

## « Antoni Taulé : Art as enigma »

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The paintings of Antoni Taulé resemble one of those locked room puzzles so beloved by English novelists.

Each work poses a riddle, complete in itself. Clues are provided, some real, some illusionary. For the viewer who refuses to become involved, the end is always the same: this could not have happened the way it seems. Only those who study the works at length discover the less obvious clues, the ones that unravel the mystery, revealing an answer that is, in itself, an enigma: life.

In once sense, Taulé creates the ultimate in participatory art. These paintings could not exist without the viewer. The tantalizing stories that begin on the canvas must be spun out in the mind of the beholder. The emotional and philosophical baggage one brings to the art carries as much weight as the intent of the creator.

And these paintings expect much of the viewer. They resist superficial explanation. They are like the works of Kafka and Magritte. What they seem to say is not what they say at all –or is it? Only one thing is certain with Taulé. The paintings must be interpreted. They will not let you ignore them.

A Spanish-born artist who has lived much of his life in Paris, Taulé began painting when he was 15. At first, he wanted to be an architect, but soon gave up that career for painting. By the time he graduated from the University of Barcelona, he was considered one of the Spain's most talented young painters. Now, at 37, his portraits of people placed in space, architectural settings have made him famous throughout Europe.

His first exhibition in the American West continues through the weekend at the Gallery Wall, Marshall Way at Fifth Avenue, in Scottsdale. It came about almost by accident. Taulé met Joe Sheldon, an American artist in Paris who had once worked for Glenn and Green, owners of the Gallery Wall.

Shelton contracted the Greens and Taulé exhibit was arranged. In return, Cesare Rancilio, who represents Taulé in Paris, will arrange an exhibition of works by Dan Namingha and Alan Houser, artists represented by the Greens.

As evidenced in the Scottsdale show, each of Taulé's best paintings begins with a room. Sometimes the room is bare, sometimes it contains a single piece of furniture, or several. The only constant is a source of light, brilliant in its glare, which intrudes into the pleasant

solitude of the dark interior.

His latest paintings, completed earlier this year, focus on the stark, architectural details of an empty house in Paris. But, like all his work, the effect is of emptiness waiting to be filled, a quiet that is neither frightening nor haunted; ghosts do not walk here, only the promise of something to come.

The minute people enter his rooms, however, a disturbing influence is felt. Hidden tensions lurk beneath the surface; a feeling of loneliness is so intense it becomes tangible, leaping from the canvas to grip the viewer.

A Taulé painting may contain just one person, or several. Usually, they are reflected in a mirror, or on a canvas. Almost always they stare at this reflection. Again, the only constant is the brilliant light.

This theme of the individual, alone even when with someone else, always absorbed with his own reflection and illuminated by a bright source of light that comes from without, appears repeatedly in Taulé's paintings. In art, repetition of a theme usually means the artist is making a crucial statement.

But why do the people never look at the viewer? Why do they seldom look at each other? Why are the rooms empty, or so sparsely furnished? What is the meaning of the brilliant source of light? Why, in another series of paintings, mostly of outdoor landscapes, are the scenes glimpsed through the doorway of a room, with a figure silhouetted in black against them? And, why, when that figure moves outdoors, is it still the featureless black figure of a silhouette?

Don't expect the answer from Antoni Taulé. During a brief visit to Phoenix to open his show, he is as enigmatic as his paintings, though very charming, as only a European can be. His answers are convoluted; frequently, he changes the subject without ever giving satisfaction to the question.

Part of that may be due to the fact he is a Spaniard who makes his home in Paris and thus works and lives in both languages, not to mention Italian and several others. His English is not quite fluent, but very rapid, and answers may have been given, but not understood by a reporter with slow ears.

"In the dark rooms, you only see the light when the dust is there, when it is reflected in the tiny particles that float in the air, or when it strikes something, a person, a vase of flowers, and is reflected back from that. It is the same between galaxies; the light is black unless there is a planet or some other piece of matter to reflect it.

As for the feeling of loneliness that seems to permeate his paintings, "Why do you assume there is something wrong with being alone?" he asks.

“It is a pleasure to be alone. Sometimes, it is very hard, but at the same time it is a pleasure. For me, one person alone is stronger than any religion. I am more fascinated by one individual than I am by all the congregations of the world.

“The individual is... is...well, *most* important for me. I am not motivated politically, but I am ready to defend the individual. I think the secret of life starts at that one point – the individual.”

As answers then, Taulé’s statements are as rife with meanings as the paintings. But that’s the way he wants it.

“People must find the answers for themselves”, he says, smiling. “If they are told the answers, they will never appreciate them. You only appreciate what you find inside. And as for the art, if it is easy, what value does it have?”

One suspects, though, that the answers are not there because the paintings are so intensely personal; they are Taulé’s allegories of the world as he sees it; they are not meant to be guidebooks. They combine his feelings about himself, those around him, art, philosophy, politics, social interaction and reaction.

He obviously believes strongly in the role of the individual. The individual, he says, creates his world from inside; he opens his mind to the light, but only to the degree he wishes. He turns inward; to study himself for the answers. He strives to become confident so that, when he ventures into that light, it cannot penetrate him; he is *himself*, inviolable and human.

“The light ? I didn’t choose to put the light in the paintings”, he says. “It came into the picture because it was there.

“For me, the room is the inside of the head, the windows are the eyes, the light is the exterior... when I put people inside, they are the thoughts.

“The inside is stronger than the outside. It creates the time and space of life. You must look to the inside to find strength. Other people can help in a certain manner, but you can get nothing in the world without first finding what is inside you. Nothing that lasts, anyway.

“The light comes in from outside, but unless there is something there to stop it, unless there is something there to reflect it, it is not really light. This is what I mean when I say the inside creates the outside.”