

Creativity and artistic exchange: reflections about Morocco's case

Extract of Chakib Guessous speech on the occasion of the meeting "Creativity and artistic exchange: reflections on the case of Morocco", organized by Love Difference inside Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto, on September 28th 2002.

Figurative production in Moroccan painting, long held back by the Muslim religion that bans all representation of the human figure, came into its own only at the beginning of the 20th century, when Morocco became a French protectorate. The evolution of painting became tangible only in 1956, following on Independence, remaining firmly anchored to the craftwork tradition; that is why I insist in focusing attention on the case of Moroccan craftwork.

Whereas music, in which the African (Nigeria and Guinea), Andalusian and the strictly autochthonous inspiration have co-existed, is a fairly old and prolific expression. I am thinking, for example, of the "malhun" sung by artisans as they work, a chant that encourages them to get down to their work. Today Moroccan music, though strongly influenced by that of the Arab countries, manifests numerous borrowings from western North American and European music.

Creativity, the capacity of imagination and invention are a treasure for the community and, since they require a set of numerous human and social factors, they must be encouraged. Fruitful creativity, in fact, will go hand in hand with positive effects on the community. In artistic creation two different criteria can be distinguished: the art work as expression and the art work as product. The market value of the artistic product and its commercialisation can be relevant for their potential effects on the population. The more fruitful creativity is the more the production of works increases and the more economic activity, related to the works and to the artists who produce it, develops.

But the art work as expression is, in my view, more important. The manual work in modifying the initial object and the spirit of the man necessary to make of it a work of art takes its inspiration from the lived experience of the artist, from the world that surrounds him, from his feelings, from his impressions and from his imagination. The work is witness to a culture, to a way of perceiving the world and life, to the manner of dealing with it, it is an indivisible synthesis of the real and the imaginary. Fruitful creativity is witness to a certain cultural vivacity. It enables people, the beneficiaries of art, those who taste it, who see, who hear, who touch or who listen to art works, to glimpse the cultural identity of the artist itself. In the best of cases, they experience a perfect communion with the work and with the artist. But exchange is at the basis of tolerance and mutual understanding. Without complete mutual tolerance, one cannot respect and the wish to understand one's neighbour cannot exist. Artistic exchange, as part of cultural exchange, is a voluntary act that cannot be forced. It presupposes mutual respect.

Cultural exchange, in the spheres of the sciences and the arts, so that it may turn into a dialogue between different cultures, must take place in an atmosphere of serenity and of calm, far from any instinct of supremacy. The interested

parties in such an exchange must consider themselves equals and behave in consequence. The feeling of superiority of one culture towards another is source of conflict because one of the two parties feels threatened and fears to lose its own identity. There is no morally superior community, nor community of little morality, especially when speaking of democracy or of human rights.

Such an exchange must allow for diversity, the pluralism of the one and the other. Globalisation must not lead to a global culture but to a mosaic of cultures that co-exist peacefully and respect each other.

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