

ART AT THE SERVICE OF INDUSTRY

(Translation Brander)

The relationship between the world of the textile industry and that of art is very ancient, complex and unpredictable.

Their encounter can be like a spark where the excitement of creation takes over and provokes the concerned parties.

This encounter took place in 1985.

When I suggested to Jörg Baumann, the Director of the "Création Baumann" textile industry in Langenthal, that he should join in an artistic venture, he agreed enthusiastically.

I thank him for it.

He won't blame me if his taste for research carried him away to that familiar land: art. Today, a few creators of flags already design fabrics in Langenthal...

My suggestion was simple: to commission twelve artists with the creation of flags.

The rules of the game: create real flags for the open air. The manufacturer takes up the challenge of carrying out the artists' fantasy.

As for the artist, he agrees to submit his creation to the tortuous paths of industrial production.

Despite occasional difficulties, the dialogue proves to be extremely valuable and fruitful. As a result, today, in 1987, twelve poetic and personal flags fly and embellish the skies for everyone's pleasure.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to Jörg Baumann's associates for bringing this venture to a successful conclusion, as well as the other textile firms which assisted them: Keller & Co. AG Wald (Gibswill), Willi Sturm GmbH & Co. KG (Gersfeld/Germany), Bandfabrik Breitenbach AG (Breitenbach), Fiorete S.p.A. (Fino Monasco/Italy), Siegrist AG (Langenthal), Textildruckerei TDS Suhr AG (Suhr), Mister Romano Genini (Langenthal) and Mister H. Fluck (Zurich).

I wish to warmly thank all the artists who enthusiastically contributed to this project. Special thanks must go to Balthasar Burkhard, who was there all along facilitating the dialogue between authors and craftsmen.

Many thanks also to Georges-André Althaus for his beautiful text, to Jacques Demierre for his musical composition, sonorous poetry which accompanies the exhibition, and to Jean Genoud whose great care was invaluable for this publication.

Hendel Teicher, May, 1987

HYMN TO THE HEAVENS

(Translation Rosemary Besson)

The flag is omnipresent. A day is never too unimportant to have its flag, a place never too remote to deck itself out in bunting. It is just something man has adopted for his own floating reality, something which so effortlessly calls time and space into play while marking out and transcending their limits at the same time.

TIME AT A STANDSTILL

Fluttering in the continuum of the finite, the flag is the focal-point between past and future, a moment of history suspended in temporal movement; possibilities, events change suddenly, come into being and are 'woven' into the fabric of the flag which has no history of its own, but is History. With no beginning and no end, it represents both.

No beginning – the flag is not invention but "ananke" ἀνάγκη inescapable necessity.

With no end – the flag is merely a symbolic projection-sheet and can therefore be reproduced ad infinitum.

It is the beginning – beginning is life, the flag is Christ risen again.

It is the end – the end is death and has no banner, as it hovers silent and unseen in the last gusts of wind over the flag at half-mast.

Hoisted at sunrise, lowered at sunset, the flag spans the daylight hours, encompassing the celestial sphere as it feels it gliding by. The flag-pole as the sundial, the fluttering tackle, the imaginary second hand.

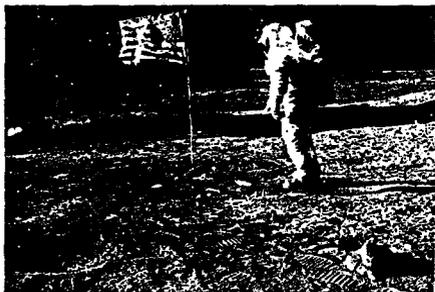
Firmly set in the ground, but flamboyant in the sky, the flag soars from the finite to infinity, linking the micro- and the macro-cosm, reconciling the dualist world with this visible analogy, and plunging from the temporal to the timeless universe.



Carlo Crivelli:
Resurrection
Camerino Cathedral



The Belgian Lion,
17th Century map
Congruity of form
and content



July 1969:
On the Moon

*"Stop wasting time with flags – collect some stones"
(Original: Capcom Houston to Edwin Aldrin, in Norman Mailer,
"A fire on the Moon")*

IMPOSSIBILITY TO REACH THE HORIZON

Space can only be conceived as such if it is marked out, organized. In his endless struggle with nature's confusion, man takes the flag in his hand and divides the complex world into simpler factors, splitting reality into visible units.

*"La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers."*

(Baudelaire, "Les Fleurs du Mal", N° IV)

The flag as a network for space: it forms the body of nations, gives populations an identity. It symbolizes man's will to systematize, wavering between setting limits to or pushing back the boundaries of space, between his craving for conquest and his search for security. (Scott's shock when he saw Amundsen's Norwegian flag. The South Pole had already been marked.)

Space is also melted down, becomes simultaneous. 'Here' is also 'there'. 'Up' is 'down'. The flag represents its king. The King is everywhere, moving among the multitude of flags he has scattered across the earth. The divine Roman Emperor's standard was worshipped intact and omnipresent from London to Constantinople. America is also on the Moon (the 51st Star on the U.S. flag).

The flag, ready to 'stake out' the boundlessness of outer space.

A PIECE OF CLOTH

"Was I not myself witness to seeing 500 living soldiers hacked to pieces for a gleaming piece of cloth they called their flag and which would not have fetched threepence from the rag-and-bone man? (...) Such are the symbols whereby and wherein men, consciously or unconsciously, live, breathe and exist."

(Thomas Carlyle, "Sartor Resartus")

A piece of cloth swells in the sky and sets out on its imaginary journey. No need for words to speak, not of its two visible sides, but of its third invisible and all the more striking side. It unfurls its charisma. No longer just the reflection of reality, it becomes real itself. Ideal and real intermingle to unite. Empirical reality dissolves and makes way for the mythical, the legionary. Within the symbolic content of the flag, the world of phenomena, simultaneously limited and multifarious, becomes profoundly intelligible, and relevance to life is no longer confused but, to the contrary, full of hope. An ordinary piece of fabric has become the perfect projection-sheet. Just like a magic mirror, it transforms anthropomorphic projections into potential primitive, intuitive knowledge. Thus, with the help of the flag, man can find his bearings.

With this projection and identification process, latent emotion unfurls; brought into focus by the flag, time and space are comprehensible and tangible.

The flag catalyzes man. A Roman General hurls his vexillum into the enemy ranks to unleash the power of his troops; their honour is at stake and must be recovered: *Actio via affectio*.



In hoc signo vinces
Constantine the Great's standard



THE DIFFERENCE

The significance of the flag changes. The Victory of Salamina. In 480 B.C., Themistocles tied his red coat to a pole and with this rallying signal his troops were to win. The flag sets out the plan of battle, distinguishes one's own from the enemy front, separates the centre (the 'righteous') from the periphery (the 'foe'), situates shelter- and combat-areas.

729 years later, on Milvius Bridge: "*In hoc signo vinces*" - "With this sign you will vanquish." In a dream, Constantine had seen a sign from Christ. If he fought with Christ's

banner, he would have a share in the divine presence. In fact, the battle did not even need to be waged as victory was a foregone conclusion. Here, the flag is not an innocent sign, but a predetermined symbol, the display of divinity. It is the existence of idea itself. Transubstantiation: the cloth used by Veronica (Vera icon - true image) to wipe sweat from Christ's face as he went to Calvary has borne the impression of this physiognomy for 2,000 years. The divine, the truth is a piece of cloth.

Revolutions, nations, the Boston Tea Party and the Capture of the Bastille, all follow on from there. The 'divine' connotation is dropped and, from here on, the works of man are 'woven' into the flag's fabric: the State, its history and culture. Blowing in the sky, the flag is no longer the mediator between recognizable reality and the apotheosis of another world, but symbolizes the legitimation and identity of events in this world. Secularization of the flag: taking it as far as the orgiastic cult of the swastika.



Tsarist flag:
"God with Us"

TETRAD

Friedrich Creuzer, in the "Symbolism and Mythology of the Peoples of Antiquity, especially the Greeks," (1810-1812):

"It (the symbol) expresses everything peculiar to this race, the 'momentary', the 'total', the 'necessary' and the 'impenetrable'. For the flag this means:

The 'momentary' is the present, junction between past and future. The superabundant contents of the flag spring forth and momentarily affect intuition, the soul, with no need for spoken words. A thunderbolt, a visionary information explosion. The flag unfurls all its kinetic power. Immediately sensuous: Hieroglyphs; dancing in the wind, the sky is the stage for a universal colour play; jets of flame whip the air, making the wind visible. An unwritten symphony with myriads of rippling melodies. A poem dedicated to the clouds.

The 'total' is the sum of all the significance packed into the flag. It is its autonomy and its authority. Representing all possibilities, the association of all aspects of life. The total is 'ratio' and 'emotio' at the same time. The analogy starts to liberate itself from achievement and moves into the 'verifiable'. Here speaks of There, Now of Before and Later. Divisions fuse. All is fluid (Heraklites). On the flagstaff, in the sky, in the wind.

The 'necessary' is the *sensus moralis* of the medieval exegesis. The strength of the flag to provoke action. Energy aroused finds its guide. The goal is unity, mediation and equilibrium of contrasts. The aesthetics of the sublime bridge the gap between mind and matter. The flag is necessary – just as it is – stimulating progress and ascension.

The 'impenetrable'. The third side of the flag. The impenetrable remains impenetrable.

Georges-André Althaus



Flagthrower