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I met Cazac in Paris, in 1959. I was introduced to him by our friend Beauford DeLaney. Cazac was very young then, but so possessed, and so utterly individual, that he was sometimes as exasperating as a boy of ten, and sometimes as inaccessible as a man on ninety. DeLaney appeared to understand him completely, but I didn't. Cazac said that he was French, and he is, but the French appeared to find this claim somewhat dubious, and so did I: it helped, but not by very much, to be informed that the Cazac family had roots in Finland and Brazil. For Cazac's real antecedents are to be found in the history – the mystery – which, ruthlessly, produces and shapes the artist.

Cazac was then experimenting with brûlages. These struck me with their violence, and, also, their depth. There was a violence on the surface which immediately assaulted the eye – and the surface, because the texture, or la matière, seemed volcanic. One sensed the danger which accompanies the unknown, or revelation. But, as one studied, or lived with, these beginner's voyages, one began to be pulled beneath the surface, into another depth, the depth, perhaps, from which a volcano erupted.

Or a Cazac. Through frustrating and innumerable experiments – most notably, les aquarelles – and many voyages, Cazac found himself evolving a new palette, in oils and in a new landscape, Tuscany. I awkwardly state, or suggest: Cazac had begun with oils, as an adolescent, but he could have had no palette – that is, a vocabulary, then: nor, as seemed apparent in Paris, had he yet found a landscape. The landscape of an artist is his irreducible element – is the artist – his evidence, his testimony – the grandeur of the light in Rembrandt, the opulence of Rubens, the mocking and often bitter carnival of Picasso, Dostoevski's Russian villages, Ingmar Bergman's wintry clocks. The artist searches for, and creates, a landscape which torments his inner eye.

The landscape, however, is real – it is not a fantasy – whether it be the landscape of Rimbaud, Cazac or Duke Ellington. People suffer, rejoice, live, love, die, in this landscape, go to war for landscape: which they are endlessly creating, and which is endlessly creating them.

The artist is probably the only real visionary because what he sees is real. He helps us to see what we have always known. He leads us back to reality again. So we can endure it, rejoice in it, and, even, begin to change it.

The tension between the surface and the depth in Cazac has become greater, more beautiful, and more demanding since those early, fiery, volcanic years. He defines spaces by challenging it. Consider those figures involved in what would appear to be domestic activity, or attempting to speak beneath walls clearly about to fall in on them, or staring into the face of the rock, or signalling to each other across vast chasms. The Tuscan landscape solicits us with stones, trees, waterfalls, figures decipherable and indecipherable, here, a house, here, a clump of trees, again a waterfall, a pilgrim, hunters, the horizon rising relentlessly, repeating itself at each new height, the landscape pulling us into it, hill upon hill, rising, rising, until the very idea of a horizon grows dim, and we are left, within ourselves, with the beauty and inexorability of the earth, the hope and the tyranny of the sky.

James Baldwin

St. Paul de Vence, 1977