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Lothlorien

Albert Vanderburg

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Lothlorien

LOTHLORIEN

1965-66

environment consisting of acrylic-on-canvas panels and polychromed wood

16' length x 8' width x 7' height

A STATEMENT FROM THE ARTIST

Noting that my copy of "The Hobbit" bears the information nineteenth printing, I must readily admit to being a latecomer to the Tolkien circle. My tardiness was, however, I hope partially excused by the almost excessive attention paid to the book and the succeeding three volumes during the first virtually non-stop reading: one of the classic "stop only to find food (but not during the eating of it) and for a bare minimum of sleep". After this first marathon reading session, I immediately turned back to Chapters Six and Seven of Book II and reread the account of Lothlorien and the visit there by the Company of the Ring. After three readings of the entire saga, those two chapters remain (along with Chapter V of "The Hobbit") my favorites.

The biggest problem in attempting some sort of visual interpretation of the Lothlorien segment lay in the editing of an incredibly rich descriptive text. The journey into and the respite in Lothlorien is almost minutely described and it soon became evident that one single work, whether sculptural or two-dimensional, would not suffice nor would a series of non-related works accomplish what seemed at least the minimum necessary effect. The solution to the problem seemed to be incontestably the use of an environment where the viewer would be drawn into the work and immersed in an atmosphere as close to the original verbal description as possible.

This solution arrived at, the secondary problem immediately made itself felt and developed into a much more serious one: how to remain true to the text and the detailed description and at the same time produce a pictorial work of acceptable visual continuity and sustained interest. Whether this problem is satisfactorily solved I cannot say. The answer lies in whether or not the idea of an "interpretation" allows a certain degree of departure from the original and a flexibility in minor (or major) detail.

The Tolkien enthusiast will be quick to notice certain elements within the work which are inconsistent with the actual descriptive text -- these departures were each subjected to debate and consideration with concern for the work as a whole taking precedence in most cases over absolute attention to detail.

(continued)



A STATEMENT FROM THE ARTIST (continued)

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Blocking out the incidents to be depicted was an easier task, although the temptation to enlarge the work to include greater detail of Caras Galadon and the final farewell with its Fellini-like visual possibilities did provoke some hesitation. Nevertheless, the decision rested on the sequence leading from Nimrodel to Cerin Amroth to the dominating presence of Celeborn and Galadriel to the Company (with the notable absence of any attempt to really make absolute drawn characters in this case and the total absence of Frodo and Sam) to the Mirror of Galadriel and finally leaving with the outside "friend" and future guide spying from a tree. This sequence seemed to touch upon each major aspect of the two chapters and, in combination with the three-dimensional elements of the environment and the controlled lighting, established a visual atmosphere which is, I think, in keeping with the overall effect of the Tolkien description.

Lothlorien, as a place in Middle-Earth, was a world unique: a Utopian world inhabited by a race willing to lose their private Utopia for the benefit of the universal Positive; ruled by sovereigns unwilling to risk accruing unnecessary power for fear of distorting their natural ambition and clouding their personal intellectual responsibility, yet maintaining power sufficient to check the Negative and aid those in search of a fairer world. If I have made a major mistake in my own "Lothlorien", it is more probably in emphasizing the lightness, beauty and tranquillity of this best of all possible worlds, omitting reference to the intensity and dignity of the responsibility its inhabitants carried. If this be so, I plead guilty and stand in the good company of Sam Gamgee: "I feel as if I was inside a song, if you take my meaning."

ALBERT VANDERBURG

New York City
February, 1966

["LOTHLORIEN" will be exhibited at the Frederick Teuscher gallery, 53 West 83 Street, New York, in June. -- Dick Plotz]