

selma feriani

FARES THABET

UN BATEAU, SANS NAUFRAGE ET SANS ÉTOILE



UN BATEAU, SANS NAUFRAGE ET SANS ÉTOILE

Reality and fantasy offset one another in the artist's mind corridors, where the mundane and the transcendent, the tangible and the intangible are faithfully wedded. They are in constant harmony and aporia. Unloosening his wandering eye, it jots down, registers and encloses objects from its surroundings, yet frees them from anticipated vanishing. They are not slavishly or sparingly reproduced as the standardized vision is overridden and forsaken. Intuition here supersedes a pallid monotony that is all the more oppressive. For Thabet, variations are borne out of this optical scansion, naturally and instinctively.

As a keen observer, everything that Thabet encounters and experiences in nature is inherently and abidingly visual. Yet, it is not an imitation of nature – we seem to rather perceive it anew as he imbues it with kaleidoscopic rearrangements. Are they surviving memories, dreams, afterthoughts or reminiscences? A vista of a languid reverie? The result is a fictive space, teeming with fanatical, valiant – yet sometimes inexplicable and hazardous – colour possibilities. Verdant chlorophyll green here, an incandescent

pink-punch there, atop of them sudden blazes of an inflammable tangerine transiting through a lapis lazuli-like background. All is chromatically choreographed while also leaving room for surprise. Yielding his canvas much freedom but never relinquishing control so to prevent a painting from careening into an erratic temperament.

The eye strives to predict, but the brush is devoted to the concerto of the hand, to the motion that delineates its path across the canvas. Colour, in its dynamite-like forte, escapes predictability, resists literal formalities, and opts for semi-opacity over transparency. What is relatively visible is somewhat also beyond recognition, for it is a continuation of the artist's personal worldview. Perhaps if we squint enough we may vicariously reach the unattainable, we may be transposed into realms unbeknownst to us. We may tread its grounds and trek through his trails. It is to leap forward into mystery, to unlock the gates of curiosity, to dabble our gaze into compositions that defy seasons and measurements. It momentarily awakens our appetite, that is, our gift of sight, to a moulting/coating of the world.

A woollen pastel-blue moon is perched over, specked on the depths of the sky, oozing like a beam with an anchoring gravity. A breeze from the crests of waves perfumes his canvas, a scent exhaled from the lush grove of trees, caressing our eyes like a mist of an early dawn, as the branches heave up and down. A volcanic shape looms across the canvas, unthreatening, for we do not waver at its sight. We swim from one shore to another, sailing between boats and ships showered under brisk dashes of water, and despite a mounting wave, they do not lurch. They do not flounder. A lighthouse with its diaphanous shafts of light, shooting like gentle arrows, arises from the depths of darkness. The sea and the sky appear almost undistinguishable at times, whether they are succinctly dappled in azure strokes or not, traversing them is a voluminous palm tree, slanting over, shrouding a territory of a distinct architecture.

The leafy, the urban and the maritime elide into a sequence or an emergence that are neither provincial nor paradisiacal. Aiding us out of our hebetude and blankness, Thabet glazes a purely aesthetic, sensory

experience. He rides the tide of serendipity, tossing away settled conventions of pictorial structuring while maintaining a fidelity to the rhythm of nature, to its rising and cowering. His vocabulary of pigment, colour, texture, and form allows for an expression of considerable freedom and fecundity. Seeping himself into the landscape, he alters its physiognomy, such as the succulent canary of a mystical desert, as its seeming dryness dissipates unknowingly.

Culled from photographs that he had personally taken, from spaces that linger in his mind, or from imaginary folds, pulsating compositions emerge, with an air of improvisation and effervescence. With genuine candour and intentness, Thabet lends us a window, a glimpse into the genesis and telos of his artistic experience thus far, in an intimate dialogue where we embrace his integral voice.



Fares Thabet Studio

In conversation with Fares Thabet

R.K: When confronted with an empty canvas, upon which you weave vibrant hues and light, could you elaborate on your approach – both in terms of mental preparation and physical execution?

F.T: The essence of a painting lays in its canvas – earth, sea, and sky – the foundational elements that give rise to it. From these emerges the essence of painting: colour, texture, and form. I can convey this through an aesthetic expression; it is always a starting point, but then it is also improvisation. I gauge where the painting can lead me. We can only control fifty per cent of the canvas and, in turn, it controls us back. This improvisation stems from negotiating with the painting, departing from its various sources or foundations. Photographs sometimes trigger the process; what follows however does not directly link to the final image. I do not base my work on a certain discourse; I trust my intuition, I am guided by it, and I work at the same time as I study other painters and art history in general. Colours are akin to musical notes – improvisation, composition, and harmony. I never begin with a blank canvas, rather, I always start from a background of colour, dominant or complementary, to achieve ultimate harmony.

R.K: There is a sense of layering in your plane modulating technique, a sense of hiding and revealing at the same time, a luminosity and a depth, how does that relate to your process and practice?

F.T: In relation to this exhibition, there is a new dimension; that is pictorial surfaces. I approach them as diverse textures. This means that within a single painting, depending on its composition, you can find various painting techniques and treatments. This is what I try to achieve – different languages, different artistic expressions that, together, yield a somewhat unified canvas.

R.K: Would you deem your work to veer towards a rather joyous or melancholic sensation? What other dimension do they inhabit in this exhibition?

F.T: I think it lies somewhere in between the two, meaning it is neither entirely one thing nor completely the other. It is not entirely dreamy nor entirely melancholic; rather, it is positioned somewhere in the middle, not leaning towards either extreme, but rather existing within a dichotomy between the two.

R.K: Could you tell us more about your exhibition title, as well as the titles of your paintings?

F.T: As for the title of this exhibition, it is a phrase from a poem by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado. I do not necessarily draw direct inspiration from his work for my practice, but I found that the title of the exhibition resonated well with what I wanted to convey. Regarding the titles of my artworks, they often stem from things, or passages, that I have read, segments from songs, or thoughts and feelings that arise at the moment where I create the painting.

Racha Khemiri

Tunis, June 2024