

## The Contemporary Relevance of Albert Marquet.

*'But what if Marquet's oeuvre has been unjustly underrated? ... As early as 1908, Guillaume Apollinaire was more discerning: " Marquet's talent is, in my opinion, greater than he realizes" ..... Matisse himself, some forty years later, associated his name with Monet's - that is to say, without giving the impression that the price he was paying for the accession to "abstraction" that the new century demanded, was necessarily the renunciation of the realistic tradition... .. while Matisse around 1900 was still hesitating and searching, Marquet was to come up with the answer; in his work, through a series of extremely subtle transitions, the moment of nature is replaced by the moment of the artist' (Matisse, by Pierre Schneider, Thames and Hudson ed 2002 pp125-6)*

Pierre Schneider, in his monumental study, illuminates the early importance of Marquet to Matisse, - for example in terms of how drawing relates to painting, and how form becomes sign. This suggests why Marquet is being looked at today with renewed interest by painters of all generations. Perhaps one reason for his contemporary relevance is the pared-down economy of his method, inviting reflection on the nature of painting.

Not as well known as many of his peers, Marquet seems to have sidestepped a linear, historical position. He has a freshness about him, and a quality of dedication without heroism. As Matisse pointed out, Marquet did not have the identity in his lifetime that a recorded body of work brings, as so much of it sold so quickly. An overview is now forming - he is on the verge of being re-discovered, as exhibitions and cataloguing catch up, as it were, with his *oeuvre*.

Painters I have spoken to discuss how he seems to construct completeness with a few very specific decisions. But the economy is deceptive. The paintings often show an emptied-out space, with a minimally geometric sub-structure. The exactness of hue and tone however, brings a set of chromatic and spatial relationships that keep filling the space. Luminosity can make the small monumental. The touch is direct to surface, without flourish or any apparent system, and although it is in the service of description, it seems to offer up something fundamental about painting, collapsing the *what* and the *how* of depiction into each other.

Much new painting these days is appearing in artist-led galleries, some of it reaching larger venues. Painting websites and blogs have created a new critical forum, and discussion is lively. The best new painting I have encountered, even when it is apparently raw or informal, disguises a sophisticated interest in pictorial structure. The 'art which conceals art' is always recognized by enthusiasts, whatever the medium or form. As the old separations between figurative and non-representational imagery have faded, the meanings of *abstract* and *depiction* are being re-examined. The giants of painterly painting, masters such as Titian, Velazquez, Manet, and Matisse, are frequently quoted, and contemporary writing continues to discuss their evolving greatness - but in conversations between painters there is also a delight in finding lesser-known artists who were in quieter ways independent and radical and in thrall to what painting can do. Marquet is a good model for this kind of discovery. In my own experience of shared enthusiasms with others, he is the exemplary 'painters' painter.'

Those who already admire Marquet's paintings see beyond the charm of the scene, the seductive palette and light touch. They see through to his insistent enquiry into the fundamentals of painting. He is full of intriguing shifts - the Fauve who began mixing greys, who approached the monochrome but found luminosity, whose paintings can look easy-going, but are actually tough. He was the traveller who meticulously painted the specifics of light, place and time, over and over again, arriving at a constant *present*, a constant *here*, and a constant *now*. This is painting *per se*.