

THE MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE OF CHAOUKI CHAMOUN

CHAOUKI CHAMOUN manipulates scenery in its polysemous dimension, with a plural, even paradoxical reading. His urban landscape juxtaposes the skyscraper contemporary city with the ancestral desert, giving off a modern-day impression mingled with mythical perennity that resorts to human imagination accumulated since the beginning of time.

Chamoun's urban myth is built upon this complexity of simple lines and well-defined, mostly vertical, geometrical shapes associated with largely extended spaces like the ones created by the golden sand's sumptuous fluidity or by the nocturne interstellar space. These multifunctional lines and geometrical shapes manage to build a known universe but also an unknown one that remains to be deciphered and discovered.

In this dichotomic nature of urban architecture coordinated with untouched nature, a myth is no longer simply an image that communicates a message or tells a story but rather a specific composition with a rhythm that varies from one painting to the other; the rhythmic variations of these space layouts are based on a specific and individual graphic alphabet, thus creating the specific language of pictures that characterizes the painter. Solid and fluid shapes, the vertical and the horizontal, the figurative and the abstract, the known and the unexplored are the structural equations that are reinforced by a human presence that hangs like a signature.

The miniaturized being contemplates this stunning scenery from which he expects a few revelations. The disproportion between the magnitude of the represented scenery and the horizontally laid-out human dimension at the bottom of the painting connotes the place of man in this universe which he created himself. From New York to Dubai, from one side of the planet to the other, the urban myth of Chamoun includes coordinated representations of modernity and the daily life as perceived by each person; yet it is a modernity stemming from pictorial writing that only retains the essence of what is represented. It is a familiar synthesis of scenery that is common to a humanity which is waiting, and which is subjugated before its immense but breathtaking achievements. When man is exceeded by his own creations, he appears like the actor who is expecting something, and the spectator who is always waiting.

The gold-strewn canvas reminds its viewer of a nature that is intact and barren, pure and precious, and that opposes itself to urban constructions with infinite dimensions. The sun and the moon are here for actualizing natural cycles, whose marvels do not cease to dazzle and arouse the archetypal sensations that are deeply buried in memory.

Despite its specificity, this graphic alphabet that characterizes the painter's pictorial writing also belongs to the collective and universal credo of the painting's observer in such a manner that the decoding of the canvas imposes itself through the insertion of a clear but complex significance that is evident but protean. The immediately-recognized scenery models perception by giving it a polysemous meaning that is attached to a composition with infinite variations.

Transparency or golden opacity, the stretches of desert, the skies and endless skyscrapers all participate in the concept of the abstract and the figurative together, thus giving these pictorial representations a truth such as the mythical images that are buried in consciences since times immemorial and that reveal a poetic dimension with a rhetoric that is understood by everyone. They are images which are lived, experienced, and felt by everyone in an indisputable manner but which are suddenly perceived from afar, as if historicized and delayed in time, and yet they are still real and present. It is thus that the modern city thrives and is registered in contemporary mythology as a concept implanted in reality, a concept originating from the present, put at a distance, and contemplated in its magnificence.

The mythical city of Chaouki Chamoun is this gigantic or natural urban scenery that is « linked to the entire world », to explorations, and to humanity's new adventures. It is a condensation that takes the unlimited essential images of human acquisition, those of a civilization that manipulates its environment, while being constantly connected to the being of the world, to the substance of a planet whose tread-upon sand leaves no trace. It is the sign of the gigantic human action as opposed to its absence in a magnified barren nature that accepts no alterations. The unaltered golden sand is this return to the unspoiled origin of humanity; it is the nostalgia of the commencement, of the fluid horizon that is without any form and infinite, and whose mystery hides the inexpressible. The enigmatic desert keeps its secret, but the city is here in all its greatness to impose itself as a revelation of the mystery, a revelation of man to himself.

A shifting and moving substance, sand is subjected to the influence of both the seasonal cyclical winds and those brought by man, who adds to them his whirlwind. It is the conquest then the transformation of a mineral earth that is always equal to itself but never identical. Sometimes, transparent and colored vertical shapes land in the painting in order to inseminate this sandy expanse and introduce it to the human cycle that is marked by the transmuting act. This lonely expanse is modified and tamed, and integrates the city through the burgeoning of teeming constructions and an urban thrust that takes root in the fields of liquid sand, in a desert that is a plant one from now on. Hence, the desert becomes inhabited and urbanized while keeping its characteristic traits, i.e. its magic and its fluctuating mood.

The eternized urban shape is purified by the eternal and original golden expanse, both of them being representations of a present that combines opposites and eliminates paradoxes while highlighting them. The gaps between the past and the future are bridged. This timeless present is a stop, a suspension of time that condenses all the eras.

The painting is perceived simultaneously as a real synthesis owing to the analogical representations that motivate the described reality and as a virtual reality in its mythical dimension; both authentic and unreal, special and universal, pictorial amplification is highlighted by a human line that represents this link with man and the world.

Hence, instead of evacuating reality or freezing it in images, Chamoun's mythical city reinserts and recreates it with such intensity and acuity that it does not stop renewing

itself. It is a perpetual enrichment of the reality of the observer, a construction that creates its world and reinterprets it.

The essential simplicity of a world of contradiction is the basis for the evidence of perception. Moreover, mystery and enigma are there to introduce a hint of occultism, an impression of magic that is sometimes uncertain and futuristic, even visionary. Representation is invented in a geographical climate divided between nature and the city, in a wonderful and shifting earth and space cosmogony whose multicultural implantation is liberating.

The urban scenery of Chaouki Chamoun does not freeze the world, but calls for recreating it and even admiring it since the euphoric utopia is mingled with reality, and the mineral is mixed with the natural flora. It is thus that the golden desert is sometimes transformed into a city with high buildings in order to define the link of the present with the past, realization with regeneration, security with rest, creation with fertility. The city that is hence represented in its vertical specificity acquires a symbolic dimension. The metal's precious gold has the glow of light. It is the mineral light of the sun and the sun together. It is the celestial effect of absolute perfection where the golden desert becomes the skin of a sacred and immortalized earth that is strewn with geometrical shapes that come from elsewhere.