

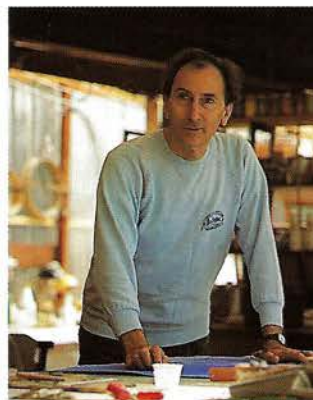


"Tourcan". Collage on canvas. 81 x 110 cm.

# Through the looking-glass

*Look through a Baviera window and you'll look into a magic world. Light and colour stream into your vision. Landscapes appear in your mind's eye. They are timeless and powerful in their vastness - and always etched with minute traces of humanity and plant life.*

Text by Inger Holland

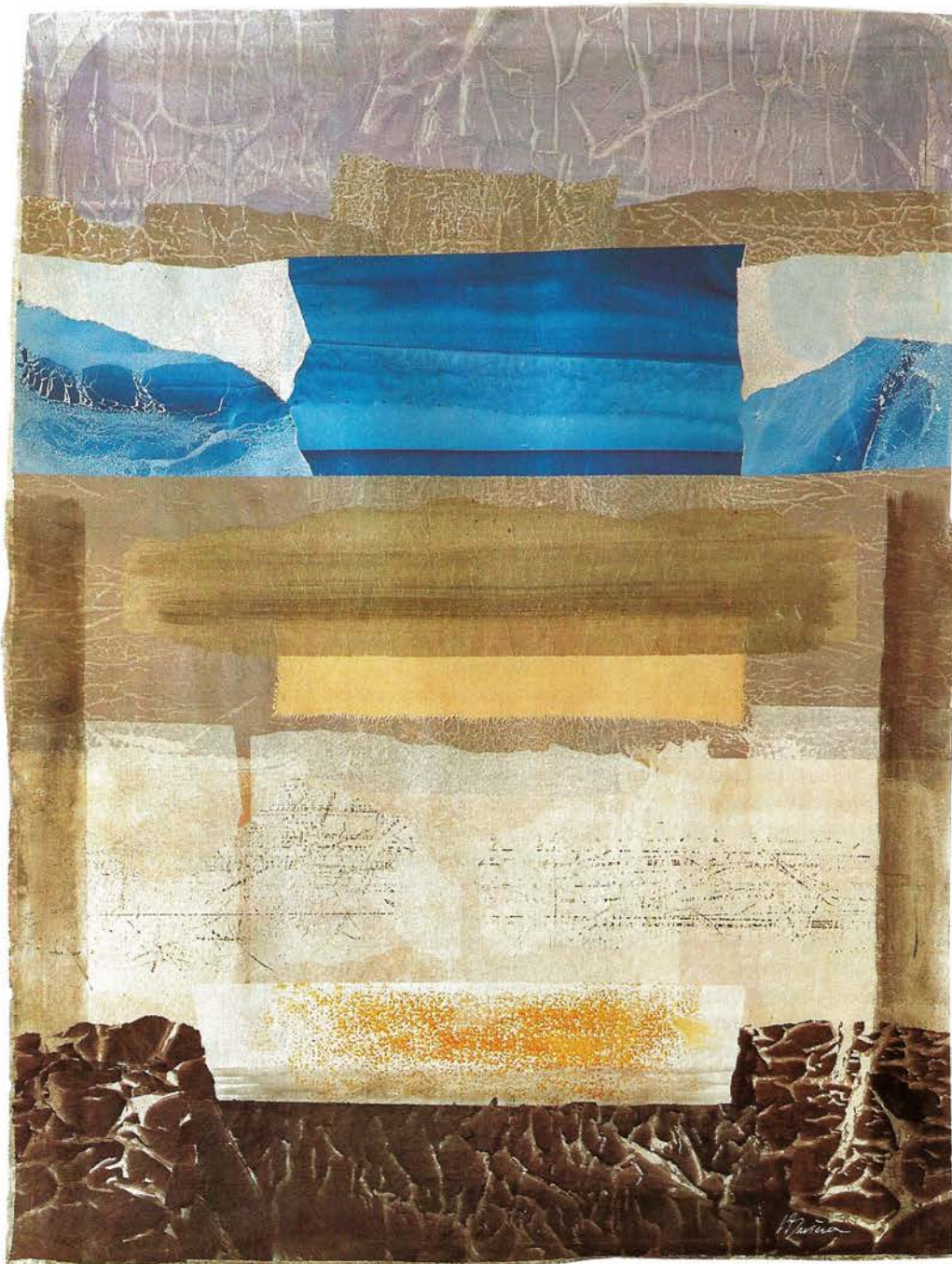


**H**enri Baviera has his studio in Nice. The sun streams into the Old Town apartment, lighting the canisters of paint and the giant printing press. Pulling out one canvas after another, he explains that much of his work is in Japan right now.

Henri Baviera has a way of drawing his audience into his imagination, into the very interior of his paintings. He uses the allusion of windows to catch the eye. "Anyone can be impressed by a painting," he says. "We have made it a privileged surface. It hangs rather like a postage stamp on a wall. You look at it. It distinguishes itself from other surfaces in the house because something is inscribed in it."

"But with a window, you must stop and look through or into it. When I create something that resembles a window, the viewer must enter it. The relationship becomes interactive. In reality, it marks a physical space, but it can become a mental one as well."

Baviera's work is about man's relationship with the universe inside himself and the universe outside. Baviera's windows present opportunities to look out onto other perspectives of our lives. He segments his canvas into planes and spaces of different colours, shapes and textures. The planes are often super-imposed in order to create "open vistas" onto many little worlds: abstractions of mountains, glaciers, skies, creatures - all separate universes that live side by side, complementing one another. They represent the harmony that Baviera seeks in the relationship between man and nature. "What has always interested me is



"Mentua", 1995. Collage on canvas. 82 x 108 cm.



"Gao-Sya", 1997. Acrylic on canvas. Diptych 300 x 202 cm.

the link between realms of living things. The rapport between minerals, vegetation and animal life should be in perfect harmony all the time." Through his windows, Baviera's timeless universe can't exist without the traces or footprints that mark the passing of life: animal tracks, human scribbles, or the remains of organic matter, such as imprints of roots or leaves.

"I also like to leave these traces," says Baviera. "because they provide a link to the person who created the piece. It also avoids our having to look at something too technical, with no soul, that is then no longer a painting." He floats magic crystals - geometric shapes like diamonds - in his scenery. They represent man's impact as he passes through the universe. On earth, only man can fabricate straight lines and symmetry... in that he is like a crystal, the only natural object with rigid geometric forms - though a crystal takes millions of years to be created.

Baviera's imaginative worlds, so rich in the ochre colours of the earth and the blues of air and water, are intuitive landscapes to be crossed by the

mind of the viewer as if he were the first explorer, with no map and no preconceived notions. Baviera's titles will give no clue: *Shimanda*, *Mekita*, *Lunycia*, *Apsamé*... They are part of his own make-believe language, meaningless words valued for the musical and poetic sounds and images they evoke.

Baviera is an artist who has evolved enormously, just like his landscapes. In the 1950's, he painted scenes of Provence: villages, olive-groves, fruit arranged in kitchen still-lives. His paintings had a rough, rustic look about them and sold very well. He was an artist in one of the world's most celebrated artistic communities: Saint Paul de Vence. For Easter, 1952, an exhibition of local artists was organized in the only gallery in Saint Paul. Henri, then 18, prepared a large canvas showing the interior of a peasant's cottage, lit only by the sun through a rear window. At the famed Colombe d'Or hotel, there seemed to be some interest in his picture. Borsi, one of the local artists, told Henri that he should go talk to a man sitting at the back of the bar, wearing a

large Mexican sombrero. Rather timidly, he introduced himself.

"Are you the young man who paints peasants' houses?"

"Yes, sir."

"You want to paint?"

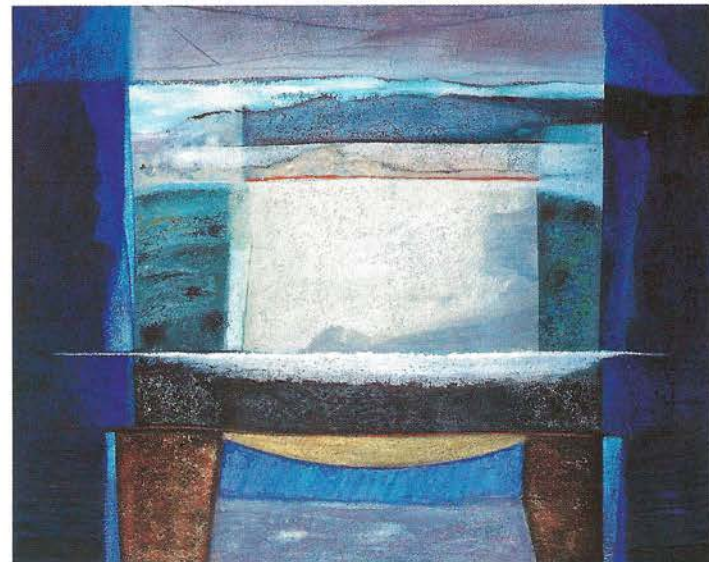
"Oh, yes!"

"Then continue to look closely at everything. You know, you must always observe everything, even

backwards and upside-down. You have the temperament to paint. Follow your eye and work!"

Henri was deeply impressed. As he left, the owner of the Colombe d'Or, Titine Roux, had a big smile on her face when she asked him, "And what did Picasso say to you?"

Henri Baviera's family in Saint Paul can be traced back to the 14th cen-



"Hindkata", 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 162 x 130 cm.

tury. He spent his childhood there before going to study art in Nice. In the early 'fifties, he opened his first studio back in the family home on Saint Paul's western ramparts. Throughout the 'fifties and 'sixties, about 20 artists lived and worked in studios within the village walls. A terrific camaraderie developed. Chagall was often at the Maeght Foundation, along with Giacometti, Miro and Léger. André Verdet was his neighbour and was often accompanied by Arman, César, Martial Raysse and Yves Klein, who lived in the neighbouring village of La Colle. Baviera lived on the edge of these *Ecole de Nice* painters. He wasn't influenced by them, because his work was not about the effects of the industrialized world and mass consumerism, as theirs was. He sought harmony in what was timeless and universal, not in what was modern.

Baviera remembers it as a tremendous era. "No-one who lived through it can ever forget it," he exclaims. Many people from the cinema also frequented Saint Paul : Yves Montand, Simone Signoret and Jacques Prévert. The "good years" lasted until 1968. Then the village sold out. Land prices sky-rocketed and agriculture - oranges, wine and olives - gave way to real estate.

Baviera is very saddened by what happened to his ancestral village of Saint Paul, but one must look to the future, he says. He now works in the countryside near Lorgues, where he feels he can get away, to find harmony between his life and the world, and be in touch with nature. The studio he maintains in Nice is primarily for efficiency, not inspiration. His designs and paintings are conceived in Lorgues. Nice is where they are produced. A giant printing press fills one of the work rooms.

Baviera has invented a type of engraving called *polychrome relief*, which allows him to print multiple colours and, at the same time, make indentations in the soft, thick paper. He uses the technique as a means of combining painting and engraving to produce his soft landscapes of the mind, so intricately etched with the scratchy traces of mankind.

*Henri Baviera will be showing recent work in Lorgues at Le Garage Gallery, 2 place Auriol. His work is also permanently on display in Monaco at the Galerie Henri Bronne.*



"Caltanisa". Collage on canvas. 61 x 110 cm.