

Catalogue de l'exposition Sergio de Castro, Landscape of light,
Gallery Wildenstein, Londres

The development of painting in our century is a complicated affair with many different and even contradictory tendencies struggling to come to the fore; and as a result the situation is fraught with problems and difficult to evaluate. One thesis that has found favour with some is that easel painting, as hitherto known, is no longer a valid means of visual expression and that it is mandatory for an artist to exploit new media, whatever the outcome.

The validity of this theory will only be substantiated or rejected with time. As it is, there is still a place for the painter who finds that he can do justice to his vision by means in tune with those of the past. One artist who adheres strongly to this belief is Sergio de Castro. This painter, who lives in Paris, is a man of high intelligence and possessed of an intimate knowledge of the Old Masters as well as of music which is fitting for a former pupil of Manuel de Falla.

Castro's art has much to offer. He has shown, for instance, that landscape painting can still yield secrets to someone who undertakes it with patience and understanding. The fact that landscape attracts him does not imply that he has produced pastiches based on traditional formulae or that he remains stuck with a stereotyped language. On the contrary, he shows a relentless desire to refine his sense of colour. The paintings in this exhibition reflect his determination to capture the nuances of light which he observes around him in various guises; they reveal that he is a traditionalist in so far as he declines to accept that Nature has nothing more to offer a painter. In earlier landscapes he was fascinated by the light he discovered in Greece: the series of paintings of Greek islands, with their exquisite color sand jewel-like passages, are among the most distinguished works of our period.

His latest paintings show that he is equally attracted by the light of Spain or Tunisia. One point has to be made clear. Castro is not a topographic view-painter. His aim in such pictures is not to depict a scene exactly; it is to find the equivalents in paint of the sensations he has experienced in seeing combination of light and landscape. In doing this he achieves two distinct and complementary things; he presents a landscape that, if we happen to know it, can be deciphered as Hammamet or Toledo, for instance, and, at the same time, one that provides an arrangement of the dominant colours that give it validity and individuality.

Castro's painting, like a decent claret, must be given time to breathe. We have to look at it carefully so that his subtle colours have the chance to exert their magic. His paintings, in fact, are not brash posters inviting us to delectable spots but works of art constructed with deliberation. Each portion in his composition is carefully related to the other; these rest for their logic on conjunctions of tone and handling. The effects are secured by a sensitivity of touch which gives life and brilliance to form, which emerges from the colour.

Bonnard once said that a painter ought to tell fibs. By this he meant that an artist should take the world, not as it is, but as he sees it and thereby allow the spectator to profit from his creation. Castro belongs to the same persuasion and, like Renoir, he believes that "il faut embellir"

Landscape is not the only subject he has tackled; still-life, figure-painting and the representation of his studio (those low-toned authoritative canvases enlivened by dashes of red) are themes that have appealed to him. He has also designed two impressive series of stained-glass windows. The group of landscapes on view in the exhibition illustrate his qualities - a love of Nature, a passion for colour, ranging from fragrant and redolent tones to more austere ones. There is nothing, one is thankful to say, casual about such pictures: they translate his perceptions about light into works of art that repose for their appeal on the permanent values of painting. Castro is an experimenter who believes in the necessity of tradition.

