

SHADOWS AND MIRRORS

Shadows and mirrors are in a sense Divine opposites, or perhaps more accurately, complimentary states of being, and complimentary means of perception. One is a projection of dark that functions by absorbing light and eliminating it. The other is a combination of every frequency of light and functions by reflecting it. Both of these states, or perhaps more accurately visual concepts, appear contradictory and antipathetic. In the works presented in this book by the two Quistrebert brothers we are drawn into an occultural maze of paradoxes, reversals and mysteries whose initial nature appears reductive to a point of deceptive simplicity. At times we are assaulted by monochromatic decay more akin to fungus, mould and the bizarre creations of stalactites and stalagmites formed by millennia of directionless sediment as epitomized by works like “Canvasless Round Painting”. All familiar aspects of a traditional “painting” have been removed leaving a monolithic enigma of thick, black paint that defies not only every previous “painterly” convention, but also appears to defy the “Laws of Physics” and gravity as we may previously have understood them. We are further confounded by yet another ambiguity imposed in our Western European Judeo-Christian conditioning...is this a robust formerly molten solid, OR, a black hole in potentia? These “Brothers of the Shadow” smash any comfort we retain from our inherited and generally accepted binary foundations of perception as absolutely and meticulously as the CERN Particle Accelerator disintegrates and smashes matter to such infinitesimal quantum states that Science reaches out to poetry, Zen, aesthetics and the most enigmatic layers of Philosophy in its attempts to explain the inexplicable. When a shadow can literally be viewed as separate from that of which it IS the shadow we are in a realm that awaits a revolutionary breakthrough in creative exploration.

We exist in a post-virtual reality. No longer Platonic rationalism, no longer binary sub-structures holding culture together like magnetic poles. The Renaissance viewed as an “Age of Reason” radically subverted the hold of the Vatican and its Holy Roman Empire at first examination. Yet what humanity finally inherited was an ever more inflexible either/or Universe. Or, as the Quistreibert Brothers propose, “...ideas of the sublime intersect with those of decline...”and as a result the conservative imagery is implemented to generate its own self-destruction.

Da Vinci, and indeed all the great masters of that era, were patronized by the Church whilst simultaneously undermining its dogmas and tenets with varying degrees of sacrilegious alchemy and heretical occult geometries. In a very real sense the meanings and hypotheses concealed consciously within the most religious contexts were evidence of a continuous lineage of mystical subversion stretching back further than a Christ to the Divine Architect Hiram and the pyramids of Egypt in their formality and Mayan, Aztec, Toltec, Kabalistic and even Dogon symmetrical patterns and structures. This book can be interpreted as a contemporary grimoire in this ancient covert magical tradition and, just as the Key of Solomon interprets and empowers the initiate, so the Quistreibert Brothers offer a covert portal into alternate viabilities of pattern, primary shape and intersection. One of the fundamental models used to define Alchemy is Squaring the Circle. It is the esoteric heart of the Temple of Solomon and in direct lineage from that concept of perfection is central to Freemasonry and is as crucial to a deeper comprehension of these works as the Golden Sector became to Renaissance composition. Circles within squares, pentacles, and triangles that can be perceived as two dimensional pyramids litter many of these paintings. “Circles” (2010) being a prime example.

Like alchemists through the ages the Quistreibert Brothers are an enigma. They create sequences of stacked eyes in triangles in such

a brutally structured repetition that they become an invocation, but what are they conjuring up? What are they manifesting? They give us a clue in their interview with Martha Kirszenbaum and Dave Harper for the exhibition “NineteenEightyFour” when during a discussion regarding “Illuminati” and “Congruent Triangles” the Brothers propose,

“ Our interest in this specific symbol emerged while we were doing research on occultism and secret societies, starting with one of the most famous, yet still very mysterious, the Freemasons. Also, at that time, our work was undergoing serious reconsideration. We were including more and more geometric and non-figurative shapes in our compositions and leaving behind narrative landscape paintings. We found out that the eye framed by a triangle is symbolically known as the all seeing eye of God, under which nothing can be hidden. Although Freemasons never refer to any embodied divinity capable of mercy or anger, the eye in the triangle, through Masonic perspective, represents a neutral superior entity that watches and organizes this world (the Eye) as well as it is a symbol of supreme knowledge (the Triangle) So this Eye really symbolizes an absolute state of mind, the ultimate stage of consciousness that Masons strive for and that they actually call “The Great Architect of the Universe”.

Here is a central concern of the Quistrebert Brothers. As you travel through this book it is apparent that they have very consciously after careful research and mutual discussions developed their own symbolic language, a density of layers made effective by **absolute transparency**. Their intent is exposed then after meditation becomes hidden, yet exists almost in between each work. A shadow is connected to its source, yet only exists through illumination. Motivation is camouflaged then didactic. They are steadily constructing a mythos of holographic logos in an intricate web of invisibility made visible by the act of painting, just as rain,

or bright sunlight reveals a spider's web. The viewers perception occurs in between each viewing, like the silhouettes left on retina by a bright flash BEHIND an object in a seemingly endless labyrinth of contradictions and contra-indications. Yet just as the patterns of a spider's web can seem geometrically simple, their execution has come after millions of years of specialization. Theirs is a reduction through evolution to maximize efficiency and conserve energy.

From my apartment window in the Lower east Side in New York can be seen the Empire State Building and the beautifully Art Deco Chrysler Building, perhaps the most perfect expression of a skyscraper ever built. Inspired by their inspirational sojourn in Manhattan the Quistrebert Brothers created a series of small paintings concerned directly with the imposing power transmitted by skyscrapers. These works, in particular, are a primary key that exposes and unlocks one of the vital themes contained in the Quistrebert Brothers aesthetic. Their time in New York had a permanent and deeply profound effect upon them. They were drawn towards the clusters of skyscrapers with the same sense of awe they experience when studying Gothic Cathedrals and both have become intermingled as symbols of a contradictory dialogue with power and decay. Austerity and celibacy in conflict with sensuality and lavish display.

At the height of the Vatican's corrupt affair with artists whose genius was equaled by their overt decadence and masked their deeply occult agendas, we perceive an immense demonstration of Divine power released by the structures of St. Peters Square, and, in fact, all the Cathedrals and momentous Gothic buildings deliberately designed to reflect and amplify the "shock and awe" of the Faith. Cathedrals were POWER engines, generating unquestioning submission, and representing symbolically and constantly reinforcing the absolute control of the Church.

This “Cathedral engine” continually nourished Papal control (and still does to this day) by feeding upon a billion minds convinced of a preconceived Divine truth. A truth that could only be disseminated by a Priestly class. A privileged elite. For any belief system to dismiss alternatives as misguided and false reinforces a confrontational either/or mentality, which in turn perpetuates bigotry, fanaticism, intimidation of alternative views and justification for a never ending plutocracy of power. Conflict camouflages hidden political and economic agendas and a retention of privilege by a continuance of the existing vested interests of a dominating few.

Global existence was still primarily predicated upon a foundation of good/bad, Christian/Moslem, black/white, male/female, and this underlying means of perception compromised any truly meaningful philosophical radicalism. Galileo was still prosecuted, millions were annihilated by the Inquisition and other intellectual cleansings up to and beyond the Holocaust, Pol Pot, the Balkans up to the present day.

A superficial fragmenting and certainly a deepening of philosophical enquiry did open up temporary discourses but the debates remained rooted in confrontational differences in order to feel “proven right”, in these conditions righteousness with an avant garde face remains oppressive.

From pre-historic, stone age, iron-age, bronze age, post-industrial to post-technological eras we are now poised upon a possibility of a post-digital age. Throughout these various pre-historic periods there has been an alternative, often very secret but parallel and dynamic cultural thread. For want of a better word we will call this Alchemical.

The Quistrebert Brothers in an interview state,

”Our practice started early in the 2000’s, after years of relational art and a prevalence of “new technologies”. our work then comes after this period of absolute conceptualism and faith in progressivism. Therefore, if the art of the 1990’s is considered modernist, our work is post-modernist, which also explains certain ideas of reversal involved in it.” They are very conscious of the echoes and reflections of previous movements and very specific artists. They knowingly play with Feininger, revealing the abrupt simplicity of structure yet erasing the kitsch connotations that resulted from mass production of prints. In fact they revel in these investigations. The repeated use of series’ of a subject, a pastiche, or a congruence of shapes is removed from painterly, precious concerns by their cunning use of cardboard cut out geometrical shapes and non-elitist paint cans rather than sable brushes. Theirs is not an attempt to maintain the aristocratic implications of rarity, or traditional techniques. They remove, or as they like to say, they descend, or “. desire to merge Avant-garde and darkness and to treat the of utopias with “poor” materials, like spray paint.” This decline is a valiant refutation of the over-worked and vacuous emptiness usually associated with current modus operandi used to inflate art market value.

Many of humanities greatest thinkers, artists, and scientists paid a necessary lip-service to those policing any given status quo, but in their works they often explored radically original concepts in coded systems and personal “alphabets” of symbols, equations, images and metaphors. Not to be obtuse for its own sake, simply secretive so it might save their lives. The Inquisition continued beneath a facade of polarizing religious fervor, political dogma and criminal intent. In our contemporary era commodification hides new variations of pressure to conform.

We believe that Art, if it is to have any worthwhile meaning or functionality for social change is duty bound to address the “Cathedrals” of power and cultural delusion. And it is THIS

concept of millennia of inherited positions of Power that brings us to the two Quistrebert Brothers. We take the “Cathedral” as timeless symbol of economic, aesthetic and political power, primarily in relation to Western expansionist power, imposed by force of will, military might and even biological reinforcement. So, for the purposes of this introduction the Cathedral Engine represents rationalist, imperialist, economic and consumption based oppression. A negation of creativity as toxic as previous invasions of indigenous possibilities fueled by missionary zeal and a unquestioning conviction. Cathedrals and skyscrapers bridge centuries through their works as symbols and symptoms of supremacy. The Brothers re-establish uncertainty and doubt as “...they incarnate the silence of forms to emerge in light and forms vanished in darkness...” and by their expulsion of grey they generate a fragile immobility.

A story of European expansion into every reachable part of this globe is a story of imposed perceptual boundaries that serve the imposition of Power by only a privileged few. The confusion that really becomes ever more complicit in this interaction is the subjugation of Creation, whose implicit force is CHANGE, to an ongoing cabal of arcane “bloodlines” whose primary purpose by patronage is to block and disperse any mode of thinking or perception that might release into the general populace of humanity ideas, energies or anarchic explorations whose very raison d’etre is overthrow of any and all previous systems of aesthetics.

Quistrebert Brothers, a simplicity of mysteries constructed to explore the confounding of all previous means of perception. Beware; be VERY aware as you enter this decidedly deceptive “Book of shadows”. According to the palmist reader Mir Bachir early in the 20th Century, (if not far earlier, historical documents cannot be more specific) ancient Sanskrit divination systems propose that a “Book of Shadows” refers to the concept or

manifestation of a manual that explains how to foretell things to come “based upon the length of a person’s shadow”. Although Doreen Valiente and Gerald Gardner (assisted by the notorious Aleister Crowley specifically on this matter) later suggested that this title referred to a very personal, original book containing and carefully documenting in detail every “spell”, every “enchantment” attempted and expounded through considered and realized ritual. A grimoire, a word invocative of the Andersen Brothers collections of fairy tales, myths, paradoxes and parables, and in the case of the Quistrebert brothers, a very accurate aspect of their incredibly complex body of work. Like all such breakthroughs of evolutionary perception THEIR works are, inevitably, deceptively simple, but never deceptual.

Theirs is only an apparent simplicity of mysteries. One of the declared aims of a Gardnerian definition of “Book of Shadows” is for a sorcerer(ess) to collect and collate every experiment and convocation in a research archive as both a discipline to teach rigorous methodology and evidentiary documentation. It is a book of experiments applied with a scientific application and the same rigor as any scientific laboratory in order to appraise and evaluate effects and results with an inevitable objective of mutation, revelation and thus CHANGE!

Through the contents of this remarkable book we are likewise compelled to explore privately and with intellectual rigor a body of artistic works and experiments as methodical and precise in its detail as any cutting edge scientific enquiry. In the post-digital environment, this focused application of concepts and results proposes a contemporary Alchemical “Wedding” of techniques in order to reveal potential ways forward in an age of accelerating technological choices too dazzling to describe.

Theirs is a proto-scientific approach coupled with their combined intuitions. For we must never forget there are two beings as artist

here. As W. S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin proposed in their incredibly influential manual “The Third Mind” a piece of literature created by the use of random chance, what they dubbed “Cut-Ups” is no longer attributable to either writer, but becomes the product of a third disincarnate being. Both Burroughs and Gysin were fascinated by non-alphabetised languages. For Burroughs it was the Mayan codices with their astounding astronomical accuracy that was used by a privileged priestly society to control not just daily life but also predict cataclysmic future events that fascinated him. For Gysin, first it was Japanese calligraphy and its beauty, but later he integrated Moroccan sorcery and the use of “magic squares” to enchant people or to occasionally devastating effect he (and Burroughs) used it to cast spells and curses. In a way both Burroughs and Gysin were a kind of occult surgeon exposing the gangrenous sickness of materialism and sexual oppression with geometric precision in order to cut-up and cut away the muscles of hypocrisy and tendons of reduction in order to nurture a true freedom of expression within all social structures and without intimidation by tools of control.

Likewise in my own explorations with Lady Jaye developing ever more precise biological, physical and decorative reflections of each other we propose that our various actions, including cosmetic surgeries, go towards our creation of a third autonomous being “Breyer P-Orridge” that we have called the “Pandrogyné”.

The Quistrebert Brothers, with their related strategy and by their unique sibling duality also become a third being as declared by their choice of “Brothers” rather than using their individual names. They reject mediated materials of privilege choosing consciously to declare their combined selves a dyadic entity. In so doing they begin to erase timeworn structures in place for centuries and reject the status value of individual revelation by super Individual artists that for too many centuries attributed privately agreed upon values designed to support the already rich and powerful. By their

disintegration of individual genius the Quistrebert Brothers reclaim the meaning and making of art and reinstate Creation itself as the only truly implicit determination of worth and simultaneously bypass any long term notions of investment significance.

All three of these examples in their approach to their chosen media renounce categorically the redundant and effete role of the singular “Artist” blessed with a unique individual genius and/or Divine Inspiration. As the old saying goes, two heads are better than one! The age of the “cause celebre” and monstrous anguished egos is over. What we have here implicit in the nom d’Art “Quistrebert Brothers” is a refutation of those self-aggrandising ego and market driven identities developed to serve an immoral collector’s ego driven art market. Here are the first rumbles and shakes of an aesthetic tsunami destined to recalibrate the meaning, motive and miracle of making art and the nature and role of this future form of multiple art maker. Of collaboration instead of competition and of meaning being intrinsic to a work of art. Theirs is a world where shadows reveal instead of conceal.

Genesis BREYER P-ORRIDGE New York, 2011.