

The windseeker

I discovered Guevrekian Gabriel's water and light garden (1925) thanks to Elise Berkvens. Although we never in fact talked about this cubist garden, let alone mention Guevrekian, an architect born in Constantinople, but who grew up in Tehran and ended up working with Le Corbusier in the 1920s in Paris. However, she did expose me to the concept of 'hortus conclusus', the Latin denomination of 'an enclosed garden' which inspired her new series of paintings.

Will she introduce landscapes into her compositions? This question arises because architecture is an important theme throughout her body of work. I haven't yet seen her new paintings, but seeing Guevrekian's strange gouache of his garden design sparked the following thoughts.

In Berkvens's paintings, for me everything starts with the visible tension (not to mention contradiction) between spatial conception and use of color. Elise follows an almost Cubist logic in her compositions : she presents an imagined space, not a spatial representation. We might have forgotten by now, but this thinking which originated at the beginning of the twentieth century radically changed the conceptual framework of painting. Artists became "windseekers". This word does not exist in the art books and dictionaries, yet it applies to the history of mankind from caveman through to the contemporary wizards of our time and has a direct relationship with philosophy. The cubist space moves and seeks out change or transformation as it follows a logic of which is its own. The cubist painting breaks free from the constraints of impressionism, its static nature, its atmosphere, its colours and its representations of the landscape.

I was puzzled by my first encounter with Elise's paintings and the gouache of Guevrekian tickled my sense of intrigue further. He uses in his garden design of 1925 the analytical framework of cubist paintings, yet his use of colour seems to aspire to simulate a photographic reality. To me it feels like the design is a template for a vision of that reality; the garden and its landscape become a 'screen' of paint and photographic colours. Are you still with me?

Guevrekian is 'my' enclosed garden from which I am able to perceive and understand Elise Berkvens' work. It's a hypothesis. The motifs of the Hortus Conclusus (house and garden design) bring together two colliding movements in the history of paint: space and color.

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