

Rendering the Transcendent Perceptible

Paola Grossi Gondi

Paola Grossi Gondi, a painter born in Rome in 1964, graduated from the Faculty of Scenography, in the Academy of Fine Arts, in Rome in 1985. She earned her teaching license in Design and Art History from the Istituti Superiori of Rome in 1987. Her professional achievements include: Architectural studies and interior design: "Program" and "Luigi Sturchio & Partners", Rome; Advertising agencies: "Roncaglia & Wijkander", "Studio Più", "Armando Testa", "J.W. Thompson", Rome offices; Art galleries: "L'indicatore" by Teresa Purificato, Rome; Restoration and artistic decoration: "Nike", Rome; Publishing Houses: "Edizioni Sottotraccia", Salerno; "Edizioni Beta", "Edizioni Arte 21", "Apollinare Studi", Rome; Production studios: "Perseo", "Lux Vide", Rome. Selected Expositions: 1983 Mantova - Institute of Germanic Culture - Display of R. Wagner's scenographic collection; 1989 Rome - Capannelle-via Appia - International exhibit; 1992 Rome - Galleria la Pigna - Personal exhibit; 1993 Rome - Complesso Monumentale S. Michele - International exhibit of paintings and watercolors; 1993,96,99 Pianfei - Palazzo Comunale - Triennial of Painting; 1994 Rome - Galleria L'Ariete di via Giulia - Personal exhibit; 1996 Rome - National Academy of St. Luke, Palazzo Carpegna; 1996 Rome - Palazzo Barberini; 1996 Rome - Galleria Monteverchio; 2000 Rome - Complesso del Vittoriano - Personal exhibit; 2001 Galerie Forum Lindenthal, Cologne, Germany.

I have always loved painting, so much so that I decided to dedicate my life to this field. I have focussed my attention on the most common things that can be encountered in daily life: familiar, domestic objects, the details of a window, the sun that filters through it in a room, a reflection on a wall, or a ray of light on the floor — details such as these reveal the charm of little things, the beauty that can be discovered in the ordinary. (*Table 1*)

THE JOURNEY

Since my years of training in art school and in the Roman Academy of Fine Arts, I remember being struck by the contrast between the works of the Masters

of the past that I had come to know — immortal works that inspired wonder and admiration in me — and more recent works that troubled me at heart.

Although each artistic expression reflects the historical period that produced it and each artistic creation deserves respect, inasmuch as its maker has been coherent and sincere in expressing his emotions, I could not bring myself to agree with those who held that “everything and anything” is art. Thus began my journey as a painter, preferring to march in solitude in search of beauty and harmony, rather than to go with the ephemeral flow of the majority. (*Table 2*)

Each search led to the joyous confirmation that beauty abounds in our midst, and that the role of the artist is precisely to make this beauty evident to others. At my first personal exhibit, I stood by to watch the impressions that my paintings made on the public. More than appreciation for technical matters — more or less favorable critiques and aesthetic judgments — what moved me most was how visitors were actually captivated by those paintings as they stopped and whispered intimate thoughts before them: those works of art had touched them to the heart!

Such reactions were a discovery for me: artworks can communicate more than their authors could have hoped for or foreseen; art is a mystery that escapes even the artist; it is a revelation even for its maker. For those who know how to appreciate it, art is a privileged means for perceiving and discovering that imperceptible reality — the transcendent — in a most simple and personal way. (*Table 3*)

If at first my passion for art was a private affair, if at first I feared that dedicating myself to painting meant settling for a hobby, or doing what I was doing only for myself, I began to be aware of the responsibility that had been placed on my shoulders. I understood that *Someone* had placed me in these circumstances, had given me talents and was inviting me to make them bear fruit. Soon you shall see why I say this.

It was not sheer coincidence that in those moments, the person who was closest to me in my interior journey was an art critic and faithful of Opus Dei: while commenting about the subjects of my artistic search (the grandeur of little things, of the ordinary), she was communicating to me the message of Blessed Escrivá, suggesting that my paintings had a meaning that had escaped me and that these paintings could be my very path towards achieving — and helping others to achieve — happiness.

THE DISCOVERY

Immersed in such thoughts and resuming my work, I was commissioned to transcribe the words of St. Thomas Aquinas’ eucharistic hymn in a chapel: a task for which I had no experience, but for which I had received a handsome pay!

It was on that occasion that my heart grasped the depth of the divine message entrusted to Blessed Escrivá: paint-brush in hand, I was making a declaration of love for God; I was telling Him in colors, «*adoro te devote latens deitas*», devoutly I adore you, hidden God.

It was in this way that the vocation, prepared for me from all eternity, became apparent to me with disarming simplicity and extreme naturalness. In its light, the contours of earlier thoughts, intuitions and reflections acquired their full definition. In accepting this vocation, it seemed to me that I was receiving the answer to all my questions. A work of art was immediately created in order to express these sentiments.

THE CONSEQUENCES

Today, I am asked to evaluate the effects provoked in my life, by Blessed Escrivá's message, with the professional and personal aspects taken as an integral whole.

How shall I go about this? Rather than speaking of art, I would like to let art speak for itself. Allow me to summarize it in these points for reflection (*a series of paintings are flashed on the screen for every idea that follows*): (1) a glance that penetrates the depth of reality and uncovers its mystery; (2) rendering the transcendent perceptible: the divine that shines through the ordinary; (3) the grandeur of little things; (4) there *is* beauty — sought, found and revealed; (5) as children of the God who *is* Beauty, we love the world passionately because it is filled with traces of Him; (6) every aesthetic experience inspires wonder and gives profound joy that can be shared and put at the service of the happiness of others; (7) the artist's responsibility before society; (8) the conquest of the world of art by the children of God in order to lay it before the Father.

As can be seen — in the light of the filial relationship with God — on the one hand, one becomes conscious of one's own personal dignity, and this ennobles and stimulates one's professional commitment (the role of the artist); on the other hand, one is also challenged to overcome isolation in order to communicate and share with other men and women — our brothers and sisters — the great existential discoveries, so that working together, they can spread them daringly throughout society, through their art (the apostolic potential of art).

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Every artist has a special experience of God, and each one, even the one who is farthest from God, has admitted this at least once. Denying it would put artistic authenticity at risk.

Curiously enough, if the link between the Creator and the artist were not established, the former's work would be unable to make the transcendent perceptible, and it would no longer be possible to call it "a work of art."

Naturally — and I speak from first-hand experience — one will not always have great insights, brilliant intuitions or sublime ideas. Rather, the artist's weakness, his excessive sensibility, and his insecurity which stems from treading on unfamiliar ground can all give him the sensation of losing the ground on which he stands. But then again, it is precisely this continual experience of precariousness that serves as the lever to bring him to the state of extreme ardor, where he can go beyond himself and realize what is humanly impossible. It is in this daring leap into the infinite that the artist is "caught in the embrace" of God. Otherwise — I ask myself — how could a few musical notes arouse in its listener supernatural thoughts and emotions? How could letters printed on a page, or carvings on marble, or brush-work on canvas...?

I believe that the mystery of art and the indissoluble union between God and the artist rests in this interlacing of love, faith, zeal, abandonment, intuitions and realizations.

Judge for yourselves from what heights one can contemplate human reality when one lets oneself be taken by the hand of Blessed Escrivá. It is not that he wrote about art in particular; but because his message is universal and is addressed to all men and women — of all races, conditions and activities — that it reaches deep into the hearts of painters as well!