Abstracts from the Unconscious

‘Introspections’ is the title of the current personal art exhibition by Gozitan artist, Christopher Saliba. This is his 10th personal exhibition. After his last exhibition in 2006, *Of Time and Timelessness*, Saliba created a body of work which reflects his continuous exploration of images derived from his surrounding environment and the unconscious. This consolidated his experience as an established artist who moved from the figurative and landscape to abstraction.

The power of art transforms our faith in the transcendental and bridges the gap between the believable and the unbelievable. That’s why contemporary artists like Christopher Saliba use the illusions of nature and express its essence. Abstraction becomes the tool for the artist to convey emotions derived from the daily visual experiences.

The artistic development of Christopher Saliba started when he studied art in education at the University of Malta where he qualified as an art teacher in 1996. Later he continued his art studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti ‘Pietro Vannucci’ in Perugia in Italy. Here he passed through the rigorous training in traditional drawing, painting and pictorial composition techniques, which stood him in good stead. We remember Saliba as the artist who transformed the images of our distinctive landscape into stylized abstracted icons by reducing the details in simple forms. Later, the artist also explored other contemporary tools like video and photographic installations. His oeuvre includes various conceptual and figurative works which address
themes like the existential quest and the spiritual attitude of humans. The link between humans and the environment was always a subject which Saliba investigated with great enthusiasm and discipline. In this work the artist represents the blending of the fractured and the whole and effectively created diverse surface textures which reveal a range of warm colors, light and shapes that symbolise the environment.

In this collection of abstract paintings, Christopher Saliba incarnates certain aesthetic and spiritual values which have the power to make us see things in a new light. The artist successfully moved from an outer to an internal realm. In the exhibition catalogue, Professor Friggieri suggests that Saliba’s paintings are “spiritual landscapes” expressing a “whirling inner world of sensations, impressions, fears, passions and hopes”. The artist’s work evolved from representational images of his investigation of human relations and the environment to a more emotional manifestation of visual representation of the non-objective world. The ‘inside world’ became the subject of his paintings. As the great psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung describes from where non-objective art is derived: “Non-objective art draws its content essentially from the ‘inside’. This ‘inside’ cannot correspond to consciousness, since consciousness contains images of objects as they are generally seen, and whose appearance must therefore necessarily conform to general expectations.”

The symbolic images emanating from the unconscious of the artist also have a spiritual connection. This spiritual connection is achieved through the use of colour. We find in Saliba’s work the use of dynamic colours ranging from vibrant reds and orange and dark blues dissolving into bright indigos.
My argument here is that the artist employs a primitivizing element with a colourful idiom as a portal to reach the inner world of spiritual relationship with Self. Kandinsky says that colours have a psychic effect. Colour is used to “produce a corresponding spiritual vibration, and it is only as a step towards this spiritual vibration that the elementary physical impression is of importance”.

This is an important moment for Christopher Saliba because he is celebrating another milestone in his artistic journey. It also articulates his unique expression, fascination and passion to discover new directions in creativity and provide us with intimate and insightful views of the internal and external visions of the world.

*The exhibition runs until the 30 April 2010 at the Auberge d’Italie, Merchant Street Valletta.*

**Louis Laganà**