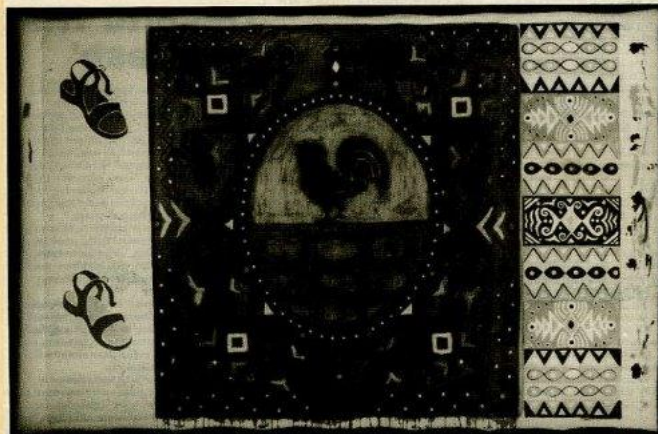


22.10.93

גלריה ארטיפקט



Asad Azi: painting (Artifact Gallery, Jaffa)

The Art of Decoration

By Gil Goldfine

For as long as I can remember, when the word "decorative" was used to describe the manner or content of picture-making, it was considered as bad as labeling something amateurish. Be it the whimsical imagery of naive painters or the superficial canvases of "dabblers," decorative art has traditionally been a misplaced concept in the lexicon of high art.

Together, the stoical purity of constructivist art and the post-World War II pursuit of maintaining the flatness of the picture plane (adopted by artists of the New York School and subsequently by color field and minimalist painters), has led to a broad-based international style which effectively derailed the individuality promoted through nationalistic and ethnic imagery.

In an art world filled with figurative angst and conceptual theory, Asad Azi (b. Israel, 1950) stands apart. In a group of recently completed paintings, collages and mixed-

media works he carefully embraces and amalgamates local colors with a sensitivity for a broader international style.

As in the past few years, Azi has ably extended his vivid palette and rich ornamental motifs past the mere decorative. Like the great Orientalists, from Delacroix to Matisse, he injects his pictorial vocabulary with a variety of visual devices, pictograms and geometric designs which lend character to a personal assessment of his surroundings.

However, if one views these works in a larger scope, the imagery engulfs more than personality; it encompasses the horizon of a contemporary scene.

Israeli artists often describe their environments or socio-political feelings in hollow installations or hollow conceptual pieces. Even in pure representational painting, esoteric molds have become something of a family secret whose conundrums can only be deciphered by the initiated.

By contrast, Azi's paintings are basically direct and uncomplicated. Their messages

are clear, sensitively organized and delicately balanced — each canvas is compositionally divided into two or three rectangular segments. Fabric-oriented color harmonies oppose architecturally rendered geometric panels, syncretized and stacked alongside romantic silhouettes of Arab vases, symbolic oranges, biblical sandals and chickens.

The intellectual underpinnings of Azi's work lie in the conflicting imagery and techniques of East and West, whether taking the form of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's photographic portrait or a European fabric (floral and Baroque) implanted among a plethora of crisp Oriental designs.

Azi's use of filigree cutouts from pristine white canvas of fruits or Islamic floor tiles are inspired by Victorian doilies, while in a more subtle, impressionist manner he mutes his palette so that the vivaciousness of turquoise, greens and orange is baffled by blue-gray and rust-reds.

This exhibit is worth a visit. (Artifact Gallery, 12 Aref, Jaffa.) Till November 26.