

he had always wanted, and it was to run, to run, to run, away from these people, all of them, everyone, to get away. He must have hit someone too hard, pushed someone into a window, for the police caught him easily, stopped him, and he was still running from them, sprinting away faster and faster, even as they helped him into their truck.

JAMES THRALL SOBY

LÉONID

'EVERY new painter in our era', Léonid Berman once remarked, 'must decide to be for or against Picasso.' He meant, of course, that a basic issue facing contemporary artists is whether to join the revolutionary procession led by the Spanish master, or to seek instead a lonelier course. Léonid himself, though he once made use of cubist-abstract precepts for which Picasso had been largely responsible, long ago made up his mind. Since the beginning of his mature career in the late 1920s he has been essentially a painter of reality, interpreting with rapt yet controlled devotion aspects of the tangible, seaside world that interest him deeply. He is, indeed, a scrupulous epicure of hour and place, of light and tide, of the physical and atmospheric subtleties which differentiate one coastal scene from another. His preference in seascape is for those places in which water, land, sky, and man are in close and ancient communion; he has no interest whatever in the ocean for its own sake or in those dramatic episodes of tempest admired by marine painters of an earlier time. His taste is confirmed by minute and sometimes oblique details. When, for example, he stands beside his 'Les Bouchots à Marée Haute' of 1937, he will first describe the exceptional flavour of the mussels scraped from the wooden weirs shown in his picture. 'Mussels are superb in that place', he explains, 'because of the wood to which they adhere and the gentle run of the sea.' His appreciation of a given fishing village extends to its people, boats and gear, to the sweep of its beach or the angle of its jetties. Once in Paris he drew with relish a map of the French harbours where he had worked, remembering the paintings he had derived from each. To understand how alien is his programme

to that of most members of the older generation, we need only recall locale's minor role in determining the great progressive movements of the earlier century. The Cubist alliance of Picasso and Braque flourished at Céret, it is true, but they could have painted what they did in another town and season.

I have already suggested, however, that Léonid's use of the scenic is carefully controlled, and it is a significant fact that when, at St. Tropez in the mid-1920s, he first settled definitively on his coastal subject matter, he worked under the guidance of the Cubist, Louis Marcoussis. Léonid cannot paint without the stimulus of an appropriate, external reality. Nevertheless, his subjects are transformed according to personal impulses which operate within the limits of a knowledgeable plastic discipline. He has not painted in the open air since his first professional years. His customary practice is to saturate his memory with impressions of a given scene, and then to execute a series of pictures at a nearby inn, insulated from excessive reality by the window-panes of his room. He seldom makes complete topographical drawings. He proceeds to an imaginative panorama through a reverence for local details, and gathers around him models of boats, fish traps, and other paraphernalia of the sea. Sand for him is an astonishingly rich and variable substance, and on its colour, texture, and patterns he lavishes an attention comparable to that which the Mannerist and Baroque painters reserved for precious cloth and furs.

Léonid's philosophy of painting was unquestionably affected by his training. Born in St. Petersburg in 1896 of a wealthy family, he was exiled by the Soviet Revolution, and took refuge in Finland. There, in 1918, Nicholas Roerich spoke to him enthusiastically about Maurice Denis as a teacher in Paris. Since Léonid had longed to live and paint in the French capital, he made his way to Paris the following year. He found that Denis was the director of the Académie Ranson, a small and rather informal school for painters which had been founded by one of Denis's colleagues in the group of symbolist artists, known as the 'Nabis', which had begun to meet in 1888 and to propound a new aesthetic based on Gauguin's synthetist discoveries. After Paul Ranson's death, his school was continued for his widow's benefit by his old associates, and among the teachers were Paul Sérusier, Félix Vallotton, Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard (who rarely appeared), and, of course, Denis.

Léonid studied at the Académie Ranson from 1920 to 1922. By that late date the symbolist-synthetist uprising had long since disbanded, of course. Yet something of its spirit persisted in the art of the school's instructors—a use of acute local characterization in conjunction with arbitrary dislocations of colour and space, an emphasis on spontaneity of emotional response. These are attributes of Léonid's own painting, however much it differs stylistically from that of his teachers, and it may be a meaningful fact that he should have continued to study at the fairly conservative Académie Ranson at a time when Picasso's bold, post-Cubist resurgence was everywhere felt in Paris, when the Purists were reducing the tenets of abstract art to a scholastic gospel. By temperament Léonid is unsuited both to insurrection and to dogma. While conceding that Monet was more of an innovator than Manet, he regards the latter as a finer painter; his own ceaseless regard for tonal values is based on experience rather than rote. In essence he remains an intimist like Vuillard and Bonnard, that is, a painter whose mainspring is an affectionate lyricism toward subjects he knows by heart. He still speaks respectfully of his masters at Ranson's school, though it cost him considerable effort to throw off Denis's insistence on dividing the palette into warm and cold tones, not ever to be mixed. Quite likely he outgrew this narrow doctrine through an independent study of the older masters, especially Brueghel, El Greco, Poussin, the brothers Le Nain, Canaletto, Guardi, and Corot.

Among Léonid's fellow-students at the Académie Ranson were his younger brother, Eugène, Christian Bérard, Thérèse Debains, Edouard Goerg, and Pierre Charbonnier. On leaving the school in 1922, these young artists worked together for a time in a studio at the apartment of Léonid's family on the Avenue Malakoff. In February 1926, with Pavel Tchelitchew, Kristians Tonny, and others, they held an exhibition at the Galerie Druet, whose director was Charbonnier's father-in-law and a brother of Thadée Natanson, the celebrated editor of the *Revue Blanche*. Previously Léonid had exhibited single works at the Salon des Indépendants, the Salon des Tuileries and the Salon d'Automne, and had had favourable notice from several critics. But the Druet exhibition won him a more general esteem. Its participants were soon labelled the 'Neo-Humanists' or the 'Neo-Romantics', first of all, I think, by Waldemar George. And despite the fact that the association of the

Druet painters was informal and of short duration, the phrase has had an abiding usefulness both in a practical and an historical sense. Like many group-titles, especially those externally applied rather than self-proclaimed, the epithet 'Neo-Romantics' served to launch a new movement, to dramatize the Druet artists' rejection of the predominantly architectonic premise of many of their elders, to point up their return to nostalgic, human sentiment. The group's theme was, and for its leaders has remained, man or his imprint on place.

At the time of the Druet exhibition, Léonid painted diverse subjects—landscape, figures, still life, portraits. Close to his brother and to Bérard, he travelled with them extensively in Italy. Presently, however, the three young men decided to go their separate ways as artists. Indeed, by the mid-1920s, their predilections were quite different, Bérard being most of all interested in the human figure, Eugène Berman in Renaissance and Baroque architecture, Léonid in the seaside. It was at St. Tropez on the French Riviera, as briefly noted, that Léonid decided to become a painter of marine subjects. From 1925 through 1928 he painted mostly along the Mediterranean coast of France, moving from one port or fishing village to another. Though continuing to work within the framework of an identifiable reality, he profited from Marcoussis's counsel in abstract design. A number of his pictures of this period, particularly certain views of Marseilles and Toulon, testify to a strong interest in an equilibrium of broad, angular forms, and the impressionism of his earlier years congeals into a more rigid order based on the Cubists' research. Yet the change was perhaps most of all disciplinary, and it never wholly obscured Léonid's passion for the lyric interpretation of particular environment.

The Mediterranean pictures were shown in one-man exhibitions at Paris, first at the Galerie Pierre (1926) and later at the Galerie Art Contemporain (1927). In 1929, weary of the Midi, Léonid moved north to Boulogne. There, and at Le Tréport the following year, he became for the first time, I think, a truly personal artist. To begin with, he abandoned the block-like forms so often used in his Mediterranean series, and relied more and more on what is almost certainly his greatest gift—a delicate control of opaque and translucent volumes. At Boulogne he discovered a theme to which he has returned persistently: a deep vista of sand and water,

with diminutive figures, portrayed as though viewed from a near, high cliff or from a low-flying balloon. Later on, affected by the Surrealists' revival of vast, enigmatic space, he elaborated the theme, but in 1929 he thought of it as stemming from the art of the abstractionists. His Boulogne paintings, with their zigzag allocation of sand and tide and titled perspective, may in fact owe something to the discoveries of Picasso's Cubist circle. But in them all sense of masonry construction has disappeared. The emphasis on atmospheric content has become pervasive, and is no longer forced into a cautious architectural framework, as it had been at Toulon and Marseilles. For geometry's impeccable edges Léonid had learned to substitute a romantic floodlighting which penetrates and illumines his flat and often curvilinear forms. The change was altogether happy. Whereas the Mediterranean pictures of 1925-8 seem a rather impersonal if skilled amalgam of impressionist with abstract traditions, the Boulogne series is sensuous and fresh.

Léonid did not, however, at this point renounce entirely the precedent of Cubism and its satellite movements. In early 1930, at Dieppe and Le Tréport (where, to avoid confusion with his brother, he changed his signature from 'Léonid Berman' to 'Léonid B.' or sometimes simply 'L.B.'), he steadily enlarged the scale of his figures. Remembering the hard-won liberties of the Cubists, he also used two different angles of perspective simultaneously, depicting the figures from normal eye-level, the backgrounds as if seen from above. The increase in human scale culminated in a series of small pictures showing single figures of fishermen or fisherwomen with huge nets (Plate 1). These paintings, too, reveal Léonid's continuing use of abstract elision, as in the featureless heads and 'unreal' backgrounds. But their mood is intensely romantic, their colours dark, rich, and encrusted, chiefly blacks, greens, and blues.

During the later months of his stay at Dieppe, Léonid became more nearly a realist than ever before. While retaining a broad, almost symbolist simplification of form in defining areas of beach, sea, and cliff, he began to characterize the postures and action of the Dieppe fisherfolk. Perhaps it was the sight of work-horses on the northern beaches that turned him in realism's direction, for he had made endless drawings of horses as a child, striving for a maximum accuracy in order to delight his mother. In any case, he completed

at Dieppe several close-up images of horses and their great-wheeled carts; his palette grew lighter, his use of chiaroscuro more Baroque. And at Trentemoult, in 1931 (where he dropped the 'B.' from his signature), the tendency toward a more direct interpretation of local scene continued, notably in a short series of pictures of fishermen drying their nets. These paintings, though still marked by the idyllicism which relates Léonid to such masters as the brothers Le Nain and the early Corot, are rather casual in composition, as though at this point the painter was most of all interested in seizing the essence of man's compact with region. Previously he had used the human figure either as a decorative accompaniment to landscape or as a dominant subject to which nature was a relatively abstract foil. But now he sought a synthesis to which man and specialized environment should make an equal contribution. A more precise reportage was necessary for his purpose; he celebrated the typical in the sense that Guardi and Canaletto had done so before him.

In the summer of 1931 Léonid moved to the island of Noirmoutier off the west coast near Nantes, and there found a new subject in the great salt marshes which had been cultivated by generations of peasants. The long rectangular stretches of bog, enclosed by narrow paths, revived his interest in far perspective, and he painted several vertical canvases almost entirely filled by marshes (Plate 2). The angle of vision, however, is less dramatic and exaggerated than in the Boulogne paintings of 1929; it is that of a very tall man standing on the flat ground rather than of an observer in a balloon or a figure on a cliff. The colours are tawny and limpid, and leave far behind the tenebrous chromatics of his earlier career.

After leaving Noirmoutier in the autumn, Léonid did no painting for a year and a half. Recently married, he went to live in the Dordogne, where he led an extremely primitive existence. One disaster followed another: his contract with the Parisian gallery of Jacques Bonjean was cancelled due to the depression; his marriage failed; and in 1933 he returned to Paris alone, penniless and with meagre hope for his future as an artist. But Christian Dior, now famous as a fashion designer but then a partner in Bonjean's gallery, lent him a house at Granville in Normandy. He began to work again, encouraged by the prospect of an exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York (the show took place in

the winter of 1935, and was followed by frequent exhibitions which established an American market for the painter's work). Léonid made rapid and impressive progress at Granville, though with characteristic humility he was afraid at the time that he had 'lost his hand'. Indeed, few paintings of his career seem more inspired and fluent than his 'Pêcheries et Viviers' of 1934 (Plate 3), with its panoramic sweep and salt-saturated atmosphere.

This picture and other works of the mid-1930s—painted at Granville, the island of Oléron, Etretat, Port-en-Bessin, and other harbours of western and northern France—often reveal the impact of the Surrealist aesthetic. Never a painter of Freudian fantasy, immune to the darker promptings of the subconscious mind, Léonid nevertheless has always had a strong sense of paradox. He likes and stresses those aspects of nature which, while retaining a basis in local fact, suggest the enigmatic and the strange. His horses in or near the water, his Noirmoutier scenes of land that is virtually sea, his fishermen wading unreasonably deep, his Portuguese sailors like Renaissance princes or protagonists of a ballet (Plate 5)—these are indications of an interest in the ambiguous side of nature's medal. The interest was confirmed rather than prompted by the art of the Surrealists, and it gives Léonid's painting an evocative air of discovery and reappraisal. If the properties of his quiet drama are natural in origin, he selects and distributes them with an instinct for poetic metaphor and provides them with an otherworldly ambience of light and space. It is the Surrealist, Yves Tanguy, to whom he seems most closely related in spirit. What image would result if Tanguy's world of sky were annealed with Léonid's world of sea? The conjecture is tempting, however impractical it may be.

In 1936 at Le-Grau-du-Roi, Basiège, and Fitou and in 1937 at Esnandes, the painter continued that patient consolidation of style which has distinguished his career as a whole. His colours at times become vigorous and contrasting, at other times reverted to close variations on an over-all tonality suggested by a given locale (Brittany, he says, is blue, and Normandy green). In particular during these years he achieved a notable eloquence in handling the spatial relationships of near, middle, and far ground, shifting the precision of focus with deft subtlety, as in the fine 'Enganes' (Plate 4). In 1937 he visited Italy for the first time since his early excursions with his brother and Bérard. By now,

however, he had become so thoroughly devoted to the coast of France that he had difficulty adjusting to the overwhelmingly architectural Italian scene. He painted several pictures of Florence, Cesenatico, and, above all, Venice, but in 1938 returned with a certain relief to the Channel area between Dieppe and Boulogne where, in fact, his mature career had begun.

The war years were intensely bitter for Léonid. A French citizen, he was mobilized in the army, and after its defeat worked for three years at forced labour on the construction of Hitler's Atlantic Wall near La Rochelle. He found it morally impossible to paint in the little time that remained his own. He worked with his fellow prisoners and waited and kept a diary, and in 1945 at last was able to resume his career at Carnac in Brittany. Almost at once his painting showed a new boldness and authority. During the long years of forced labour he had written in his diary: 'My painter's eye no longer rejoices in exuberance of colour, a vivid note, a harmonious form. Does it function only in a world of red, yellow or blue, where everything does not hide itself, is not khaki, and does not evoke war?' At Carnac in 1945 and 1946 he rediscovered his painter's world. And in 1947 on the coast of Portugal, in 1948 at Venice, which he now found eminently paintable, he brought to his art an elegiac quality more pronounced than ever before. An added maturity is evident in his post-war paintings, a greater flexibility and elegance, solidly grounded in lifelong reverence for medium (Plate 6).

Late in 1946 Léonid first came to America. He returned in 1948, and married the distinguished American harpsichordist, Sylvia Marlowe. He plans to make New York his permanent home, though he will visit Europe at intervals. For an artist to whom location means so much, this has been an important step, and many wondered whether he would find a suitable subject matter here. What troubled him most at first was the lack of affinity between figures on the American beaches and the beaches themselves. In the beginning he thought our seaside too large and bare; it seemed to lack the predictable ritual through which Europeans have earned their sustenance from the sea for countless generations; it was more likely to be populated by bathers or men in boats than by fishermen working *on foot*. Gradually, however, Léonid's eye has adjusted to the change, and lately he has found subjects that interest him deeply: the cove at Port Jefferson, Long Island;

a moss-covered live oak in Florida; the beaches at Provincetown, Massachusetts. His choice makes clear the essential privacy of his sense of the picturesque. One cannot tell beforehand what will hold his attention, though American friends have naturally tried; it is only after he has made his selection that it becomes for others quite inevitably his.

Unlike many of his elders, Léonid is not a painter whose invention is geared to annual exhibitions, to our era's craving for abrupt stylistic change and new pronouncement. He is a modest, steadfast, devoted artist, the sort whose name will never astound, but whose works, when one day seen in public galleries, may evoke for many a surprised and pleasurable response: 'There is a picture by that excellent painter, Léonid'.

RODERICK CAMERON

WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

XIX: CEYLON

COLOMBO: the drive from Colombo to Galle is along the coast, through a forest of cocoa-nut palms, past thatched villages. The palms sweep outwards over the sands which are traced with the foam of a restless sea. The coastline is obscured by a mist as if seen through a veil of thin gauze—the spume from the waves.

Every so often we passed a palm, its trunk laced round with rope; looking up we noticed that all the palms in the vicinity were joined to it by ropes, double cables thrown from palm top to palm top. These are the toddy trees kept especially for the drawing of toddy. Toddy, I learn, is a liquor obtained from the cocoa-nut palm, 'in its fresh state being called "toddy", a sweet and refreshing beverage but once fermented becoming "arrack", an intoxicating spirit'. Once tapped, the flower will not bear fruit. But as each flower is capable of yielding from one to two hundred pints of toddy a day it pays to sacrifice them for this purpose.

The palm groves are divided up into holdings. The tree we have seen laced with rope the owner uses as his ladder, and once up among the plumed tops he need not descend again until he