

HEZI COHEN GALLERY

Professional / Husband

Neta Gal-Atzmon

A sensation of subjacent energies arises from the works of Amit Cabessa, who paints in his studio at Kibbutz Magal, far from the city's madding crowd. His outlook on kibbutz society, as well as on the artistic field is that of an insider, of a "local," but also that of a tourist who examines local customs from the outside. Cabessa's works walk on a thin line between wild chaos and self control and restriction. His strong, quick, impulsive brush strokes express tempestuous states of mind, but at the same time create understandable compositions which amiably reunite the various elements into the painting space.

The artist often paints himself and his wife, as well as his near surroundings. Couples institutionalized by the marriage ceremony and the four circles of fences enclosing the kibbutz appear in his paintings as symbols of both protection and suffocation. His preoccupation with these reflects a dual attitude towards family life, which is seen as both protective and restrictive. Both establish tension between the natural and the civilized. In many of his paintings the fence appears as a true block, even as regards the viewer. Those issues that preoccupy Cabessa are discussed in Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), where he argues that the institutionalization of people's lives by society and the protection it affords from dangers exacts a high price from the individual, whose freedom is greatly curtailed. Civilized life, he stresses, implies most extreme interference with people's passions and the restriction of people's instinctive needs and impulses and from this derives their discontent with civilization.

The garlands, strings of coloured lights characteristic of nightly events which take place out-of-doors in the kibbutz, are also a common motif in Cabessa's work, as an image of a marginal event which expresses the longing for a life of splendour and glory. Its "decorative" function in the social life of the kibbutz also symbolizes in the eyes of the artist his dual attitude towards painting itself, which for him is a daily strenuous activity, the result of which becomes for the viewer an object of illusion embodying decorative qualities.

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The people depicted in Cabessa's portraits appear in all their vulnerability (sometimes naked) but they seem to entrench themselves or hide behind entangled vegetation or a fence. Also the faces, painted at first sight from an accessible frontal angle, appear blurred and indistinct, as if broken or dismembered. The gap between that blocked access of the painted characters wraps them in a halo of mystery and creates a feeling that they exist for themselves, locked in an enigmatic capsule of time and place.

In many of the paintings (maybe in the small portraits in particular) Cabessa manages to infuse a sensation of sentimental intimacy, without creating the illusion of sentiment: in those portraits there remains a certain measure of rawness. As a matter of fact, they present themselves mostly as images of reality and not as the illusion of naturalistic painting, thus offering an interesting meeting between the sentimental and the raw and rough.

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