

The Toiled Garden

BY LUPE RODRIGUEZ

I paint in a language with which I am most comfortable and at ease. I feel a need to energize the canvas and create a sense of life in rich contrasting colours and dynamic brushstrokes. I struggle to create surfaces which are tactile, gritty and rough to the touch. The actual art of painting for me is a very sensual and physical experience and yet, that in itself is not beyond the formal elements. I feel a need to make a statement — to communicate a thought (or an experience) which is relevant to my life and which in time will be significant to someone else. That is the challenge of being an artist. You put forward ideas and for the rest of your life they bounce back disguised in many forms.

The subject of the work is the vehicle through which I search to express myself. I need a starting point and the land seems to be, for the present, the best beginning. I am, however, most drawn to the domesticated landscape. There is often in my work an indication of human presence: the toiled garden, the burning fire or the adobe house. My objective is to paint a landscape that is animated but not exploited by human and animal life. This harmony between people and nature is a subject I have intermittently explored and which has recently become the focus of my work.

I am presently working on a series of paintings which deal with the human presence in nature. While painting the land, I am not naturally drawn to the isolation of the wilderness. Although I understand the fascination with the pristine untouched beauty of the northern landscape, at present it is not a part of me. Instead I choose to explore a more familiar landscape: the Mediterranean and the American Southwest which are in many ways totally different from my immediate environment.

My roots are in the Mediterranean, so it is not astonishing that I would find a need to continuously return there. I was born in southern Spain but most of my education and upbringing took place in Toronto. I have constantly returned to Europe, spending the majority of my time in Andalucia. Spain represents for me both the beauty and energy of a southern country as well as the centre of my family roots. Having grown up in Canada without an extended family, I was not accustomed to the world of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. In fact as a family we were quite isolated from a supportive group. Summers in Andalucia became an intense period of family events, trips, fairs, sun, beach and all the intimate details of my family's past. The months of July and August seemed eternal.

These very warm, and memorable experiences continually filter into my work. I paint aspects of this land which give a sense

of shelter and protection. Although the landscape may at times appear isolating, there are always natural forms included within the environment to nurture the viewer. I often seek areas which have been occupied and carry a sense of history. If the land is no longer inhabited, there are at least remnants of human presence, such as the remains of a pueblo village or the ruins of a castle. It is this association with the past which eventually led me to travel throughout the American Southwest, where I discovered many similar characteristics.

It strikes me now that the landscapes which I constantly represent are characteristically warm, vibrant, inviting, enveloping and nurturing. I draw my ideas and inspiration from the world I am most familiar with — my family and my friends. I may travel extensively and research in great detail but ultimately I paint the world closest to me — the home and the complexity of relationships within that home.

