

The Life and Metamorphosis of Forms: Focillon's Influence on Baltrušaitis's Morphology

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The intent of this paper is to demonstrate the profound influence of Henri Focillon on the thought of Jurgis Baltrušaitis. Their meeting in 1924 marked a crucial moment in Baltrušaitis's intellectual life for the next twenty years. Focillon sparked in him a strong interest in medieval art, which led to a significant turning point in his career. The notions of "survival" and "revival" of forms represent just two of the many legacies Baltrušaitis received from his master. Baltrušaitis took up Focillon's idea of the "awakening of ancient backgrounds," according to which Gothic art recalls and evokes the Romanesque fantastic, but he further deepened this conception. Baltrušaitis pointed to and radicalized Focillon's methodology, seeking extremely precise documentation, rich in exotic elements such as oriental influences and monstrous figures. In his works, he devoted large passages to the rediscovery of stylistic precedents, distant in time, highlighting examples of formal continuity. Both Baltrušaitis and Focillon were convinced that the life of forms revealed laws and constants. Baltrušaitis took the path traced by his master and realized his dream: to discover and verify, beyond the contingency of forms, a morphological *necessity* that would be answered by the constancy of formal laws that govern the evolution of artistic forms over time.

Keywords: Focillon, Baltrušaitis, aesthetics, shape, metamorphosis, monsters

Preamble

Many years have passed since the two volumes I devoted to the thoughts of Focillon¹ and his pupil, Baltrušaitis,² were published in Italy. Since then, other studies have appeared and research has continued – see, for

example, the important conference *Jurgis Baltrušaitis 120: the Fluidity of art History and Imagination* (Vilnius, May 19–20, 2023). I asked myself what still remains inexhaustible in Baltrušaitis's teachings today, and what ontological assumptions Focillon, and later his pupil, take their cues from.³ There

- 1 Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, *Forma come destino. Henri Focillon e il pensiero morfologico nell'estetica francese della prima metà del Novecento*. Firenze: Alinea, 1998.
- 2 Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, *Deformazioni fantastiche. Introduzione all'estetica di Jurgis Baltrušaitis*. Milano: Mimesis, 1999.

- 3 This meeting between Focillon and Baltrušaitis took place near the end of 1924 (Focillon held the Chair of Archaeology and Art History of the Middle Ages at the Sorbonne since 1925), the year in which a decisive turning point in Baltrušaitis's intellectual life was determined. In Paris, Baltrušaitis, Lithuanian by origin, attended the master's courses and presented his exposé

are underlying themes that no new paper can undermine but only help implement: the autonomy of forms, their metamorphic and prodigious life that is structured from awakenings, anticipations, and delays.

It is not possible to say that Baltrušaitis was an entirely faithful pupil of Focillon, but it cannot be denied that the theoretical premises of their research have common ground. If it is true that after the master's death, Baltrušaitis set out on the intricate paths of cultural history, strewn with myriad images and legends,⁴ then it cannot be denied that the fascination with the form – which becomes autonomous in its genesis and metamorphoses – derives directly from Focillon's studies and especially his *Vie des formes* (1934), which remains a masterpiece in the history of art criticism and aesthetics.

There is an obvious continuity between Focillon's pupil, a scholar of medieval ornamental systems, and the indefatigable enthusiast of fantastic forms.⁵ This connec-

tion is dictated by the profound influence of the master and the search for new ways to understand the autonomous becoming of forms, through a series of revivals, re-propositions, and cross-references that follow what we might call a "morphological logic."

The Theme of the Contingency of Form: Theoretical Premise

Form is not an accidental covering of content; on the contrary, it shapes and sculpts the meaning of things: it is its identity. It is that *quid* without which the thing would be different. Form is the manifestation of the ontological; it is the manner, the appearance by which it manifests itself to the observer.

The Aristotelian distinction, and *a fortiori* the Kantian distinction, between form and matter, between form and content, is meaningless to those who, like Focillon and Baltrušaitis, approach the morphology and want to investigate its meaning. Focillon and Baltrušaitis attempted to resolve the problem of "contingency" – by "contingency of form," we mean the fact that form always poses the problem of its own necessity. To separate form and matter is to empty form, abandoning matter to chaos and indeterminacy. Form is an inherent quality of the thing, or rather it is the thing itself with its own visibly qualitative peculiarities.

An inquiry that focuses on the autonomous role of morphology implies that form is free in its evolutionary genesis. Artistic and symbolic forms are subject to change over time and space: they can evolve and transform to fit the cultural and social contexts in which they are used. Indeed, Focillon elaborates a dual definition of iconography,

on the analysis of gesture in art, which earned him the appreciation of Focillon, who proposed that he begin a study that would later result in a thesis written for the *doctorat es lettres*, published in 1931 under the title *La Stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane* (reissued in 1986, extensively modified, under the title *Formations, déformations. La stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane*). In addition to its original methodological scope, this work complemented and in part confirmed Focillon's doctrine on the formal principles of Western Romanesque art, so much so that Baltrušaitis himself considers it complementary to Focillon's *L'art des sculpteurs romans*.

4 Cf. Baltrušaitis, *Aberrations : quatre essais sur la légende des formes* (first edition, 1957) and *La Quête d'Isis. Essai sur la légende d'un mythe* (1967).

5 Baltrušaitis is also the great scholar on the prodigies of forms, optical distortions, and deceptions of the eye (*Anamorphoses ou Thaumaturgus Opticus*, first edition 1955, and *Le Mirroir*, 1978).

considering both the variations of form based on the same meaning and the different meanings the form itself can take on. Every form is immersed in the continuous mobility of time. It is at the same time particular, local, individual, and a witness to the universal.⁶ One cannot reduce art, just as one cannot reduce form, to a mere outline, but must evaluate it in all its fullness of expression, under all its qualitatively present aspects.

A sign signifies an object, form signifies only *itself* [...]. Form has a meaning – but it is a meaning entirely its own, a personal and specific value that must not be confused with the attributes we impose on it. Form has a significance, and form is open to interpretation. An architectural mass, a relationship of tones, a painter's touch, an engraved line exist and possess value primarily in and of themselves. Their physiognomic quality may closely resemble that of nature, but it must not be confused with nature. Any likening of form to sign is a tacit admission of the conventional distinction between form and subject matter – a distinction that may become misleading if we forget that the fundamental content of form is a *formal* content.⁷

According to Focillon, forms that live in space and matter also live in spirit.⁸ Indeed, to become conscious means to take form. “Art doesn't just give form to sensibility but awakens form in sensibility.”⁹

6 Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, suivi de *Éloge de la main*. Paris: Puf, 1943.

7 Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*. Translated by Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler. New York: Zone Books, 1989, p. 34–35.

8 Focillon, *Vie des formes*.

9 Focillon, *Vie des formes*, p. 49–50, translated by the Author.

Formal Survivals and Awakenings

Given this basic premise, a premise as revolutionary as it is necessary, the collaboration between Focillon and Baltrušaitis led to the development of a methodology that is, in many respects, common. Baltrušaitis's analyses of the Middle Ages and the period's prodigious and fantastic aspects are the outcome of research shared by the two scholars, the results of which also flow into the great and important work of synthesis, Focillon's 1938 *Art d'Occident*. Here he takes the pattern of evolution of styles as his model. Transformations in medieval art appear in the form of morphological shifts that can never be traced to linear and evolutionary patterns but can be framed within survivals and revivals of ancient forms. In 1939, Focillon published an essay entitled “Quelques survivances de la sculpture romane dans l'art français,” where we find some arguments that were developed more extensively precisely in Baltrušaitis's own text *Réveils et prodiges. La Stylistique ornementale*, which strongly echoes Focillonian influences, particularly the notions of “survival” and “awakening.”¹⁰

In *Réveils et prodiges*, Baltrušaitis takes up Focillon's idea that Gothic art awakens and deepens the fantastic in the Roma-

10 Baltrušaitis, *Études sur l'art médiéval en Arménie et en Géorgie*, 1929; *Art sumérien, art roman*, 1934; *Le Problème de l'ogive et l'Arménie*, 1936; “Cosmographie chrétienne dans l'art du Moyen Age”, 1939; *Le Moyen Age fantastique*, 1955, reissued in 1972 without changes, and in 1981 by Flammarion with additions and changes; *Réveils et prodiges. Le gothique fantastique*, 1960, reprinted by Flammarion in 1988 without any relevant changes, but with the title *Réveils et prodiges. Les Métamorphoses du gothique*.

nesque, noting that the Gothic recovers even older forms that had deteriorated since the advent of the Romanesque order. The evolutionary cycles, which had previously promoted the establishment of the Romanesque style, are now set in motion again in such a way that their contribution relates to the new Gothic forms that are developing in the meantime. In adopting Focillon's methodology, Baltrušaitis radicalizes it, deepening, with extremely precise documentation, some of the insights articulated by the master. He investigates with an abundance of detail the vast repertoires of survivals and revivals. Therefore, in Baltrušaitis's texts, the investigation of the Romanesque and Gothic orders is repeated and updated through new elements often charged with exoticism (oriental legacies and monstrous figures).

Emerging through the rhythm of references and returns are a Middle Ages that do not give up their past. Some elements continue to persist precisely in those centers where the Gothic style is developing. Baltrušaitis recognizes periods of strong experimentation when certain aesthetics persistently reassembled themselves into the most curious revivals. For example, the Romanesque survivals, found beyond the 12th century, are not the faint legacy or last breath of a now-dead world that only endures in environments that Baltrušaitis calls "latecomers," but are rather the overt manifestation of a deep and permanent state whose existence is strongly demonstrated by its presence and vitality even in the last period of the Middle Ages. There is an underground river that causes forms to surface and revive, a river that flows

naturally only when the forms no longer encounter obstacles.

The Romanesque order returns in a new guise, attaching itself to novel elements found even beyond the Middle Ages, either in the form of direct survival or through transposition into different contexts, such as sculpture or miniature. Survivals, however, do not have the same scope and value everywhere. Sometimes the traces are weak, sometimes they prove to be strong and constant, and this happens most often in precisely the objects that turn out to be most distant and therefore unexpected: miniatures, talismans, coins, gems, and the like.

In *Réveils et prodiges*, the Middle Ages become a monster of a thousand forms that expands irregularly, throwing itself into seemingly random directions at varying speeds. But randomness is only the superficial façade, the lying face of a universe that hides a logic given both by the very life of the forms, their analogical references, and the internal and relational coherence of each of them. A coherence that follows a geometric logic calculating and connecting the parts. Prodiges and monsters are the protagonists of a teratological novel into which the reader of *Réveils et prodiges* find themselves projected. A teratology capable, however, of concealing a plan, a pattern, a geometric scheme that makes it intelligible.¹¹

In *Le Moyen Age fantastique*, Baltrušaitis persists in investigating this varied world. If the Romanesque universe is even

¹¹ Baltrušaitis, *Réveils et prodiges. Les Métamorphoses du gothique*. Paris: Flammarion, 1988, p. 10–15.

monstrously “superhuman,” the realm of Gothic forms is tormented, full of prodigies that develop in parallel with the propagation of an “order of life” and a certain “realism.” And this is because fantastic cycles are constantly being reborn, contaminating that very realm from which they had been excluded.

Focillon had already repeatedly expressed the idea that Romanesque sculpture is above all movement, and it is in movement that formal rules and laws are put into practice with the greatest rigor. It is precisely from this assertion that Baltrušaitis seeks – through a painstaking comparison of images, sometimes even redrawn by him in the pages of his texts – to trace those “formal constants” that, despite the passage of time, remain unchanged even within a process of continuous evolution of artistic forms. He devotes large passages of his works to the rediscovery of stylistic precedents, distant in time, bringing to light examples of formal continuity in both Greek and Roman art and in ancient Eastern civilizations.

Beyond the apparent chaos of the forms, there exist, underlying them, shared reference models that allow chaos to be transformed into expressive form. Form necessarily bears this double status of freedom and constraint: free in its genesis, it is nonetheless bound within a model, within temporal, spatial, material, and geometric limits.

Baltrušaitis noted in *Le Moyen Age fantastique* that Islam provides Romanesque art with several geometric and heraldic motifs, along with a taste for abstract morphology: “geometric dreams,” “unreal beings,” and “wonders of the world.” Contacts with the

East, from which Baltrušaitis sees most of the legacies that enliven Romanesque art, especially in the field of decoration, are maintained and nurtured during the 13th century and later. However, Eastern influences are not limited to arabesques or frame layouts but also contribute to iconography.

Three great repertoires, ranging from Hellenistic Antiquity to the Far East and passing through Islam, influenced the art of the medieval West, which masterfully reconciled the permanence and renewal of oriental elements with ancient sources within a choice of differentiated systems.¹² The phenomena of transmission, awakening, or rebirth must therefore be examined based on the interpretations and adaptations that forms and motifs undergo in different and distant contexts. It is not enough to note the transmission, in very distant environments, of a few isolated images, but it is necessary to establish “the analogy and filiation of the processes that generated them” rather than the superficial similarities between various artistic repertoires.¹³ In order to uncover deep morphological kinships and provide a plausible explanation for such filiations, it is necessary to search for avenues through which morphological contacts can be established between spatio-temporally distant cultures. One such avenue is provided by the so-called “intermediary arts” (designs worn on clothes, porcelain, various decorations, legends, etc.) capable of influencing and transmitting formal tastes from one culture to another. But although this route often

¹² Baltrušaitis, *L'Église cloisonnée en Orient et en Occident*. Paris : Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1941.

¹³ Baltrušaitis, *Art sumérien, art roman*, p. 6.

stands out clearly, it must also be kept in mind that the intermediary arts do not serve the same function and do not all carry the same weight in morphological diffusion. Another way to discover the modes of filiation might be to investigate any similarities among the techniques adopted. However, each technique adapts to the needs it meets and is unlikely to be passed on without variation.

The search for filiations must therefore be shifted to a different plane, that is, almost solely to the plane of morphological life. One can see how any kaleidoscopic vision of forms moves and renews itself “in the web of the same lines.” This means that formal imagination has narrow boundaries and that forms cannot vary indefinitely. One is therefore very likely to see, in distant cultures, “not only the same combinations born of the same principle but very often some motifs and even representations that are roughly identical,”¹⁴ whose thematic value, meaning, and context has nevertheless changed enormously. Focillon’s teaching cannot be more obvious.

Metamorphosis: Precocity, Actuality, and Delays

“Built in stages, carved in marble, cast in bronze, fixed in varnish, engraved in copper or wood, the work of art is only seemingly immobile.”¹⁵ While maintaining its own peculiar identity, a work of art constantly changes, like its form, which is “a mobile life in a changing world.”¹⁶ The

metamorphoses never end. From Focillon and Baltrušaitis’s point of view, the metamorphosis of forms, their autonomous life, and their inexhaustible dynamism can be investigated either by turning to the temporal succession of styles or by focusing on the ornament – how its geometric patterns reveal a continuous repetition of the same elements, which nevertheless give rise to ever new combinations. Baltrušaitis inherits the Focillonian concept of history – understood as a conflict of precociousness, actuality, and delays – while nevertheless developing an interest in all those artistic manifestations that, seen in the context of a particular era, appear as anomalies, exceptional cases when compared to the dominant culture.

The different speeds at which the phenomena proceed makes it possible to determine, within a given period, what is early and what appears late. Certain elements or events prolong their influence, while others, now outdated, appear later, giving rise to the phenomena of revival and recovery. In this way, various layers may merge or generate a series of exchanges. Historical events thus seem to be the almost fortuitous result of the relationship between different actualities and inactualities, which have distinct speeds. There may be many causes of delays, but we can rule out some of them. For example, ignorance of sources, legends, or forms. A myth, figure, etc. may be known in a given era, even if it is not used and revisited. It is not lucid sociocultural research that can give well-founded explanations of morphological development. Neither, therefore, does the inadequacy of structures explain the delays. In fact, it is the figures

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10–11.

¹⁵ Focillon, *Vie des formes*, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

that adapt to the structures and not vice versa. It is necessary then to resort to more nuanced elements.

Baltrušaitis refers to a morphological maturity and a set of purely formal circumstances – for example, the prevalence of a monumental style or, on the contrary, the search for preciousness coinciding with the re-presentation of specific forms that are more or less refined. Here, then, are dormant forms that return to the present and are reborn in contexts that do not seem to conform entirely.

Focillon's assertion that art and the artist "evade" their social function in the name of a higher mission, dictated by the autonomy of form, implies that art should not be constrained or limited by external considerations, such as its social function or audience expectations. On the other hand, Baltrušaitis continues beyond his master, arguing that form in art makes use of the performing subject rather than being generated by it. The artist becomes an instrument through which the form manifests itself.

It is a matter of relating the *phenomenon* (i.e., the individual form) to the *type* (i.e., styles, recurring forms) and then examining how the types succeed each other, how they change with the flow of time, which imposes the obligation to draw a canon, a standard for their variation. That is, art has its own laws that are independent of both the expressive will of the individual artist and of the great knots of history. Focillon and then Baltrušaitis freed themselves from any subjectivist legacies, tilting the scale in favor of the object, the form. The artist's freedom does not consist in obeying their

own will. There is an invisible but extremely strong bond that unites the artist to the world of forms and their history. It is not just a conditioning dictated by tradition or the social environment – in short, by everything that precedes and lives with the artist. It is that the artist themselves enters as an element into the life of forms. The artist's freedom then is played out only within a world – specifically, that of forms – which provides them with the models, traces, materials, and techniques within which they can make a decisive and qualitative choice. The artist loses themselves within a legend of forms or styles, and their personality is replaced by the forms themselves and the styles themselves.

Laws and Myths

As early as *La Stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane*, Baltrušaitis showed that he has assimilated his master's lesson, nullifying, almost completely in his treatment, the presence of the subject. True, the Romanesque and the Gothic favor the inclination toward the object, and yet in Baltrušaitis there is more. By showing how Romanesque sculpture can be considered a whole, a system, he in fact derives formal laws within which the artist must move. The law of attraction of the frame (adaptation of the animated figure to the lines of a geometric frame), together with the law of the horror of emptiness, express the great hypothesis that underpins his work: every plastic invention depends fundamentally on architecture and conforms to it. This morphological analysis is developed systematically, and it is joined by another

fundamental law, which is that of the geometric scheme, whereby there is an order capable of regulating and determining the influence of the geometric figure on the figurative matter. The medieval artist cannot disregard certain morphological rules whereby the richness of living forms, animal and plant, results in the service of plastic art, which in turn serves architecture. A continuous exchange is thus established between figures and forms, between the real and the abstraction, creating dwarfs, giants, and monsters of all sorts that have a precise morphological and contextual origin. "This is not a gratuitous game or a decorative whim, but a rigorous calculation. It is a linear reasoning that builds like a dialectic by knotting and unraveling its arguments, antitheses, and syntheses, following a relentless logic or, if you will, a well-regulated mechanism."¹⁷

We are faced with a kind of ornamental dialectic that is played out exclusively within complex combinations and abstract patterns. All the variety of plastic art invention (including sculptural monsters) can joust exclusively within this system. The artist is not allowed imagination or daring invention. "This study showed us that the ornament, as an abstract figure, could be analyzed not as a set of independent forms, invented on a whim, but as a series of combinations linked together, so that they seemed to arise and derive from each other like the *elements of mathematical reasoning*."¹⁸

17 Baltrušaitis, *Formations, déformations. La stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane*, Paris: Flammarion, 1986, p. 57.

18 Baltrušaitis, *La Stylistique ornementale dans la sculpture romane*, p. X.

But the artist turns out to be subjected to other kinds of schematic imposition as well. The awakenings of certain symmetrical or moving forms or complexes of figures coming from the East or other places of origin (Baltrušaitis's texts abound with such examples) draw a complex but well-defined landscape in which the artist is forced to move. Monsters, of which iconography produces example after example in the West as well as in the East, are also the subject of an investigation aimed at highlighting filiations or simple influences. Carved in stone on the pinnacles of churches or fixed in the miniatures of the *Bestiarii*, monsters seem to migrate, reappear, and disappear in the most varied contexts, but according to the logic of morphological awakenings.

Not only formal constants but also mythological and fable constants act strongly on the artist's choices. Take as an example the theme of Gilgamesh, or "the man of lions," which also exemplifies the history of Eastern influences on the Christian art of the West. Baltrušaitis returned to this legend on several occasions and treated it by accurately pointing out the smallest details. His starting point was neither the written sources nor the legend itself (the story of a Sumerian fighting with lions). Rather, he analyzed the given representations of the hero in visual art and followed their development by essentially studying the evolution of a minor iconographic theme, namely the battling of a man with wild animals.

This example of Gilgamesh represents the merely formal affair (the pattern of which is given by a standing figure surrounded by two symmetrical animals facing each other) that recurs through

“multiple epiphanies.”¹⁹ The initial theme (a man between two lions, holding them by their throats) has been given different meanings and is constantly transformed, introducing itself into Romanesque sculpture by passing through Sassanid textiles. There is no original figure to which all subsequent ones refer, as its existence would dictate the exact adaptation of a form to a meaning. On the contrary, there is a form or rather a formal pattern, a geometric structure, capable of taking on different meanings. The pattern derives from a legend that was immediately transposed to a formal register. More than a “fable” or a particular tale, a stylistic logic can be traced that explains the emergence of forms, which similarly follow one another in heterogeneous settings such that, if the formal structure is preserved, Gilgamesh is instead replaced by other characters (Daniel among the lions, for example) who play the same or similar role. It is a dialectic of ornament development that Baltrušaitis wants to arrive at. Baltrušaitis’s method is rigorous, although he never expounded it systematically. He replaces the forms of legend with a “legend of forms.”²⁰

Conclusion

Baltrušaitis’s research proceeds through direct comparisons between monuments and monuments, decorations and decorations, figures and figures, and legends and legends most often disregarding place

and time and rather following, through an analogical system, the evolution of forms and themes. Analogy becomes for Baltrušaitis a privileged way of proceeding through a morphological investigation. When comparing form to form, deriving valuable morphological patterns or models, Baltrušaitis applies a procedure strongly marked by comparison. Of course, analogy brings with it advantages and disadvantages. First, it is necessary to rise from a merely empirical level of observation to a law that can explain the emergence of all forms and their dynamics. Then one must specify – though not necessarily in a systematic way – the criteria for choosing the examples brought in as verification. An analogical inference in the sphere of forms requires, in fact, that there exist constant and actually observable relations of structure – that is, that some kind of structural similarity exists. The validity of an analogical inference, which is based on structural homologies, is simultaneously the result of empirical comparison and the method of comparison itself. Analogy is thus employed heuristically: this is Baltrušaitis’s response to the issue of the contingency of form raised by Focillon.

Baltrušaitis’s method, although based on an analogical system that is sometimes pushed a bit beyond its boundaries, yields results, and especially fascinates those who, far from seeking a historical methodology, allow themselves to be led into a whirling labyrinth of forms and images from which emerge, only seemingly by enchantment, well-structured laws and rules. Baltrušaitis, adopting a methodology marked by a strong formal autonomy of Focillonian

19 Baltrušaitis, « Gilgamesh. (Note sur l’histoire d’une forme) », *Revue d’art et d’esthétique* (juin 1935).

20 Jean-François Chevrier, *Portrait de Jurgis Baltrušaitis*. Paris: Flammarion, 1989, p. 47–48.

derivation, discards research that is based on art history. The becoming of forms develops by “swellings” and “knots,” which can dissolve or tighten, determining the end or beginning of morphological development. Therefore, the succession of certain historical stages is read only as a function of formal metamorphosis. Baltrušaitis is convinced that the work of the art historian, properly so called, can only serve as a corollary to that of the morphologist.

Although he repeatedly stressed his disinterest in art history, he does not shy away from drawing conclusions about the processes of style development, identifying correct filiations. The history of forms, which does not parallel that of man, has rigid rules and fixed paths. Baltrušaitis's method, for a scholar of aesthetics, exudes an irresistible fascination precisely because it evades the boundaries of art history to enter fully into morphological genesis. During their lives, forms disguise and cloak themselves with new meanings, concealing their origin and truth. Baltrušaitis precisely investigates the places where deformation becomes evident, where forms are striking in their apparent enigmaticity. There is no aberrant form that Baltrušaitis does not investigate with the gusto of the meticulous

scientist who discovers intelligible laws behind chaos. Even monstrous, seemingly illogical forms thus receive their own clear legitimacy. Formation-deformation seems to be one, since every formed form represents the genesis of a deformation. Forms cannot, while trying hard to disguise it, destroy their origin. The realm of the possible, the realm of art, is identified precisely in the contrasting categories of dynamic and static. Contraries always flow into each other, within a continuous movement that guarantees the multiplicity of nuances.

Capturing the formative forces of art, whether intrinsic to the work or identifiable in an extrinsic morphological path, is the task Baltrušaitis sets himself to. The response to the Focillonian theme of morphological contingency becomes evident, weighty, and meaningful in his methodology. The invisible forces are those dictated by the intrinsic coherence of the morphological dynamic that inexorably imposes itself on the imagination of the artist or decorator. Realistic figures or deformed, twisted, elongated ones emerge from a universe of forces that can always be precisely calculated. For it is exactly the play of metamorphosis, of morphological awakenings and references, that allows form to manifest its conditioned freedom.

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