

## Philosophy And The Art Of The Photographer \_ God And I

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**Is photography an art? And if so, is it a “major” art like painting, or is it to be considered as a minor one? Before answering this question we shall first have to understand what is Art.**

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Art as *“the use of skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others.”* Sadly, using this definition of Art has opened a door in the last decades for many excesses, allowing art to include nearly anything, any human production. I will not forget my surprise when, at the beginning of the millennium, I had discovered in the opera house of Tel-Aviv an “Art exhibition” of painted toilet seats. In this case the toilet seats were not only the support of an artistic painting exhibition, but the artistic concept itself. None of these painted toilet seats brought an aesthetic, nor spiritual experience, and I must say that none of them made an impression strong enough to have been captured in my memory, and for the better, but I do remember one thing: I clearly understood that day that not all production considered as Art...is Art.

So, what should Art be? We can have a more precise understanding of the Britannica definition if we think about the concept of “imagination” (*“the use of skill and imagination”*) and separate it from what we shall call “fantasy”.

Imagination is the ability to “see the invisible”. Thus, to perceive something which does exist but which does not express itself in the Sensible world. To imagine is to “see with the eyes of the soul”, it is the capacity to reach a more transparent and subtle level of reality made of symbols, images and sounds: the Platonic “ideas”, the Archetypes. The Art product is then the result of the imagination process, the transposition in the senses and through a form – physical, audible, gestural, or photographic – of the parcel of reality reached and “seen” by the artist.

The artist is, in fact, a real Prometheus... he does not steal the fire from Zeus to bring it back to humanity, like the divine hero did, but he does “steal” the vision of the archetypes – especially Beauty and Harmony, and makes it perceptible to the rest of humanity through his own art.

Fantasy is the opposite. It is the act of elaborating things which do NOT exist. They may exist in our mind – if not, we could not produce them – but not in the natural order, neither in the visible or the invisible plane. The result of the fantasy process is the result of a combination of intellectual and/or emotional elements, which will always result in complexity.

In contrast, Imagination leads to simplicity because the real artistic product is always the manifestation of the unique and archetypal Beauty and Harmony.

In some way the relation between Imagination and Fantasy is similar to the relation between Wisdom and Knowledge: the main characteristic of wise men is their capacity to give an answer with simple and clear words to the deepest and apparently most complex questions while the main characteristic of not so wise men – usually known as “intellectuals” – is to

elaborate the most complicated and obscure answers to the most simple and fundamental questions.

One of the most accurate definitions of Art as a spiritual process is still the one given by the Egyptian born, Roman philosopher from the third century AD, Plotinus: *“The art object gives no bare reproduction of the thing seen but goes back to the reason-principles from which nature itself derives.”*

So, if Art is the capacity to Imagine the archetypal beauty and develop the receptacle – which can be, again, form, sounds, images, etc. – allowing this beauty to be revealed in “our” sensible world, what would be the virtues, or the qualities any one needs to develop in order to become an Artist?

Firstly, obviously the artist has to develop his imagination. As the necessary quality allowing him to perceive the invisible – the archetypes – it is the means adopted by the photographer to take a picture “without recognizing.”

But there is more: the artist cannot just search for a bridge which will allow him to cross the frontier between the visible and the invisible, in search of the archetypal beauty. Such a bridge does not exist outside the artist himself, and thus the artist has to himself become the bridge. Just like it is written in “The Voice of Silence” – an ancient text of wisdom giving the first instructions for Disciples in quest of wisdom, translated and brought to the west in the XIXth century by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky – “Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself”.

Becoming the bridge is at the same time the process and the result of a spiritual experience: to reach the upper bank, the one in the intelligible sphere, the artist has to expand the limits of his consciousness. To walk on the bridge, he has to become the bridge itself.

So, is photography an art? The answer does not lie in photography itself. It depends on the photographer. When the photographer becomes the bridge, then the photograph has a chance to be the reflection of the archetypal harmony, which is the only criterion for qualifying it as Art. Otherwise photography could not be more than the product of the photographer himself, it will only reflect his own sensibility, his emotions and his thoughts. It can be a very touching, deep, interesting and emotional image... but it would be the reflection of a man, not of an archetype. It would not be considered as Art.

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