

Georges Mazilu

COMMENTS

Through the looking-glass: on entering the world of Georges Mazilu
by Andre Brink

A cold grey afternoon in Amsterdam: dark human shapes scurrying along the Kalver Street huddling under black windblown umbrellas. I am stopped in my tracks by the illuminated window of an art gallery. Inside, glowing in a luminosity of its own, a picture sits on an easel, defying the drabness of the day, the pressures of time and space, inviting-demanding – to be acknowledged. I leave the bustling world outside and find myself drawn inside. As in a love affair, I know this is the beginning of a relationship that cannot easily come to an end again. It is dangerous, because it admits of no compromise and of no easy way out. It is exacting and mysterious. It is also exhilarating. It is my first encounter with the work of Georges Mazilu.

The painting lures me closer, sucks me into its vortex the way a moth is drawn to the essence of light. In the foreground, right, a model, who might just as well be Venus or a common and saucy village girl; to the left cluster of three figures who seem obliged, in one way or another, to react to her presence: a gnome-like little girl with a gesture of supplication, a seated man who peers at her through a tube, with a gaze that might be either aesthetic and painterly or possessive and voyeuristic; an abject, guilty, perhaps older man who tries to turn his gaze away (because he cannot cope with the affirmation of her presence?). In what seems like supreme indifference, she has turned her back on them as she proceeds with a process of disrobing which may or may not be innocent. She cannot care less about them: she may not even be aware of their presence. They, on the other hand, cannot ignore her. Within the frame of the picture, in the space she shares with them, fatally linked to them through the subtle colouring of the background in which all conventional dimensions have been dissolved, her presence has unsettled them as profoundly as the picture unsettles the spectator coming to it from the outside.

Every brush-stroke in the painting has been executed with precision, in rare technical mastery; each figure is defined meticulously. Yet the picture is totally enigmatic. There are no ready equations, no easy symbolic apparatus with which one can prise meanings from it. It contains the mystery of life itself: a life in which everything exists in terms of relations – the dialogue between female and male, between interior and exterior, between light and shadow,

between figure and abstraction, between sexuality and fear, terror and tenderness, memory and expectation.

In the voyeur of the picture, as in the figure of the painter in *Las Meninas*, I disconcertingly find myself implicated; my responsibility is invoked – a human responsibility for beauty and for the world, for desire and fear, for gratification and frustration. It is not simply a picture about the possibilities, the temptations, ultimately the insoluble mystery of love, but a demonstration and an activation of it.

As time goes by I will discover these qualities in more and more of Georges Mazilu's other work. A little cavalier, simultaneously brave and funny, comical and infinitely sad, riding his mount (a horse? an aardvark? Rocinante?) below a green curtain which suddenly interrogates the assumption of an outdoor scene and shifts it inside, into the recesses of the mind. A square window in a scene which may be set either in a room or in a street, challenges both assumptions. A vainglorious carnival king on closer inspection becomes an onion-like figure whose reality can be peeled, layer after layer, leaving one with nothing more but make-believe and illusion and possibility. Portraits of ethereal nymphs dissolving in their diaphanous wraps. Curious humanoid or animals or vegetal forms infused with unexpected religiosity. Faces luminous as moons, shining not with reflected light but from the inside. Figures that hesitate on the threshold of the subtly coloured backgrounds from which they have emerged and towards which they seem ready to return. The dialogue with the dark. The dialogue with light. The dialogue with the interminable silence of things.

A dialogue, too, of the late 20th century with a procession from the past: with Bosch, sometimes Brueghel, the fantastic imagery of the Middle Ages; or with the surrealists, with creatures from hallucinations or from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Goya in conversation with Dalí, Klee flirting with Leonor Fini. But it serves no purpose to play with names. Mazilu's originality, even when he mockingly inserts himself in an admirable and exciting tradition, lies in moving beyond what has been done, in painting precisely what Bosch or Redon or Dalí have not imagined. This is the challenge to which each picture responds, each constituting a ludic leap of the imagination, or of faith, into the dark of the as yet unimaginable: it is this motion towards 'something beyond,' this act of 'crossing over,' of defying limits and boundaries, that defines the dynamics, and the dynamism, of an art that dazzles as much through its technical virtuosity as the subtlety and outrage of its imagination.