



A SEARCH FOR PEACE:

An Essay on SAM MIDDLETON

Holland claims Sam Middleton as one of her leading contemporary artists even though he is a native of Harlem. After leaving New York City at the age of 17, he began working on merchant marine ships, thereby earning his way to and from several continents. His travels, in the same manner, took him more specifically to South America, the Orient, Mexico, Scandinavia and finally to Holland where he has resided, during the past six years. It was in Holland that he found the right conditions which later produced the climate conducive to his working and leading a free and creative life.

The life led by Sam Middleton is one which follows closely the pace of an international artist, for he is at home with people from all corners of the globe. They frequent his beautiful studio at Alexanderkade 5 in Amsterdam. Poets, painters, musicians and artists of all media come and reminisce of the days when Rembrandt and Vermeer were the living kings of Dutch art. A sense of these meetings lingers on to be reborn in the artist's paintings and more specifically in his collages. Discarded theater tickets, music programs, billboard posters and other such human items speak of the presence of people. His experience as a seasoned traveler and his close observation of all human characteristics which aid visual communication have made him a fine interpreter of today's fragmented society. Bit by bit, he pieces together odd, strange and curious things into a logical pattern which purposely do not owe allegiance to established style. Thus, he becomes a taskmaker and a stylemaster after his own calling.

Likewise, he has created a controlled surface in his work which transcends the ordinary attempt at action picture-making. The abstract quality of what he gives to the viewer is one which shows beautifully controlled calligraphic strokes that echo his knowledge of Oriental art. As one critic has put it, "he is unafraid to take used-up, no-longer-needed, everyday objects, familiar things, commonplace scraps of our times and give them a new dignity and role." Our visual literacy is challenged by the way he throws together bits of news from the journals of China, Germany, the United States and Israel. He seems to ask whether or not we are aware of the impact of the hand and its power in the physical process of making a work of art.

Color alone is not the master among the elements in his work. One notices beyond the ordinary the importance of line and texture in his collages. JUNGLE SOUL ardently breathes fiery notes of music that beckon us to sing, sing for peace. In it, the dove bids us "Search for Peace" from a U. S. postage stamp. This is the peace of sight, the peace of self and image, and above all, the peace of mind that the artist wishes upon us. The texture of a word, the meaning of a phrase, the tempo of our sight, all move us beyond seeing the surface of Sam Middleton's art into contemplation of his deeper message.

If by chance one wonders why he has chosen the collage as a medium of expression, then the following quote by the artist gives us clarification:

“In collage my reaction can be quicker than with painting. I express my emotions more directly. I do think the media which one can use are of minor importance to the existing creative potential. For me making collage is a natural thing, a matter of course; with my paintings I am tied up more intellectually—and that is not something I want to submit to.

In any case, it is life and movement as it chances to exist that furnishes the stimulus for my work. Tapping more and more the vital stream of common experiences and taste and comprehension of things, recognizing the life and beauty that is discovered in such a surface and the manipulation of such discoveries into what I consider a pleasing painting. Whether it be an expression of anger, love, harmony, rhythm, mood charm.”

Other writers have told of the humorous qualities of his work. They remind us that his compositions come alive and pulsate as though to command us. An inveigling force caused by his persuasive use of all of the elements becomes a pleasant surprise which allows one to search beyond the ordinary.

This, then, is the song of an artist whose soul is alive with all that he has seen and been a part of. His passion to collect and stabilize the discarded object reminds us of a free spirit which sees beauty in all aspects of our lives. Seeing, we too join in his song and search for peace.

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Jungle Soul

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