

Island of Treasures
Satta Hashem and John Lancaster
Shree Jalaram Community Centre, 85 Narborough Road, Leicester
26/02/07 – 09/03/07

This is an excellent exhibition of work, consisting of a series of small paintings by John Lancaster, and paintings of various size and some small drawings by Satta Hashem.

Satta Hashem is an Iraqi born artist who has travelled widely since leaving Iraq over 25 years ago. Satta has studied in the Soviet Union, Algeria and Sweden, but is now based in Leicester. His art has a complex background; Arabic calligraphy, a rich immersion in colour theory drawn from a study of art history, science and Islamic Art, and an appreciation of the mathematics that underpins much Islamic artistic production.

What amazes me about Satta's work is the incredible business and activity that combines to somehow produce a sense of peace and tranquillity; it is the tranquillity of exhaustion, a post-coital calm and sense of completion. Central to his work is a mastery of line and pattern, often energetic and seemingly frantic but with a wonderful sense of control and purpose which combines with a deep understanding of colour. The colours of each picture are often surprising, even at times shocking and yet they work together to provide an overall harmony that is deeply satisfying. In *Space Traveller* (2007) deep blues, rich browns, thin acid yellows and pale greens combine with petrol green highlights to create a quite magical effect. Turn to another painting, *Tranquil Space* (2006) and the palette is quite different; here reds and greens and yellows jostle with oranges and blues across a large canvas, yet the final effect is of something achieved and completed. Pieces of Arabic text appear, faces appear, inked lines outline and wander across the surfaces and then merge into the pattern and disappear. Seeing these paintings is like being confronted with little explosions of energy and fascination, one's eyes take in the whole and then search the surface hungrily for detail and meaning, for conjunctions of colour and design.

Satta's drawings underpin and introduce the paintings. Here the same magic and energy draw one into a world of imagination and purity, for this is art that attempts to point us towards that transcendental possibility of peace and beauty. This is extraordinary, special and wonderful work, and I feel honoured to have seen it and to have been moved by it. I'd buy *Space Traveller* tomorrow if I had the money, I'd hang it on my wall and I'd never tire of looking at it. Ever.

This is an excellent exhibition. I have visited it twice and will go again before it closes. If you didn't see it you missed something special, and with the Matisse to Freud exhibition on at the New Walk Museum, Leicester is currently hosting some truly unmissable work.

Hamish Whiteley