

# TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM

## THE ART OF ADI DA SAMRAJ



la Biennale di Venezia

52. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte  
Eventi collaterali

**PALAZZO BOLLANI**

Castello 3647- 30122 Venice

**10 June - 21 November 2007**

Hours: 10.00 am - 6.00 pm

### THE ROOT-TRADITION OF MODERN ART

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by **ADI DA SAMRAJ**

A new approach to the process of making images began in the late nineteenth century, essentially, with Cézanne—extended principally by Picasso, but also by numerous others, including those who worked in the cubist mode and beyond it—and continued until about 1950, or the end of World War II. Because of the devastation in Europe after World War II, many of the artists who had been working in this new, free mode were interrupted—and the movement continued in America, in an entirely different mode and with different interests.

Cézanne was involved in the impressionist mode of making images, yet there was not sufficient structure in it for him, only the eye's response to color. He wanted to cultivate a more classical approach, in which structure is fundamental. His view was that, when one examines nature, one finds it is made of cylinders, spheres, and cones. Such was the new tradition demonstrated by Cézanne and others—each with a unique approach, but using such fundamental structures as the basis for generating an image. Such is the tradition that is essential to the way of making images that developed from the time of Cézanne.

A great deal of secondary art has been made and valued since then. If you compare any image made since 1950 to the art of the first half of the twentieth century, you will see the difference between the profound and great art that was being made during that earlier fifty-year period and much of the casual, even ironic art of the post-World War II period. Of course, the more recent art is interesting, and people are doing creative work. However, if one is to be involved in the profound process, one must return to the root-understanding of modernism—or at least continue to work on its basis.

Every artist works in the context of the art of the world. Therefore, all the arts (and not only the plastic arts) are the domain of the artistic work I do—

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(continued)

fundamentally, the domain of world art from Cézanne through approximately 1950, the domain of art that transcends “point of view”. In the art I make, I am indicating the transcending of “point of view” for the philosophical and spiritual reasons I have communicated in the books I have written. Yet it is this principle that I see in the tradition of modernism, as a revolutionary mode of generating images.

My artistic work extends from that modernist approach—the freedom to make use of the entire resource (both the natural, or “external”, and the subjective, or “internal”) without any limitations, the freedom to go beyond the modes and traditions that I would characterize as modes of fixed “point of view”. Thus, modernism represented an entirely new way of making images, an approach that is free but also not simply chaotic. In that sense, the artistic work I do is a continuation of the tradition of Cézanne, the cubists, and other artists whose work extended from early modernism.

The appearance of the camera and photography allowed this new approach to emerge in the making of images. Photography made it possible to effortlessly achieve the kind of verisimilitude that artists had tried to achieve in their painting and drawing. Therefore, with the advent of photography, artists had to reconsider what they were doing—and, in the process, they developed a new approach to making images. Therefore, the advent of photography has much to do with the modernist way of making images.

In the artistic work I do, I use the camera as part of the process of making images, yet that work is intended to break out of the “point-of-view box” that is a camera—in fact, to break out of any “chamber”, including a room, or any object, or any form, or any subject at all. However, the artistic work I do is not about

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(continued)

deconstructing. Rather, it is intended to communicate a profoundly free sense of perception that goes beyond the “point of view” of the ego-bound body, beyond the view of things from the perspective of the body-mind, and all the content that is generated on the basis of “point of view”. Going beyond “point of view”—that is what I am doing. Therefore, work I do has references to the modernist tradition—which, in very fundamental terms, has been lost since World War II.

It is not that there has not been good work in the interim. There certainly has been good work. Some of the work of the abstract expressionists actually continues the tradition begun by Cézanne. In this regard, De Kooning, for instance, is a very important artist and part of the continuation of the modern tradition, as well as Rothko, Gorky, and others. Through the work of such artists, the tradition did not disappear completely. Presently, however, the tradition is exhausted, and art has become empty and nonsensical.

My work is abstract in that it takes an abstract (or a non-“point-of-view”) approach to any subject. Yet, like Cézanne, I have a fundamental orientation to structure, and (otherwise) like the painters of the modernist tradition, a very free approach to color that goes beyond “point of view”, beyond naturalism. Fundamental to the image-work I make is that images must be rooted in structure and also in meaning, not merely structure (or design or form) for its own sake, but structure that is the context (or mode of presentation) of that which is meaningful, that which is unlimited (in the ultimate, or most profound, sense), as well as reflecting ordinary life.

For a number of years recently, I have been making images intensively, especially over the last decade. During that time, I have developed an

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(continued)

approach using the camera. However, the work I do is not about photography in any conventional sense. I have virtually no interest in the picture-making of conventional photography. Going beyond the camera is basic to the work I do, and I have developed an approach now to such a point that I can work freely and do what I want to be doing. I am interested in using new materials, but not for the purpose of being painterly or for the purpose of making paintings as such. To make paintings is a response to a kind of academic expectation of the beautiful object, the beautiful form, the well-made form. Nevertheless, just as structure is important to the work I do, so also is making a beautiful form of fine material, a form that is durable and lasting and that has characteristics that are physically interesting and enjoyable, that can make anyone feel good by association with something that is well made and of beauty and refinement. Not only structure, but the well-made object or form, rendered physically (and not merely conceptually), is fundamental to the image-work I do.

The approach of so-called “pop art”, or casual art, is, I feel, a very secondary way of making images—not uninteresting but also (for the most part) not profound. Such art is (generally) art for the business. In some sense, such art has lost the thread of the free tradition. My orientation is not to do that kind of work. I would find it uninteresting. There is not enough in it of the fully structured object, the freedom that is entirely of an aesthetic nature, the introduction of meaning and profundity rather than casual and despairing social-mindedness.

So much of the art that is being done now is very dark. It is disturbed, and it plays upon the viewer’s sense of being disturbed. It plays upon the downfall of culture in the world, the downfall of human consciousness. So much of art currently is the making of images out of the resource of darkness, emptiness,

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(continued)

chaos, unenlightenment, and down-spiraled egoity. I am not about any of that. I cannot say that I view such work altogether positively. Nevertheless, I am simply explaining something about the way of working I have developed. I am not intending to criticize other people's ways of working. It is good that artists work at all, that people are making images, and doing so with seriousness and being energized by it. All of that is good. However, it is not the "point of view" I am interested in working from. Any work of art can be interesting to look at. However, I am describing the principles I am responding to and have always responded to.

It is not that I am defined by the work of artists of the first half of the twentieth century, but, rather, the sensibility that informs the images I make corresponds to something that I feel in their work. I am not in the common state. Therefore, I am beyond all ordinary approaches to the image-making process and the nature of that which can be revealed through the usual artistic work. I make images, as I make literary works—such as *The "First Room" Trilogy*—on this free basis, yet without losing the sense of structure and meaning.

Structure and meaning must coincide, and the refined (or well-made) object is fundamental. The well-made object, truly right structure, and meaning rather than meaninglessness—these are fundamental values (although not the only values) in the artistic work I do.

Unpublished commentary by Adi Da Samraj.