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Mr. Greco

English III

2 October 2023

Canvas of Consciousness

In “Art Is How We Justify Our Existence”, art dealer David Zwirner emphasizes the power art holds. Zwirner wrote this piece in 2020 during the pandemic lockdown; since he could no longer visit museums or participate in the art community, he realized the deeper importance of interacting with art in public space. He claims this loss was “like our world faded... from vivid color to black and white” (Zwirner). Because people have been making art since the beginning of time, Zwirner believes that art and culture is “hard-wired into our species”. This belief that humans have always made art supports the idea that art matters because it is part of our human existence. Another supporting point is the weight of meaning, messages, and wisdom art holds. Zwirner claims that art’s “mission is simply to make us better people”.

Zwirner’s argument manifests in several works by Spanish painter and sculptor Remedios Varo: *The Call (1961)*, *Microcosmos (1959)*, and *Creating of Birds (1957)*. In particular, his view that art is the center of our being reflects Varo’s interest in using art as a form of expressing her interests and core values.



Fig. 1. Varo, Remedios. *The Call*. 1961. *National Museum of Women in the Arts*.

<https://nmwa.org/art/collection/la-llamada-call/>

In “The Call,” Varo uses balance, contrast, and movement to convey that art holds the power to help us better understand our existence and connect us to higher consciousness. Like much of her surrealist work, this painting causes the viewer to feel as if they are in a dream. The focal point of this painting is a woman in the center who looks like she is glowing. She is running through a hallway of some sort that is very detailed and contrasts the orange glow with its cool toned walls. The floor she is running on has a geometric pattern while the ceiling looks open to space as it looks like the solar system with planets. Through asymmetry, Varo creates balance, as the woman stands alone in the center, with the walls on her left and right appearing

very similar. “The Call” represents the search for enlightenment or other powerful spiritual experience.



Fig. 2. Varo, Remedios. *Creation of Birds*. 1957. *Biblioklept*.

<https://biblioklept.org/2011/08/10/creation-of-the-birds-remedios-varo/>

Similarly to *The Call*, the *Creation of Birds* (see fig 2) has a focus on one person/figure. Remedios Varo presents an owl with a violin attached to its heart; this figure draws a bird and moon, bringing it to life and giving it the ability to fly. This painting allows Varo to express how she views life and makes sense of it. For example, the owl can be a representation of Varo herself as it is a scientist and artist, which was true of Varo. Two egg-shaped alchemical vessels stand next to the owl which provide color to the bird drawings. These details of the moon, vessels, and animals symbolize the connection between Varo’s interests of science, alchemy, and nature through art. The focal point of this painting is the owl sitting at the table because that is where most of the light is. Depth and contrast is present through the darker, vignette corners which adds

light to the center. The main colors are light brown, orange, yellow, and some green which create a calm and welcoming feel. Varo uses gentle and short brushstrokes in this surrealist painting which follows her overall theme of dreams and higher consciousness.



Fig. 3. Varo, Remedios. *Microcosmos*. 1959. Remedios Varo.

<https://www.remedios-varo.com/microcosmos-o-determinismo-1959/>

Contrasting the style of the painting's focus to be on one person/figure, Varo broadens her horizon with this beautiful painting *Microcosmos* (see fig 3). This painting continues the theme of surrealism and dreams through the soft details and small brush strokes. This artwork paints the scene of a building surrounded by nature that has animals and spirit-like people flowing out. Above the building are light yellow and brown clouds with animals flying in caragies. The animals, people, waves, and the clouds all bring movement to the painting. This movement causes the viewer's eyes to be drawn outwards from the focal point of the painting which is the light brown building in the center. Similarly in "The Call," Varos uses human movement to

represent different parts of the subconscious mind. Along with movement, contrast is also present in this painting through colors. The most prominent colors are the light brown in the clouds and building which contrast the green trees and blue ocean.

Varo's interest in the human mind and experience allows her art to express the way she views the world. Throughout time art has acted as a mirror to humanity, capturing not just our physical visages but also our dreams, emotions, and aspirations. This is evident in the ethereal works of Remedios Varo as art is a bridge between the conscious and subconscious realms, guiding viewers on a journey toward self-discovery and enlightenment. Her meticulous brushstrokes, dreamlike themes, and mastery of balance and contrast serve as visual metaphors for the deeper truths Zwirner believes art brings to light.

Works Cited

Zwirner, David. "Art Is How We Justify Our Existence". *The New York Times*, 22 May 2020,

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UzvhGfrMzw-r15c3fxz06TWgP6txMpkhFwhdOnuORhw/edit#heading=h.u3wern3a60ex>. Accessed 15 September 2023.

Note on the use of Generative AI:

I used ChatGPT in the process of writing this paper. Although I did not use any direct quotes, I used the following prompts to help guide me in analyzing artwork with the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design. The results helped me form my own opinions on which elements and principles were most prominent and how to interpret the meaning of the artwork:

- Focusing on the Elements of Art and Principles of Design, write an analysis on Remedios Varo's painting "The Call"
- Focusing on the Elements of Art and Principles of Design, write an analysis on Remedios Varo's painting "Meeting"
- Focusing on the Elements of Art and Principles of Design, write an analysis on Remedios Varo's painting "microcosmos or also called determinismo"