

Alex Tavares

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Searing surrealism

Alex Tavares was born 30 years too late. He is a surrealist painter. But perhaps he was not born too late--what he is saying now needs to be restated, and restated in such a way as to jolt people out of their blasé apathy and look beneath the comfortable surface of their ordered lives. Surrealism does this more immediately than any other art form because it is starting in itself.

While we no longer consider ourselves with tyranny, anguish of others, the threat of nuclear war, because they are all the ever present phenomena of the 60s, Mr. Tavares as not allowed his sensibility to become blunted. Hence his searing exhibition at Nairobi's Paa ya Paa Gallery.

Of "The Smiling Maja", reminiscent of Goya's beautiful "Maja", but with the horrible difference of a grinning skull instead of a woman's face with an unsmiling female head hidden in her long hair. Mr. Tavares said, "This shows how hypocritical people are. They pretend to smile, but they do not mean it. I am trying to bring out the truths."

Painful images. Prodding people into thinking, he paints images recollected in pain so that they will react with shock and horror, and, hopefully, do something to correct what is wrong with the world. "If you see a man just sitting there you do not feel you have to do anything to help," he explained. "But if you see him fallen down, you instinctively come forward to try to help him up."

Each of Mr. Tavares' paintings is a paragraph in the essay of his own experience. But do not make the mistake of writing off this artist as just another angry young man. He was born in Zanzibar, studied and worked in India, Goa and Spain, and he has brought an artist's vision and technique to bear on his forthright comments.

author unknown

from *The Reporter*; Nairobi, Kenya
29 December, 1967

For example, "Sign of the Times", a distorted figure of a woman with a symbolic sword of Damocles held over her head, symbolising the threat of some cataclysmic disaster to humanity, is a brilliantly executed painting in brooding colours.

Though the limbs are strange, Mr. Tavares has obviously studied anatomy, and the horror arises partly from this fact, that the figures are closely enough related to realism to be associated with it.

His powerful evocation of images comes over in a less searing painting. "Receding Figures", still with the same brooding atmosphere but more of a flight into purely surrealistic fancy, where he recalls visiting a certain seashore and allows his subconscious to conjure up two huge female figures of desolation.



"SPIRIT OF GRAB" 1967

"AMOROUS GLANCE" 1967



Not all of his pictures are intended to carry a universal message. In some, he simply describes events, such as "Fate Visits the Golden City", a picture of a once beautiful, now ruined city, and "Next World", a self-explanatory title for an imaginative scene from after life.

And he sometimes allows himself to paint a completely happy picture. One is "Amorous Glance", the abstract portrayal of how a woman feels when she is thus flattered; a little coy, a little alarmed, a little pleased.