ARTISTIC WORK—SARTRE'S ANALYSIS
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Many other issues of human concern apart, Sartre, consistent with his theory of art, had very definite views about the position of art and the artist in the human situation. He remained more pre-occupied with artists and their activities than with any other intellectual activity throughout his career. He often refers to artists' lives and their works for clarifying his philosophical or literary concepts. His deep involvement in artists and their creative activity is also evident from the fact that some of the characters of his novels and plays are themselves artists, writers, researchers and political activists.

Wade Baskin's selection and translation of Sartre's essays on four artists—which is our primary source of
reference—is not arbitrary. It is rationally conceived because the contradictions and the 'enigma', present in all the four artists, provides an opportunity to Sartre to illustrate his own views about works of art. These four artists are: (1) Tintoretto, (2) Giacometti, (3) Calder and (4) Lapoujade. Our aim here is to concentrate on only one form of art viz. painting; we will have to exclude Calder from the present discussion because he is a sculpture.

(1) Jacopo Robusti-Tintoretto:

The Renaissance period (1400 - 1520) in art is represented by artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael. Liberation of art from the clutches of the church and to reassert humanistic world outlook of classical Greek art with its secular and rational ideas was the main object of the artists and thinkers of this period. This new outlook and approach, however, appealed to the Popes and the church also, for Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and other painters and sculptures were commissioned by the church to paint certain chapples. Thus a reconciliation between the official church's attitude to art in the Renaissance spirit was brought about. Whether the artists compromised with the church, or the Christianity found it convenient to project its teachings through humanistic works of the artists of the age, is a matter that is outside the scope of present work.
In all the fields of intellectual activity the Renaissance spirit started to decline during the 16th century. Fall of Rome in 1527, the Reformation and the general political upheavals of the era, gave birth to such a movement in Art which is known as Mannerist painting—a movement which developed in Italy in the 16th century.

Jacopo Robusti, generally known as Tintoretto represents the Venetian school of mannerism. Till the arrival of Tintoretto, Venetian school was fully dominated by Titian. Sartre explains at length main causes of the popularity and appeal of Renaissance painters in general and Titian in particular among the ruling monarchs. Titian's paintings, according to Sartre, are 'pure opera'. He painted nothing that could not please the monarchs and their aesthetic sense.

Mannerism, the chief exponent of which is Tintoretto, is characterised by its anti-classical attitude, particularly that of the Renaissance. A certain type of restlessness is always depicted in mannerist paintings. "Most of its devices—crowded composition, ambiguous proportion and space, exaggerated poses, and complex action and meaning—create a feeling of obscurity and insecurity."² The classical monotoneous paintings, stressing on line and form, were rejected in favour of a mannerism in which colour becomes arbitrary, light broken up and movements charged with emotions. Since all these characteristics could be assumed in an existential
work of art, the paintings of Tintoretto, therefore, became the inevitable choice of Sartre for his critical analysis of artistic creativity and its expression.

The creative genius of Tintoretto is portrayed by Sartre through a detailed analysis of the life of the artist. At the young age of twelve the artist is said to have been thrown out by Titian from his studio. There is, however, no authentic record available to confirm wherefrom Tintoretto learned the skill of painting but the most crucial moments in the life of the artist came when he departed from the prevalent tradition of stylistic and ideological representation. Tintoretto, deviating from the Titian tradition of creating the myth of the divine rights of the monarchs, presented in his own style, the innermost self of man and his experience of the Infinite through his painting "The Miracle of the Slave". Not only the wealthy Rialtans of Venice but the entire city populace turned against him for this revelation. They preferred the reassuring style of his rival, Titian, because:

"...they wanted a certain style that appealed to the senses, trifles, inoffensive and harmonious pomp; they knew a trade mark, a slogan."

Painting was his only means of livelihood. Rejection of his paintings by the rich and the influential deprived him of receiving any commissions from officialdom. The force of
circumstance was so immense that Tintoretto was forced to
paint in the 

same style with the 

same themes that were acceptable
to the ruling elite. In this way only could he have the offers.
But still his creative genius could express itself authentically.
Each of his great works had two layers of meaning one appealing
to popular taste, and the other expressing his own revolt.
Sartre writes:

"...Its strict utilitarianism disguises an
unedning quest. Fitting his research into
the frame of paid commission, he is obliged
to revolutionize painting even while respecting
the stipulations of his client."^4

The artists with whom Tintoretto had to compete were
such giants of Renaissance as Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael.
Eugenio Battista describes the spirit and style of the
Renaissance art in the following passage that is quoted by
Sartre:

"The Renaissance attributed to the artist
the traits which Antiquity reserved for
the man of action and which the Middle
Ages had used to adorn its saints."

Sartre adds to this his own remarks:

"During the sixteenth century painting
and sculpture were still looked upon as
manual arts; all the honours were
reserved for poetry."^5
Almost all the painters of Renaissance, according to Sartre, were frustrated in their role for being treated as craftsmen only. They grudgingly saw poets receiving the highest honours. Sartre says that Titian was honoured because of his friendship with the officialdom, though he could never enjoy the same honour as those of poets. Michelangelo and Raphael were commissioned by the church or feudal lords to paint palaces, public buildings and chappies. They enjoyed the highest honours, of which they were proud. But they had no freedom. Their fame was guaranteed by the feudal system. Sartre satirizes this aspect of their lives in the following words:

"...the glory of his throne falls upon them like a ray of sunshine, and they reflect it upon the people; the divine right of kings gives painters divine rights."6

The result is that the 'daubers' change into 'Supermen', the heroes. For Sartre they were ordinary men groomed to look larger than their actual statue. They have falsely been raised above humanity by the monarchs. "Even today, nostalgic republicans worship them in the name of genius."7

But Tintoretto was a man of different stuff. He accepted the challenge of his trade. Unlike Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael, he did not indulge in poetry or any other literary activity. The artist, for Tintoretto, is the supreme worker;
Plate No. 1 "The Miracle of the Slave" by Tintoretto
Plate No. II  "Assumption of the Virgin" (1516-18) by Titian
Plate No. 3  "Annette Portrait of the Artist's wife" (1954)
by Alberto Giacometti
Plate No. 4
Composition with Seven Figures and a Head (The Forest), 1950, by Alberto Giacometti
Plate No. 5 "The Conversion of St. Paul" (1600-01) by Caravaggio
Plate No. 6 "Guernica" (1937) by Pablo Picasso
Plat No. 7  "Triptych on Torture" (1961) by Albert Lopoujade
Plate No. 8  "Free Form" (1946)  
by Jackson Pollock
Plate No. 9  "Composition" (1921)
by Dutchman Piet Mondrian
"he exhausts himself and his material in order to produce and sell visions."  

That does not, however, imply that he should not work for the princes if he liked them. "He does not (like princes)" Sartre says "and that is the crux of the matter. They frighten him without inspiring him. He never tries to approach them or to make himself known to them."  

No doubt his 'clientele' of the Venice, for whom he paints, is unable to 'crown' him but he is not prepared to have this 'crown' at the cost of his artistic freedom. His creative genius requires freedom to express himself to please the people of Venice, who too, desire and aspire for freedom. "The Miracle of the Slave" and his works of the Scuola San Rocco are some of the Tintoretto's works that are not only in the stylistic and contextual opposition to Titian and Renaissance heritage but also expresses his freedom in creativity. (See plate No. I and II).

These works, if placed in the perspective of the general awakening of the era, reveal that art has passed from the sacred to secular role. The artist, in this general awakening finds himself in a situation in which the light of God, which guaranteed his divinity, disappears. Laws of perspective did no more allow to the artist represent God with man's body. Referring to this historical development, Sartre says:
"perspective is a violence which human weakness is forcing upon God's little world." For Sartre, the crisis in painting in that era issued from portrayal of fragility of human existence. It was this sense of human fragility which forced Tintoretto to work furiously so as to conquer the 'darkness and emptiness of human existence'. "The infinite", for Sartre, "is the emptiness, the darkness, within the creature and without." The character of Tintoretto, as drawn by Sartre, highlights the artist's passion to reveal to his fellow citizens the darkness and emptiness of human existence within or without.

(2). Alberto Giacometti:

Sartre's first satirical remark about the portraits of Monarchs was made through protagonist Antoine Roquentin, the main character of Nausea. On his visit to the Bouville museum Roquentine reflects as under:

"The power of art is truly admirable. Of this shrill-voiced little man, nothing would go down to posterity except a threatening face a superb gesture, and the bloodshot eyes of a bull." Reflecting on 'how man is re-thought by man' he says:

"They had been painted with minute care, and yet, under the brush, their features had been stripped of the mysterious weakness of men's
faces... with the help of Renaud's and Bordurin, they had enslaved the whole of Nature: outside themselves and in themselves. What these dark canvases offered to my gaze was man re-thought by man, with, as his sole adornment, a man's first conquest: the bouquet of the Right of Man and Citizen. Without any mental reservation, I admired the reign of man."

Disgusted with the sign of official portraits, Roquentin leaves the museum with the following remarks:

"I walked along the long gallery, greeting in passing, without stopping, the distinguished faces which emerged from the shadows".

(quoting the names of some fifteen members of the ruling monarch).

"...I walked the whole length of the Bordurin-Renandas Room. I turned round. Farewell, you beautiful lilies, elegant in your little painted sanctuaries, farewell, you beautiful lilies, our pride and raison d'être, farewell, you Bastards."

For Sartre, these paintings contain the idealized human figures which create the myth of the divine rights of monarchs to rule the plebions. These idealized human figures are the portraits of the monarchs and their families which
depict not only the superiority and the super-human status of the select minority, but also helps in widening the gulf in the social and political relations between the monarch and their subjects. In other words, these paintings contribute only to the belief in the status based merit and worth of the monarchy, rendering human existence meaningless.

A. Giacometti is, according to Sartre, one of those painters of our century who have ruthlessly rejected painting official portraits. Not only this, he opposes all those who try to conceal man behind the abstract concepts of right and privilege thereby coming closer to existential thought. Being interested in the concrete human existence, Sartre, is not attracted to any representational painting, e.g., the landscape the still life or any abstract composition. He attaches importance to those paintings only which are anthropomorphic in nature. We will later on see, while discussing Lopoujade, that Sartre does not stick to this position in a consistent manner. However, Sartre's appreciation of Giacometti was mainly due to the artist's representation of man as solitary, elongated and distinct, not being-in-itself, a stone like form but active like for-itself with a complete sense of human despair, terror, dread and doom. Sartre's liking for these paintings seems to be an existential presentation of human existence in them (see plate No. 3).
Being-for-others, as discussed in a previous chapter, forms the ontological foundation of Sartre's theory of art. For Sartre all the creative activity derives its impetus from being-for-others. But this 'other' is always at a distance, leaving an empty space between my being and the being of the other. It is this space which is not only the subject of Giacometti's paintings but he conceives this distance from a purely existential point of view.

Sartre tried to narrow down this distance by saying that the other is "an essential structure of our being, which at once both escapes and defines our being." The other, for Sartre, is the ex-centric limit which contributes to the constitution of our being. But this does not imply, as can be inferred from the literary works of Sartre also, that the distance between me and the other can be obliterated altogether. Because being-for-itself can never coincide with its being; it is always in the process of becoming; the moment this distance is overcome, there will be no existence. Distance is the tension that makes the life possible. And Giacometti says:

"Distance, far from being an accident, is part and parcel of every object."

Giacometti paints the objects as he observes them from a distance. All the figures of his paintings, Sartre observes
have an arresting presence, ready to drop at any moment. Sartre says that when I retreat from his painting the figures advance towards me and when I advance, they are farthest from me. Hence moving towards or away from his work, is of no avail because the distance cannot be traversed.

This distance has, however, no meaning outside the human space. It is meaningful in a human situation only. 'Distance can separate Marathen from Athens but not one pebble from another.' It means that distance is possible for being-for-itself only. It does not exist for being-in-itself which is closed and compact.

Giacometti holds that "distance is not a voluntary isolation, nor even a withdrawal. It is something required by circumstances, a ceremony, a recognition of difficulties. It is the product of forces of attraction and repulsion." 

Sartre's statement that the essential structure of our being at once both escapes and defines our being can be applied to Giacometti's sculpture 'Crowd'—in which people are crossing a public place without seeing each other; 'they pass hopelessly alone and yet together.' Sartre says that Giacometti has defined his universe better than he possibly could, when Giacometti wrote concerning one of his paintings. The artist's own description is as follows:
"a part of a forest observed during
the course of many years... a forest
in which trees with barren, slender
trunks seemed like people who had
stopped in their tracks and were
speaking to each other." (see plate No. 4).

This distance, this vacuum is found by Giacometti
everywhere. From Sartre's philosophical viewpoint it is
simply and purely Nothingness or negation that is projected
by a sense of vacuum. It is present everywhere in all men.
Giacometti wants to explain all the facets and dimensions of
this vacuum through his works:

"Between things, between men lie broken
bridges, the vacuum infiltrates everything;
each creature creates its own vacuum." 18

Sartre sees his own concept of existence in the
paintings of Giacometti. In comparison to other artists,
he sees in him, 'being' treated as in the form of becoming
and not in its fixity. In his paintings Sartre finds a
representation of man that is similar to his own reflections
of individual man in his solitude, despair and doom. Giacometti
had understood that artist's main work in the realm of
imaginary lies in creating illusions. This brings Giacometti
very close to what Sartre said about art and its function.
Before reflecting upon the abstract paintings of Lapoujade, Sartre, once again explains how the older art has negated the very purpose and aim of painting. Titian, to quote only one example, exploits the beauty of human body in such a grand style with luxuriant use of colours that the real torment of an individual existence is totally hidden from our eyes. Even if presenting a massacre, the gripping style makes one to forget the horrifying content. Colours are so adjusted with his craftsmanship that the horrifying sense of "torture is eliminated from the canvas just as its scent is eliminated from a painted rose." All those artists who were commissioned by monarchs were, in Sartre's view, the traitors, "for, they forced their brushes to paint comforting terrors, painless suffering and living corpses." Sartre says further:

"For a self-willed man in a room with windows overlooking a concentration camp to paint a compote is not serious; his sin is one of negligence. The real crime would be in painting the concentration camp as if it were a compote." (see plate No.5)

A painting which depicts horror, anger and torture in a grand style can have, according to Sartre, only one of the two reactions on the part of the viewer: the viewer may either
be lost in the admiration of the style of the painting or he may feel the horror as too real to be viewed for long. In the whole history of art Sartre could locate only two exceptions to this generalization. These are Goya and Picasso. Goya failed or lost all desire to communicate the horrors of war. He assimilated these horrors in himself and "finally transformed the horrors of battles and mass murders into the naked horror of being Goya."23.

Gurnica, Picasso's master work (pained in 1935) is absolutely a different thing. At a particular historical moment when the society, art and the artist worked together to respond to the historic situation Gurnica was created. It is a complete departure from the traditional representation of human situation in painting. It (Gurnica) is an act of violence in art. Sartre says:

"There was no need for violence to be hidden or transformed; it was simply identified with the disintegration of men brought about by their own bombs."24

(see plate No. 6)

It was, thus, the historical moment in art which led Picasso to derive from art itself his style for portrayal of such an event. Hence, Picasso belonged to a generation for which the figurative art seemed to be in a process of disintegration. And all that was left for the emerging generations
was a "medley of colours and rhythms, of crumbled remnants. They had no choice but to make use of these refined ductile materials for re-integrating shattered existence into new "wholes." Lapoujade belonged to this generation.

In almost all the fields of creativity, freedom of expression explored new horizons in the works of this generation. In painting, the presence of human figure imposed external conditions on the free expression of the artist. Artist wanted freedom from academic tradition; he wanted to cultivate his garden thoroughly; He wanted to eliminate tolls and duties, barriers, detours and the restrictions imposed by the tradition. While reaffirming unity of a work of art, artist wanted to expand the scope of art. Now the artist is not in search of a new style in painting but he is trying to give it a meaning yet hidden and unexplored.

Picasso's period according to historical changes, required total disintegration, total distortion of figurative painting. The period that followed and to which belonged Lapoujade demanded total elimination of the figure. Thus the abstract painting came into being.

The abstract artist does not want to negate or nihilate or even to make us experience the distorted or abstract meaning of the world. He wanted to create new meaning in
the world that had never existed before. Sartre says:

"At the end of this long crisis in which the artist's creativity was submerged in disillusionment through failure to understand that the imaginary is the sole absolute, the figures had the good sense to disintegrate." \(^{26}\) (see plate No. 7)

Did this abstract painting mean nothing, as some critics might have claimed? Sartre says that the case is 'Quite the opposite'. As elaborated above, it gave new meaning to the world. It set the artist free to choose. For Sartre, freedom to choose implies commitment. When a creative artist chooses in his freedom, he commits himself to the whole mankind. Now the artist becomes more responsible than ever he has been for his creative act. The elimination of figures from the canvases is, therefore, a new dimension introduced with a view unfolding the depths of human existence. Sartre says that it becomes essential for an abstract artist.

"to preserve the rhythm of explosive space, to prolong the vibration of its colors, to exploit in depths the strange, terrifying disintegration of being and its whirling movement, the artist must use his brush to impose meaning on his canvases and on us." \(^{27}\) (see plate No. 8 & 9).

The use of such terms as 'explosive', 'vibrant', 'terrifying' and 'whirling' is only meant to suggest that
artist has to paint on his canvas with extreme force. The intense experiences of human existence without the aid of any figure, symbol or sign.

Being one of the real representatives of our era, Lapoujade has already understood what Sartre conceived philosophically as the duty of an artist in our era.

"man, seen by an unprivileged eye, is today neither great nor small, beautiful or ugly. His art challenges him to place on canvases a true portrait of the human kingdom, and the truth about this kingdom, today, is that the human species includes torturers, their accomplices and martyrs. ...That is our portrait; we must look at it realistically, later one can decide to preserve it or to modify it."28
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4. Ibid. : p. 38.

5. Ibid. : p. 43.

6. Ibid. : p. 44.

7. Ibid. : p. 45.

8. Ibid. : p. 46.

9. Ibid. : p. 46.

10. Ibid. : p. 57.

11. Ibid. : p. 60.


17. Ibid.,: pp. 79-80.
18. Ibid.,: p. 81.
22. Ibid.,: p. 100.
23. Ibid.,: p. 100.
25. Ibid.,: p. 103.
27. Ibid.,: p. 111.
28. Ibid.,: p. 120.