

## INTO - *The Paintings of Avi Eisenstein*

*What does art seek to express?...Every work of art expresses , more or less purely, more or less subtly, not feelings and emotions which the artist has, but feelings and emotions which the artist knows; his insight into the nature of sentience, his picture of vital experience, physical and emotive and fantastic... Such knowledge is not expressible in ordinary discourse!*

Susanne K. Langer  
"Problems of Art," 1957

The attempt to see things "as they are," without the distortions of subjective thought, feeling and judgment, has a long history. One way is to concentrate on details. Detaching ourselves from the whole picture, with its ready-made meaning, we can dismantle it into its smallest units with the intention of reassembling it in a way that is authentic, clear and complete. This allows us to encounter the thing in itself, apart from the "I" which observes or creates. The paintings of Avi Eisenstein turn on this axis of dismantling and rebuilding, of dispersion and focus.

In his paintings the prime elements remain as in traditional drawing, the line and the stain. The drawings are done solely in the colour black; the white which sometimes appears is the basic white canvas background. The dilution of the black acrylic colour, in water gives rise to the various shades and tones which vary from grey black through dark to pitch black and including even the very palest ash. The process of diluting the paint and the techniques used to charge the wide brushes with water creates a unique texture which is sometimes reminiscent of the texture of an etching, sometimes the graininess of an over enlarged photograph.

The component parts of the paintings are simple. The backgrounds are neutral, inconspicuous, flat, delicate, pale. Their quasi-archaic hues evoke some natural quality which was already present but suggests nothing in itself. The paintings themselves are dark, a black reminiscent of ink or tar, as though imprinted on the surface. The stains are dispersed in an apparently random manner and the decisions about connections between them are never obvious so that the paintings have an aura of appropriate inevitability.

All of this complicates interpretation and the search for meaning, shifts attention to the lines and the stains themselves. Often, like various particles revealed by science, the drawings evolve into small structures resembling sections of plants or organic forms.

The background becomes the subject and then it is patently clear that neither is predominant (figs 3, 4). It is the viewer who decides whether to see the parts or the shape created in between them. The dialogue between each painting and the viewer is internal and extremely subdued. Its calm precision recalls the often sacred, almost spiritual rites of an ancient tradition. Often the simplicity of the paintings promotes clarity of vision and precise focus.

Either way a closed and complex form is encountered.

The movement between breaking away and joining together results in the bodies finally fusing

into the perfect shape. Now play is possible only within this independent whole. The format surrounding the shape is pure, affording a breathing space. What earlier was seen to resemble a microscopic enlargement of some natural tissue, now looks more rooted in the images of human culture – symbols, signs, patterns. (figs. 7, 8, 9). Likewise, the dismantling game is now more rational, detached and colder. However, the solitary painted element yet preserves its independent existence.

When Eisenstein's paintings are observed in sequence, the impression is of something in a state of enlargement and at each view the parts of the picture seem to be even bigger (or rather even more enlarged). It seems that with each stage of viewing, there is an advance to greater understanding of the entire picture. His paintings draw the viewer to a locale that is silent and pure, intimate and self absorbed, to a meditation on simplicity itself.

“Nature,” wrote Paul Serusier, “is the sum of the objects our senses reveal to us... if the painter's art were simply to imitate by reproducing on a screen the images he sees, he would be performing a merely mechanical action in which none of man's higher faculties were used: unintelligent work, the impression set down with nothing added. Interpreted this way, nature is not art”- What makes art is that which the informed eye and the skilled hand bring to the perception of the world's phenomena, that “sum of the objects our senses reveal to us.” And that is a matter of memory, of recollections, recognitions, concepts and meanings; to which are added “love or repulsion (beauty or ugliness),” and the dynamic psychology and sensibility of the artist: all these factors act upon the original sensation and create what Serusier called the “mental image.”

To create this special mental image in objective terms and to invest it with communicative potency (the power to modify the mental images of the receiver) is the constructive purpose of art, a purpose amply fulfilled in the sensitive and refined paintings of Avi Eisenstein.