

Mutmassungen on Stravinskij

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Almost all my works are called *Mutmassungen* on something.

Mutmassungen is a German word that means "conjectures". My friend Uwe Johnson from Pomerania (who died tragically in Sheerness in North Kent) used this word for the first time in 1960 in his book *Mutmassungen ueber Jacob* (Conjectures on Jacob). Ever since I have used it too, as homage to Uwe and for the beauty of the word.

In this exhibit there is a portrait of Uwe. I painted it after his death, based on what Marianne Frish told me when she visited me on June 20, 1986, about his period of happiness in Berlin together with Max Frisch and Guenther Grass. This was followed by retirement to horrible North Kent, where he died. He lost his hair, always wore clad shirts and drank in search of death. I painted him so and it "resembles him".

Walking or standing still I can suddenly think of the notes of *Dies Irae*, then my thoughts stray elsewhere. But the moment will come, no doubt, when I'll have to start weaving the *Mutmassungen* on *Dies Irae* on canvas or copper, majolica or bronze. Thus all my works are born, as conjectures.

The alternative to tremendously long periods during which I carry out the conjectures be it in the studio or in the foundry are tennis, sailing and rowing. These two selves are completely different, even physically. They exclude one another and do not know each other.

I am convinced that art possesses and one can do nothing to resist it. Either you deal with it and scrutinize the world, or you break down. Many artists broke down because they did not have the strength to cope. We artists are nothing exceptional. The only thing of which humankind can be certain is death. The thirst to deceive it is immense. We artists are the means to do so. Man tries to deceive death with everything that is art. Hence, some draw the dice to satisfy this thirst: artists!

For this, artists should be loved dearly by the State and by the people in spite of their inevitable human faults. The greatest gift artists gave mankind is theater. It is the most extraordinary means of telling a story in order to dodge death. Cinema is death because it has no depth and is anywhere at any time for millions. Opera is life because it has depth and happens in a precise and beautiful place, and only there, for a few dozens of people, and is unrepeatable.

Opera is an Italian invention, I love opera. Jazz too is a great gift, but it is more connected to the night and the female sex. In appropriate conditions I very much love jazz.

This exhibit in the Piazza di Spagna is appropriate because I grew up in the area. I am an Italian painter and, with the exception of the German parenthesis in my youth, I have always lived in my Italy in Rome and thus around this piazza. Since I was a young man I have bought cigarettes and German newspapers for my wife, who is from Krefeld, in the tobacco shop next to the gallery.

There is a painting here, from 1974, *Mutmassungen on Matilde Dolcetti's Venetian Stories*. The Lion of Saint Marc is engraved on a golden background. The faces are drawn on canvas with a quill. Through thousands of touches that keep me closely tied to the canvas for weeks, the conjectures grow ever more deep and dense and then exhaust themselves. Work of this kind reinforces my opinion that it is more comfortable being the one who can buy a painting and enjoy it than being the one who has to make it and see it.

Making paintings is most uncomfortable. It takes a minute to invent them, but weeks and months to make them. Between the one who created *Don Giovanni* and the one who enjoys it for a handful of coins from the orchestras, I prefer the latter.

The gold background on which the two figures from Venetian stories are conversing is not a color, but a symbol. Gold changed hands easily before it was substituted for paper. Gold is also one of the symbols of Venice: Venice is of gold! This is more or less the mechanics of *Mutmassungen*.

My wife was always by my side in my endeavors and my children understood me. It gave me courage when I was almost forgotten by everyone. And when I was insane she would tell me they were my "guertel"- "belt" in German. Many artists need to be alone. Since my youth I have always felt the necessity to create a solid nucleus in order to have the strength and courage to speak with my art. It stands firm with three sons, two daughters, my wife and myself. I made them live with my art and they made my art live.

In *Mutmassungen on Uncle Werner Leendertz's Piece of Land* and *Mutmassungen on an Admonishing Mask* serpents appear.

The serpent, contrary to the demonic symbol that the Catholic Church made of it, is humble and prudent, partly because it is the animal closest to the earth. Even the poisonous are humble and use the venom to live. I can't imagine a viper outrunning a hair; it is too slow.

Hence it lies in wait, immobilizes the mouse with its poison and only then it can eat it.

I can't imagine the serpent of Adam and Eve. I can imagine Esculapio's one. Esculapio and the Romans' serpent is the real one. Just as the real Giuliano is the one described by Gibbon and Voltaire and not the Apostolate of the church. The cat is beautiful because it is the antithesis of the serpent and is not humble.

The artist has the duty of calling things by their names.

I painted *Mutmassungen on David* when Pope John Paul II went to visit the Jews in their temple in Home. The Jews are among the most ancient inhabitants of Rome. Emperor I ito brought them over after the destruction of the temple (tisch-a-be-hav). Others already lived in Ostia since the time of the Republic. I love them because they are strong within. They miraculously preserved what we lost long ago even though we stayed on the same soil for thousands of years. Often we forget what the Jews have endured.

Our land provoked me to paint landscapes like those behind the urn on the canvas dedicated to Gaio Valerio Catullo. The landscape is painted on the crust of the earth by man's labor. Many places on the earth have olive trees, vines, cypresses and pine trees and they create the graphics of the landscape. Hence, we say: Tuscan, Umbrian or Venetian landscape, depending on what people grow on the Italian land. Without these differences it would have been the same throughout the peninsula.

The peasant is the greatest designer and decorator of the landscape; he is the nobleman because he determines the appearance of his motherland. I love peasants because they are similar to serpents, because they are close to the earth.

"Mutmassungen on the Wooden Prince of Bela Bartok" originated as a study for the big etching by the same title. Then I got entangled in the conjectures and Bartok's quartets "encircled" the Wooden Prince. The devil hides in this music. They are the greatest after Beethoven's. I love this painting very much because it was so difficult to make with a quill on a huge canvas. I dedicated it to Giovanni Barbieri, the best carpenter in Maremma.

What I described is the relationship between myself - the man and the artist - and the World around me. What this world reads in my work is always a mystery.

My brother Vittorio, a chemical engineer, had the following reaction, in verse, which I found by chance, all tattered, in a book by Ezra Pound in 1976:

Warriors waiting

Wizards:

My brother gave them to me,

And they accompany me

From the wall of my room

To remind me

Of the avenging severity

That must be in us;

I wink at the cuirass

At the ferocious owl

Who escort me

In my vengeful roaming

Umbrian landscapes

While I slowly get drunk

With wine

And anger.