

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

GEOMETRY AND "POINT OF VIEW"

by **ADI DA SAMRAJ**

Cézanne once stated something to the effect that the making of the structure of an image can be understood in terms of cylinders, cones, and spheres. All those are curved, three-dimensional forms. So Cézanne thought in three-dimensional and curvilinear terms. While this statement is not entirely representative of how Cézanne made images, much has been made of that statement by modernists, who have often made images based on geometric concepts of some kind or another. But it is a plastic concept, a continuation of the academic tradition, even of the traditional understanding of how to build up a picture. It is not an understanding of reality itself.

Cézanne only made this remark one time, and he did not mean he was literally making images that are made of cylinders, cones, and spheres. It was just a reference he made in a letter to somebody about how to build up a basic structural form tacitly—not actually making a picture of cones, spheres, and cylinders—and then fill it in. It was not anything like that, but (rather) merely a general sense of structure. That was part of the academic tradition.

My own artistic work with squares, circles, and triangles—or linear, curvilinear, and angular—is another matter. My artistic work is about the structure of conditionally manifested reality, the structure of perception, the structure of brain-controlled awareness or perception. My artistic work also relates to the fundamental structure of conditionally manifested reality in the human scale—gross, subtle, and causal—with the linear (or square) being associated with the gross, the curvilinear (or circle) with the subtle, and the angular (or triangle) with the causal. It is a different understanding altogether, although it does recall something of the remark Cézanne made, which modernists have made much of.

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When I was a boy, I used to watch Jon Gnagy, who was an art teacher on television at the time, and I got this kit that you could order. Jon Gnagy would draw an image—for example, a house in the woods by a stream—and make it out of fundamental shapes, then shade or round them, and so forth. In other words, he was building up a picture using geometry. He was continuing this tradition, this notion—something of the modernist tradition altogether, and otherwise Cézanne. Thus, I was getting artistic training in the tradition of modernism, and in the mode of Cézanne particularly—without the names being mentioned, without saying anything about modernism. It was just art-school picture-making—while, in fact, this approach was based on the modernist tradition and Cézanne’s remark, although Cézanne himself did not actually make paintings using these forms. He was just talking about a way of understanding (from an academic perspective) something about how to generate a sense of how you build up a picture or an image.

Unlike the impressionists, Cézanne was not interested in merely responding to what colors were coming to the eye. He was interested in thinking structure and making structure—of color, rather than of lines—seeing the surface not as a flat continuity, but still based on the three-dimensional “point of view”. There are many different “points of view” reflected in Cézanne’s images. Each day, he would change his position—standing over here, looking at a bowl from above, or straight on, or whatever. He painted it as it looked that day, because that was his perception. He wanted to see what he was seeing. Working from different “points of view” was not so much because he had a modernist understanding of the attempt to transcend perspective. Cézanne was a realist. It is just that he moved around. Sometimes his fruits would get overripe, so he would be

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working on painting a pot, after the fruit in it had rotted, and be doing the pot from a different place. He had to really be seeing it as it was in front of him at the moment. That was the reason why he changed his “point of view”, while a modernist would work intentionally on changing the “point of view” of different aspects of the image.

My own artistic work is about transcending the position of egoity (or “point of view”) altogether. While something of the dialogue of modernism in Cézanne is associated with the image-work I do, those who are considering this seriously should see and understand the profundity of the difference, also. They should understand the particularity of this summation of what I am doing. What I am saying is this: It is not “point of view”, not “point” in space and time, but reality itself that is the basis for the images I am making, the entire process of image-making that I am developing. It is not “point of view”—as if, for instance, to make a circle, you would point a compass point down and then rotate the pencil or the inscribing material to make a circle from that point, or that you would have to measure the circumference around a point by multiples of pi, which is an irrational number. If the natural world was based on measuring circles using *pi* as the measure, the natural world would never have happened! It would not be happening now, because pi is not a precisely determinable number.

In that case, how is everything happening? Conditionally manifested reality is self-organized spherically—not from the “point” that views it, but from the totality of the happening. That is the “position” of the imagery that I am making. That is the “position” of the process of making imagery in which I am involved. Therefore, I call it “non-subjective” image-art. It is not “point-of-view” art. It is not merely multiple-“point-of-view” art—whatever the appearance may be, or

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whatever it may suggest relative to ordinary perception. There is some suggestion of that kind, of course—but it is egoless, not “point-of-view” art.

However, in the image-art I make, I do comment on “point of view”. I reflect it, and demonstrate the force of reality relative to what is otherwise “point-of-view” perception. There are many elements of meaning and many visual characteristics in the images I make, but it is not based on generating circles or spheres from “point of view”. It is based on how reality is self-organized spherically—prior to “point of view”, prior to a center or a “point” from which to view it or generate it.

The illusion of egoity is that, somehow, the world is being generated from your own position, or being shown to your position. That suggests the idea that the human being must make the measure of reality and control it—whereas reality is actually self-generated, beyond “point of view”, beyond control, prior to “point of view”, prior to control, prior to separateness. You could say the work I am doing is “Reality-Art”, or (as I call it) “Transcendental Realism”—not the realism of conventional perception, such as Cézanne, for instance, was considering.

The art I make is not about building up pictures based on geometries manipulated from a “point of view”. Rather, it is about the force of reality itself, and generating images based on that force—which, most fundamentally, is a spherical force. It is a force of prior unity (or all-inclusiveness). Thus, when I make images on a flat plane, the fundamental impulse is not to imitate three-dimensionality. It is about a flat rendering (or demonstrating) of the nature of the force of reality itself—prior to “point of view”, prior to egoity. I am not just involved in an aesthetic or a program for how to make a picture from shapes and so on. I am not sitting in “point of view”.

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Therefore, through artistic means (as I also do through verbal means), I am working to demonstrate the nature of reality itself—just as it is, as it is self-evident to me already. I am not merely trying to make paradoxical images, but rather to demonstrate how the world is in reality itself, and how awareness of the world as it is in reality itself can show itself even to humanity in general, human beings who are otherwise seeing things from “point of view”, and who are also habituated to looking at pictures that are built upon conventions historically agreed upon, such as the Renaissance idea of perspective. The imitating of the real world through the use of rules of perspective started in the fifteenth century, and then that became the academic convention of how to make pictures.

One of the aspects of modernism that changed that was the relinquishment of the idea of perspective—as in Cézanne’s case, or the work of cubists such as Picasso and Braque, who began making pictures based on multiple “points of view”. But, even so, that is still taking the position of “point of view”, to make a picture that is paradoxically associated with the “point of view”. That is not what I am doing.

This is, in part, why I am tending toward the flat two-dimensional approach now. I am not trying to imitate three-dimensional reality. In Cézanne’s statement, he is still talking about three-dimensional forms—cylinders, cones, and spheres. He is not talking about circles, triangles, and squares—not flat geometries. Rather, he is still conceiving things conceptually and understanding them in terms of volume—still seeing forms in the plane of conventional realism, in the mode of traditional picture-making based on “point of view” and perspective.

I am not really involved in picture-making. The position in which I am making images is not simply picture-making in and of itself. Rather, the basis on which I am making pictures at all is the same in which I speak and live and work altogether. It

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is already prior to “point of view”, already without “point of view”. “Point-of-view” perception is part of the convention of day-to-day awareness. On the other hand, neither am I simply trying to make pictures that are paradoxical over against “point of view”—rather, I make images that are prior to “point of view”.

Therefore, the images I make are not merely images based on multiple “points of view” and the deconstruction of perspective. Rather, they are generated prior to “point of view”, prior to conventions of picture-making based on the tradition of perspective and rules in the academic tradition. I go beyond all those conventions.

Just as using the camera (which is a “point-of-view” machine) inevitably makes images on a certain basis, I have had to work with the camera now for years to overcome “point of view”. Of course, I used multiple exposure as a means to do that. And that was something I was particularly doing when I was using film cameras. Now that I am using digital cameras, I am not trying to make multiples—although I could.

In fact, at the moment, I am not using photography at all, as I was before. When I shoot images, I shoot single-frame forms. I have not been including them in the images lately (although I expect to do so again)—but, day to day, I respond to them. They are sort of like a sketchpad. I bring them to the studio, work further by responding to them, and generate images in response to them, rather than actually putting the photographs into the image. I expect to use the photographs within the images in various ways, but still as a means of going beyond this “point-of-view” machine.

The body is a “point-of-view” machine. It is an ego-machine. I do not want to simply use it as such, as a convention of communication or perception, but

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(rather) to go beyond that. The body can be a means for generating images for others, who are also bodily existing, to see—and, optimally, for those seeing the images to go beyond just looking at them and to actually participate in them.

I am manifesting the self-organizing force of reality in the context of perception and communication—and, therefore, of images.

Cézanne and the impressionists characteristically used little, short brushstrokes. My so-called “brushstrokes” are very, very small. They are bytes, pixels—more directed to how the brain organizes and generates visual perception. My interest in the digital process, however, is not merely technical. In fact, I do not really want much to do with that. I want to simply make use of the visual characteristics (as with the camera) that are possible using the digital means without getting involved in the machinery of it, the procedures of it, the linearity of it, and all the rest of the mind of it. I just work on it strictly as a visual process, without having to become embedded in the “technology-position”. I prefer to keep apart from that, just as I do not want to get over-immersed in the technology of the camera or anything else like that. I am always going beyond it, always standing prior to it, standing free of being subordinated by it.

So when I work, I am always standing outside the “seat” of the technology. The interest is strictly in terms of visual or perceptual phenomena, so that I am still working with the fundamentals of image-process, or the fundamentals of perception, rather than getting involved in “techie” business (either with camera or with digital means). In that case, I can be fully involved in the perceptual process and in the generating of images that manifest the characteristic of reality itself.

Unpublished commentary by Adi Da Samraj.