

"About suffering they were never wrong, The Old Masters: how well they understood its human position; how it takes place while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." from Auden's 'Musee des Beaux Arts'

To draw, to sculpt, to paint..... these activities were for centuries considered to be the main currency in art but artists, increasingly throughout this century, have chosen to work in different arenas, probing sensations and examining cultural criteria. So, artists working from a theatrical perspective have given us performance art; in film, video art; from philosophy and a use of diverse material, conceptual art; from an existential philosophical base using space and material, they have given us installation art and land art.

Curators, critics and the art educational structures have very much supported these new movements - perhaps, in haste, lest they be compared to their predecessors in the academies who resisted Modernism at the turn of the last century - but one unfortunate consequence is the loss of accomplishment in the figurative tradition and a disregarding of basic drawing skills.

Eugene de Leastar continues to work mainly in figurative painting and in sculpture. He has, of late, painted abstracts which are an intense blend of a wide range of colour and various geometrical shapes. The human figure, however, is dominant in his work, be it the roughly hewn stoic figures of his sculptures or the solitary passionate characters who we find in their moments of truth and epiphany.

There is a kneeling naked figure of Christ, alone and vulnerable, about to be beaten, lit to one side in a subdued light while the remainder of the picture is in sombre burnt amber and shades of ochre. There is St. Anthony, in a background of primary colours, praying and beseeching in religious ecstasy so as not to succumb to the lascivious women in his mind's eye; John the Baptist supporting more than embracing a humble Christ and foreseeing the inevitable doom of his friend. In the painting of Artist and Model he - the artist, in anguished sensibility, attempts to express this sensibility onto canvass, while she - the model, in a melancholic mood, is more in touch with the sad uncommunicative air that exists in the studio.

The sculptures also show their figures isolated, where the mood is contemplative, where the inner concentration is to be seen in the 'Poise', where, regardless of shape and bent of body, the figures spiritual resilience is to be found in the brave and dignified facial expressions.

The painter's task is to paint, to realise an image which is what Eugene accomplishes. Many of the figures have a quality as though they are imprisoned in their bodies and destinies: if these bodies are less than flattering or are about to be wounded or to be used or to be viewed as vessels of sin, there is an acceptance of their situation, of the physical, and a resignation to their fate. There is little drama or rhetoric about these compositions which are created in a direct, easy and sympathetic style.

Here is an original eye and a refreshing return to what were once familiar religious and artistic preoccupations. Eugene's craftsmanship and sensibility give us paintings which aid us

in our perceptions, in our seeing. In relation to art movements and trends of this century, essential though it is to explore the boundaries and use of material in different media and to invite new possibilities and though we may find these art pieces exciting and provocative, the spiritual quality is often that very quality which is peculiarly lacking. However this spiritual dimension is available and evident in Eugene de Leastar's work as he proceeds to develop his own vision.

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