

Symbols of 'Revelation'

Louis Laganà examines the recent 'symbolical' paintings by French artist, Raphael Labro

Since his successful exhibitions 'Rebirth' held at the Sinclair Gallery in Gharb, Gozo in August 2007, and 'Awakening' held in November 2007, at the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta, Raphael Labro's work evolved to a more symbolical and abstracted expression. In this exhibition entitled 'Revelation' the artist seeks a language which is universally accepted in contemporary visual culture.

Although 'Revelation' is a continuation of the previous exhibitions, the artist brings forth new visions "based on the sixty four elements of the universal law". His works are inspired by the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden moons. This is a visual interpretation of the description of creation in mythological legends about the beginning of the universe. In fact Mr. Labro is showing some 'symbolical' abstracted portraits of mythological figures like *Cyclops*, a member of a primordial giant race usually depicted with a single eye in the middle of its forehead, *Clieto* (Apollite) Queen of Atlantis, *Tellus* (the Roman Goddess of the Earth), *Delilha* and other modern mythologized figures like *Salvadore Dali* and *John Lennon*.

Raphael Labro embarked on this creative journey exploring the ancient symbols and reinterpreting them in his own synthesized colourful vocabulary of forms. Carl Gustav Jung tells us, "Symbols serve as a link between the archetype and consciousness and in a like manner between the artist, the work, and the audience, and the unconscious." Jung gave a significant meaning to the word "symbol". "It is the possible expression of an unknown thing." There is always an archetypal response from the unconscious when the symbol is living and pregnant with meaning. When the unconscious calls forth archetypal images into consciousness the individual finds it difficult to understand the meaning of the symbol. The symbol carries with it a strong emotional effect.

In his work Raphael Labro emphasizes the relationship between form and content and a visual exploration and expression of the spirit in and behind nature. This is what art historian Robert Goldwater termed as “symbolic animism”, namely, “the process of interiorization and expansion of primitivizing elements.” For example, we find this in the works of great masters like Paul Klee. Even in his writings Klee strengthened the primitivistic appeal for a return to the origins and marked the beginning of a new ‘spiritual era’. Artistic creation of this kind often relies on a type of feeling that sees matter not as lifeless and inert, but as animate, possessing its own unique spirit. Mr. Labro’s works demonstrate these qualities, and one could sense the artist’s concern with ancient myth and primordial nature. The artist also indicates the rapid and occasionally violent evolution of elemental forms.

Contemporary artists are returning to the more ‘primitivistic’ aspect of the way they express themselves. They find creative truth in the archetypal world of the ‘primitives.’ Art has become inclined towards a radical spiritualism that explains the mysterious forces of life, death and rebirth. The dissatisfaction with society, the dominating element of materialism of the ‘outer’ world, and the decadence of the cultural canons of our values has led to an inward psychic expression. The individual as well as the group are experiencing an awakening of the collective unconscious. This is a ‘primitivizing type of art’, and is, in a way, an escape for some; for others, it is a way of “sharing their individual psychic experiences with their audience by using the common language of the collective unconscious or politicized consciousness.”

‘Revelation’ is another milestone for Raphael Labro and I am sure that he will continue this unique experience of creating visionary archetypal images in his artistic journey. He has also great commitment to creativity which is matched by an equally strong faith in painting as dialogue.

The exhibition will run at the Mediterranean Conference Centre until 21 June 2008. Visiting hours: everyday from 10.00 – 16.00.