

FROM "I" TO "WE": THE WORK OF ART AND ITS HOLISTIC VALUE

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1. Meeting, listening, discussing, resolving

In a world such as the present, in which the condition of being "single" is considered to be highly desirable, where solitude often reigns with the unmistakable propensity of being an existential state, the need for a little more "WE" and a little less "I" to get through the difficult moments of life should be welcomed.

As is well known, in a not-so-recent past that has repercussions in the present, there has been, in the art world, a unidirectional, convinced, profound, and sometimes imperceptible, yet significant move towards the world of the "I" that has generated an individualistic vision which constitutes a stable condition of normality. The condition is a reference to the unequivocal assessment of the state of conservation and more relevantly here, to the attribution and authentication of art works based solely on a subjective analysis and therefore, validated by historical, stylistic, aesthetic, iconographic observations: an existential state, attributable to scholars with this kind of training and competence and on which they base their judgment.

This situation, which has continued over the years as a pathology centred on the "I", has led to disputes and disagreements not only among experts but also among national and international schools and institutions due to aspects of an ethical-identity nature as well as those of a mercantile-market and, consequently economic-financial nature, linked to the attribution and authentication of the works of art being examined and a subsequent judgment that is unequivocal. This is linked to the various degrees of certainty that this kind of evaluation entails, such as authenticity, original, replica, copy, attributed to, signed by, school of, follower, forgery, and reproduced. Within this framework, moreover, are included legal terms used specifically in the field of forgeries.

Hence, an objective evaluation is needed which uses diagnostic-analytical technologies that respond to characteristics of sensitivity, specificity, repeatability, reproducibility, and reliability; a necessity based on expressions such as freedom, balance, openness, and discussion involving a shared "WE", which consequently allows for an equally shared goal. It follows that even in art the human need for "WE" proves to be even more peremptory, representing, as we should also do in the case of nature, a question of approach, reciprocation, dedication, and time. Therefore, rather than by trial-and-error and intending to develop a program with precise objectives also for the future, it is necessary to overcome the division that exists between historians and technicians and to take into account the two worlds with their individual methodologies, without there being any predilection or partial and momentary favourable situations for the former or the latter attributed to short-lived successes. Indeed, it is this

basic conviction that supports the need to integrate and involve various experts from different backgrounds and skills to make the connections between the "WE" and the work of art. The above pushes one, almost instinctively, as well as opportunely, to consider the example of an emblematic approach to the "WE" represented, albeit singularly, by a versatile personality who encompasses the very meaning inherent in the word. He represented a revolution not merely by reproducing the world, but engaging with it by combining art, science, history, and technology: the sixteenth-century genius, Leonardo da Vinci who conveyed this message by examining the natural world very accurately. For that reason, it can be said that it was during his lifetime that investigation into the natural world and the environment began, precisely for the world to be reimagined as a work of art: observing the Mona Lisa one learns that one must smile at life because it is full of possibilities.

2. The work of art in the world of social media

The previous reference to Leonardo also leads us to compare it with the present world of social media. Indeed, in a world that is based on ephemeral anathemas, amplified out of all proportion by social media, in a world that seems to have erased reasonableness, calmness, and the highest of human abilities, that of introspection - in such a world, a work of art can represent a lifeline because it brings us back to the complexity and contradictory nature of our lives, teaching us to better understand what happens inside us and around us. Given that the media risk conforming our minds in a subtle but serious way, reading a work of art may be considered an extreme act of rebellion and, at the same time, one that shapes us, because once it has been read we are the ones to give it a face, a meaning, since the work will always be only ours. Furthermore, while delving deeper into researching it, we can say that that work of art reminds us of the most important steps, it preserves them within us, like a precious legacy that no one can ever take away from us. There is, moreover, a mysterious law that governs our encounters with the work of art: knowing that at some point another arrives, and it is precisely what we were waiting for at that precise moment. It is not a specific masterpiece that more or less consciously involves us and arouses us: such an attitude paradoxically confirms the greatness of that work of art which is all the greater the more muted the vision is of the others - which may be 'great' too - that preceded or followed it. But it is also true that one reads and interprets great works, as well as the greatest ones, and great eras, based on the artistic masterpieces that distinguish them, and that each re-reading confirms and transforms them. Each era has works of art that define it, following one another in succession over the years, confirming and changing with the past or recent history they belong to, each time in a different way. They are read, listened to, and admired, especially the most outstanding and disturbing ones; they are observed not only historically, as great testimonies of the past, but rather from a different perspective, like something that is yet to happen, and which seems to come not from the past but from an unknown future. Perhaps we are unprepared for an art that is yet to come, especially for contemporary art whose past does not guarantee any serenity.

Perhaps, our fascination with art, which we can trivially define as contemporary, derives from the fact that it often seems to come from the future, from a time that does not yet exist. It is a dynamic perspective, as if one could see the work while it is taking or losing shape in the author's mind: perhaps even these works make it difficult to understand and feel whether they are going to be great or whether they are going to arouse uncertainty.

3. Art as a wealth shared with business and with countries

In recent years, culture has taken on a growing and shared importance and talking about culture represents an interesting challenge at a time when public attention is turned toward the subject of artificial intelligence. Art collections are the plastic manifestation of history and culture that can determine different messages of "corporate history": some have a classical and neoclassical trait in their concrete artistic expressions, while others confront the challenges of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century. These cultural and ideological diversities that have made such a mark are able to represent a common and important cultural heritage that must be studied, understood, and put to good use to build the future. As a "business" model too, they represent different experiences: there are those that operate as intermediaries, i.e. that have a temporal and functional specialization and, therefore, are more stability oriented, and there are those that embody the company by definition and, therefore, from a historical point of view are efficiency oriented. Market events in recent years have highlighted how stability and efficiency represent the only possible way to ensure market trends are positive. From this point of view, apart from the need to safeguard artistic heritage over time, they represent the plastic manifestation of the concept described above. Besides, culture represents a strategic decision for enterprises. This idea has become increasingly topical in the context of a greater orientation towards "stakeholders", owing to the growing attention given to sustainability and the current challenge represented by artificial intelligence. Within this context, the issue of "governance" returns in all its importance and is believed to be the most significant theme to come from this consideration and the two previously mentioned experiences in the historical perspective of their continuity. It is necessary for those responsible to know how to synthesize different ideas and perspectives. Such perspectives may sometimes be antagonistic, but they must reasonably represent a common greatness. It is especially true if these concepts are applied not only to an enterprise, however large, relevant, and systemic it may be, but also, and even more so, to an entire nation, or a union of countries. Therefore, it is an invitation to look beyond, to experiment with new viewpoints, and to understand that not everything is communicable through slogans, simplification, and images. We must try to understand reality, which is complex but accessible; it is, however, something that takes time, in-depth analysis, and someone to accompany us.

4. Patronage in art

The above leads back to the important function of patronage in art which, by supporting it and sharing it with the community, can be considered a legacy that art has left us. Many of the greatest patrons, collectors, and philanthropists of all time have consecrated their social rise by competing with the aristocracy and rulers in protecting and encouraging artists, as well as by purchasing their works. Some of these collections have been dispersed, others have converged into museums, so they have been passed down to us, and many are still owned by the heirs of those who created them.

Artistic patronage and collecting are to be considered strategic tools of representation and social affirmation and, therefore, an example of the skilful transformation of economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital.

The relationship between money and art has taken on different and sometimes contradictory meanings throughout history.

At first, it was used to exercise power and consensus but later became a recipro-

cal exchange; it was no longer art influenced by the client, but art that modified and "shaped" the patron and therefore the use of the money itself. Money can wield its power in a positive way as an ethical force of which beauty and art are the expression and strength. From this point of view, it can be argued that a heritage of high artistic and cultural level, such as that lavished by patrons, represents a noble way of giving something back to the community and humanity. Indeed, it is a fact that without the support given to artists by their patrons, many works of art would never have seen the light of day. It is equally true, however, that many works owned by patrons, then have become a part of important public and private collections around the world, of which today a representative selection can be admired in exhibitions that narrate how, from the Renaissance to the modern age, the relationship between patrons and artists transformed financial wealth into an artistic heritage of inestimable value. The trust and support given to great artists by enlightened patrons have produced many masterpieces over the centuries.

Engaging with culture, growth, and civil society, moreover, is also a condition that enhances the growth of the patrons themselves, not only because of related aspects and implications in the field of culture and art but also because of a feeling of commitment, and duty, values that can be found in the Italian Constitution and those of many other countries with explicit references about contributing to the economic and social progress of the nation.

In this context, commitment in the field of art and culture represents an interpretation of patronage marked by a sense of social responsibility that permeates all relevant activity, because the ethical and cultural values that guide these actions represent an extremely important legacy that continues to inspire the activity of patronage.

5. The philosophical and spiritual value of cultural heritage

Today, the theme of the necessary passage from "I" to "WE" does not respond to a simple functionalist or instrumental need, nor is it subject to that generalist concept of "inclusiveness" that can sometimes be used ideologically and unequivocally, instead it highlights the fact it has acquired an anthropological-like character. It is expressed in this way above all in contemporary personalistic and dialogical philosophies, especially those philosophies that are in a position of continuity and not in opposition to the great reflections from the wealth of classical thought on the identity and relational nature of the human individual.

It is interesting to note how, when considering different forms of knowledge, the transition from mono-personal psychology to the "relational mind" goes precisely in this direction, or how neuroscience contributes to understanding how relationships are indispensable for our own identity to mature. In the field of work psychology, social and economic sciences, and education, perspectives of "we-thinking" and "we-learning" are increasingly becoming a matter of citizenry, considering that human beings have as their own special attribute - as attested by philosophical anthropology - the ability to actively involve themselves in being responsible for their thoughts, in making "good" life choices for themselves and others, in making interpersonal dialogue, in being socially constructive and open to transcendence.

"No man is an island"; "It takes an entire village to raise a child"; "You can't save yourself alone", and many other expressions of the kind, whether of a theoretical nature or proverbs or oracles deriving from common sense or wise consolidated traditions, do nothing but highlight how important the dimension of reciprocity is in giving and accepting, in questioning and answering, in taking responsibility and caring, in

being orderly and respectful of roles and competences, in family, social and political life: one's gaze must indeed move from self-referential involution to embrace an "all-round" vision. The environmental challenges we are experiencing which involve the whole of humanity not only in a synchronic but also diachronic, sense, and are, in fact, already leaving a mark on the next generations, are nothing but a clear manifestation that it is no longer possible to reason, plan, design, or act, if not in terms of "WE".

As Pope Benedict XVI said, "the myth of the 'self-made' man ends up separating the person from their roots and from others, ultimately making him dislike himself and life. In reality, the essential fact is that the human person becomes himself only with the other, the 'I' becomes itself only from the 'you' and the 'we', it is created for dialogue, for synchronic and diachronic communion. And it is only the encounter with the 'you' and with the 'we' that the 'I' opens to itself" (Address to the General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Vatican City, 27 May 2010). In the face of triumphant individualism, despite the providential development of systems and technologies that are interconnecting us more and more, the relationship needs to be re-evaluated: hence the most cogent meaning of the "we" perspective. In this sense, Christian theology boasts a particular and very special inspiration in indicating the very reality of God as Uni-Trinity, and therefore of a "We" and ontology which is Trinitarian. Hence, for example, the meaning of the question posed by the Italian theologian, Piero Coda, at the beginning of one of his short volumes on the subject of "we" and "us", *Se Dio è un "Noi", e noi?* (cf. P. Coda, *Se Dio è un "Noi", e noi?*, published by La Compagnia della Stampa, Brescia, 2013, 64 p.).

It is interesting to note, in this regard, what Pope Francis stated on January 10, 2021 in an interview on Tg5 (a TV news channel), regarding the importance of overcoming individualism and moving from "I" to "WE", hoping that in a situation of crisis like ours, those who have responsibilities put the logic of common good before individual promotion: "The entire ruling class has no right to say 'I' ... it must say 'we' and seek unity in the face of the crisis. [...] At this time, a politician, a pastor, a Christian, a Catholic, even a bishop, a priest, who does not have the ability to say 'we' instead of 'I' is not up to the situation."

Pope Francis emphasized the same criterion in the speech he made on January 20, 2024, to the leadership and representatives of the Italian National Union of Mountain Municipalities, Communities and Authorities (UNCCEM) regarding the situation in inland areas and small municipalities, and the need for a new policy for the territories, first and foremost, to counter the phenomena of depopulation and abandonment. This would be to the benefit of human assets and natural and environmental heritage, by implementing a careful and dedicated policy, stimulating local authorities, creating communities that move forward together, involving subsidiary and related institutions, with full co-responsibility for actions, the distinction of roles, the unity of values and the communities themselves, starting with those of the inland and mountain areas. Pope Francis said: "It is in the inland, marginal areas, where most of the natural heritage is to be found (forests, protected areas, and so on): they are therefore of strategic importance in environmental terms. But progressive depopulation makes it more difficult to care for the land, which the inhabitants of these areas have always done. Abandoned territories become more fragile, and their disruption becomes the cause of disasters and emergencies, especially today with the increasingly frequent extreme events [...]. Looking at these areas, we have confirmation of the fact that listening to the cry of the land means listening to the cry of the poor and the rejected, and vice versa: in the fragility of people and the environment we recognize that everything is connected – everything is connected! – that the search for solutions requires interpreting together phenomena that are often thought of as separate. Everything is con-

nected. (Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the Association for Subsidiarity and the Modernization of Local Authorities (ASMEL), Clementine Hall, Saturday, 20 January 2024).

This "dimension" of the "WE" – this is what we are stating here – also directly concerns all cultural heritage and its holistic significance, thus requiring the maximum commitment to its conservation and enhancement, aware that in order to protect and take care of a common good it is necessary for people to have a different logic, what some have begun to call the "logic of the WE", so that the asset that is "nobody's", or just "someone's", becomes "EVERYONE'S".

6. Conclusion

After this brief study of some of the aspects related to the holistic value of cultural heritage necessarily implying the importance of more "WE" and less "I", the message we wish to highlight is that it is an emblematic sign that keeps track of the challenge to be faced and leads back to the maxim: "The only creatures with shells are those with no backbone". This is why, with more "WE" and less "I" - even though an authentic "WE" does not necessarily mean devaluing the "I", it can indeed be seen as a way of enhancing or even enriching it - the continuous challenge is certainly not aimed at defending what has been achieved but, strengthened by one's own identity, it is aimed at continuous improvement, a civilization that is increasingly tailored to the human being understood in the plurality of its dimensions, and intrinsically open to a relationship with alterity and transcendence.