

RAZA

It was in 1952 that I saw the first works of Raza, recently arrived in Paris from India. They were strange and unusual works : timeless landscapes, uninhabited cities detached from the earth, bathed in a cold light. Schematized houses were linked one to another in an endless, sinuous chain, suspended in the air beneath a black sun. Through an original separation of light and shadow, Raza expressed the contrast of day and of night which haunted him ceaselessly.

Raza confessed recently : "The most tenacious memory of my childhood is the fear and the fascination of the Indian forest. We lived near the source of the Narmada River in the centre of the densest forests of Madhya Pradesh. Nights in the forest were hallucinating ; sometimes the only humanizing influence was the dancing of the Gonds tribes. Daybreak brought back a sentiment of security and well-being. On market-day, under the radiant sun, the village was a fairyland of colors. And then, the night again. Even today I find that these two aspects of my life dominate me and are an integral part of my painting. There are a multitude of variations, but it has its departure point in an experienced feeling, even if the real problems are of a plastic nature."

Later, Raza made a strong effort to animate his vision, to nourish it with concrete acquisitions. His forms developed in their contrast, light enhanced by neighboring opacity. Raza always painted an imaginary world, traversed by tragic intensities, with his energies concentrated at the points where his colored planes overlapped. In the thickness of his matter, a whole network of colored veins circulated ; flashing reds and yellows pierced deep blacks. Effects of tension and nervous agitation upset shadowy zones. The composition itself was affected by this, and in a given work, the compressed pulsations of the forms, the character of which could be defined as anguishing, were in opposition to immense, light and calm surfaces. Thus, ever faithful to his deep sentiments, Raza sought to free himself of the oppression of the night and to glorify the serenity rediscovered in the light of dawn.

It seems to me that Raza is now liberated from the use of violent and brutal matter as he has been freed of his obsessions. His painting has become fluid, light, calm. His fragmented stroke is extending itself gradually across the surface, and is now being organized along unexpected planes. In the rather dull range of ochres and greys there appear tender touches of green and orange. The accords are becoming more precious, the impalpable blends are giving way to colliding affirmations. And the work is finding, occasionally at the heart of strange concretions, a centre of subtle gravity.

For there is no doubt that there is a solidity, a certainty in these forms, a quasi-mineral aspect, a presence which faces up victoriously to the wealth of imagination.

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"Oasis," 1975, Acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cms.
Collection Mr. & Mrs. Rene Floch, Paris