

Book Review 10-9-09 from Don Ratcliffe

The Language of Form by Gertraud Goodwin

“You can’t tell a book by its cover”. Well, there are only 6 words on this book’s cover: “The Language of Form Gertraud Goodwin”, printed in the simplest possible font. So what’s inside?

It is packed full and is incredibly focussed, a workshop manual presenting how an accomplished anthroposphical sculptor experiences form and how that experience and the world view that stands behind it influences her sculpture. Starting from the sphere as the simplest, most fundamental of all forms, Gertraud builds up a coherent description of sculptural form and the way it can effect us. The sphere, the egg, the flat plane, the concave, the convex, the double- bent plane, all are described in a way that shows what a rich experience of the world may come about from immersing oneself in a sculptor’s viewpoint. (What is the double-bent plane? Interestingly, if you don’t have such a concept you don’t see it!) Other chapters develop a syntax of form; “the life of the surface, the inner space, metamorphosis, the life of the form”. Clay modelling exercises for those who want a stronger experience of particular aspects of form are suggested. All this is supported by numerous sketches and colour photographs.

Reading through the book I can experience a coherent overall artistic presentation of the main aspects of the sculptor’s art. Gertraud is not afraid to reach out to the bigger questions of the spiritual in art and the role of art in life. The book is clearly written by an artist who is deeply into anthroposphy, but it doesn’t fall into the trap of talking about “anthroposphical art”. Instead Gertraud manages to look at art as a whole, neatly contrasting Rudolf Steiner’s Goetheanum with Cubism on facing pages. She points out that the breakthrough of Cubism started in 1906, while Rudolf Steiner was planning the 1907 Munich Conference. During that conference the first drawings of what later became the motifs of capitols of the first Goetheanum decorated the hall.

The relation of sculpture to nature is also a strong thread in the presentation. Here we can see the nature’s forming of bones and seeds and experience metamorphosis in leaves.

So this is a thoroughly crafted artist’s notebook, but who is it written for? In the first instance it must be for that very large group of students who have worked with her over the years at her studio in Sussex. Beyond that it is of immediate interest to artists and art therapists and others who already know her sculptural work. For all these people it is a wonderful contribution to an area in which very little is written from an anthroposphical point of view in English. And perhaps if you have a bit of an curiosity, or wonder if something really quite interesting may be happening in this specialised area that as yet you have not ventured into, this book will open a new view for you.

One final note. I used the book recently on a course in Sweden, confidently giving students the ISBN so they could order it from booksellers, but so far that has not been possible. It is published by Tobias Press with the email address manninggoodwin@hotmail.com and can be ordered from there.