

## **ANDRAS CSASZAR : STREET TALK**

By Dorota Kozinska

*Maybe I am not very human - what I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house.*

- Edward Hopper

It is what artist Andras Cszaszar calls "celebration of the ordinary", and as in the case of the great American painter, this focus on the quotidian reveals a wealth of imagery and emotion.

Born in Budapest in 1978, and now living and working in Montreal, Andras has a keen eye for his surroundings, excising striking compositions from everyday scenes. He is drawn to corners of the city he now calls home with an intuitive pre-cognition, shining a spotlight as it were, on its colourful urban landscape in places few would consider worthy of sightseeing.

And yet... In Andras' canvases, the messy, litter-strewn back alleys of Montreal are transformed into light infused magical spaces, as in his recent series *Lanes*. In two vertical works, *Lanes: Caravan* and *Lanes: Burning*, the light paints the atmosphere, illuminating the sky at the end of the long, narrow alleyways, gilding them with warm ochre. The trees and lampposts lining them become sentinels in these compositions, the lane turned into a classical colonnade. What is revealed in these paintings is the space in between, the air and the light that permeate the compositions encapsulated within urban structures.

Csaszar's paintings of the ubiquitous Montreal *dépanneur* stores offer another glimpse into the artist's creative preoccupations. As in the *Lanes* paintings, the shop façades present their own narrative. Instantly recognizable, they entertain the viewer with a colourful patchwork of overlapping planes and a wonderfully textured surface. It is in these series of works, such as *Dépanneur: Pamela*, *Dépanneur: Rosie*, that Csaszar's style most resembles Hopper. There is a wonderful sense of quiet, of a moment suspended just before the start of the chaotic goings on that mark the urban reality. There are no solitary, desolate figures occupying the spaces, as in Hopper's works. This, for now, is a stage, a setting, a brief respite from movement, a time for reflection.

From street scenes to the minutiae, Andras draws his gaze closer and tighter in with small format still lifes, where but a sliver of reality holds centre stage. In *Sardines: Gabriel* it is a half-opened can, shimmering against a pitch-black background, like some ancient relic. There is a wonderful reflection of the metal, adding to the visual quality of this precious little offering. *Watermelon* uses the same formula, showing two slices of red fruit against a black backdrop, placed slightly to the side, disturbing, exciting the simple setting.

Andras works in small format, his oils becoming a kind of *objets d'art*, tactile, intimate. This applies to his landscapes as well, where light and shadow compose the image, the trees and sky in constant dialogue, equal partners/actors on the stage set for them by the artist. As with his urban scenes, painting often *in situ*, he finds quiet vistas, where the eye is carried on by receding layers, way beyond the horizon.

*Orange Sky* is perhaps the most striking of his landscapes, the sky glowing behind a row of birch trees, their white trunks like a staccato visual accompaniment to its expanding golden glow.

As with any emerging artist, Csaszar's oeuvre is in constant flux. Some of his works are still in a nascent stage, harbingers of great things to come. His studies for portraits hint at a new production, yet this is not an easy path. Portraiture is probably the most pitfall-ridden exercise, and Csaszar's attempts, albeit tentative, are showing signs of both audacity and originality.

*Untitled Study No 7* in particular, speaks of a new approach, where an exquisitely painted face and bust seem to emerge from a jumble of rough brushstrokes, like a sculpture hewn from raw rock. Again, as with all of Csaszar's production, the light plays the main role in this composition, adding another dimension to the shimmering whole.

And it is because of this economy of means, the subdued palette and quiet pictorial presentation that Csaszar's works stand out from the other contemporary artists labouring in this exciting city. And they are legion. Rather than elbow his way into the art scene, Andras has chosen to remain true to his inner vision, and steadfastly, gently, marches to his own tune.

It is not loud, you may need to strain a tad to hear it, but the reward is more than worthy of a moment of reflection.

Dorota Kozinska is a writer, art critic, and editor based in Montreal. Her art reviews and articles have been published extensively in *Vie des Arts*, *Parcours informateur des arts*, *MagazinArt*, *Art Forum*, and *The Gazette*, as well as broadcast internationally on CBC Radio. She is the author of numerous artists' catalogues, and an independent curator.