

**vis a tergo**

---

## **THE LAST STROKE by Elisa Shoenberger**

Posted on [May 19, 2010](#) by [Jeff Chon](#) | [Comments Off](#)

I didn't even know the museum had it until the tour guide pointed it out.

The painting was small, pretending to be unobtrusive, the frame simple, like the thick-framed glasses of a woman trying to be forgotten. But when you peered into it, it was like staring into the sun. Nothing would ever look right again.

“They say that the Last Drink Bird Head was the final painting that Cazor Ciz painted. Then immediately after signing it, he shot himself with a nail gun. Died from blood loss in the toe.” She shook her head. “They say that it drove him mad. Some critics have written that the paint was mixed with something toxic that warped the brain. Others just say the subject matter is truly too horrific for a healthy mind to comprehend.”

Most of the fellow sightseers murmured a bit and then focused on the next showcased painting as the guide bumbled on. Only one gentleman and his wife peered closely at the painting and then both muttered, “Degenerate.”

As I stared at the painting, I remembered everything I knew about Cazor Ciz. He had always been certifiable. He used to leave slips of cut up newspaper on tables, chairs, desks, anywhere to mark his spot. He felt that the pieces of paper were prophetic for the people who picked them up. It was his way of ensuring that he left something of himself in the world. Legend has it that he would turn to his compatriots and declare, “My art is shit. This,” holding up magazine bits, “is my only true work.” Sadly, most of the magazine pieces were either truly gruesome, usually from horror novels, or completely incomprehensible, such as string of articles and prepositions.

I was never a fan of his, finding his lithographs of fonts to be a bit sterile for my taste. I gazed at the colors, textures and lighting. It was just like his other paintings, brash, obtuse, pornographic without the nudity.

I remembered my art history teacher fawning over his work, claiming that he was one of the great artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He made us read Ciz's “autobiography,” a work so full of hypocrisy that I could feel my faith in common decency drip away with each passing word. It was the only book that I ever felt the desire to burn.

But standing here, in front of this monstrosity, I felt an urge to approach it. Warm, bubbly heat radiated up my legs, crisscrossing across my body. I was surrounded by works by artists that I admired but here I was focused on the painting, staring into its pigmented eyes.

I wondered what went through his head as he conceived of his “works.” I imagined him, completed shaven head to toe, draped in bright yellow, hosting a raucous party where he dabbed the canvas in between the blowjobs, petty conversation and cheap champagne. I could only think of Cezanne, who would spend years on a single painting, trying to get each line and shade of color to be just so. I shook my head.

Yet, here I was. Caught into the visual embrace of it. A slight sweat grazed my brow. It seemed to have a come hither look to it, a dash of line here and a burst of yellow there. I moistened my lips.

They say that once his party became so rowdy, people had sex on the paintings themselves. People rolled around, covering themselves in reds, yellows and blues, mixing into all the colors of the rainbow. It was as if they were branding themselves with the mark of their unholy loves. Cazor Ciz celebrated these spontaneous copulations, remarking with the wave of his hand, “Art is the greatest seductress.” Moreover, he celebrated the body fluids that drenched his canvases because they “were necessary to finish his work.” I always shuddered at that.

Without a second thought, I walked over to the painting and licked it. The paint bristled against my tongue, tasting of oil, wax and other latex.

Within seconds, a security guard jerked me away from the painting. I could hear people gaping, the guard’s walkie-talkie buzzing. Another guard appeared and they both grabbed an arm as they dragged me out of the room.

“What the hell were you thinking?”

The paintings flew by this unwieldy threesome, colors and lines, mixed with speed, combined together into the ultimate Futurist painting. I would have laughed but I felt only the rough hands pulling me, and the paint flecks resting on my tongue.

Then I found myself seated at table in a windowless room, guards standing on either side, telling you this story.

“I don’t understand why you be compelled to lick the painting.”

“Cazor Ciz would have wanted it that way.” I finished, devoid of feeling.

I always hated Cazor Ciz.

**ELISA SHOENBERGER** *plays with data and logic at a major Chicago museum. In her spare time, she is learning Irish step dance and is haunted by political poster art, preferably from Latin America.*

Reblog

Like

Be the first to like this.

---

**RELATED**

[AS THIN AS TWO LEAVES](#) by  
[Jeremy Ohlback](#)  
In "Prose"

[FOG](#) by [Kenneth Radu](#)  
In "Prose"

[THE PROSPEROUS CLIFF DIVER](#)  
by [Matthew Dexter](#)  
In "Prose"

This entry was posted in [Prose](#) and tagged [Art](#), [Elisa Shoenberger](#), [Fiction](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Comments are closed.

---

*Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.*