Horizon 101: Reflections and Paintings by Jala Makhzoumi

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Horizon 101, Jala Makhzoumi, Dar Onboz, 2010; ISBN 978-9953-465-16-6; art direction and design: Nour Saab

'Somewhere between Calabria and Corfu the blue really begins ... once you strike out from the flat and desolate Calabrian mainland towards the sea, you are aware of ... the horizon beginning to stain at the rim of the world ...' the British author Lawrence Durrell wrote in 1945. Landscape architect Jala Makhzoumi's *Horizon 101*, a diary of personal reflections in words and watercolour paintings, captures precisely the essence of the Mediterranean landscape that Durrell described. *Horizon 101* is a beautifully presented book written in Arabic and English; a story told through pictures and words that complement each other.

This book takes the reader on a journey of the horizon landscape as viewed from the author's window in her one-bedroom apartment (apartment 101) on the campus of the American University of Beirut from July 2006 to June 2007. It is an expression of a recent formative life experience: the 2006 war on Lebanon and the suffering inflicted on the civilian population of South Lebanon that she encountered when she volunteered her landscape architectural expertise in post-war reconstruction. Yet the paintings and text are full of life and hope – a representation of resilience, the power of survival and re-growth encapsulated in landscape.

The author's almost daily engagement with the horizon landscape through the window became her means of relief from the overwhelming situation she was trapped within. *Horizon 101* is Jala Makhzoumi's 'personal story of displacement and longing, an act of reflection and healing', but it is also a story of the poignancy of landscape and the profound meanings and strength that can be found in observing the everyday landscape.

Horizons are longings, yearnings for freedom. The series of paintings begins with an open view of the horizon of sea and sky, then the format changes to a vertical view of the horizon through fences, conveying a sense of separation and imprisonment. Here, the aesthetics of the ordinary landscape are not confined to pictures of the intense Mediterranean blue but are as powerful in the bold compositions of barbed wire fences, scaffolds and activities screened through this view. Responding to changes in light at different times of the day, the landscape shifts in mood. The horizon is viewed in snapshots of momentary events narrating the passage of time in space, defining both immediate space, close, delineated by fencing, and the seascape disappearing into the openness of the horizon.

Landscape is never static, and the framing of the vignettes in this book in accordance with a calendar diary is a straightforward way of depicting the sense of time and the dynamics of landscape change; it is simple yet effective.

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REVIEW

Reflections from apartment 101, January 2007.



The book itself is an aesthetic gem. The author's professionally trained eye, coupled with her artistic talent, is evident in the visuals – a series of drawings that overlay architectural elevation views with gentle aquarelle washes. The richness of nuanced hues and colours adds lyrical dimensions to the story. Printed on quality watercolour-like textured paper, with a soft cover and binding and in an unusual format (23 x 33 cm) it feels like a hand-made book, an original diary, rather than one that has been mass-produced.

Sensitive observations of landscape and people are at the heart of *Horizon 101*. As a personal story, it is captivating, poetic and moving. It is a humble and candid representation of the passion for landscape and compassion for human beings that underpin the practice and scholarly work of the author.

While the sensuality of the landscape is achieved through the evocative media of watercolour and its vivid colours and luminous qualities, the words too evoke the senses. As a native of the Mediterranean, I can figuratively smell the springtime landscape of my birthplace when reading these words in *Horizon 101*:

The delicious scent

Of orange blossoms

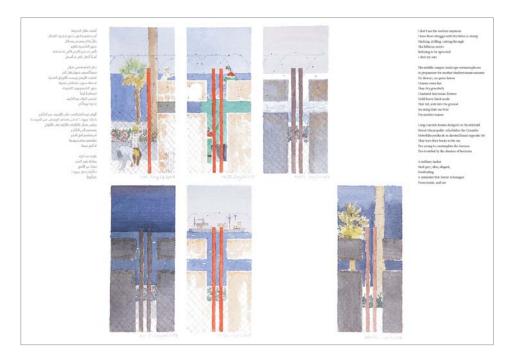
Announces spring

Citrus trees laced with white

Along Marquand House

As I walk through FAFS garden

In the hakuras past IC and ACS.



A reminder that Beirut is besieged from inside, and out. May/June 2007.

Yet you don't have to be a native of the Mediterranean to treat yourself and delight in 'the horizon beginning to stain at the rim of the world' (Durrell, 2008).

Jala Makhzoumi, the author of *Horizon 101*, is Professor of Landscape Architecture, American University of Beirut. In her research she explores the relationship between landscape design community development, biodiversity conservation and landscape heritage. Jala's professional practice focuses on ecological landscape planning and urban revitalisation in Iraq, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. She is currently working on a manuscript provisionally titled Beirut Gardens, which conceptualises traditional green spaces in Mediterranean cities to inspire community-inclusive greening strategies. In a recent personal communication about *Horizon 101* Jala Makhzoumi commented that:

Landscape, horizon and the human condition are intertwined concepts ... 'Landscapes' are a way of seeing surroundings that are fulfilling emotionally as well intellectually if you work with landscape professionally and/or academically. Whether seen or hidden, dominating or subdued, 'horizons' are the reference point of 'landscape'. 'Horizons' can be literal but they are also metaphors for a present condition linked to a future prospect; for example, 'no apparent horizon, no prospect for hope' or 'I can't see ahead, my horizon is cluttered'.

NOTE

To purchase Horizon 101 contact nadine@daronboz.com.

REFERENCE

Durrell, L (2008) *In Prospero's Cell: A Guide to the Landscape and Manners of the Island of Corfu*, Virginia: Axios Press, p 9. First published in 1945 by Faber and Faber Ltd, London.