

ARTIST

This is what I told the committee;

"My pain is very specific. If you want me, a former citizen of the lost Atlantis, to create a memorial to my destroyed home, beware. My pain very specific, and very raw. I am no Maya Ying Lin, and this will be no Vietnam Memorial; no cold, clean granite for me, no act of national mourning. I mourn only for myself, and so my pain is perpetual. And specific."

RESEARCHER

It's not until a culture has died, i.e its last member has passed on or lost the language, that whatever body of artistic work, pot shards, calenders, clothing, etc from that culture is recognizable as a kind of cohesive body.

ARTIST

You see, no one was interested in Atlantis before. We had no tourists. No one came onto the island and no one had any reason to leave. Until, one year, when we discovered that the ocean levels around our home were rising at a rate of one inch per week. Scientists were unable to explain the phenomena. The place was sinking, pure and simple.

RESEARCHER

And that body takes on characteristics.

ARTIST

There was no violent evacuation, no scrambling emergency. Everyone simply packed their bags and left their homes and, for over a month, we lived on houseboats and circled the island with the insane hope that, perhaps, it might rise again out of the ocean. Which, of course, it never did. But that month on the houseboat, circling the island as it quietly sank to its watery grave, was a month of intense, spiritual pain. What other word can I use, except pain? Pain. Pain. Violent and irreparable pain.

RESEARCHER

This is true in the case of Atlantian culture, the truths about it become clear in its sudden death. We can now see that Atlantian art is, for the most part, angry, stupid, unoriginal, ugly, and poorly made.

ARTIST

I told the committee;

"The memorial will be a painting. And this painting will record my very. Specific. Pain. And you will not understand it." I give you Exhibit A: My painting.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa'.)

Wasn't I right? Have you ever seen anything like it? It is wholly original, and completely incomprehensible to you. Only I understand. I decided to paint in the old, romantic style, a very ingenious move. Very original. Each man on the raft is an image of me, dying or already dead. You see me here, wrapped in a red cloak, intellectually brooding—made into an old man because of my insane tragedy. You see me, here, given up to spiritual death, my head sunk into the salted water. You see me here, at the very apex of the piece, waving a red and pleading flag; "Come

back!" I call to my island, "rise! Rise! Rise!" You see me here, in the very center, clutching this other man—also me—pleading him to forget, to turn away, to resign himself to the complete and utter loss of his childhood home.

Do you see too, how the island is impossibly visible in its utter invisibility? Probably not. But still, this is a genius piece of work.

The committee agreed, but they also insisted that my genius had been expressed before.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa')

I present to you exhibit B; Gericault's famous 19th century masterwork; "Raft of the Medusa." The committee insisted that I copied my painting after Gericault's. But how absurd! They couldn't be more different. There are compositional similarities, sure, but Gericault's work is utterly comprehensible, utterly universal! Mine is utterly... mine! And speaks only to my pain! These men in Gericault's work aren't mourning the loss of an island. It's obvious, isn't it? They're on a raft, waving to a distant ship, hoping to be saved! It's a universal parable, geometric in its spiritual simplicity, concerning man's enduring hope for salvation and his capability for utter depravity. Does my work concern itself with historical acts of cannibalism and sexual perversity? No. But Gericault's does. Take a look again at Exhibit A.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa')

My work is entirely different. These men are fractions of me! They are not Gericault's men. Again, I present Exhibit B.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa')

And Exhibit A.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa')

And Exhibit B.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa')

The committee said they'd other works to consider. The choice would be made in a month.

"Very well," I told the committee, "my pain is very specific and incomprehensible. I understand if you are incapable of recognizing the worth of pure and singular ingenuity."

What a bittersweet moment it was, then, when they decided that the memorial should consist, not of one artist's work, but of every submission made to the Atlantis Memorial competition. Two hundred Atlantian artists made submissions. Two hundred submissions were displayed. And wouldn't you know it.

(Image of 'Raft of the Medusa' shown again, and again, and again, and again.)

Every single artist's submission resembled the mark of my genius.

They bear a striking compositional resemblance to my work and to Gericault's. This is true. But each one, you must admit—including that old master's old painting—is deficient; for it lacks the substance of my singular and incomprehensible suffering.

Anyway, my pain is very specific, so I don't expect that you've understood a word I've said.

RESEARCHER

For example, take this scrap of poetry found on the back of a survivor's grocery list:

In tumbled the now life

The encrusted barges of grime and loyalties

And I went under.

I would like to see my time in depth

Yet fear its lesson should they find

*In future times my futility
My weaknesses
And my open jaw.*

(The End.)