

Nasser Assar

In the complex web of the international modern movement Nasser Assar holds a special place. Persian by birth and up-bringing, Parisian by adoption, aware of the aims and methods of Far Eastern art, he is nevertheless uniquely himself. His painting is not a conscious synthesis, but the product of deep feeling and experience. He has made his own the brief twilight of the desert when the still, heat-laden air is a tangible substance in which clouds and mountains float as if in water. He has caught and fixed the swift transition from day to night, when the sky goes through startling changes, from a diffused red glow to an orange streak that rises rapidly into the upper air, turns to green, and then is lost, while below the earth is already dark and empty. His use of soft violet, green and rose, the colours of a Persian miniature, gives his pictures a seductive charm; but behind this lyrical appeal to the eye is a feeling of that loneliness which anyone who has stood at the edge of the desert as night falls will know.

In his sense of communion with the natural world, his attitude to space and enveloping atmosphere, Assar has something in common with the Chinese painter. But the differences go deeper than the resemblances. The Chinese landscape is an invitation to the viewer to enter it and go wandering; Assar's world is something seen and felt from a fixed point in time and space: one does not wander in the desert. His use of colour, unlike that of the Chinese painter, is deeply evocative in itself, setting the emotional key of each picture. It is in his calligraphic use of thin oil paint as if it were ink that Assar comes closest to the Chinese aesthetic; for his brushstroke, unlike that of many Western abstract expressionists, is not solid and opaque, but luminous and alive. It is because of this quality that the daring textural counterpoint in his pictures between foreground and background is so wonderfully resolved.

Only an exquisite sensibility in the handling of the medium could achieve so subtle a balance. But the synthesis is not only visual. These pictures, – the oil-paintings particularly, – suggest an almost Taoist equilibrium between 'here' and 'out there', between the point where we stand and limitless space, between movement and stillness, the moment and eternity. The philosophical depth which underlies the visual poetry of Assar's paintings seems to stem from his serene acceptance of this duality.

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