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Whats in a name?

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## Introduction

The name of a child is as important to its identity as to the way it appears. A name is sometimes painstakingly chosen by parents. Often worried that a wrong choice of name could unintentionally single out their child from the rest of its peers and therefore open the child to the taunts of unkindly children, parents chose local or well accepted names in a hope to avoid such problems developing in the child's growing up. Of course there are the parents whose intentions are to distinguish their child from the gregarious mass by associating their child with ancient Greek warriors or to some ambiguous Roman poets. It has been known for some parents to call their children after natural phenomenon such as 'Rainbow' or 'Sunbeam'.

Within Cy Twombly's oeuvre the process of Naming becomes in itself the work. Born in Lexington, Virginia Twombly was to move to Europe in the early 1950's. There he integrated into his work the ancient classical culture of the Mediterranean. His artistic background lay with in the teachings of American Abstract Expressionism. One of his most influential Tutors around this time was the Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell. In the preceding chapters I will discuss the main aspects surrounding Twombly's work.

In the first chapter I will analysis the claims put forth by Phillippe Sollers in regard to the work emanating from theomancy. The second chapter will be examining Twombly's use of the Name in evoking the characters of Greek and Roman mythology. Also in this chapter I will discuss Twombly's visual interpretation of a Renaissance painting the 'Birth of Venus' and his use of hand writing as a visual effect. The third chapter will examine the various interpretations given by commentators on the art and life of Twombly. The premise put forth in this thesis lays in the associative power of the Name. That the meaning of art owes a considerable amount to the power of the 'Title' to evoke and focus an audience attention to the artists intended meaning. I suggest that Cy Twombly perpetuates this tradition. I also suggest he brings to our attention the tradition of authentication by signing and dating work in large.





## Chapter 1

### Analogous life with the gods.

Philippe Sollers finds in the work of Twombly a unintentional request to be thought of as a god.

"The viewer reads a missive he wasn't meant to receive and will have to send it back to the painter, who gives his name in code, his *true* name: Pan, Narcissus, Bacchus, and a good number of others. Twombly, as though with a certain negligence, asks you to think of him as god." (1 page 12)

Is Twombly a messenger between humans and gods like some sort of Mercury that chooses a feather as a quill from the wings on his feet to scribble in mid flight the words of a forgotten god?. Could Sollers have been momentarily fooled by an impostors hand writing ,as if a god really signed the canvas itself. That was not the hand writing of a god Sollers it was a mere mortal by the name of Cy Twombly.

On the other hand it is not beyond a probability that Twombly's albeit negligently ,intention is to convince the viewer he is a god. Although for this to be true it would require an act of faith on the part of the viewer. Sollers interpretation of Twombly's work may be guilty of negligence itself. He extrapolates from scribbled names of Greek gods the intention of the artist. Other than suggesting in around about way that there is a megalomaniac tendency in Twombly's character of which I feel is a dubious conjecture Sollers may have unintentionally or intentionally lead us to the subject of the anthropomorphous qualities with in Greek mythology

It is somewhat evident that the reference to antiquated gods of Grecian mythology have some relevance with Twombly's life experiences.

An example of this is a work titled "Bacchus". Placed at the centre of the paper a vine leave is crudely scribbled with a green crayon. Below the vine leave the name "Bacchus" is written by hand in pencil. This work was made just after a trip to the south of France where Twombly visited the wine producing region of Bordeaux. Albeit obvious connections arise between the artist choice of 'Bacchus' in regards to the region and its main produce wine, it must be asked did Twombly transform into a god of wine and ecstasy on his arrival to the region and on his departure resume his human form?. There is no doubt after tasting many bottles of delicately flavoured wine in the warm winds of southern





France one could assume the grandeur of a god, nevertheless there is a difference in feeling one is a god as to being an actual god. I would suggest that Twombly personalises the gods from antiquity to the circumstances and experiences of his life as opposed to presenting himself as a living anthropomorphic, personification of a god. If one considers Sollers comments in more dept he is suggesting Twombly's art is the product of a megalomaniac tendency. Although this interpretation extends the analogical processes in Twombly's art beyond a realistic boundary it points to certain belief systems within religion.

In *Summa Contra Gentiles* Thomas Aquinas puts forth the premise that when one applies the name of a quality both to God and to a finite being one is not using the name in the same sense. Therefore it is not a univocal or equivocal term. He uses the example as follows we can call hot both the sun itself and the heat that is generated from the sun. With this premise Aquinas distinguishes two types of analogical usage. They are analogy of proportionality and the analogy of attribution. The former sense applies to the qualities used to describe the created being in relation to its nature and the latter is how attributes are given to a god in relation to its nature. This system uses extrapolation of relationship from the finite to an infinite being. Within this system God or gods are attributed with properties experienced in ourselves. Human qualities such as motherhood, fatherhood, wisdom become the terms in which a relationship is formed between the person and the god. Through out Christian beleive the Father/Son relationship plays a central role in it's doctrine. So predominant a role it plays there is no mention of a Mother/daughter relationship the only variant of this being the Mother/Son relationship. In this single God religion the Father that being "God our Father" possesses almighty power. It is important to consider human characteristics with in a religious doctrine as it often reflects the particular gender roles in a society, in particular the allocation of duties to each gender.

Tenets such as "He had created the world" and "God made man in his likeness" clearly attribute the power of authority and creative action upon the male of the human species.

The nineteenth century philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach argued that the claims put forth by Christianity in relation to God were essentially truths about the human species. Only through it's doctrine and teaching of that doctrine did it obscure this fact.





The consequence of such deception for Feuerbach as he saw it mystified the nature of human existence but also degraded the human being by the worship and glorification of a non human being. He was to state in his book *The essence of Christianity*:

"Man-this is the mystery of religion-projects his being into and then again makes himself an object of this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject, a person; he thinks of himself, is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself."  
( Feuerbach,1986, p.29-30)

With such doctrines looming over western culture a man could easily fool himself when ever he wrote a poem or painted a homage to Ulysses that he was the almighty creator in flesh. Alternatively one could argue if one was to contemplate a fictional character with the intention of depicting it through artistic means, the process would constitute many transitional states with in the psyche of the artist. One could say a sort of oscillation between real and illusive states occurs in the artistic practise. These alternating states with in the artists psyche renders it's identity indefinable as it tries to make the non-existent matter. In tackling , trying to manipulate the physical material at the artists disposal, the artist finds a legitimate connection with the world around them. Roland Barthes comments on the theological aspects in Twombly's practise, he states;

" It is a fact. Twombly imposes his materials on us not as something which is going to serve some purpose, but as absolute matter, manifested in its glory( theological vocabulary tells us that the glory of God is the manifestation of his being) The materials are the materia prima, as for the Alchemists."  
( Barthes, 23rd Bienal p. 1)

If through this process the artist sees himself or herself as a god, creator, or a messenger for that moment ,so be it. The seriousness of their claim to say he or she is a god depends on what others believe god and humans to be. If one is to consider the anthropomorphic nature of religion it may be said that this self deception is not limited to a few eccentric artists, but to the whole of Christianity.

In the classics, gods relate in a dynamic interplay with the life's of mortals . Such





themes as love, war, wealth, jealousy to name but a few, are without doubt part of the human condition. The gods are not prophetic to an endless populace. They do not preach to none believers who often require miracles to convince them that there is a single God. The gods of the classics mingle with the mortals. They are illusive in as much as they are greedy, hateful, cunning, lustful, loving etc. as any mortal is.

Friedrich Nietzsche the German philosopher commented that the Greeks used their gods to deify the 'animal' within the human.

Unlike Christianity Nietzsche saw the Greeks approach less punishable to mans evil deeds as they nobly took the guilt upon themselves by admitting that he must have been possessed by a god that led him astray. Could it be, that Twombly induces a theopathic state within himself whereupon his paintings become the residuary marks of a religiously excited psyche or is it a cultural exercise so we may not forget there was a past where humans played with gods.

Abstract expressionist painters such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollack looked to the ancient past and its myths as a source into their art practise. For Jackson Pollack the particular source lay in the culture of the native Indians of America. In the case of Mark Rothko the source like Twombly was in the myths of antiquity. Rothko in a collaborative statement with Adolph Gottlieb, would say:

"They are the symbols of man's primitive fears and motivations, no matter in which land or what time, changing in detail but never in substance, be they Greek, Aztec, Icelandic, or Egyptian. And modern psychology finds them persisting in our dreams, our vernacular, and our art, for all the changes in the outward conditions of life... The myth holds us .... because it expresses to us something real and existing in ourselves." (12, p7 )

When one is adamant that there are no supernatural beings does this mean the classic mythology loses its significance?. If one is to consider Rothko's statement which sees the myths as symbols of man's inherent fears the subject of proving there is an infinite being or beings is of no importance. Classical mythology gives an insight into the believe systems of ancient peoples. Within this mythology the origins of gods can be traced back to real people. There are





stories within the classics that show characteristics of human nature that for the most part are ignored by the superfluous culture of the everyday.

The greatest development in psychoanalysis arguably has been Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the story of Oedipus. It has become to be known as the Oedipus complex. So much has been derived from this tragic tale. Such notions as the *death instinct* and the archetypal linguistic symbol of the 'name' of the father that represses and displaces a child's incestuous desire for the mother are given articulation through the allegorical use of the Oedipus story.

Lacan comments on Freud's personal choice of Oedipus the myth, he states;

" The fact that Oedipus is the patronymic hero of the Oedipus complex is not a coincidence. It would have been possible to choose another hero, since all the heroes of Greek mythology have some relation to this myth, which they embody in different forms... It is not without reason that Freud was guided toward this particular myth.

Oedipus, in his very life, is entirely this myth. He himself is nothing other than the passage of this myth into existence. (S ||.267-268)  
(Lacan, 1987p.136)

Lacan suggests there is a common thread running through Greek mythology. The Oedipus character exemplifies this myth in its entirety. The symbolic language of psychoanalysis owes so much to these ancient myths. It holds no lesser importance within the western art practise since the Renaissance.

If one was to scan through a book dedicated to painting from the renaissance era to the present day it would be hard not to find an artist who did not utilise the myths of the antiquities. Artists like Caravaggio, Poussin, even the contemporary sculpture Finley Hamilton have constituted part of, in some cases, all of their efforts in depicting Greek and Roman myths and culture. Cy Twombly is no exception in regards to this age old practise.





## Chapter 2

### What is in a name?

Within Twombly's work there is the repetitive use of writing by hand. If one studies his paintings and prints one gets acquainted with a particular idiosyncratic style of handwriting. Often parts of letters are smudged by the repetitive markings of a pencil. On mono-coloured backgrounds letters overlap and criss-cross each other. Colour is sparsely applied in some cases none is used. What is paramount is setting the stage, so to speak for the presentation of a hand written text. Although the placement of hand writing seems arbitrary one characteristic of the work is the Name as caption. There is always two or more names signed by the artist. The smallest is CT placed in the outer periphery of the canvas ( the trademark of the artist) the other or others are signatures written large. What the viewer sees first is the Name.

" What happens is stories, and, as we saw, stories from classical culture: five days of Bacchanalia, the birth of Venus, the Ides of March, three dialogues of Plato, a battle, etc. These historical actions are not depicted, they are evoked through the power of the Name." ( Barthes, 23rd Bienal, p.7)

What power has the Name? Has it the power to personify a mythical character? Is it a key to a family's history?, a foreword to some bodies being if anything a name can signify the gender and nationality of a person. For an object its name situates it within the realms of Knowledge. For the Swedish botanist Carl von Linne famous for documenting and transcribing local names of plants into a latin format, associating a name onto a plant hitherto unknown makes it apprehendable and therefore extant. He has been quoted as saying, "*Nomina si nescis, perit et cognitio rerum*" in other words if you do not Know the name of something or somebody it disappears from your knowledge. Twombly's use of the Name lets us not forget the source of his subject. A being or object can be catalogued into groups co-relating in form, substance, usage, place in time etc. Therefore by the name information can be accessed in relation to that object or





subject. The name alone elucidates to us the existence of something or some being it also has the ability to indicate something's or some being's previous existence. Is it enough to know somebody or something by name alone?. Of course for giving a more indept understanding and feeling of the Named having first hand experience adds to our conception of the subject. I suggest Twombly calls on the imagination of the viewer to bring to life the Named.

"What is in a name? that which we call a rose, By any other name would smell as sweet." (Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet 2,2) )

These lines come from the Shakespearian play Romeo and Juliet. What these lines inferentially tell us is that the name is our invention originating from an utterance born out of the sounds we produce. These sounds ( arbitrary in character and systematic by convention) are associated to our internal and external world. To experience the scent of a rose is to go beyond nominal considerations. The name "Rose" is not the actual rose.

Roland Barthes interpretation of Saussure's theories on semantics clearly shows this, he writes;

"...the sign is not the 'thing', but the mental representation of the thing (concept); the association of sound and representation is the outcome of collective training....." (Barthes, 1967, p.114)

Barthes utilises this theory to emphasise the conceptual aspect in Twombly's work. In doing so he points out a difference Twombly's work has with classical painting, he states;

" In classical painting, "what is happening" is the "subject" of the painting, a subject which is often anecdotal (Judith slaying Holophernes); but in Twombly's paintings, the "subject" is a concept." (Barthes, 23rd Bienal, p.7)

There are no evident features with in Twombly's work to show us he concerns himself with the precepts of classical painting other than his textual reference to the classics. His canvases are void of anatomical studies of the human form. landscapes dominated by perspective and tone do not appear amongst his scribbles and smudges. The function of the paintings is to inspire the curiosity in the viewer. The qualitys of vagueness and ambiguity within the work help to invoke a desire to know.





Who is Adonia? Apollo?, Achilles?. What did they do to deserve mentioning?. The name acts as a referential tool. The information is limited. Amongst the personalised hand writing we are left searching for clues only to be reminded by Twombly's adoring critiques that art does not seek to describe but to enact. One is asked to view his work as the product of meditative action. Strangely the inconsistent and arbitrary nature of the marks and paint are seen as proof to a sort of cultural catharsis. A catharsis emanating from new world notions of art and culture mixed with the preoccupation to regress into legends and literature.

Like abstractism where the subject of painting and its constituents such as colour, mark, surface and framing become all important and often there lies its meaning, Twombly employs similarly such techniques into his work.

When one views a painting by a classical artist one is confronted by a symbolic fusion. A set of elements are orchestrated to form a still frame as though one was looking at an event that happened in some ancient past. The characters inhabit a theatrical space. Their postures seem premeditated. These elements combine to give us a spectacle. Twombly purposefully evades entering into the spectacle. His work does not uphold the traditional tenets of painting. Could one say his intention is not to uphold any tenet of painting modern or otherwise?. In other words does he use painting as a means to an end so that the subject becomes all important so important as to evade the language of production in particular the language of classical painting?. Barthes illuminates us to these concerns;

"....."sparseness," "clumsiness," "awkwardness," added to "rareness," act as forces which quash the tendency; which one finds in classical culture, to turn antiquity into a depository of decorative forms; the Apollonian purity of the reference to Greece,....." (Barthes, no.1, p.7)

Barthes suggests that with in this painting there is an active conflict with culture. He also suggests that Twombly's painting in other words sieves through the culture, discarding pomp leaving only beauty behind. Barthe writes;

" It is as if the painting was conducting a fight against culture."  
( Barthes, no.1, p.7)





In a series of works titled ,The Birth of Venus, Venus and Mars, Twombly deplumes the decorative and compositional styling of a classical painting . I would suggest the result of Twombly's meditation, akin to a form of satori according to Roland Barthes, disintegrates the main constituents of a Renaissance painting by the artist Botticelli.

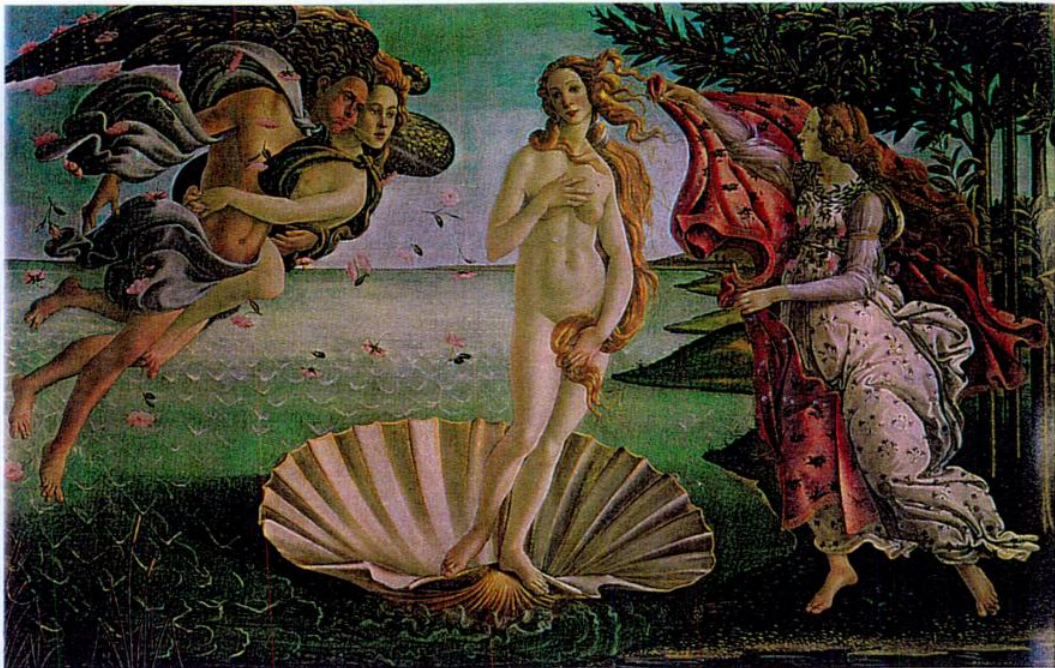


Birth of Venus.  
Rome 1963.

Rather than committing a serious offensive against the magniloquent language of the classics, a repulsive mutation is presented to the viewer. What information can one decipher from Twombly's piece about the Venus myth and the Renaissance painting?. Is it a calling for a modern reinterpretation of classical mythology?. In one particular drawing Twombly makes some attempt at replicating some characteristic features in the Renaissance depiction. There is a line dabbed with blue paint to signify the horizon. Emanating from the centre of the page a multifidous configuration of rotund shapes signifies I would suspect Venus.



There is no recognisable marks to indicate the presence of Zephyr, Mercury, or Flora. Also surprisingly Twombly does not indicated any correlation between Aphrodite and Venus. To classical Rome Venus was Aphrodite; so much so that the Greek metonymies (Aphrodite signifies lovemaking, highest throw at dice, luck, etc.) were taken over by her. Twombly refers to Aphrodite in a piece made in 1975. It is titled Aphrodite Anadyomene. However Venus and Aphrodite don't seem to coexist in any of his works. They are kept separated from each other.



2. Sandro  
Botticelli: Birth of  
Venus, c. 1484-6.

The original Renaissance painting by Botticelli was commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. It was intended to commemorate his marriage to Semiramide d'Appiano. It has been said that the painting symbolises the fruition of love into marriage yet within Twombly's version the tossed flowers, dazzling colours, fluttering drapery, unnaturally large shell, plants, landscape, etc. are deleted. In their place a bulging mass of fervent bulbiforms emanate from the centre of the page as though they were transcribed in a hurry.



This combination of allegory and abstraction is like trying to combine oil with water. In the case of the Birth of Venus the oil will never sink, in other words its abstract qualities predominate the subject as to nearly erase it. One could say that the work exhibits a combination of competing opposites. As one views the piece the Name anchors ones imagination to Botticelli's interpretation of the Venus myth while on the other hand the image intermittently overlaps this conception dislodging it's place in history. It has been awakened in ourselves.

" Technically, TW's work seems to conjugate itself either in the past or the future tenses, and never truly in the present. One would say that there is never anything more than the remembrance or the harbinger of his traces."  
(Barthes,no1,1979, p.18)

Twombly's interpretation is like a brief commentary. He disintegrates and extracts till one is left with the bare minimal. Walter Benjamin states in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* that historicism gives the "eternal" image of the past. Could Twombly be guilty of attempting to eternise the ancient past?. His work is not made in stone. Unlike Finley Hamilton's stone epitaphs commemorating classical painters and gods, Twombly uses materials such as pencil, chalk , house paint, etc. These materials are immediate in their mark making. If Twombly's work was to be left out in say Irish weather, it's life span would be certainly short. His work evades the issue of permanency. By the very nature of this material a temporal quality emanates from the work. They have a commonness about them. One could acquire them easily in any hardware store. They do not evoke in themselves a preciousness and therefore they elude to any material and technological scrutiny. The gregarious nature of the material and the referential concerns with in Twombly's work put a question mark over any suggestions that he is a modernist artist.

Within the frame a conflict is present. Sometimes the concept gets displaced by becoming entangled in a mesh of idiosyncratic marks. However the persistent arbitrariness of the mark seems to defy any evidence that the drawing originated





out of a premeditated act. Twombly would state;

" Most painting defines the image. It is therefore to a great extent illustrating the idea or feeling or content. It is in this area that I break with the more general processes of painting....." (no.5, p.153)

The often proclaimed psychology of the self and the subconscious has great significance amongst Abstract Expressionists. For them breaking with the traditional tenets of western art became in itself the process of stripping painting to its bare essentials. Barnett Newman a leading artist in the movement was to state; 'We are making it from ourselves.' The purpose of their art practise was narrowed and constrained within the constituents of painting. The sole consideration for the artist within the Abstract Expressionist project lay in a redefinition of painting itself. It became for the best part autonomous in it's outlook. With each artist formulating his or hers practise around the redefinition of painting, the mark, paint, frame, colour etc. painting became their objective.

However It's subject transformed itself into a personification of various individual artists independent of any exterior considerations but to their own conceptions of art. One could not see the world in their work. It's purpose was to reduce painting to a display of elements. By the 1950's American art had successfully defined itself from it's European counterpart. American art severed it ties with European art as it claimed for itself the right to self determine it's own mandate on culture production. For American Abstract Expressionists they had reinvented painting. They had dismantled it's past beyond recognition. Like the Titans ripping Dionyous to pieces they held onto the heart of painting making from it their own conception of art.

Twombly was to emanate from the teachings of Abstract Expressionists. Motherwell and Gottlieb were his tutors. Studying in the Black Mountain college and New York league he became associated with the "second generation" of American artists which included names like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg to name but a few. The essence of their contribution was to reinaugurate the issue of referentiality. Although they did not deny the Abstract Expressionist notion of selfhood, they became interested in things that existed outside themselves.





The concerns of the artist were no longer limited and constrained by the reinvention of painting. This had run its course. A subject was needed.

Given the role as an antagonist to the magniloquent language of classical painting Twombly introduces us to another language. This is the language of a modernist intent on disrupting the past. Barthes seems to suggest this is so. Is it as clear as this? as though Twombly by the very fact of naming characters from classical mythology, in the way that he does, is in some way mocking their significance?. With the aid of Twombly's art Roland Barthes can elucidate to us elements of Buddhism, writing, mythology, conceptualism, semantics and yet there on a surface a title accompanies smudges and scribbles. With such a minimal cumulation of material some of the rhetoric emanating from Twombly's oeuvre could also be read as having magniloquent qualities. This grand and often highly subjective discourse reveals, as does many discourses surrounding artists classical and contemporary alike, particular esoteric characteristics.

Besides informing the reader of a particular characteristics in the artists work, a door is opened so to speak. The reader is lead into a labyrinth. At each turn there is an critique commenting and interpreting a work of art. Some critiques interpret a work of art, often unbeknownst to themselves, beyond recognition. An artists work in such circumstances acts as a springboard for someone else's concerns. It is in this relationship the very roles of artist and critique become blurred.

In relation to absolute knowledge Lacan has written;

"No knowledge can be supported or transported by one alone"  
(Lacan, 1987 pp.83)

It is by this very fact that Twombly's work allows and encourages the forwarding of knowledge. The work does not assume preponderance over the subject named. It plays its part as a visual indication to a much wider subject.

Dialogues are guided by beacons in the guise of Names. With the use of the Name Twombly initiates a process of investigation. To attain the concept of the subject named one must seek to know something about the subject. Rather than informing us Twombly chairmans the motion. Roberta Smith comments on this





role of mediator;

" In all this, Twombly is more mediator than innovator, more conduit than Iconoclast,....."( Smith,1987 p.15)

Some have suggested his work invites us into the ancient history

It has been suggested that these smudges and scribbles mark the surface like an astrological map or that the paint and pencil marks swim in a giant cumulus. Whatever one compares these smudges and scribbles to, their composites are in full view. There is correlation's between the various elements. Unlike classical painting where the preliminary stages are covered by the build up of paint, Twombly exhibits the composites that make up his work.

It is skeletal. This fleshless aspect can be seen clearly in his homage to the Russian constructivist Tatlin. The name is hand-written on a stained surface. A pencil line intersects two lineament squares. The combined elements are mounted on a rectangle surface. It is a graphic act of dedicating. The signing of the name becomes the performance. In a piece like this the method of production is no mystery. It is shockingly obvious.

In such work it is hard to hide ones mistakes. Corrections are ironically ineradicable. This brings to mind Rauschenberg's attempted erasure of a de Kooning drawing given to him by the artist. After hours of rubbing Rauschenberg was left with a surface full of smudge marks. Rather than utilising the erasure process every time he makes a misstake Twombly marks over his mistakes.

Changes are seldom hidden. A certain indefinite process underlies the work. It is as though a person suffering from dysgraphia is trying to hide the fact that they cannot write easily. They might have dyslexia and by this mere fact they scribble each word in a sort of short hand in a attempt to disguise their spelling mistakes. They might know how to spell part of a word such as the beginning of the word or the end of a word but the middle is hazy. So by one continuous line, like a graph line made by a lie testing machine, they can indicate the letters they are sure of yet roll over the ones they are not sure of. Other tricks entail making some letters seem like other letters therefore acquiring duel, or triple letters in one





manufactured sign. For example 'a' becomes 'e'. When ever they are in doubt should it be an 'e' or an 'a' they make it look like them both. They depend on the reader to fill in the gap so to speak.

When Twombly writes the name of some author or ancient figure it seems he wants to bring our attention not only to the Name per se but also to the idiosyncratic nature inherent in hand writing. This infallible aspect in his work all the more humanises his hand written dedications. It is purposefully not impersonal. Typographical letters seldom press the surface. He evades their objectiveness and mechanisation. I suggest to use typographical methods would destroy the most important aspect with in Twombly's oeuvre. That being the multifaceted ability of hand writing to allow the artist to intensify or diminish the importance of something in a immediate fashion. To use printed text would eradicate any significance to the artist presence in the work. In a case like this the work would become solely conceptual. How could we imagine Twombly at the bay of Naples under a blue sky if on a white surface the words 'Bay of Naples' in bold Helsinki type where printed?. I am sure it is not impossible if one was given enough prompting to think so one could make oneself imagine this was so.

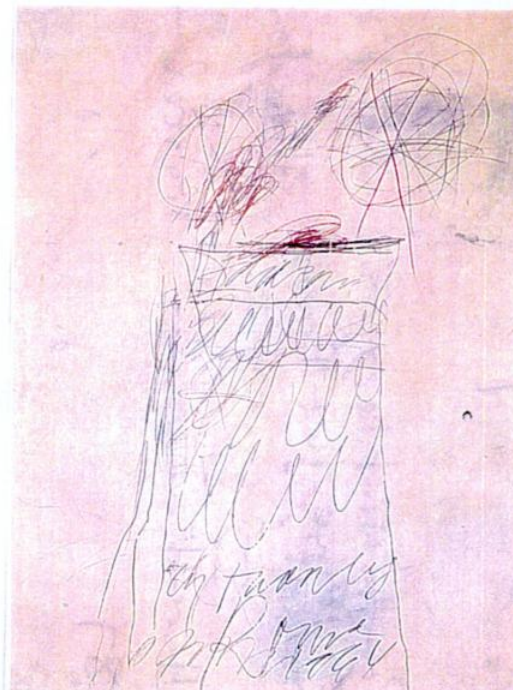
What if it read 'I am looking at the Bay of Naples TW'would this bring us any closure to imagining the sun, sea, light, or the sound of sea birds etc. Such a work could be manufactured any where in the world, one could produce such a piece without even being there. What is at issue here is the sense of authenticity. Of course Twombly may scribble some arbitrary marks on a page and on it write the place name without even setting a foot on Italian soil, this is also possible but there is no doubt Twombly participates in the making of the work. What I mean by participating is that he must be present for any work to exist. Unlike literature where an authors work can be published repetitively long after his or hers death, Twombly's pieces are produced to coincide with his life and as such cannot be reproduced. It ends with him so to speak. These visual notations are like the inventory of a personal diary except they are not kept secret in a hard cover book. Their in full view for everyone to see.





The significance of time and place can be seen in a series of works made in Rome March 1964, Naples May 1975 and Belona 1977. A general characteristic in the Rome series is the significant position allotted to the artists name, place names and dates.

The artist purposely writes in large the date and place. Out of all the confused activity with in the surface the place name, artists name and date are the only real recognisable features with in the composition. Names and dates float within a tangled mesh. They inhabit a wide an empty background.. With out them we would be left with a senseless mess of lines and smudges. Maybe it's a chimney tower bellowing with bulbous smoke? or maybe its a column?. Again I begin a endless search into what the artists intends to represent in these lines. In my opinion what saves the majority of Twombly's work from an oblivious void and insignificance is his reference to something else by way of hand written text.



Rome 1964

In the Thyrsis series we are enwrapped by the spaciousness of the work. This effect serves to emphasis the hand written text. It roams unattached and uncluttered as though in a vacuum. Its freehand quality gives the impression it has just been written. They are visual notations of an event that has just past. The place name and date anchor our imagination. Referential obstacles are diluted into accidental smudges and marks . They serve to make the experience seem more authentic. Barthes comments on this spatial quality;

"And this spaciousness is not only a plastic value; it is like a subtle energy which allows one to breathe better. The canvas produces in me what the philosopher Bachelard called an "ascensional" imagination: I float in the sky, I breath in the air....."  
(Barthes, 23rd Bienal, p.3)



With in Twombly's practise writing is used like a musical instrument. The artist intensifies the significance of a particular name or place by the relative versatility of the hand to move in accordance to the very whims and sentiments of the artist. If he wants to shout he enlarges the word in relation to the composites of the piece.

If he wants to whisper he fades the word into paint or if he desires an echo he repeatedly writes the word. Twombly seldom uses an ink pen preferring to use the more common pencil and crayon. These implements exaggerate the spatial qualities in his work by marking the surface with thin lines. The comments of Theodor Adorno are of interest in relation to the material use in art practise, he states;

"A progressive artistic consciousness is one that appropriates the most advanced materials, responding to the historical substance sedimented in them. In so doing it goes beyond mere appropriation, turning into a critique of the technological status quo and exploring uncharted areas." ( Adorno,1986, p.275)

Could the meagre pencil be called a technologically advanced material?. With pencil in hand could it be said that Twombly expands his art into uncharted areas?. It could be surmised that his use of writing as a visual medium is investigative and progressive in the confines of fine art painting. This much said it is hard to find any evidence to show Twombly has involved himself in a stringent study into the art of writing per se. What is interesting about Twombly's work is his apparent aloofness to technology. Everything is done by the hand of the artist. In this way he is paradoxically continuing a tradition that has been part of painting since its beginnings. It could be thought that his seemingly blasé approach to making art is the decisive factor in understanding Twombly's oeuvre. Essentially it comes down to him to indicate to the audience any meaning these extremely subjective pieces should have. The devise at hand for indicating four fundamentals of place, date, title and author of a drawing is the use of legible writing. Although his painting's and drawing's are in some cases very pleasing to the eye it is fortunate for the viewer that Twombly indicates a subject by writing its name upon the surface. In short the 'Name' is Twombly's saving grace.





## Chapter 3

### A grandeur Tamed.

Twombly's work takes classical and literal culture from the realms of historicism. He reintroduces these subjects to a contemporary audience. If one is to look over his oeuvre it is hard not to realise the importance these subjects have in Twombly's life and art. Since his move to Italy in 1954 one can see a clear merger of American art practise with the ancient and contemporary culture of the Mediterranean. In the course of his career many commentators have constructed lavish encomiums. Out of these encomiums a multitude of claims have been made.

Some commentators have suggested he has acquired an eminence worthy of his subject. It also has been suggested that his canvases are a repository for incantations to gods from past civilisations. In this light he becomes a conjurer. The surfaces of his paintings are remarked upon as having a sort of sacerdotal quality. As though they originated from the ancient papyrus of the Nile. On such sacred material, they have claimed the residual marks of ritual can be seen. His method of painting has been compared to aspects inherent in Japanese art practise. The near parallel to Twombly's drawing in Japanese art is the preparatory sketch. That being the under-drawing or *shita-e* from which, an artist would develop his final version for scroll or screen or colour print. These works are usually impromptu or at least unelaborated, drawn freely from nature or in other ways plainly not intended by the artist for mounting. Unlike his Japanese comparisons Twombly exhibits his seemingly impromptu sketches with out any noticeable reserve. Further claims have associated Twombly's practise as having within it Taoism. Barthes sees Twombly's art as detached of any desire to possess, he states;

"It hovers, floats, and drifts between desire, which is the force that subtly animates the artist's hand, and the polish of politeness, which is the discrete dismissal of every desire to capture or possess." (Barthes, no.1 p.21)

Barthes continues by asking if one was to find such a morality one would not find in the west, but in the *Book of Tao*.





As was mentioned before he is seen as an antagonist who resists the magniloquent language of classical painting and on the other hand, his work is said to raise questions about the way we use language. He has been mentioned in the same light as poets like Valery and authors like Joyce. Some commentators have even treated his name as a anagram. This only adds to the notion that Twombly's work is made up of many codes that need to be solved. Not only are we asked to read in the work the traits of Buddhism, calligraphy, Taoism, classics etc. but we are asked to investigate cryptic messages hidden amongst a plethora of erratic lines and smudged fingerprints. We are asked to solve the puzzle so to speak. It is this requisite that brings Twombly's work into the realm of mystery. Linda Norden has commented on this requisite inherent in the work to be deciphered she states;

" Even more than Twombly's mid-fifties "written" paintings, these simultaneously beg and frustrate "deciphering." It becomes quickly apparent that there is no one meaning offered up by any individual sign or painting. Twombly's images are not symbolic." (17p.156)

It is by this fact that Twombly is open to speculation. The unsolvable in his work continues to attract speculators determined to explain a prevailing uncertainty. Every time they think they have found a sensible reading from the mist of their investigations they shower the work with tributes. These tributes accumulate. Meanings multiply as each academic attempts to elucidate the work from their point of view. It is this indistinguishable aspect to the work that allows a multitude of readings and a reassurance that safeguards their speculations from committing any serious errors. In short there is a sort of infallibility attributed to Twombly by his commentators. It seems no real insight has been thrown on the lack of real change in Twombly's practise. His technique for the most part stays the same. One finds oneself flicking through copious amounts of plates without seeing major change in his approach to making art. There is a sort of blasé quality in the work which I might add only serves to quail any desire to know more. In short he may be doing a great disservice to ancient mythology.





By association alone with the classics Twombly has acquired a sort of grandeur and yet this grandeur is supposedly tamed by a superior modesty.

Barthes states;

"What happens in a painting by Twombly? A kind of Mediterranean effect. This effect, however, is not "frozen" in the pomp, the seriousness, the decorum of humanist works (even poems as intelligently conceived as those of Valery remain imprisoned in a kind of superior modesty). ( Barthes, 23rd Bienal, p.10)

Any relief from pomp and pretension is welcome in the arts however I cannot ignore the magniloquence employed by commentators such as Roland Barthes and Phillippe Sollers in describing Twombly's art. It is as though they have substituted past pomp with a new modified version. Barthes in particular heralds Twombly as some sort of modern day champion. A champion that with superior modesty dislodges the past pomp of painting. It is as if Twombly was employed to renovate a run down culture in the depths of a recession.

What other ply is used to tame this grandeur?. It could be said that the simile with a child is the greatest tamer of them all. In this, not only modesty can be read, but innocence too. Anything is possible in the imagination of a child. They can play games where they can take the role of anyone they like. For the child can pretend he is Ulysses if he chooses. It is this child like quality in Twombly's oeuvre that is I feel the most poignant. When one considers post-war Europe and the devastation it incurred during the war it is no surprise that within the population there was a desire to forget the recent past. There was a wish to go forward. It was a time when the emphasise was put on the next generation to build a better society in where past mistakes could not be repeated.

If anything Twombly's work shows an element of this desire for regeneration.



The first part of the document is a letter from the author to the editor, dated 18th March 1954. The letter discusses the author's interest in the subject of the journal and the possibility of publishing a paper on the topic. The author mentions that they have been working on the subject for some time and that they believe they have made some progress. They also mention that they have been reading the journal and that they are interested in the work of other authors in the field. The letter concludes with a request for the editor's consideration of the author's paper.

The second part of the document is a paper by the author, titled "The Role of the State in the Development of the Economy". The paper discusses the role of the state in the development of the economy and the impact of government intervention. The author argues that the state has a significant role to play in the development of the economy and that government intervention is necessary to achieve this. The paper also discusses the impact of government intervention on the economy and the role of the state in the development of the economy. The paper concludes with a summary of the author's arguments and a call for further research on the topic.

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## Conclusion

Twombly has attracted much attention by incorporating hand writing into the process of painting. By the mere fact of its presence, in a fine art context, an opportunity arose for writers themselves to elaborate their views on hand writing and the place it has in formulating language. So much attention has been given to this particular aspect of the work by writers whose main interest is to explore writing in all its facets. Often their commentaries consume the work with literal and semantic connotations. In these verbose and often complicated commentaries the simplicity of the work is lost. What is overlooked is Twombly's adherence to specific rules inherent in painting. He signs, names and dates his work. He gives his work essential signs that enable it to be chronologically ordered. They also enable his work to be catalogued amongst artists whose interests lay in the classics. It is quite obvious Twombly regards these signs as essential otherwise they would be neatly tucked away in the corner of the canvas. In certain pieces they take precedence over everything else, jutting out at the viewer as though they were the credits before a feature film. This begs the question is he an actor in the big picture, or is he a director of the big picture? One could say he is the method actor who identifies himself in the part, although saying this I would hasten to add his Apollo writes very clumsily.

In this thesis I have attempted to point out the importance of the Name in Twombly's art practise. In doing so I have found myself walking in a labyrinth made up of extrapolation and conjecture. All the time I was urged to look to the ancient past for the magic entrance. If that failed I was told to look to the far east and to America. If I got lost along the way I could rest in the Mediterranean sun and play a little with the clumsy child. However I was not to enter the door marked classical painting. Here according to Barthes was Twombly's radical departure from pomp and ceremony. As Twombly did not attempt to depict or convey an event, his art was seen as polemical towards classical painting.





Is it appropriate to give Twombly such an antagonistic role? After all his subject matter is very much the same as many classical artists. It is Twombly himself who has entered into the world of the classics. It is for this reason Twombly in my opinion continues a tradition that was initiated by the Renaissance. It is true that his technique and approach differs greatly from the classical painter, however what is important is the relative source binding him with the classical tradition. I finish with a painting by David who incidentally had been closely involved in the revolution of 1789. What is of interest in this painting in relation to Twombly is the use of writing. Ironically it is this and the use of the name that I am comparing Twombly with a classical painter.





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