

An Artist Matures

June 11/66

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Takao Tanabe, in town for the opening of an exhibition of his watercolours at the Yellow Door Gallery, told me that he is now working on a largish (80' by 13') mural for the Department of Agriculture in Ottawa and I suppose that a government commission must be a clear sign that the artist has "arrived".

Tanabe is a mature artist who, over the period of the last ten years, has undergone all those inevitable changes to which every painter is subject.

An artist gathers not only impressions and ideas but also influences, absorbing them and making them part and parcel of his own personality. On the surface it often looks as if he discarded them altogether. But really he digests them, maturing in the process and becoming more and more of an individual.

Takao Tanabe has now arrived at that point of maturity.

Some ten years ago he spent eighteen months studying under Isao Hirayama at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts.

By Jan Kamienski



way to a more centrally directed composition. The color in his work of that time is still on the tentative side and the clusters of short lines and commas that form the painting are mostly on a pale, monochrome background.

The question of symmetry in his painting seems to preoccupy Tanabe a great deal and his more recent works tend to evolve around a vertical axis. Even in those in which he seems to forsake this form, this symmetrical tendency is still traceable. As typical examples one may name watercolours such as "Large Rain Drop" or "Rocks and Mist".

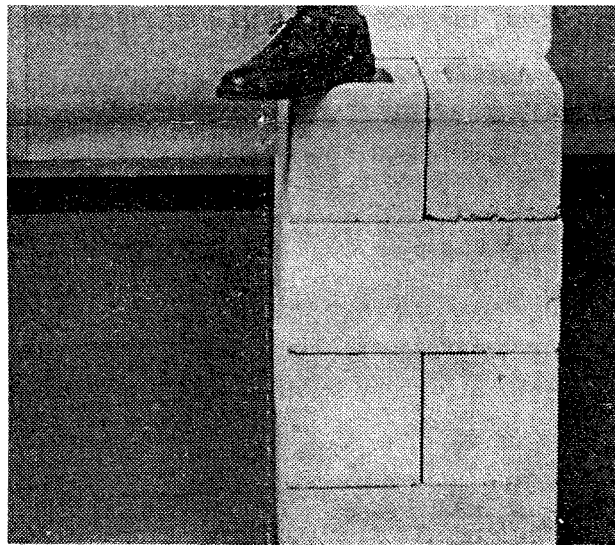
A number of smaller casein sketches shown in this exhibition relates to planned or existing oil paintings. Tanabe uses them either before tackling a larger surface, just to clarify what he's really after, or as an analysis after the painting is done. In either case, the smaller sketch is still valid as a separate painting.

Takao Tanabe prefers to paint quickly and spontaneously, using what he calls the "once over" method. He starts to paint and drives right through to the end, where no more is to be said. If the painting doesn't come off and if he is not satisfied with the end

There are, of course, painters in Japan who work in a highly "westernized" manner. The sudden break with traditionalism after the last World War has presented art in Japan with a dilemma which is still acute and remains unsolved.

Tanabe decided to explore orthodox Japanese painting and — eventually — use it as a point of departure for his own work. His painting in that period is Japanese — no more, no less.

But his art from the years immediately following his stay in Japan not only includes lessons learned there —

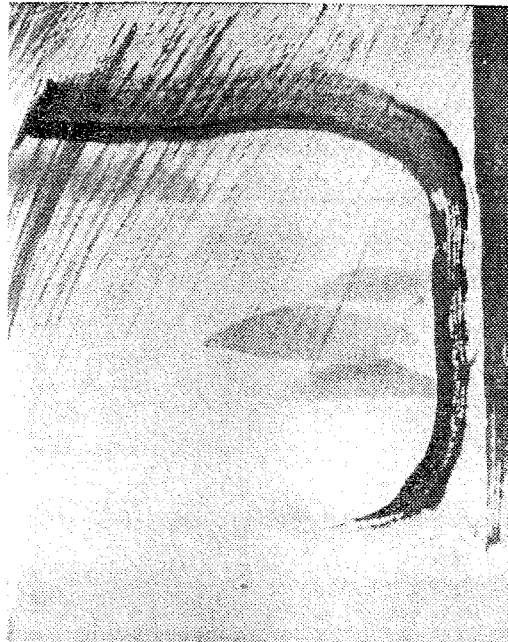


it develops them much further. It is rather more color-directed and the tensions created by the deliberate use of asymmetry are lessened and give

result, he simply discards it and starts another one based on the same concept.

He feels that the exclusive use of black and white in painting is a severe discipline that requires far more involvement on the part of the artist than the use of color. The black and white ink washes in this show certainly testify to his skill in this type of painting.

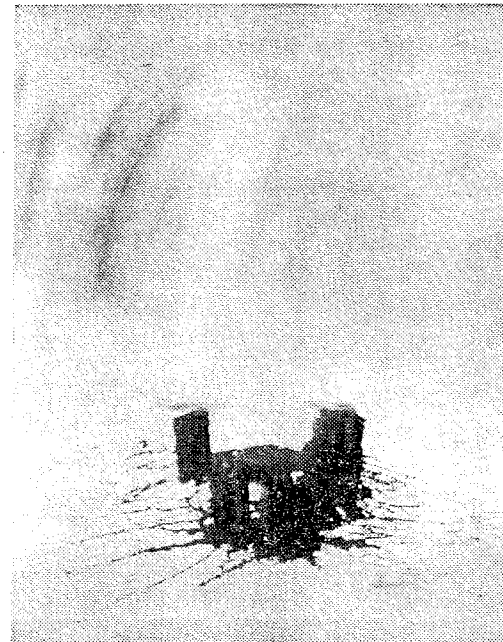
The Tanabe exhibition is one of those that illustrate the logical progression and maturing of an artist. It is relatively easy to follow his advance step by step and this show should be highly instructive to those who may find it difficult to cope with sophisticated contemporary art forms.



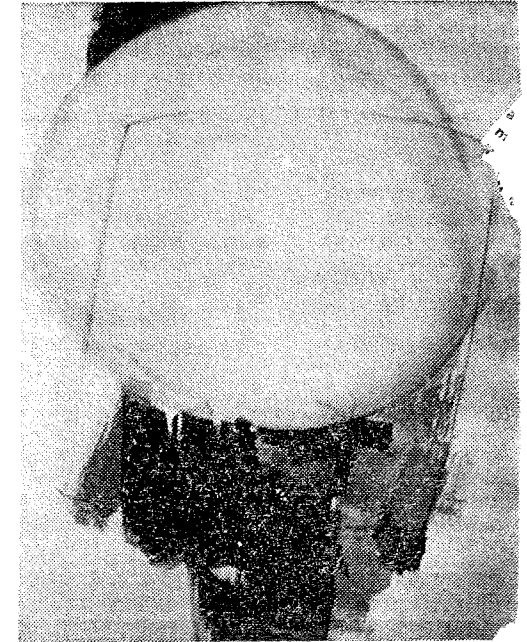
"Passing Storm"



"A break in the silence"



"Rocks and mist"



"Bubble in between"