The dilettant in thought and art: metaphysical art of Alberto Savinio

In this article, focusing on the activities of Alberto Savinio who advocated a new art experience called metaphysical art with his elder brother Giorgio de Chirico at «Valori Plastici» which can be said as a magazine of metaphysical paintings. I tried to draw sketches of expressive activities which he went through his life in various areas and their ideological background. Savinio, who refused to be an expert limited to one area and performed cross-cultural activities with composers, painters, writers, playwrights, was exactly a dilettant of art expression. Although he made creations using all kinds of expressive means, all the sources to express are based on the theory of metaphysical art. It is an attitude that turns his eyes toward the object, not the subject, and finds the intrinsic nature of the thing behind the appearance of the phenomenon.

The theory premised on the change of perceptual perception like metaphysical art was linked with the transformation of the spirit of humans that occurred from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The social change that occurred in the 19th century, such as the birth of a nation, the modernization of the industrial revolution, the birth of the masses, the privatization of bourgeois, the birth of civil society, urged a major shift in the arts of the same era. In the field of painting, literature, and theater, it is not an attitude that accurately reproduces objective things that were mainstream in the 19th century as they are, and various avant-garde art movements trying to capture the reality in a multifaceted view was born intensively during the late 19th and early 20th century.

While Savinio is based on the foundation of artistic theory called metaphysical art, its methodology overlapped with the idea and methodology of the transformation of perceptual perception that modernist artists created by reaction of positivism tried. The dilettant who did activities in all areas of various arts without restricting means responds sensitively to the trend of avant-garde art, incorporating it into his own style at one time, and at the other time differentiating between metaphysical art and other avant-garde movements clearly differentiated.

Indeed, the musical activities that had been going on until just before World War I, for example, the performance in Paris in 1914, which brought about a scandal, was a performance close to Dada. In the opera work "Les chants de la mi-mort", there was Apollinaire's illogical language arrangement and also there was a futuristic influence mainly based on unpleasant sounds. In painting, Savinio did not deny as much as De Chirico, that his style was associated with Surrealism. De Chirico refused to associate his initial painting with psychoanalysis or surrealism dealing with the theme of neurosis. Even in the case of Savinio, there is text that clearly insists on the difference between his style and surrealism, but the similarity with surrealism is obvious, because he started painting production since 1924 when the new art movement began to sweep the Western art scene after the surrealist manifesto and actually his style of painting and narrative shows
their similarity with surrealism.

In the area of theater and literature, Savinio recognized the fact that the role of traditional tragedy has ceased to function like Ipsen, and adopted a style that comically depicts tragedy by comicality and humor. Or like the fantasy literature of the 20th century and the Italian humorists of the same time, Savinio shifted his point of view from the viewpoint of staring the reality objectively like realism, to describing the human conflict between the world and his consciousness.

In addition, the transfiguration of the mind that occurred in the 19th century triggered the reversal of the aesthetic norms so far. Avant-garde arts praised ugliness which has been treated negatively in the category of beauty, and treated sublime things vulgarly, tragic things comically. Savinio also captured clearly the turning point in the field of aesthetics. In the article of "fine dei modelli", Savinio considered the transition of the aesthetic value that shifted from "beauty" to "ugliness".

In his novel work mythical gods that are supposed to be sublime and mysterious have been thrown out to the everyday world. The goddess who got on the scooter, Homer's waiting for medical treatment of his wife, Odysseus who wears a suit to the stage's sleeve without saying farewell to his wife. If Savinio hands the form of ugliness into approaching aesthetic by humor or comic, the gods who descended into vulgar are approaching the norm of beauty by witty humor.

The attitude of Savinio to look at the things advocated in art theory with double eyes, in other words was an ambivalent perspective with comicality and humor. Things that can be seen and not be seen, the attitude of removing the boundaries between reality and fiction and seeing the world from an ambivalent perspective or 'ghostly' gaze is reflected in Savinio's novels, opera works, and paintings. Although it was also seen in travel books and literary criticisms that should describe the reality empirically.

The autobiographical prose written between the 1930s and 1940s was the ultimate distraction to survive the autocratic regime full of boredom, discouragement, sadness, hatred, anger, suffering. And distraction was the way to face the world calling dictatorship and slaughter.

Stendhalism and dilettantism are synonymous, and the dilettant does not set purpose or result as a motivation for action or activity. Irrational and self-contained dilettant denies rationalism that attempts to explain and explain by reality, human beings, spirit, all phenomena by the determinism of the strict succession of the cause and the result. The denial of the rationalism was also criticism of the totalitarian regime that jokes (freddura) can not communicate and does not allow a way of thinking.

The dilettant, whose belief in freedom in thought and action, constantly sought artist autonomy without forming a party, sometimes showed an affinity towards the regime and at the same time criticized it. Avant-garde and classical regression, localism and internationalism, freedom and oppression, fascism and anti-fascism. Savinio was a manifestation of contradictions that many of the contemporary intellectuals who lived during the two world war periods had.