

The painter as a storyteller

by Shlomo Berger

Every painter tries to avoid classification. He usually wishes to reject the efforts of critics and admirers alike to label him as belonging to this or that group, trend or school. Every painter wants to stand for himself. We the authors, alas, must commit a sin in our effort to describe in words a painting that needs and deserves a silent onlooker; we categorize.

With Hieron Pessers, we are almost driven to say that the painter has the soul of an author; he mixes fact and fiction and creates a painting that unfolds like a novel or an essay on human behaviour. He makes 'figurative' paintings on usually abstract ideas: love, happiness and sorrow, truth, the meaning of life, the rational and the emotional. He is not interested in scenes of daily life and thus deviates from other painters who share the technique of 'figurative' description. Hieron Pessers uses such scenes only as a dictionary for abstract concepts. He creates a new painter's language, using the canvas as an author uses a word processor. His sentences are the details, which invite you to leave the trodden path and follow a Proustian voyage into memory and unconsciousness on the one hand and on the other a rational rediscovery of the human mind. You are bound to return from this trip appreciating the painting as a unit.

Pessers succeeds since he does not betray, in the end, the basics of the language of painters. Colours, light and shade, proportion, etc., are all skillfully interwoven in each and every painting. Thus the outcome is original in its evolutionary rather than its revolutionary process. He created his own style out of studying figurative and abstract painting alike. He aims to follow the abstract painters in their search for meaning, providing the message with a new figurative framework. It is worth exploring one of his masterpieces and demonstrating my arguments.

"Love Letter" is one of Pessers' larger canvases. It depicts a man and a woman standing apart looking in different directions and divided, right in the middle of the canvas, by a fragment of a letter, a love letter. It is thus a sort of a triptych: man, letter, woman. Pessers used only three colours: white, grey and black. It is evident that grey is the overwhelming colour. Both figures stand within a building, which cannot be identified with any real place; it is only the basic architectural form that is described. Maybe they both stand in one and the same building, but they may be miles away from each other as well. Both people stand inside the building and are looking outward. The letter in the middle of the canvas is written in white letters on a black background; no one sentence is complete, but it is clear that this manifestation of love is not simple: it pleases and hurts, it lends itself to emotions and rational scrutiny. The language is highly articulated. Evidently, there are no firm messages to be delivered in the letter, since Pessers does not believe in clear-cut answers; the grey is dominating the scene as indecisiveness dominates our lives.

Why is "Love Letter" a masterpiece? It is a great painting because the abstract thinking is manifested clearly in a legible manner. It succeeds in transmitting the irrational of the abstract with the rationality of figurative painting. It combines the two states of mind, between which we are constantly drifting.

I shall not describe more paintings; I take a vow of silence.

Schlomo Berger