

A FOREIGN PALETTE



Two artists in Paris

David Roth came to Paris in 1982 because a Frenchman fell in love with one of his paintings ; Laurie Karp arrived five years earlier on a three week holiday from New York, and decided not to go back. Both are on the verge of success as artists, and both have no plans to leave.

"I like it here, even though there's more money in the states", says Roth, and Ms. Karp adds: "People in Paris don't talk about work, they talk about ideas". Is it simply easier to think and observe in a foreign country, or is there something special about Paris which attracts so many American artists?"

Certainly Roth is a skilled painter, already called a "master-in-the-marking" at his latest exhibition in Boston. His flat in the Pr -St-Gervais, where he exudes an almost urgent vitality, is full of works with a vast diversity of styles: from romantic to impressionist, from lush landscapes to prosaic portraits, from watercolours to elaborate montages.

At 27, he earns a living from commissions and what he can sell at his shows in Paris and the USA. His rent is just a few paintings at Christmas, paid to the family of a man who visited his studio in New York, saw a picture of the Rockefeller Plaza, and invited the young man to stay - and paint - at his villa near Avignon during the summer. The painting had been rejected by Morgan Stanley, the company which commissioned it: "I was about to destroy it!"

But making a reputation, a "name for yourself", is not always so straightforward. Ms. Karp spent a year in a studio in the Cit  des Arts, but "it's not easy to get people to come to your shows". She is dark-haired, 31, equally lively and equally eclectic: having experimented with the avant-garde and the classical, she now devotes herself to mythological paintings, over three metres long.

Roth thinks too many painters these days are dishonest. "If I walk through Soho" - the artistic quarter of New York - I can see a lot of bright and flashy paintings, but no feelings, no insights. The best they can do is show you how complicated society is, and I only need to look through my window to see that".

Laurie Karp, for her part, says she can "do" Soho in twenty minutes. "Three minutes each gallery, that's all I need". She is mildly contemptuous of current "movements" in art, such as "bad painting" "Everyone's got something to get out of it: for the galleries, money; for the artists, fun and fame; for the critics, the chance to discover a new movement; and for Paris, the satisfaction of being talked about again. It's a lot of fun but it mustn't be confused with art".

Roth sees a lack of tradition as the problem with most artists, and is "turned off" by the symbolist expressionism of others. "They have good ideas but not good grammar. It's not an image giving respect to their craft. A sense of evolved tradition gives him "something to bounce off",



by David Roth

and he sees nothing in common between his work and anything else around him. "Maybe I'm behind the times and I'll catch up later... I don't really care".

Is it perhaps that some of the best modern talents are moving into other areas, such as computer graphics or video? Both disagree strongly. "There are things, aspects of space and texture, that you can only do with paint", maintains Ms. Karp; and for David Roth "it's like apples and oranges, they're not meant to express the same thing. Of course video has an influence, like everything. Monet used black and white photographs for his paintings of Rouen Cathedral. But there'll always be room in peoples hearts for artwork". After listening to these two and admiring their work, it's hard to doubt it.

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