

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

On the portraiture of things

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, February 13th, 2019

Take a look around your abode, and you will see mostly objects placed in sets, according to *patterns of activity, use or decor* such as cooking, sleeping, storing, working, leisure, entertaining and as mementos of people and events in your life.

We become attached to them as extensions of our self, and as witnesses to our history, but rarely as concentrates of their proper existence, unless they suddenly *engage our attention to their "presence", in terms of some characteristic formal and material aspects we may wish, then, to record photographically much as a portrait photographer will do for people*: choosing an expressive point of view, composition, focus, etc. to produce the portrait of this recognizable particular person.

In our case the attempt has been to portray this particular river rock, pear, cup, and candle light, accompanied by notes on their particularities.

This river rock ...



This river rock

... has been cut by a sculptor friend to produce a flat carving surface, hidden in this photograph because *it is the shape, mass, texture and traces of watery genesis that express best its proper existence as a river rock turned into a massive paper weight*.

The framing and composition of the image transformed the table and chair back, against which the rock is delineated, into a graphic background against which the massive volume of the rock is revealed through the precise traces of the action of the river waters and the light modulation on its surface.

This pear ...



This pear

... hardly an "object", I have tried to artificially shore up against its tendency to rest in a prone position, when detached from the tree, due to the asymmetric relation of the centers of gravity of its bulging bottom to its tapered top.

When hanging from a tree branch by its peduncle that asymmetry works in favor of its natural vertical position.

Artificially colored and supported this pear shows its form as a light modulating surface of subtle grain with traces of its manipulations from tree to table.

The view point, visually anchoring this pear at the crossing of the projected shadow of the shelf lit from above and the shade on the pear's bulge, expresses its temporary objectification.

This cup ...



This cup

Absent the handle and sized to be cupped in the hand, this small liquid container is double enveloped for the purpose of insulating the hand from the piping hot liquid: coffee or tea.

Placing the tea bag inside the empty cup, across an internal shadow line, provides an instant of contemplation of these light, shadow and reflection patterns ... note how the textured counter surface seems to have been printed on the cup itself.

The hot water can wait!

The cup portrait seems, at the point where these multiple visual effects cross, to have found its most expressive moment.

This candle light ...



This candle light

... is an "object" of so many associations and connotations as to be too difficult to portray except perhaps in the intimacy of a cupped hand: to keep it from being blown out by the wind or, contrarily, to facilitate one's blowing it out!

In either case the light from the candle flame is such that, according to Plotinus , it "*surpasses other bodies in beauty because it ... borders on an incorporeal nature ... which imparts heat ... and is the source of ornamental color in other bodies.*"

I may not have portrayed an object here but *a moment of beauty* only the soul, due to its own isomorphic incorporeality, can appreciate, according to Plotinus.

Has this *moment of beauty* moved me to want to portray its embodiment? does the photograph do justice to it?

You be the judge.

Bibliographic reference

Plotinus: *An essay on the beautiful – From the Greek of Plotinus* (Text obtained on Amazon as printed, unpaginated, from a translation by unknown translator)

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