

a critical profile

An internationally-recognized, master artist in painting, sculpture, portraiture, architectural design, printmaking, jewellery and liturgical themes.

London, Canada
New York, New York

.....



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May 2006

"If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him."

—President John F. Kennedy, Amherst College 1963

I do not know, but I know!

Since time began, three questions have remained eternal:

Who am I?

Where Did I Come From ?

Where Am I Going?

To understand these imponderables, the Artist knows they cannot be answered by reason alone. But, perhaps by that combination of reason plus the gift of intuition, he may at least come to broach the mystery, for mystery surely is at the heart of the genesis of life, whether in the natural, supernatural or cosmic universe.

But how to broach the mystery?

I do not know but I know, is all he can say.

While some intellectuals and scientists tend to rely almost exclusively on their sense of reason and logic to answer this challenge, the Artist uses both reason and the gift of intuition.

For the Artist knows intuitively that at the root of God, Love and Nature, lies a deep, imponderable mystery—which we may never *fully* understand. Nevertheless, the Artist searches to unlock these secrets knowing full well that it may never be realized....and, the search for knowledge continues, unabated.

I do not know, but I know!

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Curriculum vitae

Philip J. Aziz

150 Philip Aziz Ave. London, Ontario Canada N6G 1G8 T. (519) 438.9001 & (519) 432.7866	Yale Club, New York City 50 Vanderbilt Avenue New York, New York T. (212) 689.8180	University Club, Toronto 380 University Avenue Toronto, Ontario Canada MSG 1R6 T. (416) 597.1336
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Education

BFA Yale University, 1947

MFA Yale University, 1949

Specialized course of study: Fogg Museum, Harvard University, 1949

Field and study trips to England, France, Italy and Middle East in 1949, 1951, 1964, 1966, 1974, 1979, 1981

Teaching experience

1972 & 1976 Artist in Residence and Lecturer, Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Aspen, Colorado

1950 - 1955 Lecturer in Art, The University of Western Ontario
London, Canada

1947- 1949 Art Instructor, Yale University
Lecturer at various colleges and museums throughout
Canada and United States.

Selected exhibitions

1998 Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (one-man selected show)

1998 "The Flow of Grace", feature video of the Artist Phil Aziz, Sleeping Giant Productions, Toronto, Canada; won "Award of Excellence" (1999) from The National Media Network of Oakland, California

1996 "Hidden Icons", London Regional Art and Historical Museums, London, Canada (Retrospective Show)

1992 Village Square Art Gallery, Ottawa, Canada

1986 Detroit Collects, Detroit Institute of Arts (Group Show)

1985 Ontario Legislature - Office of the Premier (Group Show)

Curriculum vitae

Philip J. Aziz

- 1984 Waddington & Shiell Galleries Ltd, Toronto, Canada
1982 Waddington Galleries, Toronto, Canada
1978 Tom Gruenebaum Gallery, New York, NY
1976 David Findlay Gallery, New York, NY
1975 London Arts Gallery, Detroit, MI
1974 Albert White Gallery, Toronto, Canada (Group Show)
1973 William Beadelston Galleries, New York, NY
1972 Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Aspen, CO
1972 Tribute to Paul Tillich, St. John University, Collegeville, MN
1972 Minnesota Museum of Fine Arts, St. Paul, MN
1971 War Memorial Center, Grosse Pointe, MI
1969 Gallery of Modern Art, New York, NY (One-Man Retrospective)
1968 Gallery of Modern Art, New York, NY (One Man Show)

Selected portrait commissions

Rise Stevens

Metropolitan Opera Art Collection, Lincoln Center Plaza, NY (1962)

Nonie Ford

Collection of Walter Buhl Ford II, Grosse Pointe, MI (1966)

Lisa (DuPont) Moseley

Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Christopher Moseley, Wilmington, DE (1955)

Eric Bruhn

Collection of Mrs. S. Hallock, DuPont, Wilmington, DE (1965)

Governor-General Mme. Georges P. Vanier

Collection of the Vanier Institute for the Family, Ottawa (1969)

The Honourable John P. Robarts

Robarts Library, University of Toronto (1965)

Eugene Cardinal Tisserant

Dean of the College of Cardinals, Head of the Vatican Library, Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1965)

Curriculum vitae

Philip J. Aziz

Lady Eaton

Eaton Hall Art Collection, King City, Ontario, Canada (1962)

Mrs. J.D. Eaton

Mrs. John David Eaton Collection, Toronto, Canada (1955)

John Bassett

John Bassett Collection, Toronto, Canada (1956)

Yousuf Karsh

University of Toronto Art Collection (1957)

Solange Karsh

National Archives Collection, Ottawa (1958)

Madame Edith Engel

Quebec City, Canada, (1955-1956)

W. Hawkins Ferry

Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts (1986)

Marjorie Blackburn

London, Ontario (1993)

Kari (Mrs. Richard Costly-White)

London, Ontario (1999)

Liturgical art commissions

1964	West Chapel, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Toronto, Canada
] 1961-63	St. Joseph's Chapel of Christ the King, St. Peter's Basilica London, Canada
1958-59	Lady Chapel, St. Peter's Basilica, London, Canada
1952	Nativity Altarpiece, Motherhouse, Sisters of St. Joseph Hamilton, Canada
1951	Pieta Altarpiece, Monastery of the Trinitarian Fathers St. Bruno, Quebec, Canada

Curriculum vitae

Philip J. Aziz

Honours, awards, memberships, associations &

Recipient of a gold medal honouring his art in the "Vatican Collections:
Papacy and Art"

The Friends of Modern Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI
Heritage Canada

Who's Who (World & Canadian editions)

The National Register of Prominent Americans

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC

The International Platform Society (United States)

The Directory of International Biography (Great Britain)

Admiral in the Texas Navy (Honorary Member)

Vice President, Yale Alumni Association of Canada

The Blue Book (for outstanding achievement in the English speaking world)

Trustee, National Pollution Control Foundation, New York

Vice President, The Yale Club of Canada, Toronto, Ontario

American Directory of Arts & Who's Who in Art (English Edition)

International Directory of Arts (German Edition)

The Yale Club of New York City

University Club of Toronto

Private collections

Aziz's paintings sculptures, graphics, jewellery, silver and gold items are in numerous private collections in Canada, United States, Europe and Australia.

In 1981, Aziz was the subject of a television documentary: *Aziz, Modern Renaissance Artist*. Produced and directed by Roger Faubert of CBC Television Studios, Windsor, Canada.

A number of critical articles and essays have been written on the art of Aziz by distinguished scholars and critics in Canada, United States, Europe and the Middle East. Numerous periodicals and such popular magazines as *Time*, *Macleans* and *Arts Magazine* have featured articles on Aziz.

Curriculum vitae

Philip J. Aziz

Design projects

The Landmark Centre, St. Paul, Minnesota (1972)

In 1972 the Federal Courts Building in St. Paul was about to be demolished. Determined not to lose the pink granite architectural masterpiece, built in 1902 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, a group of civic-minded citizens turned to Aziz at the 11th hour and asked him to save the building. His mandate was simple and urgent: find a use for this beautiful example of its era and advise how to realize its new potential.

In a flurry of creative genius, Aziz prescribed a design concept for a multi-purpose facility to meet the artistic, social, cultural, historical, educational and recreational needs of the community. In a series of intense small meetings with philanthropic organizations and city fathers, Aziz almost single-handedly organized private and public support for his concept—so much so, that a special Act of Congress was tabled to sell the historic Federal property to St. Paul for one dollar. Now proudly known as The Landmark Centre, the project required six years for reconstruction, restoration and renovation.

Private Residence of Susan M. Blackburn

London, Canada (1979-1990)

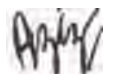
Aziz was commissioned to design a private country residence and horse complex. The house, along with an indoor arena for horses and adjacent stables, is located on 100 acres of rolling hills and forested areas. Aziz was in control of the total design concept: architecture, landscape and interior design.

The residence is built entirely of native stone surrounded by stone garden walls encompassing a small formal garden, swimming pool, terraced vineyards and grassy areas. The 180-foot pool apron is marble mosaic, as is the north terrace. The residence also features original pieces of furniture, coloured glass windows, chandeliers and other unique architectural features by Aziz.

Other projects include:

- 1969-78 Middlesex County Court House, London, Canada
- 1972-73 Ontario Place, Toronto, Canada
- 1978-80 St. Peter's Lutheran Church, New York

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Aziz: A biographical sketch

Reverent A. Durand

*The Reverent A. Durand, PhD
St. Peter's Seminary
London, Canada*

Aziz was born and raised in Canada. Upon graduating from Yale University where he received both his Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Fine Arts (1947-1949), he returned to his home in London, Ontario to set up his atelier working in relative self-imposed isolation. A glimpse of any typical picture from his hand will reveal why he has felt no inclination to settle in a large city and has positively avoided artist's colonies. Since 1950, his atelier in London has not only become the center of distinguished visitors from around the world, but the focal center of his varied artistic activities both in Canada and abroad.

Aziz is a mature professional artist with confidence in his abilities and deep faith in art as a "real, human activity." If obliged, he is prepared to go it alone, avoiding schools and attempts at categorization. His respect for historical tradition, his confidence in the present and his natural optimism about the future shows vividly in his work.

The general direction and purpose of his art is easy enough to understand and recognize. He uses familiar images as well as abstract design elements liberally in his work and has little regard for fads, as is true with most mature artists.

What fascinates him is the real—the meaning of it, not the look of it. And his particular excellence as an artist lies in his ability to achieve high intellectual significance by strictly pictorial means, with no lapse into didacticism and allegory. His inclination is to drive straight at the meaning of his subject and to reveal it by original design. He has an instinctive awareness of the kind of image for which egg tempera should be used.

But what makes the pictures of Aziz so unique is their significance for the mind and their profundity. Each one of them is a thoughtful commentary on some aspect of modern life, or more often, a timeless mystery. Even a portrait by Aziz is always more than a study of the sitter. He has an uncanny faculty of making his personages symbolic either of their generation, their social predicament, or their vocation.

Aziz: A biographical sketch

Reverent A. Durand, PhD

But it is in his paintings of great natural and supernatural themes that we most identify his true genius, that strange power of insight, which explains why his work might baffle some while holding the fascinated admiration of others.

The thing he can do (which so many artists cannot do) is generate an utterly new pictorial idea. He is able to sense how the old unchanging themes and mysteries, both natural and supernatural, can receive a new revelation, an undreamt-of significance through forms and colours. More simply, he has the true power of metaphor, that faculty of discerning how this will reveal that, which Aristotle called "the one thing that cannot be taught." The great metaphor always places a heavy strain on spectator and critic; to seize it is to be dazzled!

Aziz's work is receiving the international recognition it rightly deserves as well as the patronage and admiration of an ever-increasing group of distinguished clients and collectors here and abroad. Aziz has always been able to give his full time to his art, and he has received several remarkable commissions as

well as good prices for nearly everything he has cared to paint.

In recent years, he has exhibited widely in Canada, England and the United States. By invitation, he exhibited in the Royal Society of Portrait Painters in London, England. He was invited to have a one-man retrospective exhibition at the University of Waterloo, which formed the Centennial art project for the University. He exhibited at EXPO '67 in Montreal, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery in Ottawa the same year.

Five Major exhibitions in the United States were to follow. A one man show in the Gallery of Modern Art in New York was so successful it prompted an invitation from the same gallery to mount a retrospective for which an entire floor was given. This was followed by a one-man show in the Meredith Long Galleries in Houston, Texas. With another one-man show, Aziz opened the International Freedom Festival in Detroit, Michigan, followed by another one-man show in the Grosse Point War Memorial Centre.



PE

www.philipaziz.org

About Philip Aziz



Philip Aziz has said, "Spiritual quest has always been at the centre of my life." Thus he belongs to a tradition of abstract mysticism which links him, not only with painters of the twentieth century from Kandinsky and Mondrian to Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, but also with the illuminators of Irish manuscripts of the eighth and ninth centuries. At the same time he stems directly from the timeless icon painters of the Orthodox Church, not only in his use of egg tempera enriched with gleaming gold, but also in his intent to lead the mind to the contemplation of a higher reality. His achievement in the last quarter-century of this millenium has been to create a challenging and thought-provoking series of images which might well be regarded as the "hidden icons" of a post-Christian society.



William S.A. Dale - Professor of Fine Arts -

UWO



Aziz's works hang in public galleries, universities and churches in Rome, Paris, New York, Washington, Detroit, Miami, Sydney, Ottawa and Montreal. Private collectors such as the Bronfmans, Duponts, Fords, Vanderbilts, Eatons, Thomsons, Iveys and Blackburns have purchased his art. Aziz has painted commissioned portraits

of Ontario Premier John Robarts, Governor-General George and Madame Vanier, photographer Yousuf Karsh and opera star Rise Stevens.

Aziz was born in **St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada**, on **April 15, 1923**, before moving to **London, Ontario**, at an early age.

He grew up in Old South London at 239 Tecumseh Avenue and attended H.B. Beal Secondary School, enrolled in its fledgling arts program. Aziz graduated from **Yale University** with a Master's Degree in Fine Arts in the 1940s after which he travelled the world, living alternately in **New York City** and London, Ontario, where he resides today in his designated heritage home, studio and gallery at 150 Philip Aziz Avenue (the street was named in honour of Aziz during London's 150th anniversary as an incorporated city in 2005).

In the 1950s, Aziz lectured at the **University of Western Ontario**, teaching art history, helping to expand the collection at UWO's McIntosh Gallery.

Aziz has sold paintings to collectors all over the world and has two paintings hanging in the **Vatican**. He first became internationally recognized for his outstanding work in egg tempera.

In the early 1970s, Aziz successfully fought for the retention and refurbishment of the historic old Court House and Gaol at the Forks of the Thames River in London, Ontario, and also developed a plan for the redevelopment of the river forks, which attracted support and attention from such luminaries as Ontario's **Premier John P. Robarts**, London South MPP John White, author **Pierre Berton** and TV and radio station owner/ newspaper publisher Walter J. Blackburn.

While Aziz's forks redevelopment plan lost by one vote at London City Council in the 1970s, many of Aziz's ideas are finally being implemented in **2005** with the completion of the multi-staged, multi-million-dollar Forks of the Thames Project.

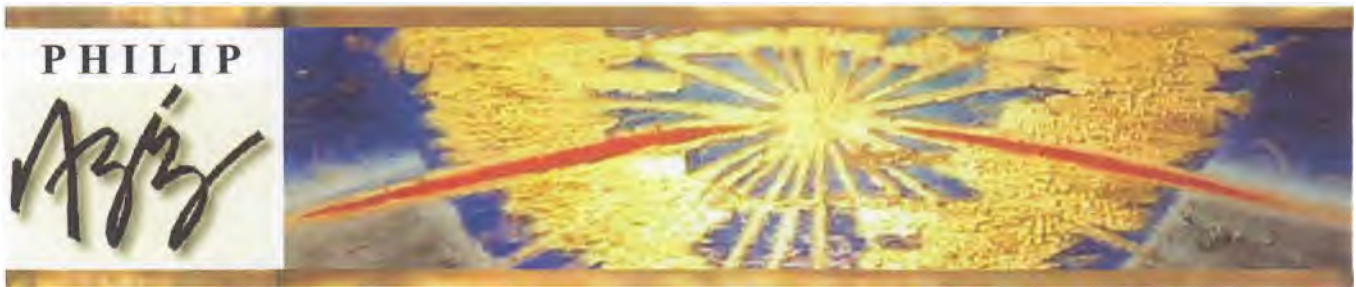
Aziz's efforts in the 1970s advocating for the preservation of London, Ontario's built and cultural heritage energized the local heritage community and in part, prompted the Ontario provincial government of the day under Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis to enact the Ontario Heritage Act in the mid-1970s.

Aziz is currently establishing the non-profit Philip Aziz Foundation of Art in London, Ontario, to expand his spacious gallery built in **1967** as his Canadian Centennial project, in order to exhibit the work of other artists, as well as his own.

From **Wikipedia: Philip Aziz**

Selected Museum and Institutional Collections

Detroit Institute of Art • Ford Auditorium, Detroit • The Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center, New York • Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Building, Detroit • Montreal Museum of Fine Arts • The National Gallery, Ottawa • The University of Toronto Art Gallery • The University of Western Ontario Art Gallery, London, Ontario • The Vanier Institute, Ottawa • The Vatican Museum, Rome



PHILIP **Doors Open a Great Success**

London, Ontario - October, 2005

On October 1st and 2nd, 2005, Philip Aziz opened the doors of his studio and gallery, and received close to 800 visitors. Of the 74 sites opened to the public throughout London, Philip's Studio proved to be one of the most popular. Demand was so great that access had to be provided on Sunday as well, despite the original one day opening.



In local media, Philip was featured prominently in articles promoting the Doors Open event. Plans are already in the works to include the gallery and studio in the 2006 Doors Open tour.

Here are a few of the 260 comments from visitors of the gallery and studio:

"As a Londoner, we are so proud of you!"

"A veritable feast for the eyes and soul"

"You are a national treasure"

"An honour to view — A wonderful experience"

"You have provided us with a profound privilege. Thank you"

Nowea.
PHILIP

Aziz studio designated London Heritage Site

London, Ontario - October, 2005

In 2004, the studio, gallery and home of Philip Aziz was designated a London Heritage Site. Philip's home is an original example of an early Ontario timber frame farm house. The studio, built in 1957 and gallery, built in 1967 as a centennial project, incorporates material, artifacts and architectural features of many famous London buildings that were demolished and saved by Philip.

Several of these artifacts are worthy of note and deserve preservation in their current context. Flanking the driveway are brick walls adorned with stone brackets taken from the former Prevost Building. The courtyard surface is paved with bricks from the early London Street Railway tracks in downtown Dundas Street. Around the courtyard is a brick fence highlighted with carved stone capitals taken from the previous Bank of Montreal building at Dundas and Wellington Streets. Several other capitals decorate the courtyard as free-standing planter bases or plain pieces. The studio on the west side of the courtyard is finished in salvaged London clay brick adorned with more stone capitals from the Bank of Montreal. Many of the windows in the studio were taken from various old homes in the city.

Inside the studio and gallery, the architectural artifacts continue among the collection of Mr Aziz's art, including a large hammered copper sink taken from the Smallman residence at 468 Colborne Street (now the Mocha Shriners building), decorative cut and beveled glass windows from several old homes and more carved stone capitals in brick walls and columns. One pair of capitals, taken from the Prevost building, form the bases of two stone columns at the south end of the gallery. The fireplace in the west wall of this area is formed in two-tone green marble salvaged from an altar that was being removed from the chapel in St. Peter's Seminary.

Several other artifacts can be found around the studio and courtyard where Mr Aziz has not yet found the place to incorporate them in the building.

Reasons for Designation - 1180 Western Road

revised - 22 July 2004

1180 Western Road is significant to the cultural heritage of London and area as the home and studio of artist Philip Aziz, renowned in art circles in Canada and internationally, particularly in New York City and Yale University Art Department. His studio and grounds hold not only many pieces of his art, but also his collection of architectural artifacts salvaged from several of London's landmark buildings of the past.

Historical Reasons

Mr Aziz's house on this property appears to be renovated around an original Ontario Farmhouse which has been updated and enlarged but still exhibits several features of the original construction in the basement and attic areas. Research into the property did not confirm the date of the original building of the house, but hand-hewn timbering and framing that is visible in the basement and attic areas, indicate that the house dates to circa 1875.

Cultural Reasons

This property's main significance is as Philip Aziz's art studio and gallery. Mr Aziz was born in St. Thomas, Ontario and began art studies at H.B. Beal Secondary School. After graduating from Yale University with a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Fine Arts, he returned to establish a studio at his home in London.

A quote from the catalogue for a 1996 show of Mr Aziz's work at the London Regional Art and Historical Museum (now Museum London) reads, "In a career spanning 40 years he has made his mark as a painter, not only here in London, but elsewhere in Canada. He has also earned a wide international reputation, and his works are to be found in public and private collections in the United States, in France and Italy, and as far away as Japan and Australia."

"Like his predecessors in the Renaissance, Aziz has also turned his hand to the design of sculpture, either on a monumental scale or in fine metalwork, or of a private residence and its furniture, or of a chapel and its liturgical vessels and furnishings. Whatever he touches reveals his feeling for rich and precious materials, and his meticulous attention to detail."

With a deep interest in liturgical art, several pieces of Mr Aziz's art can be found in chapels of St. Peter's Basilica here in London.

Architectural Reasons

Mr Aziz's artistic eye and sense of design lead him to salvage interesting features from many of London's earlier landmark buildings, even as the buildings were being

demolished. These artifacts have been incorporated into the construction of his studio and courtyard in a way that is reminiscent of Mackenzie King's collection of ruins featured in Gatineau Park outside Ottawa.

Several of these artifacts are worthy of note and deserve preservation in their current context. Flanking the driveway are brick walls adorned with stone brackets taken from the former Prevost Building. The courtyard surface is paved with bricks from the early London Street Railway tracks in downtown Dundas Street. Around the courtyard is a brick fence highlighted with carved stone capitals taken from the previous Bank of Montreal building at Dundas and Wellington Streets. Several other capitals decorate the courtyard as free-standing planter bases or plain pieces. The studio on the west side of the courtyard is finished in salvaged London clay brick adorned with more stone capitals from the Bank of Montreal. Many of the windows in the studio were taken from various old homes in the city.

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Several other artifacts can be found around the studio and courtyard where Mr Aziz has not yet found the place to incorporate them in the building.

Contextual Reasons

At this location, the intersection of Western Road with Sarnia Road and Huron Street, the house, courtyard and studio sit in contrast with the hustle and traffic of the roads busy with University traffic. The rural, "bucolic" atmosphere denies the pressure of the University of Western Ontario that surrounds it.

Street Renamed after Philip 7 Aziz

London, Ontario - October, 2005

Effective November 1st, 2005, the section of Huron Street leading into the UWO Campus, has been renamed Philip Aziz Ave in recognition of the contributions of Philip to the City of London. As well, his home address has been designated number 150 in commemoration of London's 150th birthday. The London City Council had voted unanimously for the name change and new signs have been erected prominently at the intersection of Western Road, Sarnia Road and Philip Aziz Avenue.

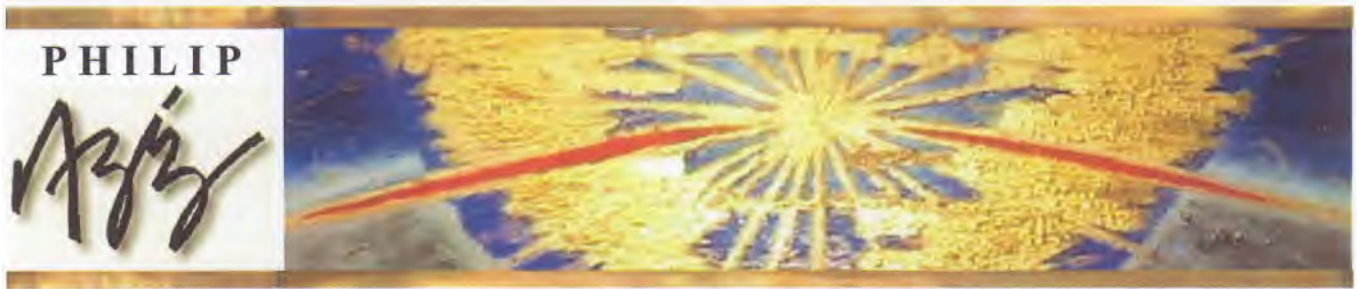


Evening with Philip Aziz Auctioned by Museum London

London, Ontario - November 5, 2005

As part of Museum London's 25th Anniversary, the event "A Night at the Moulin Rouge" featured a live auction fund raiser. Item "L7. Private Studio Visit and Home Tour with Philip Aziz," included catering provided by Culinary Cuisine and wine provided by Foster's Wine Estates. The value placed on this item was listed as "Priceless," with bidding ending with an \$800 donation to Museum London.

Philip has a long history with Museum London and the river forks area, having campaigned to preserve the old courthouse during the 70s and advocating development of the area for cultural and public use. As well, Musuem London has several pieces by Philip Aziz in its collection.



Master Works Gallery



Presented here, is a small collection of selected works by master artist Philip J Aziz. In time, you will be able to view a more complete collection of Philip's work including more information about the pieces themselves and information for ordering limited edition prints.

Painting



Liturgical Works



porstvailwr



Sculpture



Architecture





Master Works Gallery

g)oviraitur*

Eminence Eugene
Cardinal Tisserant



Miss Rise Stevens
as Carmen

Governor General
George Vanier



Madame Vanier

William Hawkins Ferry



John P Roberts

Yousuf Karsh



Solange Karsh

Jo-anne (Ivey) Mazzolini



Lisa DuPont

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Master Works Gallery

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Aziz and his art

Frederick J. Cummings

Frederick J. Cummings
Director, Detroit Institute of Arts

Aziz is one of Canada's most remarkable contemporary painters. At the same time he has had major exhibitions in the United States especially in New York City, and he has an important following among American collectors. His works stand within the tradition of formalist painters produced by Yale University's Art Department where he completed his studies in 1949.

The revelation of the present works is an intensified, purified, and often exalted sensuousness divested of particular symbolic content; they are doorways to the spiritual realm through pure perception alone.

The most important formal quality of Aziz's earlier group of works before 1976, as seen in *Isfahan* (1975) and *Epilogue* (1976), was the tense equilibrium of disparate forces. The energizing of such formal symbols as a broken or floating circle, broken column, floating bar, tautly upturned Torii, is carried into the current paintings, where colour and geometric image are placed in a nervous and vibrating tension.

The emphasis on visual perception in the works from 1976 to 1979 served to liberate Aziz from the profound grip of symbolic or religious and poetic associations of earlier paintings. The transitional painting *Epilogue*, is comprised of a vocabulary of symbolic forms, each of which, at one time or another, was the basis of a painting or series of paintings. Here the broken circle, floating bar, broken shaft, and aten ray are all brought together in one monumental summation that serves as a manifesto for one moment of Aziz's career.

In the purification process, Aziz set himself the task of creating images of such intensity that his visionary impulses are revealed in simplified, almost incandescent form. His lifelong passion for religious and visionary subject matter is now distilled through highly-charged colour. It is important to recall that Aziz has always considered the creation of a work of art to be a religious act.

Since 1979, Aziz has gradually moved away from his brilliant "optical" paintings to create a series of "cosmic" works such as the

Aziz and his art

Frederick J. Cummings

monumental *Blue Circle* now in the Detroit Institute of Arts. These shadowy paintings are increasingly mysterious, and the direction in these works remains to be defined. The Detroit painting is made up of attached pieces of cloth arranged concentrically, covered with gesso, and with the relief surface painted in brilliant blue.

The more recent works and a brilliant climax to this group is *Genesis* (1980) in which blue spiralling forms present a shimmering surface of light reminiscent of water lilies or the spirals of swirling water. These very suggestive works extend the range of visual and spiritual experience always central to Aziz's art and remind one forcefully of his searching, energetic talent.

Like Mondrian, Aziz has evolved from a highly symbolic and personal mode of expression to a purified and distilled art of pure perception and spiritual perfection. While we may not yet be entirely prepared to come to grips with the robust individuality of Aziz's paintings, we must accept that his is an emphatic, independent achievement of considerable power that cannot be ignored.

Aziz and his art

W. Hawkins Ferry

*W Hawkins Ferry's introduction to
"Art as a great human activity,"
a speech by Aziz
Paepcke Auditorium, 1977*

Good Evening, I am very glad to be here at the Aspen Institute this evening and especially glad to have the opportunity to introduce the artist Aziz. I have known him for about twenty years and, during this time, have followed the development of his work with great interest.

It is unusual, in this age of newness for its own sake, to discover the work of an artist which is thoroughly contemporary in spirit yet which has its roots in the past both technically and ideologically. It is rewarding at a time when one is confronted with so much skin-deep art, to find an art which combines aesthetics with spiritual and philosophic content and which is inseparable from the mode of living and thinking of the artist himself.

The circumstances that formed Aziz as an individual and as an artist have been both varied and unique. He first saw the light of day in the Province of Ontario and is the son of prosperous Lebanese parents of the

Greek Orthodox faith. Both at home and at school he was exposed to strong religious influences, and a religious orientation remained with him to affect his work in later years.

At the tender age of six, his school teacher recognized his talents at drawing and, from that point on, he knew he was going to be an artist. Art courses in high school culminated in academic and artistic training at the Art School of Yale University, where he received a BFA degree in 1947 and an MFA in 1949.

At Yale he was exposed to the teachings of distinguished artists, scholars and designers. By a singular turn of fate, his Professor of Painting was Lewis E. York, who advocated a technique of applying egg tempera to gesso that had been formulated by the fifteenth century Italian artist, Cennino Cennini.

With Yale behind him, Aziz took time off for trips to Europe and the Middle East. Then he began his career as a painter in New York. He employed the tempera technique he had learned at Yale, developing and adapting it to modern usage. This was the method he was to employ during his entire career.

Aziz and his art

W. Hawkins Ferry

An opportunity to develop another artistic discipline was offered him when his aunt, who owned a fashionable jewellery salon on Park Avenue, persuaded him to design jewellery for her. This experience drew out his innate feeling for craftsmanship and laid the foundation for his future work in metalcraft and sculpture. His energies at this time, however, were concentrated mainly on the art of painting.

In the post-war years there was a worldwide resurgence of liturgical art. In France, Rouault, Matisse and Leger were offering their services to the church. To paint religious pictures in twentieth century terms was a challenge to Aziz. With the technique of the Italian Masters at his disposal, he was able to convey intellectual significance by means of subtle delineation and pure translucent colours. From early religious involvement with icons and later study of the Masters of Quattro-centro, he learned that gold surfaces connote spirituality and infinity.

Soon he was receiving commissions for paintings in churches

and monasteries far and wide.

During this period, Dr. Charles de Tolnay, the learned art historian of Princeton University, proclaimed him the "El Greco of the Twentieth Century." Further scholarly recognition came from Dr. Paul Tillich, the eminent Protestant theologian at Harvard University, when he declared that he considered Aziz the leading contemporary religious artist. Aziz's work for the church culminated in the complete design of the Lady Chapel of St. Peter's Basilica in his home town of London, Ontario. Here he carried out his ideas of chaste modern design even down to the gold and silver ciborium and chalice for the altar.

While Aziz was living in New York in the fifties, he also maintained a studio in London, Ontario commuting between the two cities. Determined to assert his independence, he found that the more bucolic atmosphere of London allowed for a leisurely pace of living which invited philosophic meditation, a mode of thinking he developed at Yale.

Essentially a Humanist, he believed in a balance between God,

Aziz and his art

W. Hawkins Ferry

Man and Nature. From a study of world religions, he evolved a pantheistic approach toward the cosmos, immersing himself in the Buddhist concept of Oneness.

Recognizing that the tradition of figurative painting had exhausted its potential, he eliminated extraneous detail and concentrated on metaphoric images. At this time he developed his *Life Cycle of Dandelion* and *Life Cycle of Pine Tree* series of paintings. They ranged all the way from stylized designs in subtle tempera colours accented with gold or silver to distilled essences of cosmic forces. The dandelion theme was translated into large sculptures in bronze, nickel and gold.

Another facet of Aziz's artistic output has been his portraiture. His tempera technique and ability to convey intellectual significance stood him in good stead. He only portrayed people who interested him, and he was able to draw out their salient facial and temperamental characteristics in the grand tradition of portraiture. Among his sitters were Governor General Georges Vanier of Canada, Rise Stevens, the opera star and Cardinal Tisserant, who sat for the artist at his villa in Rome.

In the seventies, Aziz's work assumed a new direction. Influenced by the canvases of the chromatic abstractionists of the New York school, he created richer and broader colour fields and more reductive single images to express his religious and philosophical themes. Characteristic motifs are the sphere, the horizontal bar, the broken shaft, and the broken circle. In each painting ideology and design merge in compelling ideographs.

Aziz has recently translated his ideographs into sculpture, using such materials as polyester resin, acrylic, brass, and nickel. To fabricate his designs, he engaged Jack Brogan of Design Concepts of Venice, California. A recent series of lithographs incorporating similar motifs were completed at the Michigan Workshop of Fine Prints in Detroit and at the Cirrus Editions workshop in Los Angeles.

Aziz's work has been exhibited in leading museums and galleries throughout the United States, England and Canada. His most recent one-man exhibition took place last May at the David Findlay Gallery in New York. The critical

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Aziz and his art

W. Hawkins Ferry

acclaim by New York critics and connoisseurs evoked by this exhibition was both enthusiastic and thoughtful.

Lionel Landry, the Assistant Director of Asia House stated, "It is a rare experience to see the works of a mature artist in complete control of his metier, but what is important here is that the metier does not control the artist. He knows his craft and can use it with brilliance and skill. The Aziz exhibition is one of the most profound and beautiful expressions of modern art that has been seen in New York in a long time. What is so extraordinary is that from the hand and mind of one man, his art encompasses the full range of history and religions, from Egypt, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Oriental, transcending time and space to be brought together in a synthesis. There is beauty here, a spiritual uplifting of the soul that bespeaks well of the mind of an artist which seeks to comprehend eternal truths. The art of Aziz may truly be said to be ennobling."

After viewing the Aziz exhibition, Henry Geldzhaler, the Curator of American Art at the Metropolitan Museum, stated: "I am bored with

viewing exhibitions which show slight variations of a single theme over and over again. In the Aziz exhibition, no less than five major themes are represented in four media. I can move from one work to another, from one medium to another and each time have a new and exciting experience. What is important is that I can see the hand of the master artist in control of it all. The show is beautiful and I like it very much."

Thomas Messer, the Director of the Guggenheim Museum, said: "His work is in the grand tradition. It incorporates universal symbols such as the sphere which recur from time to time in the history of art. In modern art, Gottlieb and Noland have used it. Aziz, like the Oriental artists, uses it as a symbol of ultimate perfection and link with the cosmos. His work is not only beautiful but consonant with the times."

I could go on with more quotations, but I know you are anxious to hear the artist talk about his own work. So now it gives me great pleasure to introduce....Mr. *Philip Aziz*.

Aziz and his art

Dr. Robert Metzger

*Dr. Robert Metzger, Director
Bucknell University Art Gallery,
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.*

Aziz has long experienced a unique position in the international art world. His formal body of work which encompasses all disciplines in the visual arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, printmaking, design—confounds critics by his virtuoso achievements. Perhaps more fully appreciated in the United States than in his native Canada, he is the erudite, urbane Renaissance artist of the late twentieth century. Equally at home in North American and European capitals. His capacious intellectual vision is indeed broad, compelled by his need to give meaning to life as he grapples with the great cosmic leitmotifs of the universe. Aziz is concerned with the primordial condition of man on the edge of infinity, suspended between decay and rebirth, before the division of heaven and earth.

Universally acknowledged as one of the greatest living practitioners of the exacting media of egg tempera, he has in recent years gained wide

acclaim for his mastery and control of inventive, grandiose textural surfaces using mixed varied techniques. The brilliant surface effects are the results of extensive experimentation with various materials shimmering in dense colour fields and juxtaposed with vibrant areas of gold and silver. The intense jewel-like colours project an enveloping radiant luminosity similar to Byzantine icons in which light is emitted from within rather than reflected off the surface.

Although these works are vigorously non-objective, Aziz understands well the metaphorical use of light and the interrelationships of light, colour, and emotion. Matter is transformed into energy as refractions of light are distilled through the most elusive and subtle opalescent transparencies. The wondrously malleable ridges, striations and furrows create forms with gleaming boldness and shimmering delicacy. Aziz's atavistic Byzantine sensibility has taken him to regions uncharted by Western art.

A strong counterpoint is suggested between the polestar northern nocturnal experiences and pigmental

Aziz and his art

Dr. Robert Metzger

varieties of more temperate climes.
This lucid dialectic super-energizes
these canvasses with highly charged
freedom, alacrity, and joyousness of
the human spirit at its zenith, and
reinforces fecund humanity
sustained by a deep spiritual quality.
These paintings powerfully create a
subliminal intangible space of the
artist's own making and weave a
lingering mystical spell on the viewer.

Aziz and his art

Edgar G. Shelton, Jr.

*Edgar G. Shelton, Jr.
Public Relations
United Nations Plaza, New York, NY*

Aziz, a native of Canada, received his Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts degrees from Yale University, acquiring two academic degrees in four years, followed by postgraduate studies at Harvard. He is a life fellow in the International Institute of Arts and Letters and Vice-President of the Yale Alumni Association of Canada. For five years he was Lecturer in Art at the University of Western Ontario.

He is one of the few painters in the world who uses the painstaking technique of egg tempera on gesso panel almost exclusively, a method used by the great masters of the Renaissance. This is one element which isolates his works from the mainstream of contemporary art. His versatility in painting, sculpture, architectural design, artifacts, liturgical art and jewellery design, plus his zest for life and beautiful women have caused some to refer to him as a modern Cellini.

When persons first see his art they often ask, "Where has he been all

these years?" The answer is that he has been painting. He works. He belongs to no school or fad of painting but considers that he belongs to the immortal family of artists, past, present, and future.

He uses recognizable images as well as abstract elements in his works. Through these run themes of great natural and supernatural importance which have held the fascination of people of all ages, particularly the young. He is at his best when describing art and the history of art to young people.

Essentially the great theme of all his art is the immortality and dignity of man and, indeed, of all life. Since 1950, he has exhibited his works in one-man shows in Canada, United States and Europe including: the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Ottawa National Gallery of Art, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters (London, England), the Detroit Art Institute, Canadian Pavilion, EXPO '67 (Montreal), the Gallery of Modern Art (New York), Lincoln Centre (New York), Houston Galleries (Texas) and the Detroit International Freedom Festival.

Aziz and his art

Edgar G. Shelton, Jr.

His religious paintings and works of liturgical design are in major churches and church institutions. Dr. Paul Tillich, prominent Protestant theologian, says: "Aziz is one of the greatest liturgical artists of our time." Likewise, his portraits and paintings are in some of Canada's art galleries as well as in the collections of some of the most distinguished persons and business firms of the United States, Canada and Europe. Dr. Roland Balay of Knoedler Art Galleries in New York has stated to Aziz, "You are one of the great portrait painters today."

Aziz is a compact, athletic and articulate bachelor who seldom talks about art unless asked to do so. His major hobbies are horseback riding and conversation. The conversation is seldom about art but about people and their mores or about world affairs.

His second home is the Yale Club in New York, as well as the United States in general. Since August of 1968, due to his intense curiosity and interest in human affairs, he was invited to both Republican and Democratic national conventions with a side trip to Texas. Then

Governor Smith of Texas made him an honorary Admiral in the Texas Navy.

His studio is his home in London, Ontario, Canada, looking out on his broad lawn, bordered by a grove of trees full of his pheasants, tanagers, chickadees, bluejays, cardinals, squirrels and chipmunks, all of which come up to his breakfast room window each morning begging for their daily handout.

He lives in the midst of his times, intensely curious about all around him. He is gregarious; to him no man is a stranger. He is a man's man greatly admired by women to whom he returns the compliment. In fact, a handsome woman is the only thing which can distract him from his work.

When asked why he became an artist, he replies, "One has to do something." And referring to his background, he illustrates his point by saying, "I am Aziz the picture maker, as in Omar the tent maker."

Aziz is a man who believes that art is not death fished from the contents of a garbage can, but life. He feels that art must come from the wonder, reverence and reaffirmation of life and its eternal conquest of

Aziz and his art

Edgar G. Shelton, Jr.

death by all living things generation
after generation. To this end he often
says: "The artist is not important,
only the man. "

But the man is important to us and
it is here that Aziz also triumphs. He
is a man.

Aziz and his art

Dr. Nancy-Lou Patterson

Portraiture

*Dr. Nancy-Lou Patterson
Director of Art, Gallery of the
Theatre of the Arts, University of
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*

Of the portraits by Aziz, are they not fashionable, current, to the taste of an individual, meant only to please a client of taste?

The field of portraiture forms an important part of his artistic output. He will choose only to paint those people who fascinate him so that even a portrait by Aziz is more than a study of the sitter. He has an uncanny faculty of making his personages symbolic either of their generation, their social predicament or their vocation.

Mr. Roland Balay, Chairman of the Board of Knoedlers of New York, upon viewing Aziz's portrait of Rise Stevens, famous mezzo- soprano of the Metropolitan Opera referred to him as "one of the leading portrait painters in the world today."

Here again the comparison to Mannerist art is fruitful. To look at Parmigianino's *Antea*, or the portraits of Brozino, or the numerous studies of ecclesiastical and public personages of El Greco

will teach us that portraiture is a universal statement. Perhaps in no other field is this dual capacity of art so apparent as in portraiture.

It is almost the test of a significant portrait that it can serve these two ends, and the test is made by taking the work out of the home of the owner and placing it in a gallery among paintings of other types, far from its intended ambience.

It is in this setting that the portraits by Aziz assert themselves as part of his main work, as much expressions of his sensibility and religious viewpoint as are his overtly religious works.

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Aziz and his art

Reverent **A. Durand, PhD**

Liturgical art

The Reverent A. Durand, PhD

St. Peter's Seminary

London, Canada

Aziz is perhaps one of a half dozen artists working in the liturgical field in the world today. Dr. Paul Tillich, eminent Protestant theologian visited his studio in London, Ontario, and referred to him as "one of the best liturgical artists in the world and superior to Dali."

When the *Pieta* altarpiece, commissioned by the Trinitarian Fathers for the chapel of their new monastery in St. Bruno, Quebec, was exhibited in the Eaton's Fine Art Galleries in Toronto, he was referred to as "one of Canada's leading artists." (*TIME Magazine*)

"Aziz is the best unconscious theologian I have ever met," says Cardinal G. Emmett Carter, Archbishop of Toronto. "He is not learned in dogma or liturgy but whenever he paints something religiously symbolic, it is exactly right. It is a kind of genius." (*Macleans Magazine*)

In 1952 Aziz completed the monumental Nativity altarpiece for

the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Hamilton Ontario. Dr. Charles de Tolnay - of the Institute for Advance Study, Princeton University, eminent scholar of the Italian Renaissance and of the works of Michelangelo, viewed the altarpiece and, after careful study, turned and said: "Aziz, you are the El Greco of the 20th century."

Aziz is a graduate of the Yale Art School and the skill and finish of his work bears witness to his teacher's insistence on good technique in young artists. The general direction and purpose of his art is easy enough to recognize. He is not content with pure abstract design as practised by so many painters, but has no more regard than they for the merely literary.

What fascinates him is the real—the meaning of it, not the look of it. And his peculiar excellence as an artist lies in his ability to achieve high intellectual significance by strictly pictorial means, with no lapse into didacticism or allegory. His inclination is to drive straight at the meaning of a subject and to reveal it by original design.

It is not surprising that such an

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artist should be attracted by religious and liturgical themes which, for the Christian mind, are inescapable fact, possessed of eternal significance, and which must, therefore, present the greatest although the most difficult opportunity for fusing monumental design with moral or theological meaning. The utter originality of Aziz's approach to such ancient subjects as the Ascension, the Resurrection, the Annunciation, Veil of Veronica, Creation of Adam, Ecce Homo, Mary Queen of Heaven, the Nativity, to name a few, shows that a modern revival of religious art is entirely possible and that these mysteries might be expressed with as much force by twentieth century painting as they were by the art of any earlier period.

After some hesitant beginnings, Aziz's development in religious art has been extraordinarily rapid. Soon, he would be creating the simple, inevitable *Veronica*, or so strange and searching a work as *The First Birth Out of Death*. It is only right to notice here that his best known works are not available for exhibition. These are the *Pieta*, in a Trinitarian monastery near

Montreal, and the colossal *Nativity with St. Joseph*, in the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, in Hamilton. His ability as a religious painter and, more particularly, as a liturgical painter, cannot be fully appreciated without a study of these two pictures.

For many years Aziz remained active in the liturgical movement in America. He was a delegate at the World Liturgical Conference held at the Seattle World's Fair, and exhibited some of his religious art. Theologians and religious scholars of all denominations visit him in his studio in London, Ontario.

While there is no question as to the power and reverence of his mature religious work, still it will probably be agreed that his **full** originality is best shown by some of his secular pieces. Things like *Nature and Man*, and *Matrix*, should convince any thoughtful spectator that in Aziz, Canada possesses an artist of the first order.

All his paintings are in egg tempera, a medium neither easy nor, in our time, very common. For those unfamiliar with the method, it may be briefly described as the

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application of pigment in a mixture of water and egg-yolk as binding material, to a panel coated with several thin layers of gesso, or plaster.

Although the oldest and the most durable of all types of painting, tempera has largely gone out of fashion. The causes of its decline in popularity cannot be discussed here, but it may be pointed out that it has marked disadvantages in relation to oils, as well as certain advantages. Subtle sensuous effects, exploitation of surface texture, chiaroscuro and illusions of depth, all attainable in oils, are hardly possible at all in a tempera picture, which must succeed principally by means of painting's two basic forces: design and colour.

Really good composition will be all the more effective in this austere medium, while its colour can be so delicate, pure, and luminous as to confer a kind of depth by itself. A / fine tempera painting, indeed because of its extraordinary response to light, can achieve something of the monumental effect, the translucency and glow, of stained glass, while retaining the fluidity of painting.

The question which naturally

arises is why this artist should be drawn to use, for nearly all of his work, a medium now rather unusual. The reason will become clear if we consider what a painter must do if his work is to make us think, rather than make us feel, or perhaps, more accurately, make us think, and so come to feel as we ought. Obviously if he is to lead us to think deeply, he must not caress our emotions, but must somehow paint so as to encourage thoughtful contemplation.

Now, what this means in practice is that he must appeal to the sense of sight rather than to the other senses. This last statement may be thought a puzzling one, because it is commonly assumed that pictorial art can hardly do otherwise than appeal exclusively to the sense of sight, since it has no direct means of reaching any of the other senses.

But a little reflection should teach us that a competent artist can easily awaken all our senses if he chooses. A skillful painter in oils can call into being, within the confines of a picture frame, a little universe, lighted from within, full of ambient air, into which we feel that we could

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walk, and there find atmosphere, water, sky, and all objects, whether of nature or of art, responding to our touch, taste and hearing as they do and, indeed, in a certain respect, better than they do in real life.

These subtle and magical effects, exploited but never abused by genuine artists, are made possible largely by the medium. For oils are susceptible of delicate control, and will yield the gradual shadow and variable intensity of light, which make possible convincing perspective; and also the exact texture for anything, from fabric to flesh, with as much emphasis on a given sensuous quality as may be desired.

Tempera is something very different. The artist is brushing a relatively thin coloured fluid on dry absorbent plaster. He cannot control edges to anything like the same degree, and all his surfaces inevitably take on approximately the same chalky quality. His picture will never make us feel like touching it, nor lead us to think of any object in it except as a painted object. Effects of distance, if they are attempted at all, can be achieved only by geometrical line, and will yield the appearance of

a back drop, of an artificial stage for his main theme. Light may seem actually to come forth from the picture, but it can hardly, be induced to fall within it, so that the artist loses a dramatic means of singling out given areas in his composition.

All this makes it sound as if the instrument had limitations only, with no compensating advantages, but the thing we must notice is that in the limitations themselves there lies an enormous potential advantage. If a design has high intellectual significance, it will be all the more effective if the medium in which it is carried out actually prevents the spectator from doing anything but pondering it, until his feelings are stirred by growing comprehension. Where there is no illusion, there is no distraction.

The medium which permits the artist to concentrate on design and colour forces his audience to do the same. The successful tempera painting fastens itself upon our eye to the degree that we seem to forget the existence of our other senses. And if the power of vision is prized above the rest, it is surely because it is the widest in scope, the best

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source of information and so of the means of understanding. The painter whose special gift is the power to enlighten will therefore find himself trying to arrive at a medium which will suit his aim; and this means that he will use oils warily or, if he can master its technique, will find himself at home in tempera.

It may be added that the really great subjects of art demand the kind of treatment characteristic of tempera, and will receive it even when attempted in oils. The theme of *Matrix*, for example, if possible in oils, would require that the paint be handled very differently from what is usual to this medium. When rendered in tempera, the medium itself teaches us how to look, and guides us to the artist's intentions.

None of the above should be taken to mean that Aziz is a calculating worker, consciously bent on securing a certain hold on our minds. To speak of him as an intellectual painter is to refer to the effect of his work, not to its mode of production. From the fact that the cells in a beehive reveal precise mathematical proportions, it does not follow that their builders

worked with scientific knowledge and purpose. The naturalness and inevitability of his best pictures should be apparent, and the essential beauty of such work escapes all analysis.

If this little introduction has dwelt on the intellectual value of the artist's work, it is in order that paintings not always likeable at first glance may be given the patient, quiet study which they deserve.

Major shows

capsule comments from New York & Toronto

"Throughout the range of art, secular and liturgical, Aziz has combined original vision with a command of technique that makes him a rare artist today."

—*Detroit Institute of Arts. W E Woods*

"Aziz is winning international renown ...talent and insight...master artist."

—*Macleans Magazine*

"Exquisitely sensitive paintings."

—*The Tower, New Jersey*

"Technique is Renaissance...exuberant and contemporary."

—*New York Post*

"Resplendent sculpture and painting."

—*New York Daily News*

"Established firmly as one of Canada's leading artists."

—*Time Magazine*

"An artist of the first order...splendid."

"Supreme mastery."

—*Eaton Fine Art Galleries, Toronto*

—*London Free Press*

"Vibrant...in the tradition of El Greco ...Cellini...flamelike movement...dazzling."

—*University of Waterloo Art Centre*

"Sensitive artist."

"Exciting new artist...versatile.. new dimensions of beauty."

—*McNaught Syndicate*

"...old-master technique...like Celini...glittering."

—*Arts Magazine*

"Reverence and mysticism, delicate and original...reminiscent of Byzantine."

—*Canadian Interiors*

"The generation gap was successfully bridged...making a splash at the Gallery. They dig this Canuck."

—*Windsor Star*

"Revved up exhibition program."

—*New York Times*

"Very well received..and well attended.. ..definitely versatile."

—*New York Cultural Center, Gallery of Modern Art*



Major shows
critical comments from New York & Toronto

GALLERY OF MODERN ART NEW YORK CULTURAL CENTRE), NEW YORK, 1969

DAVID FINDLAY GALLERY, NEW YORK, 1976

GRUENBAUM GALLERY, NEW YORK, 1978

THEO WADDINGTON GALLERIES, TORONTO, 1981

WADDINGTON & SWELL GALLERIES, TORONTO, 1984

*Compiled by W Hawkins Ferry, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
& Staff members of the various galleries*

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

W. Hawkins Ferry

Patron & Connoisseur of Modern Art

Collector & Chairman of the Friends of Modern Art, Detroit Institute of Arts

The Aziz exhibition at the David Findlay Galleries in New York must surely be counted as one of the highlights of the artistic season. He is a master artist in full command of his creative powers...original in design yet expressive of deep religious, philosophical and spiritual meaning and insight. The monumental *Triptych: Epilogue*, sums up the five universal themes of his show...an epic work; and one of the best paintings produced during the past decade. Aziz has entered the world scene of art.

Dr. Robert P. Metzger

Director of Modern Art, Stamford Museum of Art

The Aziz exhibition is a profound expression of modern art. In one show he has achieved the impossible: he has bridged the decade of the 50s with the 70s and brought it into proper perspective. Only a mature, confident and brilliant artist could have done it. He is a craftsman without equal in the world today in the difficult egg tempera technique. He has made technical breakthroughs with the medium, achieving a luminosity and quality of coloration unseen before even in the masters of the Quattrocento.

The work is original yet profound and beautiful. There is here a marriage of four media—each interpreting five universal themes and which together give a substance to an exhibition which one rarely finds in art today. Of 52 works in the current show, 13 paintings, 20 gouaches, 6 lithographs and 4 sculptures were completed within 4 months of his New York show. This in itself is historically significant—a Tour de Force of artistic creativity rarely seen in artists today. Aziz and his art have assured him a place in the front rank of artists in the world today.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Albert Landry

Art Director, Connoisseur of Modern Art & Freelance dealer, New York

One of the most important and beautiful exhibitions of modern art I have seen in recent years. Paintings, sculptures, gouaches and lithographs all forming part of a profound and beautiful synthesis. Art filled with meaning, yet devoid of tricks. A master of his craft of the difficult medium of egg tempera....No one, I venture to say can equal let alone surpass his skill. His art spans the ages and reaches for the cosmos....Needed in a cynical age... a reaffirmation of faith...beautiful and profound.

Lional Landry

Assistant Director, Asia House, New York

It is a rare experience to see the works of a mature artist in complete control of his metier. But what is important here is that the metier does not control the artist. He knows his craft and can use it with brilliance and skill. The Aziz exhibition is one of the most profound and beautiful expressions of modern art that can be seen anywhere today. What is so extraordinary is that from the hand and mind of one man, his art encompasses the full range of history, and religions— from Egypt, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Oriental, transcending time and space...to be brought together into a synthesis. Nature, man and the cosmos are the great subjects of his art. There is beauty here, a spiritual uplifting of the soul, that bespeaks well of the mind of a great artist which seeks to comprehend eternal truths. A craftsman par excellence...finally. The art of Aziz is ennobling.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Salvador Dali

I never visit exhibitions of other artists, but I want to see yours. Very good show. Good art. You paint in egg tempera. Very difficult—I cannot. You are a very good artist.

Dr. Robert Rosenbloom

Critic & Scholar, New York

A beautiful exhibition of art; so varied and yet cohesive. An exciting aesthetic experience as I move from one art work to another.

Dr. Henry Geldzeller

Director of Modern American Art, Metropolitan Museum, NY

I am bored with viewing exhibitions which show slight variations of a single theme over and over again. In the Aziz exhibition, no less than five major themes are represented in four media: painting, sculpture, gouaches and lithographs. I can move from one art work to another, from one medium to another, and each time have a new and thrilling aesthetic experience. What is important is that I can see the hand of the master artist in control of it all. I am not surprised at the wonderful critical acclaim this show is receiving....It is beautiful and I like it very much.

Betty Parsons

Betty Parsons Gallery, New York

They are all beautiful—I like them all. What more can one say? A master artist in control of his medium...themes such as the broken shaft, broken circle and floating bar are entirely original and, like all true art, rich in content. When might we have a show in my gallery?

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Gill Kornblee

Kornblee Gallery, New York

It is refreshing to see elegance and beauty reinstated in art again. Aziz is a master of his craft! I like it very much.

Mrs. Barnett Newman

Widow of artist Barnett Newman

The Aziz exhibition is beautiful—deep in religious philosophical and spiritual significance, which is at the root of all great art. So it was with the art of Barney. He would have loved Phil's show. Aziz is a great artist...in full command of his gifts...original and meaningful, it stands on its own merits.

Mr. Thomas Messer

Director, Guggenheim Museum, New York

The art of Aziz is in the grand tradition. **It** incorporates universal symbols such as the sphere which recurs from time to time in the history of art. In modern art, Gottleib and Noland have used it. Aziz, like the Oriental artists, uses it as a symbol of ultimate perfection. United with the cosmos...his art is cosmic. He is a master craftsman. His art is not only beautiful but consonant with the times.

Dr. Frederick C. Cummings

Director, Detroit Institute of Arts

I have watched the art of Aziz develop over the years. The present exhibition marks a high point of a brilliant career. As a man and as an artist his works rank him as one of the major artists today. Deep in spiritual, philosophical and religious content, brilliant in its original use of metaphoric images and symbols, a master craftsman in the difficult technique of egg tempera, the show is a triumph.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Bates Lowry

Critic, Art Historian & Scholar

Former Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

Beautiful, original and profound....Epi/ogue is a major work.

Dr. Allan Shestack

Director, Yale Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Beautiful...a fine exhibitior...Epilogue must be considered as a major work...glad to have seen this show.

Mr. Arnold Glimpsher

Director, Pace Gallery New York

I like this exhibition of Aziz...Beautiful...serious and original.

Buffie Johnson

Artist, New York, NY

Ennobling...spiritual...beautiful and profound. A serious and brilliant artist who works in the grand tradition of art, yet is of our age and of our tune.

Arts Magazine *New York, New York*

The recent paintings, sculptures, gouaches and lithographs in the Canadian artist Aziz's first show in New York since his major exhibition at the Cultural Centre, is ultimate perfection. United with the cosmos...his art is cosmic. He is a master craftsman. His art is not only beautiful but consonant with the times.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Director of Art, University of Waterloo

In the works of Aziz one encounters a rare combination of great technical skill, intense religious feeling, keen independence of spirit, and professional success. His meticulously painted works vibrant with spiritual meaning, are far from the mainstream of experimental contemporary art.

Macleans Magazine Toronto, Canada

Our world famous "unknown" master artist is winning international renown. While Aziz has established his reputation chiefly by liturgical art (defined as a picture you can pray before) he has ventured successfully into vastly different fields. His painting of Rise Stevens, the mezzo-soprano, in the role of the gypsy enchantress Carmen, will hang in the Metropolitan Opera House at New York's Lincoln Center. Other artists who have not his talent or insight, get on the bandwagon of his style or concept.... his panels, *The Four Seasons*, are perhaps the most eye-catching items in the spectacular new Detroit building of Michigan Consolidated Gas. Another Aziz mural decorates the loggia of the Grosse Pointe mansion of Mt and Mrs. A.D. Wilkinson, prominent Detroiters.

Marylou McKenna

McNaught Syndicate

Canadian-born Aziz, the exciting "new" artist now being honoured with a major one-man show at the noted Gallery of Contemporary Art across from Central Park...is the versatile artist whose paintings and sculpture have been snapped up for investment by such discriminating judges of artistic talent as the DuPonts and the Fords...critics have expressed special fascination with his pure, quintessentially fecund paintings of the life-cycle of a pine tree.

He also finds new dimensions of beauty in the dandelion, for which, incidentally, he used actual egg yolks to obtain a true yellow. His portraits are also outstanding. Termed by one critic, "the greatest living portrait painter,"

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Aziz has interpreted the style and personal individuality of such as opera singer Rise Stevens, Signe Eaton (elegant wife of the owner of Canada's huge department store chain), and Solange Karsh, late wife of fellow Canadian photographer, Yousuf Karsh.

London Free Press Newspaper *London, Canada*

Patience and ability to maintain interest...are absolutely essential requirements in the artist. Aziz understands the medium and he has the necessary qualities to use it. Aziz is a complex personality which shows also in his paintings of dandelions and pines. Without being obvious, he relates plant life to human life and therefore in his *Life Cycle of a Dandelion* and *Life Cycle of a Pine*, he presents the story of life itself. Diversity of subject is matched superbly with difference in colouring and style in the cycles. There is supreme mastery, for example, in the use of grey and yellow, looking as naive and pristine as old-fashioned water colour. The show presents many reasons for Aziz's international success.

New York Post *New York, New York*

The painting technique, egg tempera on gesso, is Renaissance. The style, while not abstract, is exuberant and contemporary. He said: "People have been so wonderful, so kind! They say it's a happy show, full of life and full of growing things."

Canadian Interiors Magazine

Aziz is a romantic. His warmth, humanity and sense of theatre delight and surprise, while his religious work has colour, magic and mystery reminiscent of another and unprosaic era. Artist, designer and interior designer, he has a versatility unusual among today's artists. He does not paint composition and colour for its own sake but must start with an artistic idea. And he does not believe man should be so arrogant as to put himself before his art.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

There is a reverence and a mysticism 20th century scientific man so often lacks. He also has a sense of theatre and occasion. His use of egg tempera and gold leaf is reminiscent of Byzantine things. An age-old technique has been given a new lease on life in another and explosive century. As a craftsman Aziz has a delicate and original touch.

Time Magazine

Artist Aziz is a notable exception to the Massey Commission finding that artists in Canada "are quite unable to live from art alone." An exhibition of the Ontario painter's big, 13.5-foot altarpiece drew several thousand visitors, proved so popular that Eaton's gallery in Toronto decided to extend the showing...he is established firmly as one of Canada's leading artists. Some critics rate Aziz as "Canada's best liturgical painter."

Arts Magazine *New York, New York*

Aziz is an artist that makes use of every device to reincarnate the image of the Renaissance Man. He uses the old-master technique of egg tempera on gesso panel almost exclusively in his paintings of religious and mythological subjects, portraits, still-lives and landscapes. He makes sculpture, liturgical designs, artifacts and jewellery using materials such as marble, silver, glass, bronze and gold-leaf. He, like Cellini, particularly adores gold. He uses gold-leaf on many of his paintings and intaglio reliefs....A glittering effect.

Toronto Star Newspaper

A 10-foot high dandelion, finished in gleaming chrome and weighting 300 pounds, dazzled a distinguished list of patrons of the arts at the Gallery of Modern Art (New York) showing of the works of artist Aziz of London, Ontario.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Windsor Star Newspaper

In New York, they dig this Canuck...Canadian artist Aziz is being discovered these days by increasing numbers of Americans, ranging from plump matrons to unbarbered hippies. "We really dig you, man," said the spokesman for a hippie group after a long conversation with the personable artist from London, Ontario. They apparently had gone to the Gallery of Modern Art to see the widely advertised two-floor showing of the American primitive paintings of the late Grandma Moses. On the fifth floor they found Aziz and 75 of his modern paintings, liturgical creations and sculptures. The generation gap was successfully bridged.

A little old lady, about 60, wept on his shoulder as she told Aziz of the message she discerned in his mystical paintings of the nature of man. A young man from mid-America found the show refreshing. "We're tired of coming to New York exhibitions and being conned," he declared.

Aziz's first United States showing opened in the slender, marble-clad exhibition gallery built by wealthy Huntington Hartford. It has been extended to April 6. Then it moves to Texas, next stop on a United States tour of up to 18 months under the auspices of the National Pollution Control Foundation, Inc.

His modern paintings are making a splash at the Gallery of Modern Art in New York and his show has been extended to more than seven weeks. "Aziz's use of white in his pictures is most unusual and in some respects almost Chinese or Japanese in its design effect," says veteran newspaperman Peter McEvoy, now a television-radio journalist here.

Mrs. Peter Sammartino

Foundation for Modern Art, Gallery of Modern Art, New York

We are pleased to learn that you are now arranging exhibitions of the Art of Aziz in other parts of the United States and that one is now being planned for Houston, Texas. When Aziz held his exhibition of paintings and religious artifacts in this gallery from February 12 through April 6 of this year, it was well attended and very well received.

Major shows

critical comments from New York & Toronto

Detroit Free Press Newspaper

If the Aziz show proves to be a hit with the public, and it deserves to be, the foundation may take it on the road, Detroit included. Aziz has done an interesting series on the life cycle of dandelions and pine trees...you just ought to see how such simple themes can be developed by a sensitive artist.

London Free Press Newspaper *Ontario, Canada*

Dominating the (*Aziz*) exhibit (at the New York Cultural Centre) is his latest work, a 10-foot high dandelion of nickel and gold. When it whirls around on its steel base, propelled by electric current, it looks as though it would waft dandelion seeds throughout the room. It is the grande finale to 14 studies which the artist calls *Life Cycle of the Dandelion*.

New York Daily News

The forum was the Gallery of Modern Art. The occasion, a showing of the resplendent sculpture and painting of Canadian gentleman artist Aziz.

New York Times

In the last six months the Gallery's (Gallery of Modern Art) pulse has begun to flutter again. Its revved-up exhibition program...Sir Jacob Epstein, Grandma Moses, a Canadian painter named Aziz...while there's life, they say, there's hope.

Major shows

viewer reactions from New York & Toronto

"Aziz is one of the great liturgical artists of our time."

—Dr. Paul Tillich, Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University

"One of the great portrait painters today."

—Roland Balay, Chairman, Knoedler Art Galleries, New York

"Aziz is...indeed, a modern Cellini...congratulations, inspiring art."

—T. Alcoholz

"...fresh energy and sensitive imagination...went to visit your show, and yesterday took a group of twenty people."

—A.P. Moor, New York

"I say your work towers and is filled with spiritual content."

—M.N. Johnson, Editor, New York

"...beautiful pine trees."

—T. Edison, St. Louis, MO

"...run, run, run and see the energy and spirit captured in the cycles of the dandelions and pine trees."

—Ruth Carroll, New York

"One of the great modern artists in America today."

—Ashley Astor Chanler

"Darling, it is SO wonderful...so much life...such loving. I'm going to make you a nice big bowl of chicken soup. You are a good man. So beautiful...this work."

—Unknown Bronx Woman

"I decide myself what I'll see and like and don't like....and I like this. It's magnificent."

—A Bearded College Student

Major shows

viewer reactions from New York & Toronto

"Splendid....such joy."

—A young Librarian

"Europe should see this work...so strong...so positive...such technique. It speaks with a firm voice."

—A New York Lady

"Too happy...too much God...bad, too good...junk."

—And Somebody Else

"My God, this is gorgeous."

—A Young Lad

"Some of the best paintings I ever saw."

—New York Man

"You can almost hear them singing..."

—New York Lady

"Tomato soup cans are for soup. This guy's for art."

—Student, Northwestern University

"I think everyone who possibly can should see these paintings. (*Misty Pine*)...is a special pine tree soaring toward heaven."

—Young New York Lady

"He's a major artist..magnificent technique in a medium not often used today, so difficult..and such variety of expression."

—Art Teacher

"Those bees...the light...I wish it were Summer..."

—Young Lady

Major shows

viewer reactions from New York & Toronto

"The remarkable use of white..very rare...quite Oriental...the delicacy of the pine tree series...sophisticated simplicity."

—Artist from New Jersey

"The cadets thoroughly enjoyed your gallery talk of last Saturday. Several who had been to no gallery before have told me that the adventure has inspired them to begin visiting galleries on their own."

—Major J.H. Coreth, Associate Professor of English, U.S. Military Academy,
West Point, New York

"Thank you for your beautiful paintings. It was an inspiration to see them."

—Mrs. Charles Edison, St. Louis, MO

"You can't possibly imagine the very real pleasure you gave the folks (a visiting art class of senior citizens). They couldn't stop praising you and your beautiful works of art."

—Ruth Getzels, Long Island, New York

Major shows

Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts

*Dr. Nancy-Lou Patterson, Director
Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts,
University of Waterloo
Ontario, Canada, 1967*

The art world is not a homogeneous collection of like-minded persons, but a divided and dispersed system of many branches and levels, each of them fissiparated like the ramifications of a world religion. Participants in art include not only the artists, much divided by their styles, their interests, the community which they choose to serve, their status as amateur or professional, and their ability to devote more or less of their time to art, but also the different art dealers, art galleries, advertising agencies, and others who deal in, but do not produce, art, as well as the consumers/buyers, collectors, experts, connoisseurs, scholars, students, viewers, and critics, for whom alone space does not suffice to make a list.

One tiny, but highly significant, enclave of this complex field is that made up of the persons able to commission truly beautiful portraits of themselves or others. Another equally rarified level is that on which superb works of liturgical celature are commissioned, designed, executed,

and preserved. Within this latter division one must include paintings commissioned especially for altarpieces, or to hang in religious institutions. Surely neither of these specialized clientele can comprise more than a fraction of the number of individual works commissioned and purchased in any one year.

Aziz is an artist whose entire time is taken up with working in these two fields. His religious paintings and works of liturgical design are in major churches and church institutions; his portraits and paintings are in the collection of some of Canada's most distinguished citizens. It is an aspect of working for such clients that his name is not widely known outside their circles, though his liturgical work is enjoyed by hundreds of worshippers who do not know him.

It remains to gather in one exhibition examples of both types of work, so that they may be made available to viewers as part of a unified oeuvre. This the Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts is very pleased to be able to do in the first exhibition of Aziz in a University.

Major shows

Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts

For his work is all of a piece, unmistakably his, unquestionably part of a particular style and world view. Paintings which vary from portraits of beautiful and elegant ladies to works of metaphysical expression like *Surge of Apples*, religious subjects like *Resurrection*, and pieces of celature like the *St. Paul's Cathedral cruet*, all show Aziz's distinctive approach to form and design. They are designed and planned with the most exquisite care.

The painstaking technique of egg tempera, working on a prepared wood and gesso ground, with specially made pigments and carefully applied gold leaf and the precision required for a rendering or maquette of a word; to be executed by celators, both help to produce this effect of extreme care. That alone is enough to isolate the works of Aziz from the mainstream of contemporary art, for, except in the area of hard-edge abstractions, care for technique, edge, control, perfection, are not only unfashionable but disdained, not part of the method, not appropriate to the desired end, and not a matter to be considered, worked toward, or trained for.

Added to this cause of estrangement is Aziz' meticulous concern with draftsmanship, which he combines with a strong Mannerist approach to form and spatial treatment. In the tradition of the sixteenth / seventeenth century, as embodied in poetry by the trembling metaphysical constructions of John Donne, and in painting by the attenuations of El Greco, Parmigianino, Bronzino, Tintoretto, even the elderly Michelangelo, and in celature by Cellini all that disturbing combination of speculation, coulisse contrasted with surface space, contorted, hovering, wavering figures, acid colouring, chilly, detached, even insolent regard, these are part of the style in which Aziz probably quite without intention, has chosen to work.

Expressionism, and even a certain Baroque explosiveness can be seen in some contemporary works; the hard-edge abstractionists seem coldly Neoclassical in their systems of reduction and subtraction. But Aziz has chosen an alternative. Possibly this is dictated by his religious

Major shows

Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts

concept of reality, one lying close to the piety of St. John of the Cross, and perhaps even closer to that of the Eastern Church, whose child he is.

There is in him a questioning of the flesh that introduces a certain flame like movement, a certain foreboding of imminent combustion of impending spiritualization. The dazzling expanses of white, the dissolving encrustations of pure gold, the forms that flicker like the skirts of a great curtain, or perhaps more exactly, like the Northern Lights, the luminous, acerbic colour, all contribute to this sense.

Still further, Aziz elects to produce works of specific, even insistent meaning. Not that they yield themselves immediately. On the contrary, they repay continuing study. But there is meaning there, deliberate, thought-out, specific meaning.

Usually it is iconic meaning, that is meaning that can only be expressed in a form, that will not submit to verbal expression, but must appear before the eye, to be absorbed intuitively, through the senses, to become part of the direct, the physical experience of the viewer.

For while the subject matter is spiritual, and the forms spiritualized, the appeal is not only to the mind, but directly to the aesthesis, to the sensory equipment. The sensuality of the smooth surface, the tactile quality of the gilding, the jewellery, the presentation of the forms as if the viewer were actually seeing things in that heightened state now popularly labelled "psychedelic", the unrelenting concentration upon anatomical detail, the "supernaturalization", as Aziz has called it, of the drapery—all these combine to produce a tremendous reaction in the viewer.

This reaction cannot always be comfortable; one perhaps wishes to be less aware of the forms as icons, as pictures of things in a world where senses and spirit combine. One would prefer, perhaps, to remain untouched, as one can be by an abstract granting one's commitment only to judgments of its formal construction, its use of this or that technical or intellectual device.

One has been used to that sort of experience or else used to the form of representation common today, which holds a mirror up to our daily

Major shows

Gallery of the Theatre of the Arts

world, with all its flash and coarseness. All these are desirable, involving, legitimate ends. But we are used to them. We have, perhaps forgotten what lies beneath, behind, beyond both ends of the contemporary spectrum.

For to orthodox religion, and Aziz is orthodox, the world of the present day is, while aching, demanding real, yet but a warp in the force field of eternity. And the speculations of the mind make use only of a few of the multiple faculties inherent as well as present in a personality-cum-body which is intended for an experience of the ultimate. Language, used for such concepts, begins to fail. It is at this point that the intimations of art can serve orthodoxy best. It is at this point that art has always been the handmaiden of religious expression.

Aziz was trained at Yale University, where he graduated in Fine Arts. He served an apprenticeship in a jewellery making atelier, where his first assignment was to design a cornucopia of jewelled fruits. This vision-inducing task, he has related, taught him how much he had yet to learn, and he

struggled for weeks to produce a design in which jewels would be fruit, and fruit, jewels.

Moving gradually into portraiture and thence into works of religious use, he has now built his clientele to the point where he does nothing but paint and design. He lectures occasionally at the University of western Ontario but does not make teaching his profession.

Pursuing a course quite tangential to the norm of the Canadian avant-garde, and to its academic school as well, he is still in mid career, very much engaged in the business of fulfilling his commissions and working out the concepts that he first charts in dozens of large charcoal sketches with which he strews the floors of his studio.

The exhibition of works shown at the University of Waterloo comes equally from the hands of their owners, who of their courtesy have let these precious objects go for a short time in order to make them available to students, and from the artist's own collection, where they hang upon the walls of his studio-cottage like windows into another world.

THE WORK OF PHILIP AZIZ AND ITS ENDURING MESSAGE

remember Richard Pousette-Dart once telling me: "To use the word spiritual in the 1930s and 1940s, was near-heresy and dangerous to an artist's career." At that time, intellectual discourse dealing with modernist issues avoided the metaphysical. Abstraction (The Oxford English Dictionary defines abstraction as: "to withdraw, to take away secretly, to disengage") metamorphoses reality, etherealizes it and, yet, gives it a spiritual quality. Ever since the 1940s, curators like Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and critics like Clement Greenberg, have encouraged the association of abstraction with non-representation. Its formal properties and its aesthetic aura were accepted but its spirituality was glossed over.

That, however, began to change in the 1970s with a younger generation of art historians, less formally focused and unafraid of that mystical ingredient. I suspect that their [and my] teacher, the late Mayer Schapiro, whose scholarship encompassed Cezanne but also Christian iconography, had more than a little to do with that change. Today's writers reconfirm the subject in supposedly non-representational abstract painting and they have begun to rediscover meanings, neglected or ignored by a previous generation. Spirituality has been restored to art as a legitimate objective and the imagery of abstraction's pioneers—Kandinsky, Kupka and Mondrian—is now routinely viewed in the context of the philosophical and mystical sources that inspired it.

One passes through a world of forms ascending from reality to abstraction. In this manner one approaches purity itself, Piet Mondrian wrote in 1913. A comment repeatedly heard from those who, like myself, admired that artist's stunning retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art last fall, was the intense spirituality of the viewing experience. Within the spiritual-abstract nexus there are five underlying impulses, according to Henri Focillon. That critic's *LA VIE DES FORMES* (1946) lists: 1) cosmic imagery: 2) vibration: 3) synesthesia: 4) duality: 5) sacred geometry. Familiar as this audience is with Philip Aziz's art, do you not recognize the applicability of those five impulses in the paintings before you? Kandinsky believed that human emotion consists of vibrations of the soul, and that the soul is set into vibration by nature. His ambition, and I daresay Philip Aziz's, was to produce an art that does the same.

Francis Kupka was involved with the mystical and the occult ever since childhood. His art aspired to the transperceptual in which colour is imaginary, space is infinite and matter's appeal is in flux. To Kupka, nature manifested itself as a rhythmic, geometric force. Again, does this audience not see that rhythmic, geometric force (Focillon's "sacred geometry") emanates from Philip Aziz's paintings?

Alchemy is the secret art of transmutation: base elements into precious metals, the crass individual into a paragon of virtue. To me, Philip Aziz is a modern-day alchemist with the God-given ability to turn ordinary chemicals and minerals into spell-binding imagery and who, in turn, may convert anyone's ordinary day into one in which he or she "sees the light." What does that alchemic imagery consist of? In Hinduism or

Buddhism, it would be called a mandala. In Sanskrit, mandala means circle though as an image with the power to heighten concentration and induce meditation, a mandala may be square or floral as well. As a microcosm or spiritual diagram of the universe, the mandala and its iconic reflection in Western art becomes a metaphor for order, an emblem of the harmony that results when all of life's governing principles and forces are held in balance.

A cautionary remark is in order. I do not want to give you the impression that the thoroughly Christian Aziz frivolously engages in esoteric philosophy or proposes a Faddish substitute for true religion. Yet, as an artist with a recent migratory link to the "cradle of civilization," Aziz fathoms better than anyone the cross-cultural connections in human experience and in man's recognition of the godhead. He brings that sense of universal—as contrasted to parochial—values to bear upon work he does in his studio as well as work he does in and for the church. His approach to ecclesiastical commissions is unconventional. may not always have courted favour and must have required courage on occasion.

While studying art history at a Catholic university in the immediate post-war decade. our teachers made us aware that, in France, a battle was being waged. spearheaded by Dominican fathers Marie-Alain Couturier and Raymond Regamey. to grant leading modernists Chagall, Leger, Lipchitz. Richier and Rouault, a role in the renovation of Church art. Known as the "Querelle de l'art sacré," this battle engaged the forces of the rear. steeped in academism and hacked by orthodoxy, who had allowed statuan' and vessels. vestments and glazing to become stereotypical and sentimental to the point where they merely served pietism and had taken on the appearance of kitsch. We know. of course. who won, and monuments of the stature of Notre-Darne-de-Grace in Assy. Le Corbusier's church in Ronchamp and Matisse's chapel in Venice. are convincing proof. But the battle is ongoing and conservative forces are on the rise again, at the Vatican. in North American politics and in every community and parish.

Philip Aziz is a spiritualist among painters, proud of his convictions. and a modernist among church iconographers with the courage to put up a fight as he is well aware that we live in a society that attempts to dictate upon the individual the inhibiting, levelling and ultimately pernicious norms of the group. The exhibition opening here today should convince all those who come to see it, that Philip Aziz, now at the top of his profession. sets an admirable standard as a spiritually engaged abstractionist and as a fighter for a sacred art of contemporary relevance.

Jan van der Marck
Former Curator of
Modern Art & American Art.
Detroit Institute of Arts

[This is the transcript of a talk delivered on May 5, 1996. on the occasion of the official opening of Philip Aziz: Hidden Icons at the London Regional Art and Historical Museums, London. Ontario. and may not he used for any purpose not specifically authorized by its author.]