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## Zobel at the Tate

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## SHAKESPEARE, USA

But with all this theatrical variety, Shakespeare remains America's favorite playwright. The proof of this is the number of Shakespearean productions and the large crowds that attend them. Among the major theatrical events are the great Shakespeare Festivals held in Connecticut and New York every summer, and the yearly visit of the "Old Vic" of London. Among the minor productions are those of the university theatres and of the New York playhouses "off Broadway". But Shakespeare is a large subject and best left for another occasion.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

*Zóbel at the Tate*

The point is of course in some ways fatuous, but the embarrassing thing about Fernando Zóbel is that he is a painter with an ambiguous artistic "nationality". Not that national boundaries have ever really stood for much in the world of art, nor that one cannot in view of this say, "For 'embarrassing', read 'disturbing', or 'interesting'". Zóbel is in fact interesting, sometimes disturbing, and—as was well demonstrated in the recent (January-February) exhibit of Modern Spanish Painting at the Tate Gallery in London—able to create a curious ambivalence between being internationally understood and retaining "national" characteristics.

"National" is kept between inverted commas because it is one thing to make the above observations of Zóbel's art when Zóbel's paintings are viewed in isolation, and quite another when they are seen in the context of a collection specifically identified as Spanish.<sup>1</sup> I felt that the three Zóbel frames—which I personally liked very much—were, in the particular setting, a trifle anachronistic (perhaps the word should really be "dislocated" but I do not think it necessary to decide whether the heterogeneity is a matter of time or space). This, needless to say, is not derogation: the point is that there is an undeniable difference

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<sup>1</sup> Even if Zóbel has been exhibited as a representative Philippine artist in the QANTAS-sponsored group-show that toured the international capitals from London to Canberra last year, he has, as a Spanish citizen, every right to seek a place alongside Saura, Tapies, Cuixart, and Tharrats. Any quarrel about the nationality of his art on the score of his citizenship would be as pointless and tiresome as a dispute about whether James Whistler were British or American.

between his contributions and those of the other painters represented, and the difference is apparent in more than merely matters of technique (though these, too, were present) and personal idiosyncrasy.

In general, the Spanish painters are bolder as exponents of visual aggression. One might think that the group-show was not lacking in the Iberian flair for over-statement: Alfonso Mier carries collage to an extreme with his barbed wire fixed onto a parched and embattled landscape; Manuel Rivera splays out collanders, snips at pieces of wire-screen, weaves aluminum cobwebs three-dimensionally; Julian Martín de Vidales tortures slices of leather across a canvas almost white-hot with pigments in monochromatic tones of glazed ochre; and Gustavo Torner spreads out rusted galvanised iron to enhance the arid emptiness of yet another burning canvas.

To anyone who has seen any of Zóbel's recent exhibits in Manila, the different between him and the other Spanish painters should by now have suggested itself: where most of the Spanish group try to refresh the sense of sight by enlisting the sense of touch, Zóbel has preferred to experiment with line, or with masses of color. (Lately, he has combined both, although he has reduced his colors economically to basic black and basic white—an ascetic rather than a niggardly use of the palette by which he eliminates the possibility of distraction from the exciting interplay between lines and mass.) In the mastery of line he is peerless in the exhibit under review, with perhaps the exception of Eusebio Sempere whose linear and color contrasts nevertheless jarred where Zóbel's blended in a manner more quietly Oriental. For with his exquisitely calligraphic delicacy and his sure command of his black "Chinese mist", Zóbel at once creates tensions and correspondences between electric speed and solid immobility. And yet the contrast is never naively stark: somehow, he is able to cushion what certainly could be an explosive and unaesthetic clash by the easy insinuation of indeterminate masses of black between the "whitewash" and the multifarious foci of lightning tines. The result is arresting; and the attention, once engaged, is at last challenged to pick its way through a sense of labyrinthine space which, I discovered, makes the painting refuse lyrically, iridiscently, tantalisingly if you will, to concretize into symbol.

This, certainly, reflects the personal experiences of a painter who perhaps is more influenced by the East than any of the others in the show. The assertiveness of the Spaniard is there; but so, too, is the self-effacing urbanity of the Oriental. Again, Spanish austerity is there, and yet also the rich Eastern sense of mystery. With one quality counterpointing the other, the Zóbel's may well have forced some "milque-toast" art-fancier to take a few embarrassed steps back to the foyer where he might furtively check on the floor plan and see if he had not unwittingly wandered into some other salon. But, being reassured, he

would have then gone on to the fiery, twin canvases of Luis Feito (coldly furious, ember-like studies of red on black: useless each, I am afraid, without the other); the controversial representations from the work of Antonio Tapies (reportedly exhibited against the artist's wishes); the intelligent collage-patterns of Francisco Ferreras (wraith-like in deep, cavernous creations of space); or he may have decided to hover nostalgically about the turn-of-the-century paintings of Isidro Nonell, with their eminently successful capture of light upon forms not yet unrecognizably abstract.

Zóbel's kinship with the East struck me even more when, a week after my visit to the Tate, I decided to examine a group-show from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and—unexplainably, I thought—Saudi Arabia) in the University of Durham's new Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art. A fair portion of the paintings on exhibit made part of the show look like a Zóbel "retrospective", though perhaps the pictures were not as well painted. F. N. Souza of India was represented by a "Madonna and Child" which recalls not so much the hieratic "Carroza" as the fine drawings in the "Sketchbook". Manuel Fernández, also of India, had a blue, black and tangerine abstraction called "Symbolic Presence" which in turn recalls the Zóbel of the later 1950s, though perhaps Fernández (as *The Guardian* of Manchester suggested) was really interested in exploring the New Vision/Univision line. It must be added that one does get the feeling that Zóbel has grown away from all this; but if he must now tap Europe for the kind of critical and popular response upon which his future as a painter vitally depends, he does so with a vision and a tradition not altogether uncolored by his long and happy exposure to the East.

ANTONIO G. MANUUD

## *Ateneo Expedition To Sulu*

On Wednesday April 4 a Fokker Friendship aircraft swept into Manila's afternoon skies and headed for Zamboanga. A routine take-off for a routine flight. But the passenger list was anything but routine. It included six names belonging to young Filipino and American anthropology students. Their destination: Sulu. Their purpose: seven weeks' field study of the Tawsog, Sama!, and Badjaw.

They were well prepared for their task, for their study plans had been scrutinized and sifted by the Ateneo de Manila's