



I've never understood modern art. Last week when we were visiting the MET, one brother leaned toward me and whispered, "It looks like a waste of good paint." What could I say to that? But while some were staring quizzically, I felt something stir in my heart. And as I continued through the rest of the museum, I discovered something that changed my view of modern art forever.

When I reluctantly turned the corner into the modern art section of the museum, I prepared myself for a bombardment of random and unintelligible works. I entered the first room and scanned the walls for something interesting. I saw a description of the exhibit on the far side of the room. It explained that for modern artists it is not enough to simply *represent* nature. (That's what the world has been doing since the 14th century.) Nor are they aiming for something merely "different". They reach for something "beyond". It said that they try to express the "psyche", their inner self.

"Well let's see what the *psyche* has to say." I thought to myself as I moved to the first piece of art. I didn't look at the plaque. I examined the painting, not wanting to be influenced by someone else's description. Scaffolding rose out of a thick fog of mellow grey and sepia tones. I felt "pointlessness" and "helpless depression", "disillusionment with life" perhaps... Once I felt that I had *experienced the psyche*, I looked down at the plaque: *Tomorrow is Never* (1955) by Kay Sage. She painted the image only months after the sudden death of her husband. It was one of her last major works before committing suicide. I looked back at the painting. A gut-wrenching pain lurched within me. I felt my heart flop out of my chest and onto the floor. Like a dark Russian novel, the tragedy seemed as thick as the fog in the painting. Kay Sage managed to smear onto the canvas the deepest (and darkest) sentiments in her heart. I had *experienced the psyche*.

This "smearing of sentiment" is precisely the deeper aim of the modern artists. **As future priests, we should thank them for taking up that aim, because they have torn open a window into the *real heart of man*.** It is easy for us to pace through the galleries of Vermeer and Velazquez and "like it". Just so, it is easy for a priest to sit back and admire all that is "right and just". But a priest that is unable to reach into the muck of sinful souls and encounter the heart buried within is not a priest like Christ.

Our Lord was just fine in heaven. Everything was clear, bright, and reasonable. But he loves man. He would not leave us alone. He plunged into the grime, the sludge, into all

that was broken, dark and completely unreasonable.

In **modern** art, the priest finds a unique ability to learn how to encounter and understand **modern** man. This is the art of today. This is our culture. Man is expressing himself. Are we listening? Or would we rather turn a blind eye and walk back through our perfectly-proportioned-*Michelangelo-world*? If we're going to transform culture, we need to understand it. If we're going to understand it we need to be willing to encounter it. **A priest who refuses to understand modern art refuses to understand the heart of modern man.**