

# SCHELLING



Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854)

Schelling transposes Schiller's utopian idealism into an absolute Idealism in which beauty actually constitutes the original essence of reality. In a manner similar to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* Schelling constructs a transcendental idealism which attempts to bridge the gap between nature and its necessary laws and morality and its requirement of freedom. In *The Philosophy of Art* (1802-3) Schelling attempts a systematic philosophical articulation of the arts which forms a crucial chapter in post-Kantian idealism and also plays a significant role in the emergence of the aesthetic that informs modernism.

In *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) Schelling saw art as the 'organ of philosophy' for it can see what philosophical concepts cannot—the absolute. With this Schelling thus turns philosophy in an aesthetic direction. This notion of art as the 'organ of philosophy,' art thus as the means to get to truth, art thus has truth status, and this becomes one of the foundational elements of Romanticism in art and philosophy. Schelling contends that nature and the work of art are the product of one and the same activity, an activity that is in its essence aesthetic. The only difference between the world and the work of art is that in the former the creative activity is unconscious whereas in the latter it is conscious. As Schelling put it: "the objective world is only the original, still unconscious poetry of the spirit"

Given his conviction that reality is poetic, it is not surprising that he sees philosophy culminating in art. Only art can make objective what the philosopher represents in thought. Thus philosophy, after completing its task of representation, must return to "the universal ocean of poetry from which it started out"

"art occupies the highest place for the philosopher, since it opens up to him the holy of holies, so to speak, where in primal union, as in a single flame, there burns what is sundered in nature and history and what must eternally flee from itself in life and action as in thought"  
(*System of Transcendental Idealism*)

## Selection from *The Philosophy of Art*

In the philosophy of art I accordingly intend to construe first of all not art *as* art, as this *particular*, but rather *the universe in the form of art*, and the philosophy of art is *the science of the All in the form or potency of art*. Not until we have taken this step do we elevate ourselves regarding this science to the level of an absolute science of art.

The assertion that the philosophy of art is the presentation of the universe in the form of art does not yet, however, give us any complete idea of this science; we must specify more closely the *mode* of construction necessary for a philosophy of art.

An object of construction and thereby of philosophy is essentially only that which is capable as a particular of taking up the infinite into itself. Therefore, art, in order to be the object of philosophy, must as such either genuinely represent the infinite within itself as the particular, or must be capable of doing so. Not only does this actually take place as regards art, but it also stands as a representation of the infinite on the same level with philosophy; just as philosophy presents the absolute in the *archetype* so also does art present the absolute in a *reflex* or *reflected image*.

Since art exactly corresponds to philosophy and is merely the latter's complete objective reflex, it must also proceed through all the potences within the real as does philosophy in the ideal. This one fact suffices to remove all doubt regarding the necessary method of our science.

Philosophy does not present real things, but rather only their archetypes; the same holds true for art. The same archetypes that according to philosophy are merely reproduced imperfectly by these (the real things) are those that become objective in art itself — as archetypes and accordingly in their perfection. They thus represent the intellectual world in the reflected world. As examples we might take *music*, which is nothing other than the primal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself, which by means of this art breaks through into the world of representation. The complete forms generated by the *plastic* arts are the objectively portrayed archetypes of organic nature itself. The Homeric epic is identity itself as this identity lies at the base of history within the absolute. Every painting discloses the intellectual world.

Given these assertions, in the philosophy of art we will have all those problems to solve regarding art that we also must solve in general philosophy regarding the universe.

(1) In the philosophy of art, no principle other than that of the infinite can serve as our point of departure; hence, we must present the infinite as the unconditioned principle of art. Just as for philosophy in general the absolute is the archetype of truth, so also for art is it the archetype of beauty. We must therefore show that truth and beauty are merely two different ways of viewing the one absolute.

(2) The second question, both as regards philosophy as such as well as the philosophy of art, will be just how this principle, a principle that is in and for itself absolutely one and simple, can pass over into multiplicity and differentiation, and thus how individual beautiful things can issue from universal and absolute beauty. Philosophy answers this question with the doctrine of the ideas or archetypes. The absolute is absolutely one; viewed absolutely in particular forms, however, such that the absolute is thereby not suspended, this one = idea. The same holds true for art. It, too, views or intuits primal beauty only in ideas as particular forms, each of which, however, is divine and absolute for itself. Whereas philosophy intuits these ideas as they are *in themselves*, art intuits them *objectively*. The *ideas*, to the extent that they are intuited objectively, are therefore the substance and as it were the universal and absolute material of art from which all particular works of art emerge as mature entities. These *real* or *objective*, living and existing ideas are the gods. The universal symbolism or universal *representation* of the *ideas* as real is thus given in mythology, and the solution to the second aforementioned task consists in the construction of mythology. Indeed, the gods of any mythology are nothing other than the ideas of philosophy intuited objectively or concretely.

This still does not answer the question of how a *real*, individual work of art comes to be. Just as the absolute or unreal is always characterized by the condition of identity, so also is the real always characterized by the nonidentity of the universal and the particular, by disjunction, such that either the particular or universal predominates. An antithesis thus arises here, one between plastic or formative art on the one hand, and verbal art on the other. Formative and verbal art = the real

and ideal series of philosophy. The former is characterized by that unity in which the infinite is taken up into the finite, and the construction of this series corresponds to the philosophy of nature. The latter is characterized by the other unity, the one in which the finite is formed into the infinite, and the construction of this series corresponds to the *philosophy of nature*. The latter is characterized by the other unity, the one in which the finite is formed into the infinite, and the construction of this series corresponds to *idealism* in the general system of philosophy. I will call the first unity the real unity, the second the ideal unity; that which encompasses both I will call indifference.

If we now concentrate on each of these unities individually, then, since each is absolute for itself, the same unities must recur in each; hence, the real unity, the ideal unity, and that in which both are one must all recur in the real unity itself. The same holds true for the ideal unity.

A particular form of art corresponds to each of these forms to the extent that they are encompassed within the real or ideal unity. *Music* corresponds to the real form within the real series. *Painting* corresponds to the ideal form within the real series. The *plastic arts* correspond to that form within the real series that represents the confluence of the previous two unities.

The same holds true as regards the ideal unity, which in its own turn encompasses within itself the three forms of lyric, epic, and dramatic poetry. Lyric poetry = the informing of the infinite into the finite = the particular. The epic = the representation (subsumption) of the finite within the infinite = the universal. Drama = the synthesis of the universal and the particular. Hence, the entire world of art is to be construed according to these basic forms both in its real and ideal manifestation.

By tracing art in each of its particular forms all the way into the concrete, we also arrive at a determination of art within the conditions of time. Just as art is inherently eternal and necessary, so also is there no fortuitousness in its temporal manifestation, but rather only absolute necessity. In this respect, too, it is the object of possible knowledge, and the elements of this construction are given in the antitheses manifested in art in its temporal appearance. Any antitheses posited as regards art in its temporal dependence, however, are, as is time itself, necessarily nonessential and merely formal antitheses; hence, they are completely different from those real antitheses grounded in the essence or in the idea of art itself. This universal, formal antithesis extending through all branches of art is that of *ancient* and *modern* art.

It would be an essential weakness of our construction if we were to neglect the consideration of this antithesis in our discussion of each individual form of art. Since, however, we consider this antithesis to be a merely formal one, its construction necessarily consists in negation or suspension. By considering this antithesis, we will simultaneously present the historical dimension of art; only by this means can we hope to bring our construction in the larger sense to its final completion.

According to my entire understanding here, art is itself an emanation of the absolute. The history of art will show us most revealingly its immediate connections to the conditions of the universe and thereby to that absolute identity in which art is preordained. Only in the history of art does the essential and inner unity of all works of art reveal itself, a unity showing that all poetry is of the same spirit, a spirit that even in the antitheses of ancient and modern art is merely showing us two different faces.