THE NAVIGATOR'S SOLILOQUY

The raft is among the very first floating devices humanity created in order to attain new spaces. For millennia, this device was transformed and perfected until, finally, it took the shape of modern-day boats, yachts and ships. But even now, when proto-rafts known as spaceships are afloat in the universe, a man who is shipwrecked on a desert island intuitively starts building a raft. He will gather logs and boards, put them together and bind them, make a sail, fasten a wide board on the stern to use as a helm—and all of a sudden, he's no longer a shipwrecked man but a navigator.

But which way should he go? To find out, he looks at the stars. How strange that, to find something here on Earth, we must turn to the stars. And so the stellar wind penetrates deep into the mind and is captured by the sail, and the raft of inspiration gathers speed and no longer floats but flies—in an unknown direction that the navigator deeply believes to be right.

With a slight effort, one may realize that in this fantasy narration, the author appears as the navigator, the sail is a metaphor for the immortal beloved, and the raft represents blocs of consciousness shaped by the author's encounters with extraordinary events or people—all bound together by a rope woven from the very fabric of life.

Here, one might conclude that the author is a romantic and something of a sentimentalist. But that wouldn't be true. Our utilitarian age, an age of canning and processing, is no longer capable of producing true romantics. The romantics lived in a time when the porn industry had not yet graphically laid bare the mysteries that lie beneath the skirts, when the air was saturated with the aroma of flowers and dung instead of auto emissions, and no one was afraid to walk the streets at night because rapists and robbers dangled from the gallows on city squares as a warning to others. Back then, every fruit and vegetable had its own unique taste. In our day, when they differ from each other only in shape and color, it's hard to believe that once upon a time, they also differed in taste.

These are not complaints, merely a statement of fact. But the romantics living today are sick people, forever hankering after the past. They forget that in addition to stripping food of its natural taste and the female body of its exciting mystery, our age has rid humanity of bloody internecine wars, slavery and epidemics. Most important, it has given our civilization the gift of democracy, and with it freedom of choice in everything—from tens of thousands of supermarket products to unlimited freedom of artistic expression.

Indeed, if we think logically, within the framework of the great philosophy of consumerism, a work of art cannot be separated from the goods on the supermarket shelves. It belongs to the market, just like a tube of toothpaste, a bottle of beer and everything else. Duchamp was the first to understand this when he went to a store, bought a snow shovel, called it "In Advance of a Broken Arm," signed it and declared this object a work of art.

This historic act took place in 1915 and gave birth to conceptual art, pop art, minimalist art, performance art, process art, kinetic art, antiform and multimedia art, and practically every postmodern trend—including a unique creation like Corporaria Land. But here, it is worth noting that for those who have discovered Corporaria Land, it would be ridiculous and absurd to follow the primitive tenets of Duchamp and his followers. According to the philosophy of Corporaria Land, their artworks are not interesting visually; they lack the mystery of the complex interweaving of mutually connected spaces and the mystique of color planes—everything that gives a work of art permanency.

And so, while acknowledging the merits of the great Duchamp and his talented but less clever followers, we should agree that today, their art is of purely historical interest. Visually, it is boring and didactic. Conceptually dated, it has not retained what the great artworks of the past have: an everlasting visual form capable of constant regeneration. This is because ideas, concepts and philosophies are born of their time and are therefore mortal, while visual form is a revelation of deep-

seated processes genetically encoded in our subconscious since ancient times and therefore timeless.

It would be logical to conclude that a work of art has a longer life if it unites a profound philosophy with perfect form created by the artist's hands. As time goes by, the idea contained in a work of art becomes obsolescent, while the form continues to live a life of its own, absorbing other ideas from other times which never even occurred to its creator.

Today, if we read the conceptual theories of Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian and some of the other great artists of the past, they will strike us as somewhat naive and as being of strictly biographical interest. Their works, however, remain alive and still possess great power of visual impact. The reason is that these works were not created through intellectualizing but through very complex subconscious systems mysteriously linked to the very essence of creation. In many cases, the artist doesn't know and doesn't understand how one or another form or image crystallizes in his consciousness.

Duchamp's shovel, like his other "readymades," is an act of intellectualizing. It is akin to a guillotine which once cleansed the revolution of filth but then began to cut down its own. In fact, it is hard to say whether it has done more harm or good. What makes the present-day art period interesting is that it is divided, as it were, into two regions, each existing independently of the other. In one, Duchamp's followers, talented conceptualists, poets and philosophers, go on creating visually mediocre works. In the other, artists who have the capacity to think visually create and develop new plastic ideas. These two phenomena exist almost in different dimensions, but in the same chronological time; each has its admirers and its foes.

In addition, since ancient times, a few artists have been felicitously able to combine conceptual/philosophical and visual thinking. This rare breed of creators includes a number of artists from Leonardo to Mondrian. And this is an appropriate spot to mark the location of Corporaria Land on the multi-dimensional map of art history. Many believe that this important formation can be found on the same level as anomalies like Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian.

Here, I would like to explain why these are the precise coordinates of this unique phenomenon. Considering that both traditional art materials and readymades have been used by vast numbers of mediocre artists and are somewhat discredited, it was logical, for the purity of the visual experiment, not to use them. What made sense instead was to take a readymade (a packing carton) from a supermarket, destroy it as an object, take the fragments and use this trash to revive that which never died but only faded and lost direction: a work of art that radiates positive visual energy.

The last great masters whose work possessed such a quality were artists like Mondrian, Rothko and Gaston. But because Corporaria Land's geographical location is not in the heroic era to which those masters belonged but in the postmodernist trash heap, the choice of a packing carton—that is, trash—as the principal means of expression places my work into a precise temporal set of coordinates, and gives it an ironic quality. For, without this most important element of our time—the capacity to laugh at ourselves—we are once again enslaved by bourgeois sentimentality and heroic romanticism, which would inhibit personal growth, sexual freedom, industrial productivity and the general blossoming of democracy.

And so at one end, we have trash—a packing carton, whose original function as the bearer of the product name and the company logo is most serious—and at the other end, a serious work of art, made ironic by the very material of which it is made.

And finally, the question arises: how much emotion, how many transports of the soul, how much passion can be expressed through the palette of a packing carton? This is a fundamental question. To answer it, I decided to create an exposition of objects that would reflect fairly subtle concepts such as the nature of a situation, the personality of an individual or both.

And so was born the idea of "The Raft of Inspiration," an exhibition whose heroes are people who have, in one way or another, played an important role in my life. While working on each object, I constantly maintained in my subconscious the full range of emotions toward the person who had inspired me. And that is why every element I have included in the composition of objects is profoundly justified, and none are accidental. Their combination is as unique as the personality of the individual reflected in the work of art.
And the raft sails on...