

More Innocent, More Detached

Like many another surrealist, André Masson suffers from insomnia. There was a time when he spent the long, painful hours of darkness dreaming up new paintings, but not any more. Masson has called a halt to the shadowy flood of gutted women, warring insects, angry furniture, neon seas, chalk idols and galloping labyrinths that made him famous, and moved out into the sunshine to paint landscapes.

In his red-shuttered house overlooking Aix in French Provence, Masson tried to explain last week what the switch meant. "Don't think I'm going to return to the Barbizon school and paint descriptive landscapes," he began. "No, I'm still a surrealist, but a sun-loving one - seeking

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the fantastic and mysterious in broad daylight, under the sun."

How to Grow Old. Masson was once the unwilling prize pupil of Fresco Painter Puvis de Chavannes. "I loathe frescoes," he said, "and I have never done one since." During the '20s he mounted Montmartre, began painting the accomplished macabradabra on which his reputation rests.

"My style has often changed since then," he said. "but my real conversion to landscape painting goes back to the day I returned to French soil after four war years in the U.S. For a long time I doubted myself too much to paint without trying to prove anything, but with age one often fulfills the dreams of youth, paradoxical as that may seem. We grow more innocent, more detached."

How to Keep in Shape. Now a squat, high-domed 53, Masson starts the day with three cups of coffee which his wife brings to him in bed (she also advises him

Galerie Louise Leiris

MASSON'S "LA MONTAGNE STE.- VICTOIRE"

Break fast in bed.

about his painting on occasion, but he considers her taste too classical). After breakfast he pores over reproductions of old masters. Sometimes he copies their drawings, "to keep in shape, like a pianist."

Masson's studio window commands a view of Ste.-Victoire, the mountain, which Masson, like Cézanne* before him, has pictured again & again in all weathers. Compared with Cézannes faultlessly constructed landscapes, Masson's were explosive in composition. Cézanne's seemed to have the range of a 75, Masson's that of a cap-pistol - but they popped with the vivid brushwork that had always been his trade-mark.

Masson no longer sketches in pencil on the canvas. "It paralyzes the arrival of light," he says. "I now begin with a dark background and lighten it as my painting begins to live and grow like a pancake. Do you see the light in my painting? Is there not a certain freshness?"

Paris evidently thought there was. Masson's last show there was all but sold out.

*And Winston Churchill. whose painting of Ste.-Victoire is a fair, if fuzzy, essay in impressionist technique.