

...Far from the classics and closer to the Impressionists, despite a primitive naturalism he was unclassifiable (and why classify him?). He was said to be private and independent, but in reality was dependent on his environment, feeding himself on it and enriching it, still tied to his origins, and in this sense, an original painter.

His talent was quickly recognized by those around him, and his first successes came early. It did not take people long to realize the contribution and the novelty of this young painter, in a country where pictorial expression was an alienating exportation with no object, at most orientaling Western traditions. Many were turning their attention to the country. Lellouche was in the country! Unpretentious, young, happy, he expressed it first, without effort or strain: the complexity, the changing fluidity, the unexpected contrasts.

Neither his travels in Morocco and Spain nor his encounters with major works could separate him from his origins and the pictorial mark it had left.

The works from Marrakech and Toledo still bear the remnants of his childhood in Tunis, and I can still see on the walls and doors of his closet the copies of Rembrandt, Goya – Renoir even – treated with a casualness, a curious fancy. Did Albert Giacometti not say recently that originality is revealed through imitation as much as it is through original works?

These were the best years of Lellouche, those of his joyful assurance. Often discussed, he was spoiled by all, living freely between his closet and his piano in his mother's house. -Have you ever heard Lellouche dabbling on piano, ignorant of music theory and notes, but with the same sense of inspiration and rhythm as in painting? -His faithful friends, thanks to whom he was revealed to himself: the Swiss painter and honorary Tunisian Louis, the father Laurent, caustic or solemn according to the skies, but always disillusioned, and the train of admirers as attentive to his performances as to those of an athlete.

The first shock occurred in Paris, and Lellouche has yet to recover from it. So there was something other than the blue, yellow, green and orange of his Tunis... There were other skies, other people. There were works that he went through the trouble to build, to paint in depth reserved works, to make them sober and far more exact. There was the Louvre, and everything had to be renewed, if not redone.

We knew Lellouche during these hard years of solitude, labor, study - never of doubt.

Silently and almost without friends – resident at Colarossi – he studied every day, every hour of the day, so much painting was his life.

Fortunately for him, he got free of the court of his tasteless supporters, of the nonchalant complacency of those who merely produce with no renewal.

He "learned painting," an alternative painting with no teacher or school, a painting in the image of nature, of reality; he learned to discover, behind the first impression, to render more than the first draft.

He learned to paint nudes, the Seine, Pont Neuf, and out of the canvas were born volumes before colors, attitudes before movement, as much as he feared being too rashly exposed.

Each day was a new inquiry, a victory over an art form he was no longer afraid to confront and to torment. Without losing any of his spontaneity or his originality, his art became more sensitive and more human.

The walls of his studio on Rue Daguerre were covered with beautiful series of studies, academic

works of sober values, carefully finished nudes, bridges of Paris not always successful yet felt exactly, chilly and clear like the ends of the days of March in Paris. Soutine came to take a look at them, at length and attentively, and he came back. Once, on the street Campagne-Première, some Nordic connoisseur took advantage of a "crisis" period to make away with fifty admirable drawings. We will always miss them.

The war brought us Lellouche transformed, his career in full stride yet unsatisfied. He had a hard time "finding himself," to mesh with the requirements of a brilliance he had forgotten, that of a burning and charred earth, an art that was refined.

It was no longer enough to see and to paint, to capture nature. He had to understand it. In advancing beyond his first impressions, he had to surpass himself.

Never was Lellouche as worried, never as groping. His creativity failed him at times; the brilliance of years past came and went. We will one day pardon him for certain disconcerting weaknesses.

Last year, however, he got back to work as conscientiously as in Paris, if not as happily as in his early years of painting.

He was not afraid of tackling the various problems of our changing sunlight.

He dared to spread purple shadows that raised an outcry but are genuine. And to capture on multiple small canvases all the states of a seascape, a sail, the sand, and the sea. There are in the sequence of these sketches undoubted successes, but in Tozeur and Nafta, where we were amazed to see him go, he stood at the forefront of his research and discoveries. I think of a little oasis which marks a turning point in his work, reconstituting a crystallization of forms through the harmonious, natural, spiritual assembly of a single green tint so slightly brought out by short fine orange and blue touches.

We expect more of Lellouche, we are waiting for his return from another bout of hard work in Paris. No doubt he will renew himself – he certainly will vary – but what we know about him suggests that he will know how to overcome even greater difficulties, to endure by assimilating other influences, to enrich his art while keeping his style and his originality as a painter of our country.

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