

other, and that they possess inner truth, makes us certain that they are the first signs of the coming new epoch – they are the signal fires for the pathfinders.

The hour is unique. Is it too daring to call attention to the small, unique signs of the time?

10 August Macke (1887–1914) 'Masks'

Macke was associated with Kandinsky and Marc in Munich in 1909–10 and joined with them in the formation of *Der Blaue Reiter*. Originally published in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac in 1912, the present text furnishes a typical case of the association of Modernism with the primitive, and of that diversification in the interests of art and art history which took place in Germany at the turn of the century. This translation from Lankheit, op. cit.

[. . .] Is life not more precious than food and the body not more precious than clothing?

Incomprehensible ideas express themselves in comprehensible forms. Comprehensible through our senses as star, thunder, flower, as form.

Form is a mystery to us for it is the expression of mysterious powers. Only through it do we sense the secret powers, the 'invisible God.'

The senses are our bridge between the incomprehensible and the comprehensible.

To behold plants and animals is: to perceive their secret.

To hear the thunder is: to perceive its secret. To understand the language of forms means: to be closer to the secret, to live.

To create forms means: to live. Are not children more creative in drawing directly from the secret of their sensations than the imitator of Greek forms? Are not savages artists who have forms of their own powerful as the form of thunder?

Thunder, flower, any force expresses itself as form. So does man. He, too, is driven by something to find words for conceptions, to find clearness in obscurity, consciousness in the unconscious. This is his life, his creation.

As man changes, so do his forms change.

The relations that numerous forms bear to one another enable us to recognize the individual form. Blue first becomes visible against red, the greatness of the tree against the smallness of the butterfly, the youth of the child against the age of the old man. One and two make three. The formless, the infinite, the zero remain incomprehensible. God remains incomprehensible.

Man expresses his life in forms. Each form of art is an expression of his inner life. The exterior of the form of art is its interior.

Each genuine form of art emerges from a living correlation of man to the real substance of the forms of nature, the forms of art. The scent of a flower, the joyful leaping of a dog, a dancer, the donning of jewelry, a temple, a painting, a style, the life of a nation, of an era.

The flower opens at sunrise. Seeing his prey, the panther crouches, and as a result of seeing it, his strength grows. And the tension of his strength shows in the length of his leap. The form of art, its style, is a result of tension.

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In our complicated and confused era we have forms that absolutely enthrall everyone in exactly the same way as the fire dance enthralls the African or the mysterious drumming of the fakirs enthralls the Indian. As a soldier, the independent scholar stands beside the farmer's son. They both march in review similarly through the ranks, whether they like it or not. At the movies the professor marvels alongside the servant girl. In the vaudeville theater the butterfly-colored dancer enchants the most amorous couples as intensely as the solemn sound of the organ in a Gothic cathedral seizes both believer and unbeliever.

Forms are powerful expressions of powerful life. Differences in expression come from the material, word, color, sound, stone. We must learn to understand each form. One also need not read each form.

The contemptuous gesture with which connoisseurs have banished all artistic forms of primitive culture or applied art is amazing at the very least.

What we hang on the wall as a painting is basic as the painted pillars in an African hut. The African connoisseur's simple form for an incomprehensible idea, the primitive concept. For us the painting is the comprehension of an incomprehensible conception of a deceased person, the whole magic of nature, of the rhythmical. [. . .]

Everywhere, forms speak in a sublime language of aesthetics. Even in the games of children, in the play of a sunny day, invisible ideas materialize quietly.

The joys, the sorrows of man, of nations, lie behind the temples, cathedrals, and masks, behind the music, the dances, and dances. If they are not there, if form be absent, then there is no art.

11 Emil Nolde (1867–1956) 'On Primitive Art'

The painter Nolde was a member of *Die Brücke* from 1906 to 1908. His work is central to the characterization of a specifically German form of Expressionism. In the paintings by which he is best known, 'primitive' figure types are used to evoke emotional and religious themes. The present text was incorporated in Nolde's autobiographical *Jahre der Kämpfe* [*Years of Struggle*] 1912–1914, Berlin, Rembrandt, 1934, pp. 172–5, with a note to the effect that it had been written in 1912 to introduce an intended book 'on the artistic expressions of primitive peoples' on which Nolde was working at the time. The present translation is made from the 1934 edition.

- 1 'The most perfect art was Greek art. Raphael is the greatest of all masters in painting.' Such were the doctrines of every art teacher only twenty or thirty years ago.
- 2 Since then, much has changed. We do not care for Raphael, and are less enthusiastic about the statues of the so-called golden age of Greece. Our predecessors' ideals are not ours. Works signed by great names over the

centuries appeal to us less. In the hurry and bustle of their times, worldly-wise artists created works for Popes and palaces. It is the ordinary people who laboured in their workshops and of whose lives scarcely anything is now known, whose very names have not come down to us, that we love and respect today in their plain, large-scale carvings in the cathedrals of Naumburg, Magdeburg and Bamberg.

- 3 Our museums are getting large and crammed and are growing rapidly. I am not keen on these vast collections, deadening by virtue of their sheer mass. A reaction against such excess must surely come soon.
- 4 Not long ago only a few artistic periods were thought suitable for museums. Then they were joined by exhibitions of Coptic and early Christian art, Greek terracottas and vases, Persian and Islamic art. But why is Indian, Chinese and Javanese art still classified under ethnology or anthropology? And why is the art of primitive peoples not considered art at all?
- 5 What is it about these primitive forms of expression that appeals so much to us artists?
- 6 In our own time, every earthenware vessel or piece of jewellery, every utensil or garment, has to be designed on paper before it is made. Primitive peoples, however, create their works with the material itself in the artist's hand, held in his fingers. They aspire to express delight in form and the love of creating it. Absolute originality, the intense and often grotesque expression of power and life in very simple forms – that may be why we like these works of native art.

12 Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) 'On the Nature of Visions'

Kokoschka's brief text condenses many of those themes which pervaded the Austro-German Expressionist avant-garde in the years before the First World War. Not yet inflected by politics, as Expressionism was to be by the war, Kokoschka's preoccupation is with that constant of German Idealism: the Spirit. He offers a vitalism in which the soul, notably the soul of the artist – free, untrammelled, and marked by a kind of fierce innocence – is in direct harmony with the forces of nature and the universe. Tellingly, his metaphors tend to the Biblical. Originally delivered as a lecture in Vienna, 26 January 1912, the text appeared in English translation by Heidi Medlinger and John Thwaites in Edith Hoffman, *Kokoschka. Life and Work*, London, 1947, pp. 285–7, from which the present version is taken.

The state of awareness of visions is not one in which we are either remembering or perceiving. It is rather a level of consciousness at which we experience visions within ourselves.

This experience cannot be fixed; for the vision is moving, an impression growing and becoming visual, imparting a power to the mind. It can be evoked but never defined.

Yet the awareness of such imagery is a part of living. It is life selecting from the forms which flow towards it or refraining, at will.

A life which derives its power from within itself will focus the perception of

such images. And yet this free visualizing in itself – whether it is complete or hardly yet perceptible, or undefined in either space or time – this has its own power running through. The effect is such that the visions seem actually to modify one's consciousness, at least in respect of everything which their own form proposes as their pattern and significance. This change in oneself, which follows on the vision's penetration of one's very soul, produces the state of awareness, of expectancy. At the same time there is an outpouring of feeling into the image which becomes, as it were, the soul's plastic embodiment. This state of alertness of the mind or consciousness has, then, a waiting, receptive quality. It is like an unborn child, as yet unfelt even by the mother, to whom nothing of the outside world slips through. And yet whatever affects his mother, all that impresses her down to the slightest birthmark on the skin, all is implanted in him. As though he could use her eyes, the unborn receives through her his visual impressions, even while he is himself unseen.

The life of the consciousness is boundless. It interpenetrates the world and is woven through all its imagery. Thus it shares those characteristics of living which our human existence can show. One tree left living in an arid land would carry in its seed the potency from whose roots all the forests of the earth might spring. So with ourselves; when we no longer inhabit our perceptions they do not go out of existence; they continue as though with a power of their own, awaiting the focus of another consciousness. There is no more room for death; for though the vision disintegrates and scatters, it does so only to reform in another mode.

Therefore we must harken closely to our inner voice. We must strive through the penumbra of words to the core within. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' And then the inner core breaks free – now feebly and now violently – from the words within which it dwells like a charm. 'It happened to me according to the Word.'

If we will surrender our closed personalities, so full of tension, we are in a position to accept this magical principle of living, whether in thought, intuition, or in our relationships. For in fact we see every day beings who are absorbed in one another, whether in living or in teaching, aimless or with direction. So it is with every created thing, everything we can communicate, every constant in the flux of living; each one has its own principle which shapes it, keeps life in it, and maintains it in our consciousness. Thus it is preserved, like a rare species, from extinction. We may identify it with 'me' or 'you' according to our estimate of its scale or its infinity. For we set aside the self and personal existence as being fused into a larger experience. All that is required of us is to RELEASE CONTROL. Some part of ourselves will bring us into the unison. The inquiring spirit rises from stage to stage, until it encompasses the whole of Nature. All laws are left behind. One's soul is a reverberation of the universe. Then too, as I believe, one's perception reaches out towards the Word, towards awareness of the vision.

As I said at first, this awareness of visions can never fully be described, its history can never be delimited, for it is a part of life itself. Its essence is a flowing and a taking form. It is love, delighting to lodge itself in the mind.