



TREE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE * NORBERT FRANCIS ATTARD

When Marcel Duchamp created the notorious *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, in 1912, he was proclaiming a new beachhead for avant-gardism in New York. Norbert Attard's inspiration for his *Tree Descending a Staircase* goes beyond the mere concept of movement and radical and ironic ideas. It is symbolic of the artist's unconscious. The archetypal descent to the unconscious could be interpreted as the artist's journey into the depths of the unconscious psyche in search of the 'self'. Ascending to a higher level signifies the spiritual growth of the individual or various possibilities of self-transformation.

The symbolic images of the staircase and the tree have also a spiritual connection for the artist. Attard's use of the tree evokes a kind of spiritual appeal. The 'tree' is the Tree of Life which shows the higher metaphysical reality. It is a primordial instinct, a state of intimate participation with nature, exactly what Lucien Lévy-Bruhl termed *participation mystique*. This shows how the individual can experience symbolic life which Jung describes as 'archaic identity'. The 'stairs' is symbolical for a sense of hierarchy and progress in life. The steps show different levels or forms of success: "moving up in the world". It can also be interpreted as the growing in one's own self confidence, experience and wisdom.

In this work I find that the artist is expressing a kind of 'personal animism' establishing meaning not only about 'the idea of descending or ascending a staircase' and its use, but also about himself. It is above all a primitivist's appeal to the 'spirit'. In other words, the artist wants to reclaim the archaic, pure state of 'mystical consciousness'. It is this kind of primitivism which becomes a medium of soul-searching and self-transformation.

LOUIS LAGANA

* This work is named after *Nude Descending a Staircase*, a 1912 painting by Marcel Duchamp. The work is widely regarded as a Modernist classic and has become one of the most famous of its time. In its first presentation at the Parisian Salon des Indépendants, it was rejected by the Cubists and caused a huge stir during its exhibition at the 1913 Armory Show in New York following a press copy of an abuse scandal.