
Double, double, toil and trouble Fire burn and cauldron bubble

Tod Wizon's paintings are alive. The paint swirls on the surface, different shapes, figures and views crystallize themselves only to melt back into alternative images or a primordial mass of daubs. The paintings have no centre of gravity, the eyes float over them, making it hard to keep bearings, even to say which way is up and which is down. Here is no limit to how long one can enjoyably look at an individual painting, since the longer one looks the stronger the effect, the entertainment as the next group of images spring, as if by magic, from the paint.

"Most paintings, the instant you see them, they become familiar and then it's too late" (Gaddis). With Wizon's paintings almost the opposite of familiarity happens. Even after long acquaintance they change noticeably, with all those things that might change other paintings too, such as the changes of natural light or surrounding, but they change dramatically with the moods of the viewer, to show things never before seen in them. The paintings are ongoing visual educations. The eye sometimes bounces off them at first, since there is rarely an immediately recognisable element in them. They often require long scrutiny, sometimes to the point of stupefaction, for them to start working.

Wizon's standard size for a painting, just 10 x 8", is the perfect vehicle for his art. Held in the hands or hung on a wall, the paintings sparkle, refracting the artist's and the viewers sensibilities. *Jewel Heap* is a telling title that could apply to all the paintings in this book. "Before (them) we lose ourselves in amaze of strange lights and mysterious colours which make us sink deeper and deeper into a world which is as entrancing as it is far away." (Berenson) As the cognitive mind and the emotions are drawn into the paintings, we start to forget ourselves. When the right painting and the right viewer meet at the right time, there is a brief fusion of conscious being with the alternative universe that lies in the painting. It is this release not only from the outside world but also, for a moment, from ourselves, that makes these paintings work. "The entire consciousness is no more than the clear mirror of the artwork, is the medium in which it reaches the world: one knows of oneself only in so far as one knows of the artwork: one exists only as the pure subject of recognition: for a moment, one only knows that there is looking; but not who is looking; the whole

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consciousness is completely filled and engaged with one visible picture." (Schopenhauer)

The size of the paintings forces us to peek at another world, as if through a key hole. Dutch painters such as Jan Breughel come to mind, as does Joachim Patinir, a Danube school artist who is one of Wizon's favourites. These artists create worlds, illusions perhaps, but of such majestic beauty that our most sincere response is the desire to get into them. The size of the works calm any fear we might have of actually falling into these worlds and not being able to get back out. It also makes it impossible to be engulfed as larger paintings or environments might do. Free from any risk of surfeit, the tension of desire continues unabated.

The paintings allow you to savour your own emotional response, but you must come to the paintings with independence and discipline, because only then can Wizon's unstudied and unconscious approach remain emotional without cloying.

Not every painting will work for every viewer. It can take years of fleeting glances before a figure is unfrozen and comes to life or a landscape gains depth and contour. And this is the starting point for the appreciation of the paintings. Alcohol and drugs help. So does music. Wizon's personal top ten is the perfect accompaniment to his art. Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*, Brown & Roach's *Basin Street*, Pink Floyd's *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* and Hendrix's *Are You Experienced* are pieces of music that can, at times, turn simple contemplation into a real thrill.

Wizon's first paintings, done in the seventies, are mainly landscapes, or seascapes. The same could be said of the paintings done in the last five years. They have change, however, from views outward to views inward, becoming more psychological than geographical. Since they are of a man, they are vertical not horizontal. Until 1989 or 1990, a tangible external element can usually be recognised in the paintings. There is an abundance of earth colours. By 1992 these elements have started to disappear. Today it is rare to see a Wizon which can conclusively be linked to an outside experience, and the colours have become subject to an inner sense. "Must there be all these colours without names, without sounds." (Hendrix). The rays of sunlight are

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still there, but they are more imagined than experienced, and they are rendered in a more painterly and less naïve way. Wizon seems to be showing us the tactile remnants of optical impressions that he had many years ago, that still linger in his memory. The paintings have aligned themselves with a more transcendental and less concrete power. Wizon's art is not concerned with abstraction, although it may at first seem so. Abstraction is about silence, and Wizon's work is lyrical, as are the prose poems of Rimbaud that the artist so admires. Both the poet and the painter try in their work to loosen up the mind to deal with the world.

Some paintings are dark and deep, as if an approaching storm clod in the background of an old master magnified, the varnish lending age to the image. Although, as in *Winter's Eve*, the paintings can be very dark, there is always some light in them. In a series entitled *Nocturnes* there is sometimes only moonlight, even only starlight, but the paintings always shine rather than absorb light.

Fog and rain are recurrent stylistic elements, and through them we can make out ever changing landscapes and figures. In one painting Lucifer and his followers fall from heaven to the dark depths below, or, on reflection, butterflies might be circling a candle. In another the *Last Judgement* is visible through the Cardinal's smoke in the Sistine Chapel, or, equally plausibly, the image represents a shoal of brightly coloured fish swimming over a reef just under the surface of the sea. *Signals* could be interpreted as looking up into a grotto or down into a landscape, or perhaps what a meteor shower might look like on Saturn.

The paintings such as *Play* or *Serpent Sea* have islands of colour which connect alternately to create different images and associations behind the light, connecting fog. Most of Wizon's paintings can be perused while held in the hands, but paintings like this must be hung on a wall and seen from a distance to allow the image to coagulate. By drawing attention to such a small image from a distance the space around the painting is usually warped, adding a presence that other, much larger paintings, do not achieve.

The creation of these paintings visibly required time and effort; both are needed from the viewer to really appreciate them. "It is just as

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true that the knower is a product of matter as that matter is a mere representation of the knower ... the intellect and the material are correlatives. We then get two absolutely first things" (Schopenhauer)
The artist opts for very specific titles for his works, but given their polymorphous nature they add a psychedelic not rather than helping in their interpretation. Above are some things I have looked for and found in Tod Wizon's paintings. No one is likely to see them the same way. And what does the artist himself look for in his paintings? "A naked man chasing a nymph through the forest."

Luca Marenzi