



Alberto Morrocco

Thackeray Gallery

Morrocco was born in the grey granite city of Aberdeen; something one could never tell from looking at his pictures which mostly treat of the light and colour of Italy. On deeper reflection, it is obvious that his marvellous use of colour, bright but never crude, lies in direct line of descent from the early 20th Century Scottish colourists. Morrocco was for many years head of painting at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee; his retirement has provided a rush of joie de vivre, and the time to re-explore sources of inspiration in his father's country of origin. Many of the works were painted in the Abruzzi, a coastal area not far from Rome little known to non-Italians. In the light of Morrocco's gentle hedonism Italy is shown at once modern and timeless; the neat arch-framed *Swimming Pool* is as contemporary as Hockney's California but the steady un-

changing light fell on the ancient Romans as well. Morrocco's solid curvaceous Italian women silhouetted against burning blue sometimes take on the unchangeability of goddesses (*Sunbathers*). Even the still life introduced into the foreground of *Sunbathers* is full of shapes from time immemorial: a curved milky green glass jug the crescent horns of a sliced melon — unassuming objects which take on a ritualistic aspect.

Like his colourist predecessors Morrocco is a master of still life: not using the elegant accoutrements of bourgeois life painted by Cadell and Peploe, but quirky bold objects: primary coloured children's toys, stumpy jug and volumetric fruits.

Still Life with Pineapple and Blue Bird seems like a treatise on the enjoyment of pink. From the rose madder of a halved watermelon to the hot spotted pink of a cloth, everything has its place, volume and picture surface vying for transcendence. Most of Morrocco's subjects though figurative, are subject to drastic simplification through his loaded, confident colours; the still lifes take their cue from Picasso technically and iconographically. Morrocco's musical instrument and Pierrot motif are however, used in a highly personal way, as can be seen in the magical syncopations of *The Clown's Table*. His people become still lifes too, and human nature is expressed by sympathetic silhouette: contrast the humped brown middle-aged man with the vital lines of the females in *Bathers at Terracina*. The same feeling for outlines is apparent in *Interior with Tropical Plants* the largest picture in the exhibition, which is one of the most appealing. It shows Morrocco's wife beside a small forest of indoor exotic plants, which filter the light to a humid tenderness (to Nov 18. See colour illustration)

SUSAN MORRIS