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The Naked Soul of Sagi

by Mark Howard

If your soul is attuned to poetry, you'll appreciate the poetic quality of the art of Israeli-born Siglia Vas, better-known in the international contemporary art world as "Sagi."

While she credits the Bible as a major source of philosophy and inspiration, the influence of both William Blake and Kalil Gibran are hauntingly evident in her metaphysical landscapes. Ethereal figures, more spiritual than physical, appear out of the ether, take form from the firmament, float through the cosmos. Delicate vulnerable beings in whom we must recognize ourselves, ravel and unravel their component parts while in another part of the psyche, a somber face emerges through the floral veil of a blossoming rose. Mystery and emotion, mysticism and divinity create a fusion completed in bold and powerful colors.

"Floating shapes in gray tones with crimsons and vermillions, cobalts and ultra-marines portray the union of nature and spirit, the human being," states the artist. "I paint naked, hairless bodies to portray naked souls, unmasked with cosmetics, hairstyles and fashion."

"I weave these figures into the fabric of friendship, passion

and love. From this fabric I create the flower, my symbol of beauty, naive and the youthful spirit."

A perfect illustration of this spiritual fabric is Sagi's oil-on-canvas entitled "Fragrance of the Hidden Soul." A towering rosebud, on a stem that's more a stalk, seems to define beauty as a quality unto itself. Growing in the foreground, it aspires up to the blue serenity of the heavens, which, in turn, is reflected back in the calm tranquility of the passive waters. In the background, a woman is hiding. She is enveloped within layers of shadows and an otherworldly rose. She is passive like the still waters, but she is also beautiful, like the rose. The full red lips are ripe, fully bloomed, and the fiery center burns with the intensity of power and passion. Yet the clasped hands held to one side mirror the aloof distance of the face hiding in the flower. Is this a spirit hiding in beauty--or a passion not yet born?

"In my art," says Sagi, "I create illusions--my own realities. Each of us, despite surroundings that mould our images, can see the world from a different angle of vision. Therefore the meaning of my art belongs to you."

As Dr. Igor Kuchinsky of Ontario, Canada has observed, "Sagi's paintings are basically personal impressions of her life experiences ...With deep concern and understanding of human nature, she puts the emphasis on the hands and faces of people and expresses so bluntly their agonies and ecstasy."

Unlike the mundane nudes of artist Eric Fischl which confront the viewer with the uncomfortable real taboos of incest and fetishism, bestiality and necrophilia, Sagi creates a naked reality at the opposite end of the spectrum. She invites us to share in her visual poetry.

"Queen of the Horizon," for example, could very well be the birth of that other fragrant hidden soul. If Botticelli's Venus was a goddess, Sagi's Queen is a sensual mortal, a flesh-and-blood woman. Hairless naked sylphs rise in the air around her like

vapors in fluid motion. While behind the scene--rather than upon it--is the omnipresent hand of a creative and sentient god. The subtlety of Sagi's vision presents us with a painting that strives to be a poem.

In "Elements," two nude upper torsos and what appears to be either ribbons or molds wrought of the firmament, unwind and intertwine in a coalescence of mind and body, spirit and substance. Since Sagi perceives the naked body as the naked soul, she seems to be saying that we are rarely complete in our own souls. Like biological molecules, spiritually we are in perpetual motion, ever seeking the needed parts and pieces of others to make us whole.

Truly a wandering Jewess, Sagi's art background is international in scope. After an apprenticeship under Haim Nahor in Israel, she continued her education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Utrecht, Holland. Next, her studies took her to the School of Art in Glasgow, Scotland and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, followed by work at California State University, Northridge.

Her list of exhibitions is equally impressive in spanning the globe. With over 20 major showings to her credit, some of her more important exhibitions have been held at the Hagefen Gallery in Haifa, the Capelrig House Gallery in Glasgow, the University of Strathclyde, the Academy of Art in London, the Gallery Heritage Toronto in Canada, and the Eva Dorog Gallery here in Los Angeles.

As the poet William Blake has said: "And all must love the human form,/In heathen, Turk, or Jew;/Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell/There God is dwelling too."

But if your artistic soul is attuned to poetry, you'll appreciate the words as well as the images of Sagi Vas: "Art should not only decorate empty walls or bring beauty to an ugly world; art is life and as such should glorify our thoughts, nourish the air and decorate our souls."

The work of Sagi Vas will be on display at the C'est la Vie Gallery, 1944 Topanga Canyon, May 3 through the 26.