

Nikos Houtos: a master of color and light

The history of collage starts in Cubism, where Braque and Picasso, in their search to depict the three dimensionality of objects, stuck pieces of paper onto the canvas. A few years later Dadaist artists Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann developed a collage style called photomontage using images from magazines. Abstract surrealism left the geometric vocabulary of cubism behind with the biomorphic collages of Jean Arp and Joan Miro.

These last ones relate very much to 'cut-outs' of Henri Matisse. When Matisse talked about his collages he said that he "painted with scissors". Color had always been the central theme of Matisse's art, who, together with André Dérain started the movement of the "Fauves". His collage technique allowed him to produce some of his strongest coloristic effects. At the end of his life Matisse discovered that scissors can acquire more feeling for line than pencil or charcoal. The edges of the cut paper directly revealed the actions of his hand. He would say : "cutting straight into color reminds me of the direct carving of the sculptor". As a medium, the paper cut-out is virtually unique to Matisse. He had his assistants paint large sheets of paper with gouache, hence his cut-outs are also named: gouaches découpées.

The icon collages of Nikos Houtos remind me of the technique used by Henri Matisse. With pieces and snippets of colored paper he "built up" images, drawing with scissors on sheets of colored paper, linking line with color, contour with surface. In his cut-outs Matisse tried to express the only light that really exists, that in the artist's brain.

Nikos Houtos has found his own way of "painting with colored paper". He uses hue, cut lines and color combinations, contrasts, light and dark to express his holy faces with great spirit, passion and sensitivity, 'sculpting' the icons of the orthodox church with pieces of colored paper. The way he uses the scissors (free and angular) give a specific liveliness to his work, and reveals the artisticity of its maker.

The fact that Houtos also masters painting and iconography in particular, adds to his colorful, authentic interpretations of icons in collage. He plays freely with color combinations and accents of light, "feeling" color just like the Fauves. The result is a collection of fresh and expressive paper mosaics with that are characterized by a great originality.

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