

ART HISTORY — THE LONG SHOT

At the Nautilus Foundation a time capsule to be opened in 2222 A.D. was recently filled with newspaper clippings, photos, coins, essays of high school students addressing or describing the future, a leather-bound two volume cosmological theory, and two issues of *Athanos*. Having arrived in this century at what seems the peak of discoveries and theories—such as genetic engineering, micro-engines thinner than a hair, impending fusion that copies internal events of the sun which many believe can henceforth only be refined—the future, assuming that mammals will survive, seems to some relatively predictable.

If we reverse the process by going back two centuries let us say to the year 1768, our predictions of the world at 2000 A.D. would certainly not have included instant communication, aerial travel or nuclear submarines. In 1768 Maria Theresa was in charge of Austria, Russia began its six-year war with Turkey, and Goethe lay sick in Leipzig; Mozart wrote *Bastien und Bastienne*, Linné continued to develop his *Systema Naturae* and James Cook his exploration of the Pacific and Alaska; Lawrence Stern of *Tristram Shandy* fame and the painter Canaletto died that year, and the 51 year old Johann Joachim Winckelmann was murdered by a thief. Son of a shoemaker, teacher, small town librarian, and convert to Catholicism in order to accept a job in Italy, Winckelmann had—from 1763 onward—been put in charge of the monuments of Rome. He had analyzed classical sculpture critically, separating copies from originals. He had periodicized art and had tried to establish firm perimeters for judging quality. Intent on describing both the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of works of art he had established a new definition of the classical as a glorious marriage between the simplicity and quiet grandeur of nature and divine artistic idealization. He deeply influenced Goethe and inspired Lessing's fundamental "Laokoon." As one of the founders of Neo-Classicism, he deeply affected the European and American landscape of thought and helped to bring new vigor to the groundswell of democratic ideas which were to lead to the French and American revolutions.

It seems rather obvious that, with the exception of the navigator Cook, none of these contemporaries could have imagined, alone understood a mission to the moon or Mars. Could it be that only one discipline, the humanities, whose methodology is now infinitely more detailed, has not fundamentally departed from its earlier, even pre-18th century roots? Our research is surely more

refined, but also culturally often more narrow and certainly less epic. In contrast to Winckelmann's writings, our work may lack the perception anchored in a deep sense of a cultural continuum or the informed enthusiasm through which the full understanding of an integrated past will send sparks into the future.

What might art history be two centuries from now—what direction should it take? The methods for dating, restoration, the viewing of distant objects through laser processes will continue to be refined. Learning might be instantly transmitted through electrodes implanted in the brain. Memory will become nearly infallible. Libraries will be available on screen at the pull of a switch. The "art product" will be aimed at huge audiences and aim at producing an all encompassing experience which could also be used as a powerful propaganda tool.

In the nearer future art history will be de-nationalized and become transcultural. Teams or computers might prepare the raw data for the study of unexplored areas such as a reassessment of the Doric Invasion, the influence of Central Asia on European artifacts throughout the early Middle Ages, or the impact of Islamic mathematics on Gothic vaulting. Major exhibits and books have already dealt with precise connections between "Primitive" and Modern art or the continued contacts between Orient and Occident. Creativity will be studied in context with the chaos theories. Perception and the interpretation of visual signals will increasingly move from acculturated responses toward genetic signals and will include the work of Jung and others regarding archetypes and the collective global imagery of the subconscious. Cross disciplinary work such as Kimberly Smith's Byron and Delacroix or Katherine Morris Westcott's *Atalanta Fugiens* as well as Sherry Piland's integration of Labrouste's Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève into the large 19th century movements of social philosophy will become the norm.

If indeed we are witnessing the emergence of global concepts and global consciousness crying out for a federation of all nations beginning with those in the northern hemisphere we must take advantage of a trend which will stress the communality of art, address its deepest roots, and its primary importance as an expression of a shared human heritage, a visual language on par with the spoken or written word, and thus a bulwark against barbarism.

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