

2. V. 1959

Dear Father Louis:

ever since you, looking at the triptych, have asked me who is the figure crowning Christ (which I couldn't tell you exactly) I am thinking about your interpretation: she being hagia sophia and also the mother of Christ. We were much intrigued by what you said but do not remember clearly what it was. Carolyn got the photostat from the catholic encyclopedia, which I enclose. The painting from Nowgorad bears a certain similarity with my own painting but I cannot understand its relation to the Russian writers.

My triptych has a story or rather a happening behind it. Carolyn, after coming back from Europe, where she was in 1951 for the first time, commissioned me to do a triptych of a Madonna with the child. At that time we were not married and only after she insisted and said she actually wanted the thing, I began to work. My first attempt showed a landscape reaching from one wing over the center panel to the other wing. This was the background and in front of it there was the mother sitting with the child on her lap - ruins around and at the left wing an eagle looking at the child. On the right wing the calvary in the background. But that didn't work and in the course of changing, the child grew bigger and stood in front of the mother. By that time I had scrapped the eagle and the calvary, working only on the center panel. Part of the landscape remained and also the stones standing and laying around. All the time we wondered why the child had changed so much and where I got the idea that She crowns Him. - Between the town in the background and the waste land in the foreground is that golden river that separates both. But the huge, chipped gravestone on the left hand side of the foreground, leaning sideways and only partly seen, overlaps the river and part of the townwall in the background. And for months to come I could find no ways and means of separating this stone from the townwall which overlaps. I grew a bush behind the stone, set a snake on its top, but as there are no shadows in the picture, nothing worked. We used to fancy all kinds of things which would do the trick; ~~while we were sitting on the bench~~ One evening when we again were sitting on the bench in front of it, looking at the unfinished painting, Carolyn said: you havn't put a halo on either of them -- I immediately realized that a halo of rays around His blessing hand would certainly separate the gravestone in the foreground from the townwall it overlaps. It did so when I had put the rays in. -- This IS and IS NOT part of the artist's technique, but it is something out of the reach of incompetent daubers and abstractionists.

I am very sorry we missed your friends Lax and Reinhardt. I would have liked to talk to Reinhardt as I am still unable to see anything in abstract art or understand it. These triangles, squares, dashes and moving lines ought to underlie a work of art (as it is the case in all classic art), they ought to be hidden and not to be shown. They are the hard core, the skeleton of a work of art. - If we were insects with the hard crust outside, abstract art would be appropriate. Characteristically enough we depict death as a skeleton. To me abstract art is pure perversion. Reinhardt may be sincere, but as an abstractionist he is a sinner against the holy Ghost. *it is a travesty on creation*

I had Carolyn as a patron (she even paid a nice sum for the painting; this was before we married) and she herself is also in in the picture. And now you should come in too, telling us more about hagia sophia and christen the triptych, giving it a title. So far we have not been able to find one. -- I am readin the seven story mauntain again. Why I had forgotten everything except Dr Bramachari I cannot imagine. Obviously I was not ripe for the message, or because my own experiences at that age were so completely different from yours. Anyhow, you see so clearly what is wrong and will remain wrong in this world of ours which can be kept going only through the intercession of the few saints, unknown and unheralded, among us. ** When we sit at our little table, we often think of you; perhaps you will sit with us once more, or we will see each other in Gethsemane. The red ink finally arrived and we are back on your book. Carolyn does the printing now and she is very good. I suspect the cataract on my left eye impairs my judgment as to whether the inking is right or wrong. -- Meantime we thank you for the Latin quotations.