

Pisque os olhos, e você poderia passar por Liechtenstein sem tê-lo visto

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Este artigo fala da recente visita do autor à *Vereinigung der mund- und fussmalenden Künstler* (também conhecida como VDMFK, ou seja, Associação de Pintores que Pintam com a Boca e os com os Pés [APBP]), que fica em Liechtenstein, um país pequeno e surpreendentemente belo, emoldurado pelos Alpes, fazendo fronteira com a Suíça e a Áustria. Especial atenção é dada à relação que há entre arte e deficiência. Os desenhos foram todos inspirados em artistas pertencentes à APBP.

“Blink and you might miss Liechtenstein”

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Creativity takes courage.
Henri Matisse

Abstract

This article is about my recent visit to the *Vereinigung der mund- und fussmalenden Künstler* (aka VDMFK, i.e., the Association of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists of the World [AMFPA]), which is in Liechtenstein, a small and astonishingly beautiful country framed by the Alps, sharing borders with Switzerland and Austria. Special attention is giving to the association between art and disability. The drawings are of my authorship and were all inspired by artists who belong to the VDMFK.

Bigger than Zurich, but smaller than Vienna, Liechtenstein is the sixth smallest country in the world, being overcome in smallness just by the Vatican, Monaco, Nauru, Tuvalu, and San Marino. Liechtenstein is framed by the Alps and shares its doubly landlocked 62 sq. mi borders with only two other countries: Switzerland and Austria. Inhabited since pre-historical times, its lands were successively annexed to the Roman, the Merovingian, the Carolingian, and the Holy Roman

Empires, as well as to the Confederation of the Rhine and the German Confederation, until the country (a principality since 1719) achieved full political and territorial sovereignty in 1866. Small as Liechtenstein is, no wonder that one of the best travel books concerning Europe advises travellers the following: “Blink and you might miss Liechtenstein: the pocket-sized principality is so small (it measures just 25 km from north to south and about 6 km from west to east) that a cross-country run means across the whole country.”¹.



“Blink and you might miss Liechtenstein.” (Photo taken by the Author)

My visit to Liechtenstein, which took place in November 2023, had a quite a particular goal, which was visiting the Association of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists of the World (AMFPA), which has its headquarters in Vaduz, the capital of the country. Famous worldwide for its main product, which are Christmas cards embellished by copies of paintings created by its member artists, the AMFPA also promotes the sale of other artworks of their authorship, such as postcards, art prints and calendars. Having been founded in 1957 by a German artist who used his mouth for drawing and painting – the late Erich Stegman (1912-1984) –, and being Liechtenstein a German speaking country, it comes as no surprise that the original name of this for-profit international organization has a German name, which is Vereinigung der mund- und fussmalenden Künstler (VDMFK), and that the pre-condition for joining the association is being an artist whose works of visual art are done without the intermediation of this “universal tolls” called hands.²

¹ John Lee et alii. *Europe on a shoestring*, Victoria (Australia), Lonely Planet, 2005, p. 735.

² See Aristotle. *De partibus animalium*, 687a.



Drawing made by the Author, inspired by Charles Fowler's *Autumn Landscape*

By encouraging the practice of drawing and painting among people who, due to disability, are prevented from using hands, and, instead, wish to use their mouth or feet for such kind of activity, the VDMFK not only allows these individuals to achieve personal fulfilment; it also opens the doors for them to obtain economic autonomy. The VDMFK provides a monthly salary for all its members, which includes those whose physical disabilities have become so severe that prevent them from drawing and painting. Already as a child marked by a kind of “thirst for freedom”, Erich Stegman realized that, to be autonomous, the disabled artist needs money. Always opposing false compassion, instead, Erich aimed to obtain “partnership based on mutual assistance”.³

Italian, just like myself, the current manager director of the VDMFK is Mr Mario Famlonga, who was kind enough to receive me, present to me the very interior of the association (which houses its huge and magnificent collection of works of art, all of them “mouth- or foot-made), talk with me about the association, disability and art themselves, and, as if all this were not enough, he also invited me for lunch in a Liechtenstein restaurant, in the outskirts of Vaduz. Very meaningful is Erich Stegman’s choice of Liechtenstein as home for the association which, in the beginning, was nothing more than a dream – yes, a dream that, over only ten years, this multifaceted man transformed into reality. A fact that provides food for thought is that Liechtenstein and, consequently, the headquarters VDMFK are located at the very heart of Europe, the cradle of a civilization that is responsible for the atomic cataclysm of Chernobyl – a disaster that puts our current *imago mundi* in a tight spot⁴ –, but has also acted more than

³ Marc Alexander. *Art Celebrating the Conquest of Misfortune*, Kingsley, Leader Books, 1995, p. 17; see also João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira. *Por que não eles? arte entre os deficientes*, São Paulo, Cidade Nova, 2007, pp. 69-70.

⁴ Cf. Svetlana Aleksievith. *Vozes de Tchernóbil* (translated by Sonia Branco), São Paulo, Schwarcz, 2022, p. 39 et passim.

any other civilization for the benefit of humanity⁵. And, among the uncountable benefits that have Western origin and the whole of mankind have been enjoying since Antiquity, the ones concerning the sense of self-awareness and the suitable care for the disabled person are far from being the less important and the less original.



Drawing made by the Author, inspired by José Uribe's Dome



Mr Mario Famlonga and the Author (on the left side)

⁵ Thomas Woods Jr. *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (with a new foreword by Cardinal Antonio Cañizares), Washington, Regnery, 2012, p. 79 et passim.