



Hans Kolstad : Asger Jorn and the metaphysics of the painting. Summary in English

The Danish painter Asger Jorn (1914 – 1973) is one of the most prominent figures of 20th century art history. His production was enormous: close to 2500 paintings, drawings, graphics, etc. Moreover, he worked within several other artistic fields, like pottery, weaving and sculpting, where he created sculptures in bronze and marble. In addition to this immense artistic production, he was also a great writer. He has published almost 800 books and articles (including books that he has illustrated himself). This by itself would be enough to give him a name simply as an author.

Jorn was likewise a frequent participant in contemporary cultural and artistic debate. His vision, which he fought for tirelessly, was to found a platform, a meeting-place for modern abstract art, both in Denmark and in an international context. Thus, he was one of the driving forces in a range of artistic groupings that arose from the 1930's through the post-war years in Denmark. He was also one of the founders of the Cobra-movement, later l'Internationale situationniste.

First and foremost, however, Jorn's contribution to art lies at the artistic level, where he has added a new perspective to art by focusing on a dynamic art, which consists of an untying of the classical relationship between line and colour, between drawing and the really qualities pertaining to painting. What Jorn aspired to, was a liberation of the spontaneously picturesque.

Through this development he created an image which focuses on mobility. The image not only depicts movement, but is itself movement, it is action.

Seen from this perspective, Jorn forms part of a larger spiritual current that has characterized European intellectual life in the 20th century. In a philosophical context, this movement in the direction of the dynamic has its origin in the French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1859 - 1941) new fundamental vision of consciousness and its dynamic principle, which resulted in Bergson's philosophy of duration.

This work has had two overriding goals: one is to present Jorn within the new ontological framework set up by Bergson. The other has been to show that Jorn's art, inspirationally seen, is of a metaphysical character. He looks at art as a means to knowledge of reality, just like philosophy looks at the word as our mode of access to real knowledge. Jorn held onto this dimension of his art throughout his whole life.

Concerning the first goal, many features make it possible to compare Jorn and Bergson, and consider their works parallel: Both are spokesmen for change and movement. Both argue against the one-sided cherishing of the exterior world – the world of space – and both inquire after a turning away from this world towards another and deeper reality – that of consciousness. In this aspiration, spiritual philosophy is joined together with the modern spontaneous and abstract painting. The two directions seem to correspond to one another in their respective fields. Seen in this way, the traditional philosophy of space has its counterpart in classical figurative painting. In other words: both Bergson and Jorn have taken as their object the most concrete phenomenon of all – movement – and common to both is that they must turn away from the traditional expression in order to convey this phenomenon. This was their mutual challenge.

Concerning the second goal of this work, it was pointed out above that Jorn's art represents a turn in contemporary art that sees art as part of a larger humanistic subject field. Art is serious. It is a discipline that, like philosophy, concerns the deeper questions in life. It aims to give new insight and to present a new world-view to replace an outdated one. In this attempt, we have shown that Jorn can be linked to parts of the avant-gardism of the beginning of the century. He has thus been a contributing factor in furthering an impulse. In this sense, he is not only an innovator, but also a conveyor. Jorn's contribution may be thought of, not only as his originality as a painter, but just as much as his reminding us of the bigger connections in life, and the place of art within them.

The book is divided into three parts, with an introductory presentation of Jorn's life and work. The

first part presents the different periods and levels of development within Jorn's art. The book attempts to see these developments and periods from a dynamic developmental perspective.

The second part of the book explains some of the fundamental principles in Bergson, and the relationship between Bergson's art and the avant-gardism of the early 20th century. The purpose is to illustrate a philosophy of art based on Bergson's basic concept of duration, and to confront this with the new tendencies within painting at the beginning of the century, directions which also constitute the starting point for Jorn as a modern, abstract painter.

The third part sheds light on some of Jorn's fundamental conceptions of the modern abstract painting through the philosophy of Bergson. This section is introduced by an account of the part played by time and movement in Jorn's philosophy, seen in relation to the corresponding account of Bergson's fundamental principles. Jorn's conceptions of spontaneous abstraction, the picturesque, automatically produced drawings (automatism), the silent myth of the image and empty creation are subsequently tied to Bergson's metaphysical concepts of time, movement and *élan vital*. In a final chapter this analysis is confronted with Jorn's phenomenology of art, as portrayed in Jorn's theoretical authorship.