

APOSTLES OF THE LAST DAYS

INTERVIEW WITH SCULPTOR
MARIAN ZIDARU

Last winter, while visiting a group exhibition in which you participated, at the SIMEZA Gallery, I was fascinated by those plaster eyes you had pinned on one of the three long boards supporting the drawings and the objects for meditation on the fire-water-earth theme. Those plaster eyes were nailed right in the apple of the eye. Of course, I had long before noticed your obsessive theme of martyrdom, laden with premonitions and forebodings of the Apocalypse. Still, to thrust a nail in the light of the eye was too much, for me at least. Where does all this atrocity come from?

Ever since I started to have my works exhibited, I have been signing them with the triangle, with "the eye of God". I felt, and later I was certain that my works are dictated to me, that I have to make them like that and not otherwise. It took me some time to work out a code for translating these messages. Conceiving the ensemble you referred to, it was as if the Universal Inspirer had commanded me to make a work on the theme of transforming the earthly body into a heavenly body.

Meditating on this theme, my thoughts led me to Saint Spiridon's miracle. They say that he demonstrated the existence of the Holy Trinity by means of a brick that turned, in his hand, into water, earth and fire, these three elements being actually seen by those surrounding him. The three leaning pillars, the memorials I exhibited at SIMEZA, represent the very decomposition of the brick. The one on the right side, with eyes, represents the last stage: that of hallowed matter, that is clay turned infrangible by fire. I had to present the spiritualization of this matter and the eye is what best synthesizes the light of the spirit. I had then to think of a way in which to fix the eyes on the oblique rod. Piercing seemed the most adequate technical procedure. It was only after fixing the eyes that I realized that the nails had another significance too, as the culmination of the spiritualization of matter is faith. Jesus told Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." By martyring light,

that is the eye that sees physically, I simply emphasized the power of the inner eye, of the spiritual eye, the soul's eyes which allow us to see Christ, to see God.

- *As a matter of fact, in everything you do, either volumes or drawings on strips of paper, stigmata are always there, in an alarming repetition. They are like quick flashes, incisively black, painfully stabbing the whiteness of the support or the compact wood. Sometimes, in the same repeated order the protruding, knoll-like eyes get multiplied, gathered together one next to the other or one over the other. Other times, it is the breasts that are multiplied. And I was thinking that in this sculptural and graphic ensemble you imagine and implement according to a coherent plan which you wish to fulfill, there seems to be a certain contradiction between the clearness of thought, the spiritual vocation you feel in yourself and wish to obey, and the irrepressible vitality which comes, from the very needs of the martyred, perishable body; hence, from the needs of the natural and not the spiritual body.*

How do you explain this sensual feverishness, that repeated and sometimes discipline cannot curb, but on the contrary, make more obvious in a clearly menacing way?

This problem has long preoccupied me. I had a period of doubts, when I could not tell whether it was sadism or a representation of Christian martyrdom. It is true that the signs I am working with come from a shock I experienced on the impact with the Holy Scripture. I have to confess that opened the Book rather late in life, only in 1979. It happened one summer when I was somewhere in the mountains, and one night I decided to read from the Bible. I had a shock when I realized that the spirituality of Christ is built on the martyrdom of the body, that even the incarnation of Christ on earth is marked by the most sanguinary event ever known, by the Massacre of the Innocents. This episode of the Bible has terribly moved me and I was terrified at the thought that Herod's envoys could have killed Jesus Christ. Each soldier stabbing an infant was killing Jesus. So, virtually, Jesus was killed right after his birth for 144 thousand times. This obsession with the Massacre of the Innocents might be the origin of my signs, which I was later to identify on the Shroud of Turin, as signs of Christ's martyrdom... I was in my third university year when, in my study works, I felt the need to mark the points of strain in volumes with a little stripe. I noticed the plasticity of the sign and I started to use it as often as possible. It was the notch of the cut that was to become a sign of martyrdom.

- *But what can you tell about the other category of signs, which are after all, figures of concupiscence? We notice a sensuality of the feminine-type, turgescences that are particularily tortured, transfixed or mercilessly chopped off.*

The man of the late 20th century is obsessed with the end. A tragic culmination of this obsession is, for me, the end of motherhood: motherhood which is defiled, martyred. To kill a baby in the womb, before its birth, is

the last stage of abasement of an earthly being. This terror with the end made me reach the utmost horror of the martyrdom of the life-bearing element. There is nothing more terrible than killing an angel, a being not yet born and without sin, who has not known the flesh. The idea of breasts multiplying actually comes from a journey to Italy when I saw at the Capitoline Museum the statue of Artemis of Ephesus, hence the theme of universal motherhood which contains the spirit of life and which I associated with the Christian theme of the Blessed Virgin. I worked a series of horizontal birds, a token symbol of crucifixion that had these breasts. I associated them, in my mind, with the idea of the Holy Virgin: like a horizontal flight over a mass awaiting to be fed, fertilized. I thus identified the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Ascension.

- *You told me that, for years, you had premonitions regarding the messages you – willing or not – bear and convey by means of your work. These premonitions have, lately, made a leap towards precision and it was a monk who helped you do it. Without being versed in art, this man had a deeper insight into your work than you yourself did.*

My wish for clarification made me reach this conclusion. One of my first works was the 7-horn and 7-eye lamb. It was the result of some previous sketches I had made in a village. As I was moulding, without realizing what I was doing, I started to multiply the eyes and the horns. It was only afterwards that I wondered: Where did I hear this before? And then I tried to make out this mystery, that is to explain and not to contradict my impulse. I was so amazed to read then in the Revelation about the sacrifice of the 7-eyed and 7-horned mystical lamb. Well, from that moment I started to believe that I was caught in a dialogue, that these things were coming from somewhere. I also tried to reverse positions, that is to make first a sketch referring to the symbols and then the object, but all the objects that I made trying to explain something directly were quite lame. You asked about my encounter with that monk – an almost illiterate man, who spent most of his life in the woods. I showed him the reproductions in the catalogue and I was surprised to see him so interested. After seeing them all he started to comment upon them. He understood every symbol, knew its meaning and interpreted them according to their religious meaning. He confirmed to me that such objects were not created in full awareness but they were just a dialogue between man and the Holy Ghost. He told me that the basic theme was the Massacre of the Innocents, namely that those works referred to the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. As the Holy Fathers say, aborted children go to limbo because they have not been christened. They stay there in the dark as black birds perched upon tree boughs, waiting for Redemption Day. The monk maintained – and what I am going to say is not confirmed by theologians and may seem a heresy – that we have the duty to get these babies out of limbo before the end of times. By the grace of the Holy Liturgy the Holy Ghost takes small parts of Christ's body down to limbo where the babies are given

the Holy Eucharist. After a certain number of liturgies and after receiving the Holy Eucharist, these babies are saved and become angels again. This would be the great mystery of God my works speak of...

- *Can there be any connection between... the work of God and that of the artist? You said something about a touch of the Holy Ghost.*

To me, the work of art is just the material result of the dialogue between God and man. And I think that the act of creation is very well defined by the words of Jesus Christ saying to the Pharisees that: if they – the Apostles – were silent the stones would speak. Don't we, by any chance, live in an epoch when stones speak?: The church has been quite silent of late.

- *And what could the stones say? Maybe cry out, and awaken our consciences?*

This would be like a desperate cry of God. My opinion is that the Apocalypse is now in full progress. After all, the end of the world does not refer to an imminent punishment which awaits us. I think that, on the contrary, this means that we can reach the true world and enter eternity. Now, in these last days we witness the greatest mystery of the revelation of God. First there was the revelation of God the Father, by taking the people of Israel out of Egypt by means of the earthly commandments He gave to them. The second miracle was the coming of Jesus Christ, God-the-Son who showed us the path of Salvation and freed the victims of hell. The third miracle in this world and the last revelation of God is what we are now living; the revelation of the Holy Ghost. The entire Heaven descends upon the earth by the working of the Holy Ghost. Thus, that what man creates, what man speaks can become a creative act. In this moment there is no hazard. Each and every one of man's gestures is symbolic and each object created by man becomes a telling object. Jesus says that man is created in His own image. But Jesus also said: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Studying the human body I discovered these two elements in the extremities of the body: alpha in the sole of the foot and Omega in the shoulders-neck-head relation. The whole mystery of God must lie between these extremities. The final state of spiritual progress is to understand God through thinking. This thinking must be complex and should involve love and understanding, and the great knowledge. The apple forbidden by God is the symbol of such thinking and it is not by chance that the apple and man's brain have the same shape.

- *As an artist are you in the service and under the power of the Orthodox Church doctrine as a dogma Theologically, are you more of a mystical visionary, intensely and feverishly living and feeling?*

Both, I should say. The artist who tries to understand God's mysteries without observing the Orthodox Church dogma would expose himself to a great risk. The risk of going astray and of lapsing into heresy. Obedience to the laws Christ left for this world is what gives us balance.

• *You told me that the figures and signs you work with feel as if they were dreamt of or commanded to you. You are not entirely responsible for the way they came to be, or their configuration and way of assembling.*

That is right. They appear to me in moments of great clarity and peace, of absolute lucidity. They appear to me like abstract bright impulses and I try, with my hands, to superpose the spiritual image I see to the way I feel when I make the object. This superposition brings about harmony and fullness. I have a void before me and I try to fill it to excess.

• *One question is still unanswered: how can you manage to give the terrible a harmonious shape? From fire-burning to beheading, to the stabbing of the heart and other vital organs everything is, in your vision, a passage to or through death.*

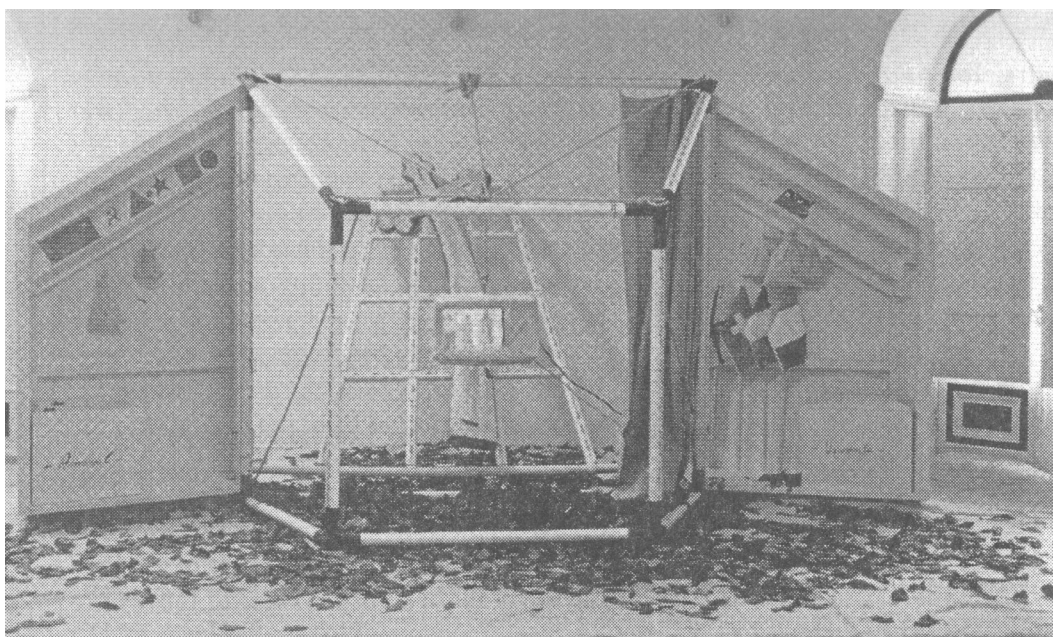
I mean to point to the way people sin nowadays. Let us suppose that I make a slain angel and I place it somewhere on the floor. The person who steps or is about to step on it will have to ask himself or herself if he or she is not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Just by seeing the work he or she will feel as a moral co-author to the crime. anyway, between making and explaining one work there is an awful period of excruciating pain. I remember preparing one exhibition at the Village Museum at the end of 1984. I had already made a plan in the studio, I knew what works I was to display and still, I soon fell prey to doubts and terror. A bloody Christmas, babies being slain, what was all that about? How was I to put that beheaded body in the manger? How was I to celebrate Christmas with a memorial pillar which represented the crucifixion of a baby to its own begetter? For the first time in my life I prayed: "God, if you don't send me a sign that what I want to do is right, I won't have this exhibition. Why should I incur your wrath by doing something forbidden?"

• *And 5 years later we were to actually live that bloody Christmas.*

Anyway, these associations anticipating reality cannot be accidental. I think, and I have to repeat it, that we are living the Apocalypse right now but we don't realize it because the mysterious ways of God are impenetrable and our hearts hardened by our foolish pride. This prevents us from seeing what is obvious to the faithful. I believe that the art work achieved by the dialogue between man and the Spirit of God, by fulfilling God's commandments, ceases to be an ordinary object and becomes a creative object. The Spirit of God works through it, that is art has the power to work in God's service.

• *Do you envisage a mission for Romanian art in this respect?*

Brancusi was the first apostle of the Holy Ghost. There are revelations of the Holy Fathers which attest Romania's vocation as the country chosen for the last days. The reason may be the same for which – God chose – on His First Coming – the Jewish people. I am convinced that their country was no better than ours, today. It was also a country without dignity, a people that no longer knew the truth, a people who had gone astray from the paths of God. I have the hope that now, at this third revelation of God, the Holy Ghost



Marian ZIDARU, *General view from the exhibition "Unsealing",*
from the "Ion Mincu" Institute of Architecture, Bucharest
(1992)

won't be crucified again. If Christ was once crucified in the flesh, when He came the first time, now when He comes in spirit we cannot crucify Him other than spiritually.

- *Couldn't we then say that thrusting a nail into the light of the eye is a symbol of crucifixion of the spirit?*

I think that you are right, we may interpret it this way. Maybe God is crying out to warn us not to commit the unforgivable sin of crucifixion unto the spirit. Saint John's Revelation says that those who sin against the Holy Ghost will not be pardoned. My belief is that the artists of the 20th century who really believe in their trade, even if their spiritual life does not observe the laws of Christ to the letter can be a sort of apostles of the Holy Ghost. It is not very easy to believe in art. Very few really do. To believe in art is the first step towards believing in Christ. Perhaps that is why God has chosen the artists as apostles of the Holy Ghost, as apostles of the last days, because they are among the few who still believe in something nowadays.