

Alex Tavares

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Tavares art exhibition has powerful effect

by Katie Fitzrandolph
from The Leader-Post; Regina, Canada
17 May, 1969

The 22 paintings by Alex Tavares currently on exhibit at Central Library art gallery are undoubtedly the most disturbing to hang on the gallery's walls in recent years. Their agonized depiction of a sick world, done in surrealist style, hurls a potent confusion and juxtaposition of myriad images at the viewer, and leaves a numb feeling in the pit of the stomach.

"State of the World", for example, shows a dismembered figure. The jawless skull is torn from the ripped limbs, without unity and without hope--a lost figure on the surface on an angry red sphere with arms groping in a gesture for salvation.

"Prostitution" has three faces--grotesque and swollen, but strangely unaware of the body beneath them--a body with arms like defeathered wings and a monstrous belly containing within it two infants standing in a pan. The knees are knotted, and the hips have bones like a cow.

"The Emigrants" is a mountain range, an arching bridge; the curves of a monstrous interchange on a giant freeway--filled with staring haunted eyes.



"FANTASIA GOANNA" 1968

There are moments of respite from the visual attack in the show, such as "Fantasia Goanna", named for Goa, where Mr. Tavares lived in in 1961 and 1962 following three years of advanced study in Spain. (He was born in Zanzibar, and completed a five year course in art at St. Joseph's Technical School in Madras, India. After living in Goa he spent six years in Nairobi, Kenya, where he taught, painted and held three one-man exhibitions. He is currently living in Arcola.)

"Fantasia Goanna" is a portrait of a young girl done in landscapes. It has an airy feeling of flitting dragonflies, with festive streaming banners dangling in gay profusion. Her eyes are three-sailed boats; a whimsical pig and cow have their portraits tucked into the edge of the painting. But even in this basically happy painting there is the jarring note of a group of dark figures waiting in a desert under a tall flagpole (which forms her nose)--waiting eternally for nothing.

The two headed portrait of "Fanciful Image" expresses in one face an upward yearning, with the face unstretched into the tumult of a dark-clouded sky; in the other face is a passive, pensive thoughtfulness, with a hint of flirtaciousness in the large long-lashed eye.

The heavy figures in "Receding Figures", arms and legs weighted down, are ascending into the ether, rising and floating despite their looming mass, over the distant landscape of a small seaside village with black boats on a grey shore.



"ENTRANCE TO A PALACE" 1968

"In the Beginning" is an melange of fragments--feet, limbs, breasts, a head, part of a face, pelvic bones--searching for the whole which will weld it together.

The horned bestial skull, vertebrae, ribcage, tree trunk and similar images of the "Scarecrow for Generations" present a grotesque and terrifying visage towering over three tiny attenuated figures in the right foreground.

The pink, flayed twisted mouth of "Face of Tyranny" bares white teeth and blood-red gums in a grimace of death above two thick figures, each reduced to a foot, a swirl and an impotent hand.

Another brief respite comes in the "Valley of Seclusion and Ideas", a fairy-tale nook in an ugly world, occupied by bizarre birds, extravagant foliage, fountains, sculptures, and probably elves and gnomes; dominated by a high blue peak, it is watched over by a benign blue god living high in the towering trees that line the valley's sides.



"VALLEY OF SECLUSION AND IDEAS" 1968

Back to the world as Mr. Tavares really sees it with the "Political Exile"--contorted limbs in a vacant plaza, surrounded by a cityscape of foreign and unknown architecture. In the sky, rings of light form graceful canopies upheld by delicate trellises.

Barbed angular abstract shapes form the "Entrance to a Palace"--cold, devoid of human figures--even distorted ones. Mr. Tavares explained that great wealth does not necessarily mean warmth and friendship, and beautiful palaces may contain more tragedy than love.

"The Goddess of Silent Movements and Rhythm" is graceful, her figure-eight arms containing the heads of long-necked birds, their green eyes at the elbows. Hideous visages are hinted at in the knees of her muscular legs.

A skeletal man inhabits "Paper Environment", one of the paintings done since Mr. Tavares arrived in Saskatchewan in February. His thin body is fenced in by three green boxes, and Mr. Tavares said man is becoming something to fit into an environment. The paradox, he says, is that environments are not made for man to live in.



"PAPER ENVIRONMENT" 1968

The official opening of the exhibition is Sunday, following the Friends of Chamber Music concert at 8:30, and will provide an opportunity for people to meet the artist. The exhibition will remain until June 1.

