

REFLECTIONS OF THE EAST

Serenity, Timelessness, Flow...

An Interview with Marta Resende by Dr. Ulrike Montigel

ULRIKE: Your paintings suggest associations with Asian, especially Japanese esthetics, yet you cannot be identified with any specific school or trend. What have you been influenced by?

MARTA: Far Eastern literature, esthetics and philosophy have been an ongoing interest since my youth. The first two books that I read -- Genji Monogatari and The Pillow Book of the court lady Sei Shonagon transported me into a different world--life at the court of the Heian period, a world of colour, poetry, scents...it was the start of a passion...There are certainly no direct references in my work, rather what I would call reflections...

ULRIKE: If you had to pick one single aspect that fascinated you most in Japanese art what would it be?

MARTA: The experience of calmness and centeredness in Japanese philosophy and art which also has become a necessity for my own life, not only my work. But it is not just serenity that has held my interest for long, it is also this different idea of time. In Japanese art the rhythm of life which is inseparably connected with one's breath--ongoing in and out--is reflected as the ongoing relationship of continuity and "cut". This "cut" (kire) is at the heart of my work. When reality is "cut" in time, the moment appears in its most essential truth.

ULRIKE: It seems that the fundamental difference is that we in the West understand time as continuous flow, whereas the East has the concept of time as a unity of discontinuous continuity. Is that correct?

MARTA: The impact of Jodo Buddhism on Japanese art reinforced a strong longing for perpetuity. At the same time Buddhism stresses the importance of living in the present moment. There is a tension between the two experiences, which we find represented, in the concept of "kire" that pervades many art forms in Japan. We find it, for example in the movements of the Kabuki dancer. All movements are highly stylized, they are reduced to a minimum, to the essential. There are no fortuitous or accidental flutters on the stage, any involuntary movement is eliminated by years of practice. When a Kabuki dancer makes a step, he puts his foot forward, stops, lets it hover for a moment

over the floor, then sets it down and glides on for the next step, that also "cuts" the flow of movement.

I find it fascinating how "kire" helps to make a shape appear, to define the sequence of a move, to create an event... "When the light goes out, the shadow becomes deeper for an instant – then it dies quickly. But there has been this moment." (Yamazaki Masakazu "Zeami", famous author of Kabuki plays) This is what I want to achieve in my paintings -- to create this clear moment. My work is not about spontaneous painting (like Zen painting), but about creating an awareness of the spontaneity of being...

ULRIKE: In seeking to define who you are as a painter it seems helpful to me to ask you what you are NOT, Marta!

MARTA: I am not an esoteric artist, in the sense that I would strive to render enlightenment or deep spiritual insights. My work is also not a direct derivative of Far Eastern esthetics. I esteem Zen philosophy and Japanese art, but I am a European artist, my roots are in the Western tradition. My approach to the Japanese culture has been to process its input deep in myself. It is the artist's privilege to react to stimuli through her artwork in an organized way and to access the world and every work of art in it as a mere reservoir of stimuli to create something that is entirely one's own.

ULRIKE: In terms of your own tradition, then, what is it that you do?

MARTA: My work is an interface of objective medial documentation of reality and its analysis and interpretation. I use photography in the preparatory steps before painting. By enlarging details of images I approach my subject matter till I achieve a synthesis of eye and idea--"the moment" as it appears on my screen.

My compositions do not refer to an objective vision of reality at all they are luminous expansions thereof.

Thematically, my art refers to experience. It is a reflection of moments that resonate objectively as well as subjectively. The process is comparable to a seismological diary of temporal, spatial and existential primary experience.

In Focusing my analysis on the smallest particles of reality I paint approaching the abstract.

ULRIKE: I have been asked whether you use acrylic spray paint. You don't! What are the technical features of your painting?

MARTA: I prefer to paint in oil, primarily because this type of paint has a warm organic effect and is technically best adapted to absorb and render the movement of my hand. This sensitive quality of the material I work with is very important to me. I find my intentions are most truthfully rendered in oil. It is my most effective channel of communication. When I paint, I take a long time. It takes a long time to recreate with my brush the moment frozen by my camera.

Layer upon layer of subtle colour pigments create those nuances that vibrate on my canvas till it seems to de-materialize and only light vibrations remain for my eyes.

ULRIKE: In literary analysis, we find that writers write with an "implied reader" in mind. Do you paint for an "ideal observer"?

MARTA: Oh yes, I have high expectations!

It is true, I want to "provoke" serenity. I think my paintings emanate calm, but not a passive calm and I hope that this will be perceived. My ideal observer does not drift off into a foggy well-being, though, but reflects on his perceptions, arrives at an awareness of "seeing". Moreover, I want him to take time--because there is an implicit time dimension in my paintings--they change continuously with daylight procession--they unfold different colour vibrations sequentially as the light changes--so, in a nutshell, my ideal observer would employ discontinuous continuity--he would grasp the moment and flow in time.