

“Trees in the Heart”

A reading in Hassan Meer’s paintings



Enlightment, Spiritual series, 2011, Photography printed on fine art paper, Edition of 5, 140x110cm - Courtesy of Piu Plus Art.

It is an experience that takes you up to unfamiliar poetic wide space, taking you back to deep-rooted origins that aspire to reach the absolute and the invisible. However, it is the deep root of the soul. It looks like the dirt of the earth and its bones, as if it were its lost blood and essence. Yet, this experience gives us freedom, the freedom to live and die like children in an infinite world, bright like a shining sun, rich with the fertility of the soul, in the pain of separation and meeting simultaneously.

This experience puts Hassan Meer in close relationship with the fertile existential anxiety; the anxiety of life and death together. He does not enter into the problem of life through a door opened by knowledge. Rather, he is an everlasting anxious person because his art experience sprang from the spiritual source, carrying that flame to

us. As such, he is certainly moving from death to life, reflecting the common theory of creation. Like a flower, that must open one day, his creatures open up flying in ambiguous universal spheres.

It is evident that Hassan has been affected by the rich religious heritage in its metaphysical visions and light that come from the inner depths. Here, one stands in front of the old encyclopedic books that embrace history and human civilizations or books that run parallel to the divine holy books. The light that burnt human features that melt in the flame gave birth to history; from the material and essence of old books, Man has been carrying that rich spiritual heritage, lighting a world of silent presence, listening to the glow of divine prophecy, sending His eternal light to the earth.

However, this experience is surrounded by a permanent silence. Even the contrast of its colors does not take you to the absurdity but to its themes: Drowning in a dark blue sea. What attracts you as a viewer, infatuated with his vision, is the union of the creature with the element of water, the most important element of life and the secret of its continuity. The other idea is that you feel as if you are standing before a mystic experience of navigating a distant space. The artist takes you away from the theme of death as a horrifying ghost or a painful end of life. Death means ending in the intimate blue, which lightens a dark world. Hassan has a strong passion to go to unknown and remote ways, looking for a new identity that civilization grants to Man, in its progress toward the creation of a new Man. The artist lives in contrast with himself or it can be described as a creature that is separated from its consciousness, or the other in his reaction to the results of modern technology. It ends with the artist carrying his worldly possessions to his final end.

The theme of nostalgia to the old house comes back as an essential element in Meer's painting experience. There, the house is no longer anything but relics. Old inscriptions, clothes of a man with a covered face, remains of the wooden ceiling of the falling house, look like arrows penetrating his body like a dead corpse.

It is an icon of the presence of destruction integrated in the particles of the discourse. The artist employs here his text in a balanced manner, especially the old windows, ignored shelves and collapsing ceilings. It is a world that later on reminds you of the romantic songs on desertion by Fairuz, Esmahan and Layla Murad, and of that entirely forgotten old world of which nothing remains save the ashes of memories.

The internal furnishing of the scene is the wealth of the painting language and its essence. This gives him the plentifulness of life and the richness of presence though the scene is that of disappearance, desertion and departure. Therefore, Hassan relies in his core experience on letters exchanged between his grandfather, who resided in the house, and his expatriate brother. He uses the old furniture, some new tools and stones that remind him of an old life that passed away a

•Three outstanding female singers from Lebanon and Egypt who appeared in the first half of the 20th century.



The Soul of the Virgin, 2010, Photography on fine art paper, Edition of 5, 150x115cm - Courtesy of Piu Plus Art

long time ago. It seems that Hassan looks back to the past which is part of the present scene. Children that come in funeral silence find that their features mature with the help of the scent of those old distant days. In another painting that shows nothing but the collapsing old house, the artist admits that everything has become void, memories were burnt by days, and the land dried up when hearts dried up. The artist consciously creates an image that shows the deserted house and the burnt memories. The pictures hanging on the wall, which may belong to a dweller or one of his children, have been eroded by Time. Everything is surrounded by the ashes of black days. When Man is out of the place only, Hassan Meer realizes the necessity of creating a clear-cut space between him and the old house, between the past



Dream on the Sky, Moon Series, 2009, Photography on Fine art Paper, Edition of 5, 150x115cm - Courtesy of Piu Plus Art.

and present. Then, the picture reserves a conviviality that looks comfortably to the past, from which we have traveled to a more brilliant world and a more vibrant life. This rarely happens. The artist is fond of discovering depths that are surrounded by darkness inhabited by dead souls. In this collection, Hassan gives his attention to the Eastern woman. No one can capture the scene of shyness, regret and sorrow that makes the woman take her pillow to her chest on her wedding night except the Oriental artist who presents a distinguished scene that is closely related to women's shyness and the bitterness of her sorrow when she moves from the phase of innocence to the phase of maturity and womanhood. It is as if it were the hymen which symbolizes the separation between the two phases in the life of the old Orient, which is charged with legends of female fertility.

This experience throws the artist away into a lonely existence in an infinite desert where Man lives in silence, aspiring to the unknown, faced with dunes of

sands. Man here seems hanging between the earth and heaven when he discovers the moment of an eternal absence of life. This essential strange existence of the human creature on the planet of the earth might have been there before or even after death. This was not the purpose of traveling to the desert. The objective here is to present the human experience in its real essence, that is: Man's loneliness before himself and his creator.

The artist opens to the viewer, through the image of the desert, aspects for deep reflection on the puzzling question of Man's negligible size in contrast with God's, the infinity of the universe, and the ambiguity of life and death at the same time. It is an intensified experience that aims at alleviating Man's pain of loss in this world. It gives Man a sense of warmth or love that he misses the modern materialistic city, taking him back to the early human civilizations and the cultures of heavenly religions whose prophets and messenger came from the desert of the East. The Moon has always been the source



The Wedding, 2011, Photography on Fine art Paper, Edition of 5, 140x115cm - Courtesy of Piu Plus Art.

of beauty and the watchman of lovers, the companion of travelers on solitary nights. It is the absolute beauty whose light every Eastern girl aspires to attain.

In Hassan's experience, one finds that he uses the theme of the girl that flies to the moon lest she should lose her virginity, which is the essence of her life. In folk heritage, a woman's monthly period is connected with the movement of the moon. This idea prevails in the rural areas of the East. The moon here is presented as a symbol of salvation and emancipation, a bed upon which the girl lies passionately waiting for the knight of her dreams. The moon looks like a seesaw in space where the girl ignites her fertile imagination. It is a crescent in its early stages, giving it the masculine character and, thus, it is seen as a ship of salvation that carries the girl, like an angel, to a world of remote paradises.

The girl of the moon travels to a world of dreams where she never wakes up. She is its prisoner because she is the captive of the Oriental imagination related to ambiguous remote stars. These stars and planets provide

experiences that cannot be realized except in fairy tales. Does the artist want to say that out of the relics of things life begins to grow again? Life begins from death, joy from sorrow, and meeting from deserting. There is no end to the succession of ages. This is the process of human existence on the earth. The secret of existence is the search for necessity to maintain his species and survive on this planet. Even at the most painful and sorrowful moments, joy begins to form. Man embraces life out of its contrasts of ruins and relics of previous civilizations that help open new flowers. New memories arise. Creatures that previously had no presence start to construct the world. Did this help keep contact with the past or was it some sort of discontinuity? We are not talking about a link between the past and what is coming. Rather, we are talking about the inevitability of those who come from the East. It is something like a flower that grows among small ruins, which smiles at the house while its memories collapse quietly.