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On Jale Erzen's Paintings¹

These are images representing some important periods of Jale Erzen's work, from the early 1970s when she was studying painting at Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles with Lorser Feitelson, to the present. Half a century of work.

Jale Erzen is known by the International Association for Aesthetics community mostly as a researcher in aesthetics, art historian and an active member of the community. Very few know that she has another identity: painter. I know her for about 20 years and what differs me from most of you is the fact that I had been her student for a long time. I know her both as a researcher and a teacher. I took her class "Aesthetics and Art Criticism" three times, not because I was a lazy student, but because she teaches a different topic each year. She was always the most hardworking person in the class. She was a lecturer, but she was also a student. You could always see the light in her eyes, that light of excitement when she learns something new from her students. This always gave us joy, the joy of ...

So, what about Jale as a painter? To be honest, I also don't know her as a painter very well. I had the chance to see some of her drawings in her studio in Ankara, and in various places in the Middle East Technical University where she teaches and where I did my BA. I also attended some of her exhibitions. Besides, I am not an art critic. So, what I will tell about her paintings are far from a technical criticism of them. They are my very subjective thoughts and feelings.

Jale considers herself first and foremost as a painter although she divides her time between teaching and writing on art and aesthetics. Her paintings are witnesses to her engaged relation with nature in the form of landscapes and the human body that she views as symbols of life forces and spiritual moods. For her, painting with its crude materiality of paint and canvas transformed into lines, rhythms and colors is a way of giving life to symbolic and fantasized inner realities. The energy that bursts forth from her brush and turns into repeating, overlapping, swirling lines make apparent the unseen layers of subjective worlds. They revive myths, fables and memories

¹ This talk was given in Belgrade University Faculty of Architecture for the opening of Jale Erzen's exhibition in the 21st International Congress of Aesthetics. Unfortunately the exhibition couldn't be carried out since Jale's paintings couldn't pass the borders due to some technical problems.

stored in the depths of personal and cultural history. Her paintings do not narrate but create appearances almost as dreams, fed with old Greek tragedies and Mesopotamian creation myths.

Her years at Art Center in Los Angeles as an undergraduate and graduate student were devoted to drawing from the figure every day, each time according to the aesthetic understanding of great draftsmen like Michelangelo, Del Sarto or Ingres, and over the years to the study of European Painting. Thus Jale wishes that her painting be viewed as belonging, in a modern language, to the great tradition of European Painting that in multiple approaches addressed meanings about human subjectivity and the human condition.

When we look at Jale's paintings, we mostly see bodies. Bodies of humans, animals, and landscapes as the body of the world we inhabit. What strikes me in these compositions is the dimness of borders between these bodies. The humans, animals and the world intertwine into each other by means of swirling lines, and curvy strokes of brush. The borders get lost, they disappear. All these bodies; the humans, the animals, and the world become one. Looking from an anthropocentric viewpoint, I become one with other bodies surrounding me. As Jale sometimes quotes in her writings, the world becomes my bones, my flesh. The anthropocentric positions dissolve into the oneness of the bodies that constitute the cosmos.

Here is what Jale writes about her work in one of her catalogs from 1998: *"I as the painter am consciously controlling the painting and start with a general form, or a basic rhythm and movement in mind, once the initial marks are laid down, often the painting evolves in a self-conditioned way. I may explain this as each painting belonging to a certain structural mode and its particularities being improvised and realized in the course of the painting's process of actualization.*

*I believe that any kind of relationship, contact, and interaction, whether it be between the observer and the object, the observer and the work of art, or amongst the elements of a work, so that a structure is created and hence a meaning is expressed, depends on an order of movement which would direct different elements to each other. The whole of existence or life is a great network of relations made possible by this endless movement towards each other of all being, creating layers and layers of visible and invisible interactive networks."*²

² Jale Nejdet Erzen, "Chiaroscuro", Emlak Sanat Gallery, Ankara, Turkey, 1998.



1. *Untitled*, 2016 (95 x 75 cm); oil on canvas



2. *Wild*, 2017 (140 x 190 cm); acrylic



3. Untitled, 2018 (70 x 90 cm); oil on canvas



4. Untitled, 2018 (45 x 55 cm); oil on canvas



5. *Inward*, 2018 (45 x 55 cm); oil on canvas



6. *Evening*, 2018 (70 x 90 cm); oil on canvas



7. *Quiet*, 2018 (45 x 55 cm); oil on canvas



8. *Amazon 1*, 2019 (135 x 181 cm) oil on canvas



9. *Amazon 2*, 2019 (135 x 181 cm); oil on canvas



10. *Forest light*, 2019 (135 x 181 cm); oil on canvas