Ceramics come to life

Review of the joint collective ceramics exhibition by Maltese and Cypriot artists

by Louis Laganà

One of the best collective art exhibitions during the first quarter of this year is undoubtedly the joint exhibition of ceramics by Maltese and Cypriot artists which is being held at the Ministry for Tourism and Culture in Merchants Street, Valletta.

This exhibition is the result of collaboration between Maltese and Cypriot artists and is the second of this kind held in Malta and Cyprus respectively. The works on show vary from free stand sculptures in stoneware and terracotta, wall plaques and ceramic plates and vessels produced by some of the most well-known ceramists from Malta and Cyprus. This exhibition is about the visual art experiences of 33 professional artists who ardently promote cross-cultural understanding and provide new perspectives and insights which enrich our lives.

We know that ceramics is a ubiquitous medium. It is one of mankind's oldest synthesised materials and is present in almost all aspects of our daily lives. However, ceramics is not simply a fixed media, but one where cultural, social, personal, historical and aesthetic concerns intersect. It is through the disconcerting fusion of roughness and smoothness, through the variety, the splendour of the glazes, and the uniqueness of each one that the beauty of ceramics comes to life.

In this exhibition these ceramic artists come from two member states of the EU, participating with high-quality works, showing not just a European legacy but also Mediterranean qualities which are unique in the ceramic tradition. This is evident in the themes of the works on show. For example, the theme associated with the Mediterranean Sea and the stories which inspired a mythology about it, is seen in the works of Fotos Demetriou, Koula Kalvari Maria Vassiliou and Constantinos Constantiinides. These artists demonstrate the ability to create metaphor out of style and effect a reaction in the audience.

Some Maltese and Cypriot artists display figurative work in ceramics with a distinct approach. Christiana Charalambous and Christina Constantinou Giusti, and Anastasia Lambaski Onisifrou did works in stoneware, expressing strongly the cultural identity of their origins. Maltese ceramists like Raymond Abela, Antoine Paul Camilleri and Mario Sammut are showing works that are inspired from Maltese heritage, human identity and behaviour. Other Cypriot artists who worked on figurative works and decorated vessels with figures are Oria Petropoulou, Christiana Thrasivoulidou, Vera Efthymiou Paralidou, Myro Psara, Andreas Kattos and Nina Iacovou who succeeded in creating a visual flow to their ceramic compositions.

The fertility theme is strongly felt in the works of Efthymios Symeou and Neville Ferry. Efthymios Symeou from Larnaca, is presenting a wall plaque entitled Source of Life, depicting symbolically the motif of the female genitalia. Neville Ferry, on the other hand, is exhibiting three wall plaques which have a spiritual approach rather than one of an erotic
nature. Other artists like Sue Mifsud and Pia Magro worked more on earth-centred themes while Sina Farrugia Micallef combined beautifully the Neolithic temple, rocks and hills in a painterly manner using monochromatic effects with delicate glazes.

In this ceramic art show we also come across works of an abstract nature. Charles Sammut, the main organiser of this project, shows his usual skill in stoneware with three pieces of sculpture. An interesting example is his Rising Sun, where the artist captures part of the bold shape of the sun expressed with orange hue glazes and refined textures in clay. Other artists from the Maltese group who produced a more abstract iconography are Valerio Schembri, George Muscat and Paul Haber. These ceramists are well known for their experiments in raku and other possibilities of combining clay with other material like metal. Other interesting works are those of Anne van den Bossche, a Belgian artist living in Malta, Julie Apap and Kenneth Grima who created abstract images inspired from nature.

Vassos Demetriou, the leader of the Cypriot group of ceramists, contributes to this art show with an impressive abstract piece consisting of two semi-spheres attached together expressing solidity and great tension in the composition, whereas, Zoe Mavogenous, Panikos Nestoras, Andri Iona and George Georgiades display decorative and semi-abstract earthenware, some made with vibrant glazes.

These pottery-devoted artists not only wanted to convey ideas about their recent explorations but also investigations and experiments with various materials, techniques, structures, and glazed decorations. They succeeded in showing the different functions and deep significations of the themes. One must mention that most of these artists have an outstanding and long experience in the art of ceramics. I am surely confident that such artistic endeavours and collaboration among artists will foster more interest so that future projects of this kind will give opportunities to other artists to show their works both locally and abroad.

• The exhibition runs until June 2 from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon.