

Moran Kliger

Cain

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The mythical story of Cain and Abel is a chronicle of a murder. It is an account of internal conflict, unbridled loss of control, and violently passionate acting out. God's (the Father) preference of Abel's sacrifice evokes in Cain scorching feelings of rejection, insult, and jealousy, which drive him to slay his brother. The biblical text is succinct; its three very short acts – the birth, the sacrifice and its rejection, the murder and the punishment – leave wide leeway for commentary as to the motivations of the protagonists: Cain, (present-absentee) Abel, and God.

The event of the murder represents the triumph of evil over morality. Unlike the original sin (the Fall - Genesis 3), which was preceded by explicit divine interdiction, Cain acts within as yet a lawless space. It is only after the presentation of the sacrifice that the Lord vaguely warns him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (Genesis 4:7). Cain has to figure out for himself how to interpret this divine advice, and is almost required to lay down a new law by himself. Besides the notion of free will, the text also contains the accompanying concepts of reward or punishment.

Staging the brothers' story as a large pictorial cycle, entitled "Cain," Kliger intertwines it with ideas and visual elements borrowed from other ancient epics and mythologies. She dissociates herself both from art history's familiar iconography and from the biblical text, offering to perceive the brothers as a split whole, as two inherently complementary representations of a single entity.

This perception illustrates allegorically the psychomachia, or the primeval conflict within one's soul between virtues and vices, and also corresponds with Jung's idea of a "complete man." The soul, according to Jung, consists

simultaneously of inseparable polar elements: the feminine and the masculine, the good and the evil, the strong and the weak, and so on. The self is the intermediary axis between consciousness and the unconscious, and it is forever created and re-created, like a body regenerating its own cells. It provides one's personality with a balance, functioning as an archetype of order, direction, and meaning, a kind of personal providence, divine voice, and a guide.

The inner layout of the gallery space has undergone a transformation, becoming an intimate, charged and condensed space, a sort of collective subconsciousness, where swarming uncontrollable urges and impulses threaten to erupt and unite in cathartic unification of the ego.

The works' installation in the space disrupts the linear continuity of the text. The pictorial cycle begins at the peak of the plot, shortly before or after the murder, and ends with a kind of apotheosis scene, in which Cain and Abel are taken to heaven to be united as the "complete one." The attributes given by Kliger to the protagonists highlight the contrasts between them: Abel, the shepherd, carries a lamb on his shoulders, as he is depicted in Christian iconography, which conceives him as prefiguring Christ, the Good Shepherd (Cain, on the other hand, symbolizes the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, or interpreted allegorically as the Eternal Jew). With a falcon perched on his shoulders, Cain, the tiller of the soil, brings to mind Yitzhak Danziger's *Nimrod* (which symbolizes both Canaanite rootedness and the biblical hunter, who rebelled against God). The falcon that Kliger gives to Cain has a double role – on the one hand, it is the sign that marks Cain and protects him from those who hunt him, and on the other hand, it also gives him the quality of a hunter (accompanied by a bird of prey). Cain eternal wandering represents a merger of oppositions.

With their blurred genitalia, Kliger's figures are gender undetermined. Be they crossbreeds between masculinity and femininity or archetypal and mythological figures, they are archaic or futuristic creatures playing symbolic-didactic role as they oscillate between the human and the trans-human, nowhere and everywhere, outside time.

Polarity is also present in the drawings: some are bright, ballpoint drawings, carefully and meticulously drawn with laborious lines and looking like faded

sketches or paintings; others are dark and shady drawings made with paint rollers and brushes as well as print-like stamping. Hanging as they do in the gallery's space, exposed, unframed, mounted on the walls, the drawings seem to both continue and transcend the genre of wall painting as know from chapels, mausoleums, churches, etc.

Thus, layer upon layer, Kliger unfolds and crystalizes the notion of unified dichotomies, bringing together bad and good, feminine and masculine, black and white, hunters and gatherers, the terrestrial and the celestial and gives Cain the whole gamut of oppositions.