

(English translation)

Rome, 1961

Art, “A New Creation”

The purpose of art is somewhat obscure, almost mysterious, perhaps simply unknown. Certainly it does engage reason alone.

Yet art, in a manner equal to science, has always produced more or less beautiful expressions of itself, because the imagination, its mother and origin, is a marvellous human talent and gift like memory, affectivity and reason, and it too has flowered in works: in “works of art,” even spontaneously.

The true artist is a *great person*. Everyone says it even though few are art critics, but everyone admires and is fascinated by “beauty.”

The artist in a certain way is like the Creator.

True artists possess their skill almost unconsciously and use colours, musical notes, stone as we use our legs to walk. Their point of concentration is in the soul, where they contemplate an impression, an idea that they wish to express outside themselves.

Hence, within the infinite limits of their human littleness before God, and thus within the infinite difference between the two “created” things (if I may speak like that), artists are in some sense those who recreate, create anew: and a true “recreation” for some could be provided by the artistic masterpieces

produced by others. Unfortunately, for lack of true artists, people find recreation for the most part through empty fantasies in the cinema, drama, shows, where art has little place.

With his or her masterpieces, playthings in comparison to nature, God’s masterpiece, the true artist gives us in some way a sense of who God is and makes us discern in nature the trinitarian traces of the Creator: matter, the law that informs it (what we might call a gospel of nature), life (what we might call a result of the first two). The totality then is something that continuing to “live” presents an image of the unity of God, of the God of the living. The works of great artists do not die and that is the measure of their greatness, because the artist’s idea, expressed in some way perfectly on canvas or in stone, composes something that lives.

Today we bemoan the scarcity of great artists. Perhaps that is because in the world there are few great people. We never ought to let our imagination play in detachment from everything else in us; that way it would cease to be a gift and fall into vanity.

We must not consider human beings as they are not, but as they are: as social beings.

For this reason there will never be great and universal art except from artists who love other people and, in the first place, love God.

There will be artists for whom this has little interest, and to an extent some people may enjoy their work. To win the favour and applause of a certain number of people is in itself a good thing and a sign of some natural gifts. Perhaps it would be helpful to artists to listen with mind and heart open to the critique of others and see their way to putting things right accordingly. In that way they would become, in their art, more the expression of *humanity* than of merely one human being.

They would not waste or misuse time and talents, nor feed on some petty passing glory while they could, after death, render perpetual service (insofar as possible) to humanity and give glory to God, by helping reveal, through their masterpieces, the infinite beauties of the masterpiece of God: *creation, one of whose most beautiful works is certainly the soul itself of a great and true artist.*

(Taken from: *Essential Writings*, New City Press, pp.306-307.)