

THE LAST WEFT

*M*aking art is doing more than crafting, representing, and expressing. Or rather it is doing more with crafting, representing, and expressing. There are artists that aim in their works at something else than exquisite handicraft, sophisticate symbolism and psychotic, ritualistic exhibitionism while precisely practising them all, though abstaining from turning them into the sole aim of their work.

Ion Nicodim is one of those artists that envisage art as having a teleology that does not end in pleasure and purely aesthetic appraisal. He sees art as focusing out of itself, but not necessarily on a spiritual, religious realm. The latter merely makes use of art. It automatically manipulates and estranges the genuine, physical-aesthetic and semiotic body of the work by means of projecting it onto the transcendental horizon of a truth that has no body. Ion Nicodim makes art to point elsewhere bodily, with its full physical and semiotic flesh. His art is mapping what one could call the last, ultimate weft of reality, a certain visual, not purely stylistic or aesthetic, perceivable and meaning-bearing matrix.

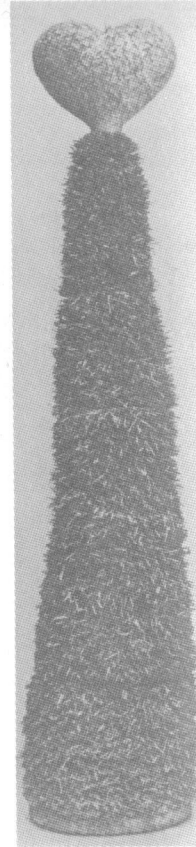
He searched for those powerful recurrent patterns that constitute the landmarks of an irreducibly human, visual and material, tactile and comprehensible attachment to the world. In the ancient world there was the column, in primitive cultures there are the fetishes, in the

modern visual civilisation there is the aggressive sign of an exasperated individual expression or the elaboration on a trans-personal, social-driven framework. Ion Nicodim's work is exploring that diffuse, universal experience of an undisclosed, deep but fuzzy, paradoxical structure that binds all these modalities, disregarding the fact of their being ancient, popular, primitive or strictly contemporary.

As an artist, and also a sui-generis anthropologist, he was looking for a common denominator of art that surpasses time, style, race, and technique. It is, perhaps, that very way of making things that matter naturally and organically to both the eye and the mind. Ion Nicodim believes that such an unformulated but acting constant is neither historically nor geographically or culturally bound. On this amorphous, timeless last weft are woven infinitely variable, rich, luxuriant forms, meanings and uses, but the strong, generic thread-work is still there like a supporting, though invisible, inconspicuous grid.

Still caught in the confines of Modernist purism, Ion Nicodim initially identified the lasting visual weft that he was delving for in various individual embodiments of it. He worked on the series Still Lakes, some huge areas of canvas entirely painted in light or bright blue, or in intermingling, rarefied and changing whitish, yellowish or brownish shades, calmly extending into watery-cloudy smooth and scintillating surfaces. The lakes were replaced at a certain moment by lake-like, massive yet frail, shallow contours of blue, red or Sienna hearts. Their colourful but not substantial flesh was thinly pouring outside some rarefied streaks of paint (or feathers, and sometimes even nails, if the heart was worked out in metal), like a refrained, noiseless rhetoric of inchoate, aestheticised pain. They were like cat's-eye glimpses on a road of touching, visual experience. Then he worked the hearted column series, bulky adobe pillars endowed with earthen, hay and dry mud hearts instead of capitals.

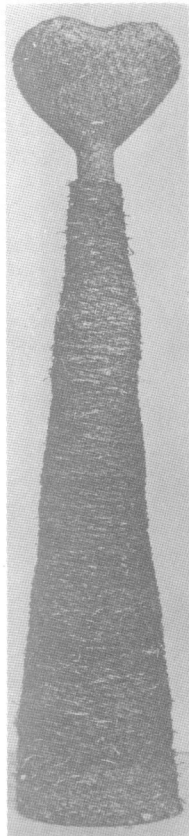
In both his painted still lakes (or, better said, lakes of still paint) and his painted or earthen and column-sup-



orted hearts, Ion Nicodim was following the path to an all-encompassing motif, a pattern able to comprehend as much of reality as possible. That is why the motif had to be halfway figurative, halfway abstract. He abstained from choosing, because he didn't use them as supports for a visual construction, but was looking for precisely their support as possible, visual and intellectual constructions. Within the weft he was exploring, both abstraction and figuration were identical, they were means, not grounds. The motif had also to be partly rhetorical, pathetic and partly neg-empathic, neither distant, nor equivocal, but secluded. Positive aesthetic investment of the work and its concomitant poverty, shallowness, and powerlessness needed to be well balanced too. A central, ultimate motif or pattern of this kind, a matrix needed to be at the same time itself and its opposite, to reveal, to disclose and to cancel, to cover, and also to contain, in its bodiliness, both the richness and the indigence of the world. As a positioning, it had to simultaneously express power and weakness, freedom and compliance. In short, it had to be everything and nothing. But no single, unique form, be it deeply essentialised, was finally able to support this impossible, alchemist-like mixture of lack and abundance, of evidence and secret.

That is why the project, in its modernist, purist and utopian variant was rather crumbling. And that is why Ion Nicodim was compelled to give up purism and, to a certain extent, art too. Following the traces left by his own research, he re-discovered the irreducible richness of reality, the tremendous chain of differences and resemblance that make so compact, though amalgamate, a world.

Nothing better than fetishes epitomise such plenitude and irreducibility, such an amalgam of reified, fleshy signs that refer not to invisible, absent meanings, but to an immediate presence. Ion Nicodim's recent work is a eulogy of the world as it is, a fetishist bric-a-brac of specimens from the real substance of reality: earth, fruits, animals, textiles, plants, tools, wood, metals, plastics, jewels, and even ready-made artworks such as popular masks. It is ne-



ther collage nor installation, but rather a synthetic, magma-like object. The artist is no longer busy avoiding kitsch, clichés or senselessness. He inclines toward anonymity. Ion Nicodim has now no centripetal concept, but a centrifugal, entropic "precept". All these bits of presence coagulate into the (sometimes seducing, sometimes repulsive) coloured miracle of life. Ion Nicodim sees now the matrix he was looking for, the weft, resembling to one of those big sea mammals. Sometimes it shows its back above the water, be it in a Negro sculpture and fetish, or in a peasant's utensil, in a cultured work of art, a painting, or in a piece of sacred food. None of these point to the invisible weft better than the other. None of these is that weft. Finally, there is no weft at all. Conversely, all of them constitute that flexible but unaccountably thick weft or veil that in the ancient Indian world was named Maya's veil of essential appearances, the veil that represented for Eminescu the metaphor of the world, whose ultimate quintessence is that there is no quintessence but only presence.

Erwin KESSLER

