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Transcendancy in Arts, as the “Shining” of the Idea in the Material

Theses for a DLA Dissertation

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The topic and starting point of my research:

1. I have studied certain topics that make it possible for the artist to raise dead and blunt material over himself and refine it as a messenger of transcendent content.
2. I have set out from the thought of Prokopios. In his opinion beauty does not belong to the material world, but it has a spiritual starting point: This is the shining of the idea through material. (1)
3. Another hypothesis of mine is the idea of Kandinski (2). I supposed that imagination, the voice of the soul, the hiding archaic picture hardly turns into material reality, but this kind of torture of the creator is the source of the artist's biggest pleasure at the same time.

My statements and results:

1. As for the relation of conception and substance there are two directions and processes to observe:

One is moving from the above downwards: For the existing imagination of the artist it seeks the suitable substance with the help of which the ideas of the artist could be interpreted in the most faithful way. Here, some part of the plan must be given up, since only material, the richness of the inner, bodyless picture cannot be reproduced. The shining of the idea decreases in an unavoidable way, when it descends into the material. This is not an artistic fiasco, but a sort of lawfulness coming from the different nature of spirit and substance.

The other is moving from beneath upwards: Here, the artist is looking for the possibilities that are available in the well-known substance and seeking new materials which have not been used with an artistic purpose so far. The history of arts has plenty of cases when a technical discovery, the appearance of a new product followed by social demand, or an unnecessary by-product of production technology gave the artists new stimulus. This created new programs and forms.

Nowadays experiments with materials gained a new interpretation. Significant parts of artists' oeuvre are bound to certain materials. The life-work of Anish Kapoor is an outstanding example. Few works are about the creating role of the substance and the resuscitation of the dead material, with pure artistic methods, other than Kapoor's works: The material of his object entitled *My Red Homeland*, is a red mass of vaseline.

In reality the two kinds of processes are intermingling: At times the material whispers and dictates, at other times the artistic conception forms the substance. As a result of this secret activity the picture is starting to change: It is not a dead material anymore, but it is becoming alive as the reflection of creation: "Indeed, art hides his art" – Pygmalion's work (3) is featured by Ovid. This is what Zoltán Tölg-Molnár is also talking about: "...the paint in the jar was merely wonderful, thick, black and strong in dammar. Then something happened in the course of the work, and now it is just standing and taking care of the silence, while I am observing it with surprise, yet afraid of this 'dead' substance, however glad I am about all these" (4).

2. Contemporary time may be defined as post-secularization.

Although the time of "autonomous human" – according to Sedlmayr (5) is still valid, where the process of secularization covers everything, yet there has been a particular change during the past decades. This fact gives grounds for introducing the theory of post-secularization. Secularization has not come to an end but the social demand for religion has increased. As Stückelberger (6) declares – "Today religion, becoming invisible in the course of secularization – in the age of post-secularization – becomes visible again and is coming back to the public field. This fact cannot appear in arts without tracks".

This means that the religious interest of contemporary arts, freed from restrictions, has strengthened. These works of art did not usually relate to the concrete elements of the Christian liturgy, this is why they cannot be considered as parts of *ars sacra*. They are works dealing with transcendency, which can both serve private devotion and aesthetic pleasure.

3. The importance of the plot of the work increases, which is related to a new interpretation between the sacred plot and arts. It is increasingly common that current works of art appear in the vicinity of sacred areas

An exemplary harmony of place and work is accomplished in "Rhotko Chapel". László Vanyó (7) writes:

“This kind of art is strongly built together with the place that surrounds it”. Mark Rothko, an outstanding mystic artist of the second part of the twentieth century – as Tamás Konok declared him, has elicited lots of teardrops, repentance and purgative catharsis from the viewers of his paintings, who may both be regarded as pilgrims and art experts.

In Hungary, at the Archabbey of Pannonhalma, we can experience the beneficial result of the appearance of contemporary works of art at different places (sacred, close to sacred, profane).

Contemporary art also deals with the chance of the (pseudo) resecularization of desacred spaces.

4. Dealing with light – as the supreme substance of art – is a significant set of problems for many contemporary artists, since its visual appearance may mean both the “in here” light with physical parameters and characteristics and the “out there” light filled with reflecting transcendency.

Günther Uecker may be looking for the light “out there” in his phantasy. His most suitable material for light mysticism is the nailed, white-painted surface. Here, the special light and pale shadows, lit from different directions, cause the above-mentioned elevated spirits in the viewer’s mind.

According to all these factors the sensitive (artistic) phenomenon helps us to fly to the world beyond the experienced, whose easily conceivable attribute is the light itself. This is the certain phenomenon, which is an artistic tool at the same time. With the help of this the art of different eras tries to encounter transcendency in many different ways.

5. The first user of the word combination “*light threshold*” is Mátyás Varga. In his opinion “(...) light is like a chance, threshold is like a frontier, and to step over it is not easy. To make another person step over it is even more difficult” (8).

With the help of the thoughts, which Mátyás Varga characterized my paintings with, we can declare that the task of arts dealing with transcendency is to accompany the artist and the viewer up to the threshold. What percolates through the threshold everyone can recognize, although, this does not depend on the artist.

With the notion of threshold, the art of the present can be related to that of the past. Since, as László Beke says: The icons are thresholds. According to Sorin Domitrescu threshold is a kind of border-line that separates this world from the world beyond.

6. In my own pictures I have been working on the iconographical system of a “light threshold” in the past decades. The characteristic of this is the openness to transcendency. The latest step of this process can be seen in my master-work.

My paintings display the steadiness recognizable in nature, which is related to order. Their symmetry is not static, but characterized by a continuous flow. Their structure is the pile of repeated elements: built as a kind of carpet to be further built to any direction. I very often knock the homogenous, glazing-like fields and open up, bright spaces against light- elements modelled in a plastic way. These little piles visualize the time and space of the painting at the same time. Their continuous fall and piling at the bottom of the painting, just like a sand-clock, show the inexplicable flow of time. Their whirling and their plastic bodies are modelled in full light, just like their own and created shadows displays the depth of space.

The condensate of time and space put into material tries to point towards transcendency.

1. The thoughts of the history writer Prokopios, referring to the Byzantine, monumental painting, summarized by Anikó Faludy this way. Anikó Faludy: *The Painting and Mosaic Art of Byzantium*, Corvina, Budapest, 1982, p. 10.
2. The inner voice of the soul is whispering what form is needed and from where. Should it come from inner or outer 'nature'? writes Kandinski. In *Vasili Kandinski: Spirituality in Art*. Corvina, Budapest, 1987, p. 88.
3. Ovid: *Metamorphosis – Pygmalion*, Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1982, p. 280.
4. Writing of Zoltán Tölg-Molnár. In: *Zoltán Tölg-Molnár: 6th Floor*. Budapest, 2004, p. 53.
5. According to Hans Sedlmayr the history of the European art consists of four parts. These parts refer to the relation of the sacred with arts even in their names.
6. Johannes Stückelberger : Religion im öffentlichen Raum als Thema der Gegenwartskunst. In: *Kunst und Kirche* 04/2008, p. 5.
7. László Vanyó: *Ars Sacra – Ars Liturgica in the Twentieth Century*. In: *Seminarium Centrale Budapestinense*, Budapest, 1994, p. 53.
8. *Light Threshold*. Manuscript – László Beke, Gábor Kovács-Gombos, Gábor Martos and Mátyás Varga – written version of talks in public. (Delivered in the Students' Library of the Benedictine Secondary Grammar School of the Pannonhalma Archabbey on 6 November, 2000.)

Relating earlier publications:

- Gábor Kovács-Gombos: *The Mining-church of Brennberg and its Paintings*. In *Bányászati és Kohászati Lapok Múzeumi Különszám*, 1983 IX..
- Gábor Kovács-Gombos: *A Possible Visual Pedagogical Model*. In: *Tudomány Napja 2000*, NyME-BEPFK Conference Volume, Sopron, 2001.
- Gábor Kovács-Gombos: *The Maulbertsch frescos of the nave of the Győr Basilica*. In: *Tudomány Napja 2001*, NyME-BEPFK Conference Volume, Sopron, 2001.
- Gábor Kovács-Gombos: *Ars Sacra*. In: *Tudomány Napja 2002*, NyME-BEPFK Conference Volume, Sopron, 2003.
- Gábor Kovács-Gombos: *Ars Sacra and Light*. In: *Tudomány Napja 2003*, NyME-BEPFK Conference Volume, Sopron, 2004.