

The Daemonic Presence Between Eros and Thanatos,

By: Jabra I. Jabra*

The profile of one of Ali Talib is constant motifs for nearly a quarter of a century, remains fraught with its suggestive mystery-fraught with the secrets of its tragedy, stressing its presence one way or another in so many paintings, until it takes hold of a whole canvas to itself, solitary, unique, holding within its scar-like lines an agony which insists on breaking out to us from its confines.

For many years, Talib's works have been visual elegies through which he plays variations on one of the basic themes of our times in a style akin to music: it vibrates in the mind long after its melodies have ceased, to remind us of the continuity of its passion and its beauty. In many of them there is a daemonic presence, not quite intelligible, not always entirely visible, but very much there, active against what is real and direct. Whenever the face and the mask figure on the canvas, it raises doubts as to which is the face and which is the mask.

In the artist's more recent work one senses a progress from the thorn and the wound towards the rose and the joy, partly indicated by his colours shifting from monochromes of green and blue to flaming reds and whites. Nevertheless, the spectator remains absorbed as ever in a strain and unresolved mystery, located somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious: it carries to him some of its tensions and revelations and enriches him with the artist's own experience of the sorrow and the joy emanating from abated dominance of Eros,

although it may well prove to be, after all, just one more seductive illusion.

In Ali Talib's paintings there is a repeated attempt to say what is almost impossible to articulate. Right from the start, a basic conflict, which seems to derive from the depths of the unconscious, activates his work, creating a tension symptomatic of all significant works of art, capable of multiplicity of suggestions and interpretations. His paintings skillfully tackle an experience insistent with its inner contradictions: evasive and recurrent, leaving its impact each time in certain forms on the canvas-and in our memory.

It is an opposition between Eros and Thanatos, between the principle of love and union and the principle of destruction and death, that haunts these works on the level of the ego and that of the other, achieving over the years greater symbolic intensity and greater disturbing power. The effect each time is analogous to that of tragic drama. As the artist continues to express the ineffably and mysterious in near monochromes perhaps borrowed from the tonality of dreams, he appears deliberately to envelope his inner scene of union and destruction, of love and death, in twilight tones which may be a feature of the agonized quest for a clarity that seems unforthcoming.

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