

## Painting Templo

Excerpts from Templo, Mylos editions, Thessaloniki 1994

3. In his curriculum vitae for an earlier exhibition, K. wrote of visiting the Documenta exhibition at Kassel in 1972. This was his first extensive contact with contemporary art in Europe and the United States. In a prominent position were the American Neorealists and Photorealism, there was Joseph Beuys, too, strongly supporting his broad concept of art and propagating his social model. I remember one magical section in the Kassel exhibition: it was called "Private Mythology" and it brought together structures of all kinds of objects, miniatures, photographs and materials such as wood and sand. Could Templo be part of a "private mythology?" For many decades-starting with Wittgenstein - philosophers debated whether the existence of private languages was possible. They came to the conclusion - as far as I remember - that such languages could not exist because they would be incomprehensible.

Templo and the space to which it gives shape have had a special significance for Greek culture; they constitute the mythological focus of modern Greece. This is the place where everything, the visual arts, music, public spectacles, started, where it acquired meaning and functionality. More importantly, it was also the point from which stemmed all the values and rules that regulated and ordered life.

The Gate in K.'s Templo has a different function: visitors to the exhibition can walk through it and find themselves in the interior, and a distinction between external and internal space has replaced the contrast between the sacred and the secular.

In K.'s Templo the large paintings do not tell stories: they show history, the history which we know is broken down into countless nameless incidents, which guarantee salvation whether taken individually or as a whole. The hope of Walter Benjamin (and others) that the revolutionary act could shatter the continuum of history has been scattered to the winds.

To the left of the Gate are two large paintings showing a crowd of human beings in furious motion. A torrent of undifferentiated heads and bodies sweeps with ever-increasing speed from the left background to the right foreground. The crowd

consisting only of men - is moving in the strong light of day, filling up a space which the artist has not classified and has not structured in terms of perspective, and where no distances have been kept. The figures blur into one another, jammed against each other as they are. The frame of the picture alludes to the fragmentary nature of the event. It is impossible to tell from the forcefulness of the crowd, its tempestuous motion, the gestures and the cries emitted by the open mouths whether the crowd is fleeing or attacking. However, some of the features of the clothes suggest that the events depicted are occurring in Kurdistan. History in motion.

To the right of the Gate - in a position corresponding to the Kurdish themes - are two large pictures of interiors. Although the events are occurring in strong daylight, they emerge - in both pictures - from a dark background without spatial layout. The scenes are lit by an artificial light as yellow as sulphur: we have the feeling that we are witnessing a surgical operation. Yet it is easy to distinguish force and violence in the confused and interlocking limbs of the figures; these are underground torture chambers in which people are massacred, raped and mutilated. Such acts are spread here and there in ambiguous gestures, like cries of pain and pleasure. The numerous nude figures can only just be distinguished from one another, as if they were repeating themselves. This creates uncertainty as to whether the two paintings show different stages of the same event or two parallel occurrences. Both, however, would appear to be fragments or details of a broader sweep of events. Just as there is no indication of time or place, so there is no suggestion of before, after, why or how. But the paintings require no rational explanation: the individual viewer has no difficulty in decoding the associations. To use the words of Nietzsche, we could ask ourselves whether this is history as perpetual repetition.

There are sure to be those who believe, mistakenly, that these paintings are a denunciation, a protest-against violence, against oppression, against torture - as if it were significant that an artist should express his indignation from the sheltered space of an art gallery. Even a picture like Picasso's Guernica, almost a wreck and tormented by millions of reproductions, is not a statement of protest against a murderous air raid. Nor can the depictions of passion, violence and pain in Christian art - in icons - be described as protest. Passion as part of Our Saviour's story: history as passion. Here we can discern a line which links the iconostases of Christian churches with K.'s Templo.

In the middle band are eight small paintings.

To the right of the Gate are two murdered victims of the evil doings taking place in the two pictures below. Then comes a painting with two figures: abduction and violence in an undefined interior lit by artificial light. The nudity of the figures is a reminiscence of Classical models and scenes from the myths. Next we are shown a variation on the theme of violence: an embracing couple is disturbed by an intruder, of whom we can see only a hand and light, since the rest of him is outside the space of the picture.

On the far right is a condemned man eating his last meal. The firm, pyramidal composition opens out towards the viewer. Behind, as if hovering in imaginary space, is the electric chair. In this orgy of blood and violence, we have come across an unexpected ray of hope: concentration on the immediate presence, serenity, strong silence.

To the left of the Gate is the naked body of a man on the floor of a room, in front of a group of shrieking people. Who are they? Relatives or torturers? The nude body is in the type of the dead Christ of Mantegna, a figure which became known worldwide from photographs of the dead Che Guevara.

The theme of the next picture is closely connected with the most climactic event in Christian history. Yet here it is a woman who is being crucified, while in Christian art the woman, the mother of God, takes part in the Crucifixion only as a spectator. We now cast a glance back to the mythology which preceded Christianity: Centaurs abducting women. The violence and impropriety of mythical prehistory are shifted into a timeless space whose architecture brings Classical types to mind. The final image on the left interrupts the chain of violence: a group of six young men are shown playing music, in a state of ecstasy in which they are completely absorbed in what they are doing.

The large picture on the left shows a painter in front of his easel. The space in which he is located is not precisely defined, although its depth is hinted at in a few lines on the floor. The strong light emphasizes the chest and head of the figure. The painter has taken a step back to look at his work. In his right hand, he is holding a painting by Picasso. We can clearly sense the concentration with which he is examining his work. Is the viewer looking here at a complex reflection? Are the painter and the viewer observing the same picture? On the right, Templo ends with an upright female figure. The same strong light as in the depiction of the artist gives the shape of her body, though space and time remain indefinite. This standing figure is a continuation of the motif from the last picture in the middle band. The concentration which we noted in the figure of the condemned man is present again, though it is more relaxed. Dynamism can be perceived in the hand holding the spear, as well as in the left hand. The woman's gaze is calm, and her overall stance is one without affectation or passion. Dynamic serenity.

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