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# PARALLEL REALITIES OF ASHRAF MURAD

I THINK IT WAS NIETZSCHE WHO SAID THAT YOU CAN ENTER THE LAST ROOM IN TWO WAYS: FREE AND UNFREE. EACH OF US SOLVES THIS ISSUE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. IT ALWAYS FACES A CREATIVE PERSON ACUTELY. AN ARTIST ALWAYS SOLVES IT CORRECTLY.

*Canada - a distant country*



**A** real artist is a man free of all and all bonds - mental, ethnic and even moral. In general, the issue of choice is probably the most difficult in life, especially in arts. Although, it would seem, man is doomed from the very beginning to residing in a dual world and in constant opposition of paired givens «inhale - exhale», «life - death», «day - night», «yes - no», «plus - minus», «woman - man», «black - white» - and therefore, it seems to be easy to choose, in fact the whole life of a person is placed in a swinging pendulum, where he freely chooses or accepts with resignation. And the life of an artist is in the swinging pendulum of art: between an easy and hard, comfortable and interesting roads full of losses and gains.

The pendulum of the life of Ashraf Murad, this wonderful Azerbaijani painter unknown to the general public, led him beyond the usual reality and put him into the space of parallel realities, where talents and creators free of any conventions live.

Ashraf Murad is one of the most significant, most mysterious and almost surreal figures of Azerbaijani art in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They spoke and wrote little about this painter and his works have never been exhibited with the exception of two short-term exhibitions (only now some of his works hang in the Baku Museum of Modern Art which opened in 2009). However, with their formal thinking, art of painting technique and compositional talent, power of impact, hypnotic properties, attraction and absorption of light, they stand apart and could decorate the halls of the world's best collections of modern art. They contain a high concentration of information that distinguishes a masterpiece - bearing deep, aesthetic knowledge

- no matter if it is expressed in a realist, cubist, decorative or any other language.

In the deeply intimate, simple, self-reflexive art of Ashraf Murad, we see the world of a person who is ignorant of the world and is outside the world and reality despite its imaginary existence. It is the world of the only person, or someone else's universe, where there is something that others do not know and where reality - the dream and paradise - is not only lost, but also not the only one. Paintings of Ashraf Murad are transcendental like the last works of the genius Georges Braque, and they seem to be ringing, but the frequency of these sounds is hardly perceptible to the human ear. It is uncomfortable to write about them using ordinary scientific vocabulary and it is unethical to see them as ordinary art objects. They are «aliens» like the «Birds» of Braque and graphics of Boyce, like the Sphinx and Shedu, like Sumerian cuneiform writings in the British Museum.

Surprisingly, some seascapes of Ashraf resemble seascapes of the final years of Braque, although it is clear that Ashraf had never seen them - either in the original or in print. They are separated from each other by 20 years, but they are in tune with their penetration into the element of water, general mood, color vibrations, palette, composition, horizon and even stains of white-wash. They are deeply archetypal. If you get true knowledge from these pictures - they are a gift to someone who is ready to accept them.

They seemed to have no time, or rather, future and past. They are a document or an energy generator, or simply a parallel reality.

This mysterious and extremely expressive painting is a high level of



artistry. This is the level that Ashraf Murad reached and none of his contemporaries was able to reach - it was only his level and nobody else's. Maybe, the price of a great thing is marginal perception and loss of the ordinary perception of everyday life?

His avant-garde came from the depths of the soul, from the reality itself refracted through psychic energy. His «avant-garde» was «realism» - genuine realism, not photographic naturalism.

In general, with a closer look at the great examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, you'll find a certain conventionality of the avant-garde - realism opposition, their relativity and typological blur. Often realist painters used modernist techniques (for example, Guttuso or Siqueiros), and inside the avant-garde there was some «realism». Besides that, the realism of some avant-garde works exceeds the «realism» of realism, if such tautology is acceptable. It is known that Cezanne had an invaluable influence on the development of modern art because in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus was mostly on his artistic



method. So Cezanne's method allowed this brilliant painter to enter the heart of the material world around us and to write objectively, say, realistically, because he wanted to write the reality of the essence of things, not their apparent «reality». «Cezanne wanted to get away from the unstable surface of things and get to the reality that does not change, but always lurks beneath the bright deceptive picture born by the kaleidoscope of feelings,» the eminent art historian Sir Herbert Read wrote.

The same desire to reveal the true reality, know it, admire it, reflecting it on the canvas, prompted Ashraf Murad to be in a sincere and permanent state as a researcher - find between

perception and expression.

Creativity, as Fazil Isgandar said, is an instinct of information transfer.

Ashraf could not but paint pictures. The individuality of the artist is unique, and his personal style has no analogues in the world or in domestic arts. He could not found a school, a national school of painting, or hand over his unique artistic experience to anyone – he was a lonely star. He introduced «psychism» and unique freedom of expression, hypersensitivity and chaste eroticism, the truth of the body, the truth of the flesh, states of consciousness altered to the extreme and the taste of today to Azerbaijani arts. Freedom that sweeps away all the «taboos», but retains the voice of conscience, the in-

ner voice of ethics - moral intuition, in which the ethical, aesthetic, sincere, honest, and, therefore, positive, bright and kind things (despite the black color or maybe because of it since it is the most solid) are inseparable.

Why was he unable to save himself? Why didn't he live a long and happy life? Maybe because he was not interested in the future and lived in the present – in this moment and at full capacity, forgetting about food and other natural needs? Sometimes he just did not have money to eat. Living in the present, he was still almost unknown to anyone of his contemporaries. Injured repeatedly, injured, but not broken, as an artist, as a sincere and honest man, Ashraf could not adjust. And he probably

did not want to, or rather, he did not know that he needed to adjust to something. He just lived passionately, and joyfully wrote canvases. He was only interested in art - he was a painter - like rebellious Qizilbash Sadiq Bey Afshar, who was not able to keep the post of kitabdar, or Huseyn Javid, or Sufi humanist Nasimi.

Of course, his creative work will definitely be studied, the time will come when there will be a serious study of the legacy of the most mysterious, magical Azerbaijani painter unknown to the audience.

They say he was a very handsome, happy, cheerful, kind and decent man. Before the disease, everything went well. They say that trouble happened to him in Leningrad - intoxication, and then consciousness changed. The disease began to attack, in spurts, advancing and then retreating. He struggled with it desperately. It took away his friends, communication, freedom of the body, but not the freedom of creativity. He did not give it to anyone: either to the disease, or to the government or to people surrounding him.

Personal problems, tragedies, mental hypersensitivity and dark forces stalked Ashraf like almost every great painter. Like Leonardo, Botticelli, Van Gogh, Kirchner ... fate was more favorable to some of them and less favorable to others (depending on the life and spiritual problems they were faced with.) But there is, perhaps, the freedom of choice. Ashraf Murad chose creative enthusiasm and burning. A Dionysian ecstasy of creation. And, as Nietzsche says, that's what Zoroaster had called for.

«The present is perfect,» wrote George Braque. Ashraf Murad wrote the same thing – in colors. ❀

