

# Paul Hartal

## THE MASKS OF THE UNIVERSE

It was in 1975 that I published *A Manifesto on Lyrical Conceptualism*. In a major book called *The Brush and the Compass* (1988), I advanced further a set of philosophical ideas relating the world to the synergic interaction of emotion and reason in the creative process. In the West we fragmentize culture. Although there is no art without science, or science without art, society today makes a sharp separation between these areas of skill and knowledge. I believe though that art, science and mathematics are symbolic systems through which humanity interprets and structures reality. The pillars in the deep architecture of human knowledge are constructed from the common quarries of emotion, mind and spirit.

The universe of the scientist is no closer to reality than the sky of the artist. The universe wears many masks and the latest cosmological theories are just further additions to the cloakroom. Even the most precise subject, mathematics, is not devoid of irrational rules. For example, we are allowed to multiply by zero but not to divide by it. So, as Einstein pointed out: "as far as the propositions of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."

## THE CAT AND THE TREE

I experienced personally the compartmental posture when even people who consider themselves experts raise their eyebrows at hearing about the discipline-traversing attributes of my oeuvre. The roots of tunnel vision in our fragmentized culture lie in mediocre mindsets and in deficient education. Yet education itself can be a hindrance, too. A case in point is Aristotle's *Laws of Thought*: According to the Law of the Excluded Middle, a thing cannot be another. For example, a tree cannot be a cat and a cat cannot be a tree. Similarly, for the compartmental mindset, painting, for example, cannot be poetry. It is either painting or poetry. It cannot be both. However, the cat and the tree are sustained by the same life force. Their master plan is a molecular substance known as DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). The DNA both in plant cells and animal cells looks much alike and has a matching chemical composition. On the atomic level the entire universe is built from the same elements.

## THE CONNECTIVITY OF ART AND SCIENCE

And this brings us back to the connectivity of art and science. Throughout the years I have explored various aspects of the relationship of art to mathematics, cosmology, artificial intelligence and medicine. I collaborated with the renowned mathematicians P.R. Halmos and John G. Kemeny, with Nobel Laureate physicists Sir Nevill Mott and Emilio Segre, with IBM Research Staff Member Clifford A. Pickover, with Cassini-Huygens Space Mission Program Manager Richard J. Spohalski, as well as many others. In the winter of 2000 the University of Oregon at Eugene invited me to deliver a lecture on "*The Healing Power of Art*" as part of my solo show of Love and Cosmos. Four years later I exhibited *Poetry and Painting* at the Art Museum of Hanseo University in Seoul.

## PAINTING AND POETRY

Although it is not widely known, the connectivity of painting and poetry through history is most evident in the work of Michelangelo, Goethe and William Blake. Kandinsky was a musician and a poet. His books, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane* are concrete poems. He perceived abstract painting in mathematical and musical terms. Both Picasso and Chagall were friends of Apollinaire. They both saw poetry as the fountainhead of painting. In 1951 Eugen Gomringer published *Constellations*, a volume of pattern verse that advanced the confluence of literature and visual art. I became interested in the exploration of the relationship of language and visual form in the 1960s. My concrete poems appeared in a variety of publications in North America and Europe. In the July 21, 1979, issue of *The Montreal Star*, Tom Konyves reviewed my experimental poetry. Among other forums, the 1998 anthology of *Selection from 20th Century Visual Poetry*, edited by Z. Kovacs and I.S. Laszlo and published in Budapest includes a concrete verse of mine. The collection of Love Poems also features an array of visual poetry. They mediate between text and image forming a unique bridge between literature and painting.

## DIALOGUE WITH THE EAST

In contrast to the compartmentalization of western culture, in my travels across China, Japan and Korea, I could see with my own eyes that in the East the arts merge in a harmonious unity. Calligraphy, for example, is often an integral part of pictures. My work grows out of the culture of the West, but in a sense, the word patterns, the visual design and the concrete verse in Love Poems enter into an exploratory dialogue with the aesthetic aura of the Orient. The show of *Painting and Poetry* in Seoul was very well received and widely reported by the media. As an Olympic artist I already exhibited there in 1988.

My oeuvre is also concerned with the cognitive status of the arts. In various respects it transcends the ivory tower of art and enters into a meaningful dialogue with science. Thus in 1994 NASA invited me to present my visionary work on space exploration at Houston. As mentioned earlier, in the course of years I also collaborated with scientists and mathematicians who have found aspects of my aesthetics applicable to various disciplines. I have published research results in such periodicals as *Leonardo*, *Orbiter* and *Contemporary Philosophy*.

## POSTMODERNISM ENHANCES ALIENATION

Since we are active participants and not passive observers of the world, I regard a great deal of Post-modernist theory more as a problem than a solution of the present human condition. While skepticism is a necessary trait in research and critical thinking, I do not see cynicism or nihilism as virtues but as destructive forces. Postmodernism reinforces and enhances alienation. It furthers the unscientific credo that the world is an uncaring, hostile and even evil environment. The empirical facts, however, contradict this assertion. We cannot exist without collaboration and care. Life would be impossible in an absolutely hostile universe. Studies demonstrate, for example, the immense healing power of love. A paradox inherent in the relativity of love leads us towards an empowering absolute. For in the act of commitment we might achieve the freedom that we are afraid to lose. It is then, in the bond of lasting intimacy that we can liberate ourselves from the tyranny of the ego and rise to the noblest level of human experience, the emancipated space of unconditional love.

## SCIENCE IS NOT SCIENTIFIC ENOUGH

Despite the central importance of love in human life, its scientific investigation is marginal. Many scientists simply avoid the subject because they believe that as an emotional phenomenon love cannot be objectively studied. However, there is no objectivity without subjectivity, and emotions are necessary for effective cognition and creativity. Science today is not scientific enough. It can be made more scientific only through art. Thus, an advanced model of artificial intelligence, for example, must take into consideration the reality of love.

## LOVE AND COSMOS

I think that we live in a mysterious and creative universe, which is a protrusion of the Self, the outer extent of our inner sphere. Intellectually we cannot comprehend the world. We probably can have the closest possible insight into its riddle, however, through the experience of love, because in the beginning, so it seems, man and woman were not separated from one another. But now, it is in the ecstasy of love, in the return to the primordial state, when body and soul reunite in the embrace that the cosmos reveals its secret in the ineffable.

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