

TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM

THE ART OF ADI DA SAMRAJ



la Biennale di Venezia

52. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte
Eventi collaterali

PALAZZO BOLLANI

Castello 3647- 30122 Venice

10 June - 21 November 2007

Hours: 10.00 am - 6.00 pm

COMMENTARY BY ACHILLE BONITO OLIVA - **CHIEF CURATOR**

COMMENTARY ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE EXHIBITION *TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM: THE ART OF ADI DA SAMRAJ*, 52ND BIENNALE DI VENEZIA - 9 JUNE 2007

When I first saw the images of Adi Da Samraj, I found myself in front of work that was not an artifice (or the simply technical production of a language), but that, rather, was the fruit of a creative experience aimed at enabling a new perception of reality in the viewer.

We are used to considering twentieth-century art in terms of groups of artists, schools of thought – on the one hand objectivity, on the other hand subjectivity; on the one hand the artist who expresses himself through impersonal, neutral forms, on the other hand the artist who instead wants to document and express his own identity.

Looking at Adi Da's works, I had a strange sensation of serenity. I was confronted with works that left me not without words but without thought, so that I couldn't exercise my consummate technique as an international art critic! I believe that art should always be a surprise. It must create, even in the critic, not emotion, but a sense of insecurity. When one views Adi Da's art, it's easy to see "pop art", "optical art", all the possible linguistic, ethnological, and iconographic references – but, in the end, the final work is always a surprise.

With Adi Da's work, I didn't simply find myself in front of a new personal iconographic universe but rather in front of images that returned me to an

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experience of “epiphany”. Adi Da’s image-work constitutes an epiphany in the sense that it presents itself neither in objective nor in subjective terms. It doesn’t belong either to the universe of the artistic search of the 20th century, the whole canon of optical-perceptual experimentation that was developed in the 1950s and 60s, nor on the other hand to an expressionist creation that tends to represent identity and subjectivity.

The image in Adi Da’s work is, rather, a synthesis of matter and energy, of abstract and figurative. It is an attempt to bring to the viewer the perception of its creative process. Within each image, every element develops the transition to the successive one. So there is an expression of fertility, of proliferation, of vitality. It is an energy, a breath that irradiates and pervades the iconography of the artwork.

It is interesting to see Adi Da’s work as a reality confronting the viewer – visually, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is a work that attempts to communicate reality both as matter and as spirituality. Leonardo Da Vinci said: “Painting is a mental thing.” Adi Da uses photographic and digital means, but in terms of representation. The monumental works in the exhibition are a path of experience, of contemplative nomadism, for the viewer.

Western metaphysics is always linked to myth and culture – Ulysses, Greek culture, the myth of the Latin, Greek, and pagan deities – whereas the metaphysics created by Adi Da paradoxically communicates spirituality in a language similar to pop art, which is a “consumer” language. But Adi Da’s work is absolutely not “consumeristic”. It is work in which the viewer descends into reality. This language of reality is not

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a superficial language – rather it could be said it is a language that, through its surface, acquires its depth.

Details are very important in Adi Da's work. The work cannot be taken in with just one look, like a flash. Every work needs to be experienced, to be entered into, as a journey of the eyes. Adi Da's work, through epiphany, is purposed to connecting the viewer with reality.

Adi Da depicts the state of things. But for "thing" I do not mean a static object or an inert element, but "thing" as condition that no longer has any superstructures, but that connects to whoever contemplates it--the subject, the world, humanity. So Adi Da's Transcendental Realism is a form of neo-humanism that wants to develop a relationship with art with a very vast public as a starting point. The iconographic elements, whether abstract or figurative, are always recognizable. Therefore, there is a sense of "visual democracy" – the possibility for the viewer to find in front of himself an iconographic universe where Adi Da becomes, one could say, the guru who extracts signs and images from the recognizable "alphabet" of visual perception, in a system that is highly connecting.

Adi Da's artistic creation develops a testimony and a knowledge of this great experience. There is the possibility, on the part of the viewer, to consider and to feel the experience. The viewer is the protagonist of a relationship with the work, both on the level of the physical experience and also absolutely on the psychic level. I also feel that there is a sort of tactility in Adi Da's work. If one watches very carefully, there is a way of working that is analytical, in a microscopic manner, and

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there are small parts that are without contours, that are embedded, and there are levels of this visual surface that are also levels of emotional depth.

Transcendental Realism means a profound reality, a real depth, it means matter and spirituality and thus transcendence of the sensibility of mere "spectacle". If someone asks me to describe one of Adi Da's works, I cannot do it. It is a labyrinth in which, once one enters, maybe it is better not to exit. The work of Adi Da is a spiritual nourishment, and we are here to celebrate it.

I wish everyone a wonderful journey into Adi Da's creative universe.

BIO Achille Bonito Oliva is an internationally acclaimed art critic, teacher, and historian. He has authored many essays on art and curated numerous thematic and interdisciplinary exhibitions in Italy and abroad. Bonito Oliva was the Director of the 39th and 45th Venice Biennale.