had the same character as that of Europe.

To conclude either directly or indirectly literature was and is of the main importance in art production.

We repeat that in old times literature was the direct inspirational source for the artist, while in modern times artists who want to create lofty conceptions need to have a wide knowledge of literary works, not only of his own country but also that of other peoples.

Plastic arts and literature are both universal, the difference is that while in painting or sculpture the artist has to limit his work to one episode, the writer may in the same work convey a complex of ideas and episodes. But as plastic and literary works represent the intellect and spirit of Humanity, so both expressions are equivalent in artistic value.

A CRITIC ON TRADITIONAL ART AND MODERN SURROUNDINGS.

I have been asked by the Standard-Vacuum Oil Company to write an article on traditional Thai Art. It is a subject with which I have dealt ardently many times, but in this matter I feel like a religious man who preaches the same thing everyday because men do not redeem but always remain the same sinners. In what concerns traditional art, I think that we, too, sin for lack of comprehension about the responsibility we have for the maintenance of our artistic patrimony.

At large, human beings take for granted everything which forms part of their routine life. The fact that we see everyday beautiful natural views, buildings, gardens, and are surrounded by finely decorated rooms, etc. engenders in our appreciation a relaxation of feeling, and although unconsciously our spirit receives the benefit that art stimulates in us, we nevertheless do not realize it. Thus in a lapse of time a rare object becomes common and it is only when we miss it that we understand its great value. Such psychological process is what happens to the majority of the Thai in respect to their traditional art. As an example we may say that everyday all of us living in Bangkok see those wonderful architectural views of the Wats formed by a complex of structures in different forms and designs: how many of us are touched by these fine visions? How many of us think how precious these monuments are for our history and for the high decor they give to our towns? In our foolish modern life we are so busy as to have no time to rest and restore our spirit and sight with works of art. We push on, promising ourselves that one day we will give more time to our intellectual affairs, but that time never arrives: when we stop our rush we are too old to take interest in anything!

How many of us passing in front of Wat Phra Keo, or any other fine Wat, stop to enjoy the sight of these magnificent architectural monuments? Look at their harmonious architectural complexity formed by large horizontal masses relieved by the contrasting slender pinnacles of the Phra Chedies and Phra Prangs. The rich and warm gilded ornaments in wood, lacquer, stucco, and mosaic play on the large surfaces of the monuments and scintillate like the stars of the firmament. Everything is so beautiful and so impressive that any sensitive person cannot help feeling moved, and being invaded by a sense of spiritual serenity. Here we realize that what is worthy in life is the spirit not the matter with all its alluring passions and consequent sorrows.

Everyday I have the good fortune to pass in front of Wat Benjamabhopitra. In the sun of the early morning this temple seems an unreal vision giving us the hope of an ideal life and a re-assurance of our human destiny.

In visiting Chiangmai or other principal northern towns, we experience one excitement after the other. Everything is so wondrous! One early morning I was standing at the base of the important ruins of the Phra Chedi Luang of Chiangmai.

I felt so moved as to cry for the aesthetic pleasure it conveyed. People who have visited the northern towns have an unforgettable remembrance. One may close the eyes and see again in his imagination those beautiful religious structures which are the glory of our past. Beholding such monuments we feel a great reverence towards the people who erected them. They were human beings like us. But contrary to us they lived in spirit. Those who built these colossal structures were not the slaves of Egypt who died in thousands to erect the pyramids of their kings. Here everyone was free and from the king to the humblest citizen all gave the best of their energy to glorify Buddha. Religion was the stimulating source; for religion they created masterpieces and once the temple, or the Buddha image, or a mural was finished it was the work of a whole people because nobody worked for his personal renown or material profits.

On account of our nonchalance for traditional art we do not notice the ravage done by time on our old artistic patrimony it is like he who lives with his dear parents who day by day get older and older, he does not perceive their physical decline till they are decrepit. But while human beings are bound to end their terrestrial cycle in a definite period of time, monuments may be protected and preserved for many and many centuries. Under this point we would like to cite an instance which may show us how the Japanese look after their art. The Buddhist wooden temple of Hōryūji at Nara is the oldest wooden structure existing in the world. It was built in the eighth century A.D. and still preserves its original form. Of course, wood being a perishable material, many parts of the old temple have been replaced, but each time the Japanese made a new part, they copied exactly the old one which afterwards was kept in the museum in case new replicas had to be done. In such a way the original appearance of the old monument has been preserved for more than one thousand years.

Our system of preservation is quite opposite. When we have to repair an old important temple, we call for a tender and assign the work to the cheapest bidder. The result is that each time we repair an old monument it loses part of its original beauty. The reader will ask what can be done to preserve our traditional art in the best condition possible. Old art was the production of people who loved to do it. In those days the proverb 'Time is Money' did not count at all. For this reason restoration of old monuments or objects of art can be done only if the artisans who do it are in the same condition as the people of olden times, that is to say, free from the lure of financial profits. This is possible when we have a large group of artisans supported by the government and who work exclusively and permanently for such a purpose. In restoration work, the materials must be exactly the same as those used in the original work. If we use modern materials, artificial colours or we apply the many shades of glass mosaic available in our days on old structures we obliterate the very character of the antiquities. Of course this kind of restoration cannot be applied to every old temple. We have to select the best which will have to be under official care and control as national monuments. With reference to modern artificial materials, I cannot omit saying that the interior of important temples should not be illumined with fluorescent light or at least the tubes should be concealed somewhere in order to have the light in reflection only. Old folk understood

so well the psychological influence of the dark and light situation that they limited the opening of the Bots or Viharas to a minimum and in some instances, as we may see in Ayudhya, the interior of these structures was illumined only by the light coming from the doors. Indeed a dark atmosphere arouses a mystic sense apt to dispose our mind to concentrate in pious thoughts.

To understand what we lament and accordingly propose, one should have in mind that under our modern civilization we cannot produce any more traditional art. For such a reason what belongs to the past must be sacred to all citizens.

MURALS

Anyone who has sense of responsibility and sincerely loves our traditional art is at a loss what to think or suggest about murals. We go in a Wat today and admire some fine painting; returning a few months later we find part of the painting vanished. We are taken by a fit of despair. In many cases the ravage is done by our humid atmospheric agents, in other instances by the incompetence of people. Today we have another danger menacing our murals: this comes from some unscrupulous painters who make copies of the murals and in order to simplify things they trace the drawing from the original. What we complain of must *not be misunderstood*. Copies of murals or any other objects of art are necessary for keeping records and also for selling to foreigners, in which case it means a propaganda of our own art in foreign lands. What we want to say is that to trace drawing over the original paintings must be absolutely forbidden. Old Thai paintings were executed in tempera over a special preparation of lime; nowadays many parts of this preparation are detached from the wall. Thus a slight pressure proves fatal to the painting. Copies can be done easily by enlarging photographs and tracing them on the paper or canvas; from the original we may copy the colours. Under any circumstance the murals must not be touched, nor rubbed with cloth, nor permit that any ladder or any other contrivance adhere to the surface of the wall.

As we have said, the tropical rains have dampened the walls of the temples so much that many murals have lost their adhesive power or have been washed out by the leaking rains. In some cases we cannot do anything but regretfully witness their obliteration, while in other cases we may fix them with chemical solution.⁽¹⁾

There are many instances in which the preparation of the painting is partially detached from the plaster coat of the wall. This is a very serious inconvenience, but patiently we have to keep the loose parts as much as possible by some adhesive matter.

Another grave damage is that caused by the plaster coat bulging out from the brick construction in an uneven way. In this case we cannot press the plaster coat into its former position lest it crumble down, so it is advisable to fill up the space between the bricks and the plaster coat with some adhesive substances.⁽²⁾ Possibly the exterior of the walls should be replastered again giving to the brick surface washes of water-proof asphalt. The murals of the Buddhaisawan Chapel have suffered mostly from this damage.

(1) The best fixative is "BEDACRYL 122 x" made by The Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd. of London represented in Thailand by The East Asiatic Co. Ltd.

(2) A cement based on some resin or celluloid matter dissolved with Acetone and amyl acetate.

All the murals should also be cleaned with a chemical solution before being retouched or screened with glass. After the restoration is finished, the lower part of the wall which is liable to be touched or rubbed, should be screened with sliding glass which may be shifted easily from one side to the other for periodical cleaning.

Because the steep roof of our temples leaks easily and also if repaired this grave inconvenience repeats itself periodically, it is advisable to put on the top of the interior and around every wall a small gutter to receive the small amount, but very dangerous, of rain passing through the roof.

Of course, what we propose to do cannot be applied to all temples having paintings, but only to those considered as national monuments such as the Buddhaisawan Chapel, Wat Dusidharam, Wat Suvanaram and Wat Suthat in Bangkok, Wat Yai Suvanaram of Pejuri, Wat Phumin in Nan and Wat Phra Sing in Chiangmai, and a few other temples.

RESTORATION

As we have said, some of the murals may be restored fairly well. Here and there in a group of figures we notice one or two which are damaged while the rest of the group is still in good condition. In this case we could repaint the damaged parts without altering the originality of the work. Thai art is conventional and as such we may find always in other parts similar figures to those to be restored. If the composition is much deteriorated, it is advisable to leave it as it is. No large restorations should be done lest we lose the old characteristics.

The restoration of old murals is a very delicate work which can be done only by Thai artists because only the Thai understand the spirit of their old art.

In the past, restorations were given to the cheapest bidder: such a system caused more damage than what humidity and rain could do because the painters engaged in this work were interested only in their financial profit, disregarding the fact that they were destroying fine original paintings.

No conscientious restoration can be done under the pressure of time and financial lure. People doing this work must be true artists who love their work as much as the old painters did. Of course we have to pay them adequately, but to adopt the system of the cheapest bidder getting the job is as much as to lose those few originals still in existence.

Lately the Director-General of the Fine Arts Department, Mr. Dhanit Yupho organized an exhibition of colour-plates reproducing many murals of all the most important temples of Thailand; this display awoke a very keen interest among the Thai as well as foreigners. Let us hope this interest may be imparted to our young generation through art education apt to create in the young Thai a profound admiration for our artistic heritage, but besides education we need also to confront ourselves with the financial problem. It is true that excavations, repairs and maintenance of old monuments and other objects of art require money, and certainly not a small sum, but as all other nations have solved this problem long, since why do not we try our best to do the same? Let us not decide upon this matter when everything is ruined by the ravage of time and the inexperience of men.

Pilhabhorani

MEANING AND PSYCHOLOGY OF COLOURS

Many writers have attempted to give a theoretical explanation of the meaning of colours and our universal psychological reaction to them, but such a theory cannot be applied to every race because it is connected with culture, climate, individuality and fashion. In fact, to like a colour or not depends very much on our personal taste which may differ on account of our own nature or education. Rural people cherish bright tints: I remember to have seen some years ago hats dyed in lemon yellow and vermilion pigments. It rather shocked me, but in our days educated people also wear socks dyed in vermilion and bright green. It is a matter of "fashion". In our human nature we always desire something new and to satisfy this feeling we imitate expressions of primitive people who, in their turn, do their best to imitate us:

Culture and climate are the major factors to form colour-taste and colour-meaning. As an example, the Chinese like red very much because it is the symbol of the male prosperous power. For the westerners "crimson" means royalty. This is because thousands of years ago the Phoenicians, a seafaring people who lived in the shore of the Mediterranean sea, dyed fine material with a pigment extracted from a sea-creature, but as it was very rare it was used only for the vestments of monarchs. In this way habit engenders taste and meaning. In Thailand the colour of royalty is yellow and indeed a warm yellow means nobility and wealth. Accordingly, both crimson and yellow are two beautiful colours which seem to synthetize the blessing of the sun on our Earth. Yellow is the colour of the fruits in summer and crimson is their tint in the beginning of autumn. Pushing our imagination on further, we may also say that violet is the maturity of the seasonal vegetation; it is the last colour to appear in foliage or fruits before the Earth rests for months.

Again we may quote another example of racial meaning of colours. For the African the muddy-yellow tint symbolizes the colour of the water-goddess. The reason is that the African water of the African rivers is muddy and so in the minds of the natives of Africa arose the idea that the goddess of water had such a peculiar tint.

Climate has a great influence on colour appreciation. Tropical people used to dye their materials or paint their architectural structures with vivid pigments. By experience they know that the strong tropical light of the sun harmonizes and subdues all violent colours. Accordingly, using too delicate tints in the tropic the effect would be monotonous and dull. In our days colour is used everywhere as a medium to give pleasure to enliven the life of the citizens and so, both in Europe and America, buildings are painted with bright tints which, as mentioned before, if well disposed, give to the passers-by a truly fine impression. Of course, the abuse of colours results in a vulgar masquerade. A few chosen tints must dominate the colour scheme on which a fine tonality depends. The tonality is that particular tint we notice as a whole when beholding a picture, a natural view, a theatrical scene of anything else from a certain distance. To explain the idea in a few words, we may say that by painting a piece of paper with red and yellow spots and looking at it afterwards from a certain distance, we will see an orange tonality. Again, by painting a

piece of paper with blue and yellow points, seen from afar it will look green, etc. In cases where we cannot discern the "tonality", it means that we have used so many pigments that the result is a greyish neutral tint.

For the benefit of our readers it will be useful to state that to harmonise colours and to judge the quantity of a pigment to be used in relation with others, is as difficult as to harmonise musical notes. In particular, we have to emphasize the fact that all pure pigments are fine if used in small quantity but appear unbearable if used pure on a large surface. Thus on large surfaces colours must be neutralized. Another important thing is that colour schemes must correspond with the subject for which we compose them. One cannot paint rooms of a hospital in red and orange, neither can one paint a bar grey or black. From this example we understand how important a colour scheme is for theatrical scenes because their tonality must emphasize the meaning of each act, or better, each scene, of the play.

A last hint on how to use colours properly is that of their "advancing" or "receding" effect. Red, yellow, orange and white advance while blues recede: for this reason, if we paint the lower part of a building in blue we have the effect of a structure without a basement; it seems to float in the air because when the basement is "airy", it recedes. Green stands between red and blue, that is to say, neither advances nor recedes.

In spite of cultural and climatic differences and besides the meaning we give to colours according to conventions, there are basic pigments which have the same psychological reaction on human beings. At large, warm colours excite or give a sense of vitality while cool colours appease our feelings. Blue, blue-green and green give us a sense of restfulness. This is easily understandable when we think that they correspond to the colours of the sky, water and vegetation. But, as already said, the use of these cool tints is also difficult because, if wrongly applied, instead of pleasure, we have the opposite sensation. Blue is the colour of serenity while green is that of vitality, of eternal life.

Opposite to green and blue is red. Red either excites or incites fear. Such sensations are those we have had since childhood about this pigment—flowers, sunsets, nightly festivals with fires. As far as the flame is controlled, it gives us joy, it excites us, and with its vibrating movement it seems to invite us to dance, to sing. On the contrary, when the flame is not controlled, it is as terrible as the third eye of Siva: it destroys, it annihilates. Thus instinctively red gives us opposite sensations.

Warm yellow gives vitality and joy and for many races symbolises wealth. Pale yellow, like Lemon or Naples yellow, in large quantity gives a sense of weakness. Orange stands between red and yellow: it means the sun's rays and thus stimulates energy and joyfulness. Yellow-green means the eternal renewal of life. It is the colour of youth or spring as we may notice in the newly planted rice which starts to spring out. For many westerners violet means victory, but as already hinted, we think it means more maturity, the limit of a crescendo like a mature beautiful woman in her declining curve of life. It cannot stimulate hope but only admiration. Grays convey distinction and subtleness but

they may also give a sense of depression. White is purity and celestial. Pink means also purity and hope as it is the colour of the aurora. Black is mystery, the void of life.

Discord means to reverse the natural values of the colours. For instance, if we paint violet lighter than yellow, and yellow darker than violet, the result is discord. Discord used in very small quantity is useful in colour schemes, but used on a large surface as in rooms or buildings is unbearable.

Combinations of colours change their singular psychological effect. Dark green in combination with black is depressing more than black itself. Black, red and some spots of yellow-green have a devilish appearance while red orange, yellow and green are the synthesis of life. The meaning or fine appearance of a colour may completely change according to its value (shade). An easy example may be seen from the paper that the Chinese jewelers used for wrapping their jewelry, it is a pale purple. From an universal point of view such pale purple is not at all fine but, on the contrary, purple when used in its full shade (value) is a good colour, a colour which embodies both dignity and maturity.

Never before our age has man understood the psychology of colours in the stimulation of our energy and pleasure. Indeed for our senses colour is the optical music and as such one must know how to use it, particularly when the market offers such variety of hues as in the present days.

NUDE—ART OR OBSCENITY?

Up to about forty years ago in Thailand we were not yet obsessed by nudism. Men went out in pakamas, while women who were mothers could go bare-breasted without scandalising anybody. Children of both sexes up to thirteen and more were completely naked, playing together most innocently.

Education came with its great advantages and also with its sophisms affecting our natural mode of life. By and by the sophisticated idea about “decency” took so deep a root in our minds that we thought it necessary to cover every part of the body, reaching the paradox that also a three year old child had to be dressed according to the western fashion. It is not seldom that one hears the criticism by some of our country fellow at the sight of a group of naked children who play together forming a most gracious scene... but because naked, the same blaming people would look at them with severe expression complaining that such a sight is not proper to the decor of our country!!! Such paradox is not due to moral reasons, but is due to adherence to an exotic civilization which has nothing to do with our own culture, nor with our own climate. What is a necessity in western countries where temperatures are low is cumbersome in the tropics.

Indeed we sacrifice our health and comfort to the altar of an exotic culture.

* * * * *

With this “mania” for pure morality and decency we have arrived at the point of finding fault also in sculptures and paintings representing nudes, the posture and gesture of which correspond perfectly to the canons of art and morality of any civilised race. In doing so, we betray our ignorance of art and Nature.

Let us consider the difference existing between a human being and say a horse, or we could cite a flower, a tree or any other natural form. If a horse is well proportioned and fine looking, we cannot help to admire it for its elegant, harmonious forms. No foolish man would imagine covering any part of the horse for the sake of morality. We know that any addition of cloth or other article over its body would only dwarf its beautiful appearance.

Now, what difference exists between the body of a human being and that of a horse? Anatomically we are almost identical. The very difference lies in the fact that Man is our own fellow-creature whom we love and with whom we may correspond by the means of our intelligence: it is just because we are interested in our own species that we see a human being perfect and beautiful, more than we do in any other lower animals. For such a reason since remote times human forms arouse peculiar interest in art representation. Both West and East have produced innumerable nudes in sculpture or painting to display to the laymen how perfect is our body and what an aesthetic pleasure it gives us when reproduced in art.

Therefore, the representation of the nude in art, be it that of a male or female, means the glorification of our own human family; it is a thankful offering to the unknown Cosmic Energy which created this beautiful body of ours.

Accordingly, to find fault in the representation of the nude is to admit our mental blindness, or our lack of reverence towards Nature.

* * * * *

Generally speaking, criticism about nude in art comes from two distinct groups: the first group of critics are those whose minds suggest bad thoughts also of innocent forms. Very often the conduct of these one track minded persons is not a model of morality and by means of a subjective criticism they want to appear faultless, blaming things which they do not understand. The second group of persons who are scandalised by a statue or a painting representing a nude is formed by people to whom Nature has not been generous in bestowing beauty to their body, or for some cause their life has been a failure resulting in a sour temperament no longer fit to bear the sight of BEAUTY.

Fortunately for us there is a third group of people, healthy both in spirit and body, who finding the nude a wonderful creation admire sculptured or painted nude. The reader must not think that we belong to some colony of nudists. Indeed as aestheticians we oppose to this kind of displays for the simple reason that in a colony of nudists we notice very few fine bodies, the majority is formed by disproportioned figures, too fat or too thin, or too old. It is just for this reason that, as a routine, a dressed person is preferable to a naked one from the point of view of beauty; at least with dresses we can hide our physical defects or correct them by some artificial device.

* * * * *

Ingenuousness or Hypocrisy

The same persons who attack nude in art patronise cinematographs showing films of naked or semi-naked women not as static statues, but acting in such a way as to appeal as much as possible to our sexual senses. The same people enjoy weekly magazines illustrating ladies in postures apt to awake the fantasy of any normal man. This imagination is far worse than the feelings that a sensual person may prove in beholding a statue or a painting representing a nude for the above-mentioned fact that in ART the posture of the body is dignified and as such not at all provocative.

If nudes had such a strong irresistible appeal for men or, as the moralists say, for youths, the seaside resorts of our time would be a bacchanal orgy because ladies try their best to cover their bodies with the minimum of clothing. But if the manner and postures of these ladies correspond to a civil dignity, men admire their forms but do not feel an irresistible sexual appeal.

A nicely dressed lady showing a too deep and large décollete is more sexually attractive than all the statues and paintings created up to our days and also more than a lady in a bath costume showing the most of her harmonious forms.

There is another type of persons who never miss a film starring sensual girls, but are shocked to see in a magazine the reproduction of a painting by a famous artist representing a nude. These people are anxious for the bad moral effect such artistic pictures may have on the public in general, but do not consider the effect produced by the aforesaid films. Is it not an incongruous conflict of ideas ?

* * * * *

It is indispensable to understand that what we have said about nude in art cannot be generalised to that kind of art in which the postures and gestures of nudes are purposely done to excite sexually the beholder. Such works are repudiated by artists and have nothing to do with art. Such kind of productions commonly art is related to pornographic pictures circulating clandestinely amongst those mentally unhealthy people who need artificial excitement for their low physical instinct. All this kind of vulgar pictures are truly harmful to our youths; they are a shameful, disgracing habit inherited from the west for the simple reason of commercial exploit. Here our efforts should be focussed to extirpate this unhealthy flaw of our modern society.

* * * * *

It is not a statue, a painting or a photograph of a naked woman depicted in an artistic posture which have a bad influence on our morality, from such an artistic production we learn how to admire Nature in all its multiform harmonious creations. It is the body of a woman, naked, seminaked or dressed pictured in a provocative posture which is to be blamed and suppressed, but, please, do not confound such vulgarities made to squeeze money from weak people with ART.

