

greater its inward strength and divinity. The difference between his poetically socially aware figurative expressionism of the 1980s and the open-faced symbolism of his figurative impressionism of this decade is like the difference between Beethoven's middle-period string-quartets and his late: the language that both of these men are speaking is a wholly universal one, beyond mere mood or affective impulse, and into pure, inchoate, yet voluble emotion. They both speak as clearly to the waking heart as does a dream to the self while being self-lived asleep.

To wit, in the six-by-seven foot acrylic *That Existential Stare*, a huge bird-footed cat-beast with no hind legs and a Juan Miro "puss" sits within a Goya-like nightscape, staring keenly and disquietingly out at the viewer, who might well be concerned for her/his safety in the face of such "existential" menace—to return to Cicero's list of possibly relevant adjectives.

And "romantic"? The World-War-I-vintage plane of *The Ghost* flies low and lean against Van Gogh-esque poplars and a Monet lake, all of this up-to-the-minute cultural

nostalgia redolently enhanced by an Easter-morning sky of yellow and pale-gray clouds.

How about "evocative"? Will the little, lonely, ash-gray canoe adrift without passenger—but *with* archetypal poetic license—on blue-black waters under a bank of trees of myriad greens, all of it under a waiting moon, do for that?

And to bring it all home—"visionary"? In no other painting in this show as much as in *The Windmill* is a work so much a vision of *itself*—*beyond* itself, passing into the realm of strange and wondrous, untranslatable prophecy. The painting—with its lone windmill standing high on a deep-brown promontory under a sensationally brown and yellow sky, a small smoke-emitting plane tailspinning to its doom off-center in the air—wonderfully refines, confounds and reframes delectable elements of Rembrandt, Maxfield Parrish and late-'30s Alfred Hitchcock. *The Windmill* is a dark, spiritually enlightening paean to the many-tiered temples of late-20th-century Imagination.

Visionary? Yes, to lasting effect. But, no—Carmen Cicero is not, for his many art-historical references,

derivative. He's one of the few post-modernists around who has accumulated enough years, and is young enough in outlook, to realize that "post-modern" can no longer mean post-art, and that a good appropriationist never lets appropriationism get in his way. These new Ciceros, we realize, are meant to be, and are, a kind of art-hymning *summa* of a remarkable career, blending "abstract" with "figurative" styles to come up with works that are as stylistically and narratively hybrid as the rarest desert blooms. Dream is mated with reality, symbol with visual fact, the lyrical with the heroic, and—the toughest coupling, perhaps, and most beautiful—vision with ultimate painterly authority.

And, the one of Cicero's adjectives we haven't yet recapped—"surreal"? Yes, the man's giant artichoke hovering certainly and ominously over blue waters between piney islets might indeed give René Magritte pause. But surrealism was, at heart, a European phenomenon, and Carmen Cicero is deeply American; his creaturely artichoke is reported, even investigated, as well as hallucinated.

The artist pledges creative allegiance to his homeland nowhere so

much as in the huge *Tracer of Lost Persons*. It's based on a popular detective radio program of the '40s, it features a trench-coated detective determinedly, hurriedly crossing a viaduct-like bridge, over remotest, boiling black waters, in search of—well, what?

His own lost identity, this time out? Himself, or his immortal soul?

"See, "Cicero seems to be saying in *Tracer of Lost Persons*. "These days, even the dicks are taking it on the lam!" Fortunately, Carmen Cicero *isn't*, and visibly—his new works are eminently all there. His paintings have *arrived*. Cicero is one of the few of today's artists who, though he dream, will *never* be caught napping.

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