

## An autobiographical sketch by Javad Mirjavadov

### MY ETERNAL PATH

*“La couleur est le point où le cerveau  
touche à l’Univers” – Cézanne*

Heart attack. January. The hospital ward is blown through by the winds of the Absheron. Cockroaches make noises in the wall. The night wind weeps and howls like a freezing ghost – ghuoliabana; to its groans and lamentations I am celebrating my birthday. I am sixty today and I cannot sleep. Unbidden thoughts of all kinds constantly rush in to my head. Nobody comes to see me. I am forgotten, abandoned and neglected by everybody. Only my wife, an angel, is by my side days and nights on end: not allowing death to drag me into the underworld... Here I am – lying in the slime of this bedraggled hospital. Nobody needs me. But I am not complaining: I have had a happy life. I ought to have expected it. I have never acted against my conscience. I lived, as I liked. I created my paintings and charged them with energy. Now that energy emanates back from them and charges me. But who needs them? Ancient people told us about two, seven, nine and numerous worlds. These worlds have been described in the epic literature of all nations; poets of the Orient spoke about them; Rabelais and Swift wrote about them. Paintings of modern artists are the worlds of physics, the worlds of metaphysics. But people do not want to understand my paintings. They do not want to and it is the most terrible thing. “I am the essence, I take no physical space and I cannot be pushed into being”, - said Nasimi... The same happened to Giordano Bruno or even closer to our time – Van Gogh and Artaud. Whitman wrote: “Bright Sun, you would kill me, if a similar Sun did not rise in me”. Those people lived and they left legends behind. “Thousands of years will pass and nothing will be left of us. Only legends will remain” Leonardo da Vinci said. Let the legend of Prometheus remain, but not that of Faust who sold his soul to the devil... There are many mysteries in the world. We look for them in the depth of our unconscious, at the heights of the Universe, like those sculptors from Easter Island, who turned their stone glance to the sky. We are keeping away from nature, we have forgotten its language. We are wandering blindly in absurdity and fuss... Bosch and Ecclesiastes described this very well in their works. The aprons of Siberian shamans speak more about death and life than mono-semantic sculptures of realism... The Mongolian-Turkic epos “Geser” says:

“Let the word said by us  
Be a model of our deed.  
Let the Gods – our creators,  
Attend and guard it,  
Now and ever ”.

An artist is clairvoyant. He puts his creative work above life. Art goes ahead of science, it leads to mysterious distances, it helps people understand themselves and the surrounding life, informs people of the invisible. An artist is a Messiah. The search for the meaning of life embodied by vivid artistic forms; penetration into the unknown and the subconscious; prediction of one’s own thought – all break loose miraculously in a painting; everything that is accumulated by you, by your ancestors and perhaps by life itself and many more things that are unexplainable – all this is creative work. Being an artist is not a profession – it is a vocation. It is predestined.... Through painting I get nearer to understanding the sense of existence where omnipresent light gives birth to color, and I, enchanted and spellbound, wander in the painting of the world. An artist is both madness and will, which, at first sight, seems incompatible. An artist needs longevity, which does not make sense either, because artists embezzle their lives. They only learn something by giving up on themselves completely.

Surrendering themselves wholly to art, they would live in their paintings. Once in my youth I used to be a follower of Cézanne ... No doubt, Van Gogh was close to me with his flaming paintings, his vivid expression and great conscience. Gauguin and Matisse were there too... Cézanne introduced me to great painting. I found an organized relationship of color, shape and space in his system. Employing analytical methods he materialized the picturesque environment of the surrounding world. Rather than rendering the substance to the level of secular objects, he inspirited it, reproducing the structure of substance without degenerating it to vulgar substantiality. Cézanne penetrated in to the essence of phenomena, transliterating the unexplainable processes of nature through his vision... His constructive approach stems from the multilateral perspective of medieval masters. His color modulations – according to Van Gogh – are associated with the sound palette of Wagner. Inspired by the faith of stoicism and ennobled by idealism, Cézanne's creative works reflect his pure inner world ascending to the heights! ...I settled down near the city in Buzovni and lived there quite lonely by the seaside, for ten years. I gradually destroyed all my paintings, one by one, and burnt everything later on. I was 32 years old. I remember my condition very well. I was in a state of despair. Almost at the same age Van Gogh had done everything and died while I had come to nothing. But I was not right. By that time I had some good canvases, but the reason for my despair was my eternal dissatisfaction, maximalism and categorical attitude. I have no pity for having destroyed the paintings, I do pity for the murdered works of mine, but we shall discuss this later. At that time I was torn to pieces by the anguish of pursuit. I took everything painfully. I was enraged. People could not live with me - their contradictions drove me mad. For my own consolation, I recalled Van Gogh's saying: "A painter is a saint and a wild dog". Yes, this was a painful process of metamorphosis. I made up my mind to start new art from scratch, just like the humanity entered into existence in the Late Stone Age. This led me to the Gobustan caves (early 1951-1952) - the drawings of early Man's primitive living and hunting grounds stretched before me. I was the first artist to visit Gobustan, later I took my classmates and friends there. I did not like the cave drawings very much. I had seen some better ones in reproductions of other countries: the animals had a more savage look, rendering that animal element of unruliness. What a place: bizarre mountain forms, rocks, scattered by prehistoric cataclysms. In my works I tried to render the spirit of those rocks, volcanoes, contours of the mountains, their monumental forms and dynamics... In Buzovni I poured resin into moulds and sculpted images on large sheets. I also made cement sculptures. I used nitrocellulose enamel and sometimes I made relief images using sand. I poured bitumen interspersing it with stones, using wood, metal. Sometimes I had small fires. This was done in nature under the open sky... I was happy! ...Or I thought I was happy. Unfortunately for me, these works ceased to exist, only three have remained... I created them on a dilapidated abandoned dacha, which used to belong to a teacher of Marxism and Leninism philosophy. One day he saw my "terrible" works and demanded that I removed all that anti-soviet stuff otherwise he would annihilate them himself. I had no workshop, neither did I have any money to transport them. The soviet system was an executioner of my art. I had to bury my works in sand. I marked on the map the places where I buried them, but I lost the map, and the dacha's host planted vineyards there... Finally in 1981, I was given a small workshop in Ahmedli. I transported the heaviest of my preserved works there and left it in the hall. But my enemies found it and destroyed it. It was burnt alive. In the morning, I saw black smoke coming from the dump and realized everything... But I have always said, "I am from the family of giants. I stand firmly on the ground, but my head is in the cosmos". The time of my recognition has not come yet. It was not easy for Gulliver to fit himself in the conscience of Lilliputians... By chance, in 1945 I discovered Freud. I put the book in my pocket and went to the top of the highest Gobustan mountain. I carried it up to the top and it was good! In those years, in the times of total fool-making and intimidation I proclaimed Nietzsche's ideas. My ardent appeal to the greatness of the spirit and force thundered on the streets of Baku. There were rumors at the same time that I was a mad painter – that I painted stones and threw them

into the Caspian Sea. I was delighted. What fools: they did not even understand how beautiful and original it was and what wonderful idea they inspired in me by their scorn... But I was a disciple of Beethoven... Hemingway was a disciple of Cézanne... I was glad to read that my favorite composer Wagner used ancient German myths liberally in his creative work. Marquez did the same insightfully, which is very close to my art... Many years passed, and I began to understand that life is not as serene as it seems. Life pierces through with different forms of struggle. Tension, collision, interlace, extinction and a new revival... Art should be a smashing, shocking experience, it should break the walls, settled and balanced by its own ideas, it should burst into the unknown, disregarding diligent execution. Beethoven said: "What the hell is a violin to me, when the spirit itself is speaking within me!". This great roughness marks men of genius, when you discover the truth beyond the threshold of the habitual beauty. The ancient Chinese characterized the level of giftedness in this way: an ability gives birth to craftsmen, whereas the talent reflects beauty, men of genius are capable of neglecting laws of beauty and harmony, exposing beauty and harmony, exposing feelings of truth and natural phenomena. These creators' pictures were called the "imprints of the suffering heart". I also think of it as such. Once I was sleeping in the open in Bilgah and had a dream. Van Gogh came to see me, with his beard as usual, very sad under the influence of some fatal sorrow, I told him: "Why? You have created self-portraits, which could be compared with Rembrandt's self-portraits". – "Is that true?" – "I always say the truth, to you especially". It made him happy. This relief for his soul softened his depression... I was sure that it was not a dream, it was Van Gogh's spirit... Many years after, while living in Buzovni, and having gone through tortures in my creative work, I went for a walk in the blazing heat. I saw a deserted hut. I went in, there was nobody there, the floor was clean, and tired I lay down on the sand, coolness came from it and, perhaps, the currents of the earth gave me something, I felt happiness, peace and I fell asleep. In my dream I saw a man who probably suffered from some mental disorder, but who looked happy and just beside him there lay a woman on the sand; the man stretched out his hand to the emaciated dog standing under the arch. He was glad to have met something. Not far from him there stood the Spirit-Light. He did not see it. But its presence gave him the light of hope. Consequently I painted a picture on the basis of that vision. I named it "The Light of Hope" and I dedicated it to Salvador Dali. When I was less than a year old, I was first tested for my mystical invulnerability. My father put me on the edge of a well and went away for quite a long distance, watching me closely and testing my fate on the lip of the well. He shouted, "It is my son. He will never fall down." And I did not fall. My father, a businessman, and individualist, tried instilling this quality to his son. But he did not know the name of the palm of salvation, which was raised over me. He did not suspect how symbolic the beginning of his son's life was. Here is another episode. My father was weighing some gold and silver coins. I seized a gold one. My father tried to persuade me to take a silver one, but I was firm. I remember how beautifully everything was painted; it was an Iranian coin - a lion with a sword and the sun. How sparkling everything was and how tightly I was holding the coin in my hand! My father told everyone about it with admiration. "What kind of son I have? What a clever son? He did not take a silver one". I was four years old. I confidently preferred the gold of the sun, the yellow color and painting to the cold moonlight of silver. An abyss lay down between commerce and art... Three decades later, angry at my carelessness, incomprehensible behavior and lifestyle, my enraged parent even spat in my soup. We could never understand each other – father and son...

**Edited by Lubov Mirjavadova,  
the wife of the Painter**