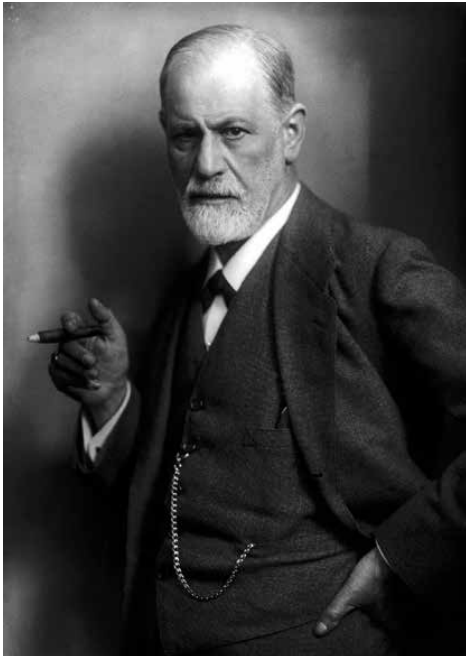


THE PSYCHIC FUNCTION OF ART

by Louis Laganà



Sigmund Freud, 1856-1939

Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life (Freud 1960:51).

Psychology, a study of psychic processes, can be applied to the study of literature, for the human psyche is the womb of all the arts and sciences (Jung 1966:160).

Since Sigmund Freud published his monograph on Leonardo da Vinci in 1910, psychoanalysts have attempted to understand the psychology of art and artists. Many writers explored new psychoanalytical methods and models to explain the aesthetic experience and the role of the individual artist's psychological dynamics in the development of culture.

The interpretation of dreams plays a central role in the theories of Freud and Jung. For Freud, dreams are 'the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious mind' (Freud 1900: 608). He established that dream interpretation assists in facilitating how 'long-forgotten experiences in childhood' become sources of a dream (204). Jung also considered dreams as a major force to gain knowledge of the unconscious mind. Yet, he did not believe that dreams were receptive but rather expressive and revealing. Dreams are 'impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche' (Jung 1933: 149).

Both Freud and Jung wrote and published their own theories to reveal the unconscious mind as represented in the dream state, and how it is reflected in active and imaginative conscious experiences.

Although at times their theories were challenged, and sometimes even discredited, many followers elaborated and modified their contributions further. Freud's theory of dreams reflects the conflict between pleasure and death. 'His resolution involves the curbing and prohibition of instinctual drives, the renunciation of the pleasure principle, and sublimation as a consequence of the acceptance of the reality principle, as represented by the father' (Knafo 2012: 130). This is manifested in Freud's use of sexual metaphors when describing Leonardo da Vinci's creativity, which indicates the genius's sublimation of sexual needs.

Jung, on the contrary, asserts that behind the real father stands the archetype of the father. Jung postulated that the moulding of the child's psyche can be discovered in the study of the family. 'The latest investigations show the predominating influence of the father's character in a family, often lasting for centuries' (Jung in Samuels 1988: 230).

Jung's dream symbols include religion and history. He believed that symbols transform the oedipal conflicts when the father shadow is conquered, thus creating a mythic hero. Jung elaborates thus on the creative process:

The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. (Jung 1967: 82-83).

Unlike Freud, Jung did not see art structured along sexual lines but in archetypes, which may be those of the collective or personal unconscious. For him, art was a creative process and not a neurosis. In his theory of aesthetics, Jung established that the artist expresses archetypes consciously or unconsciously (1967).

In my psychoanalytic discussion on the works of the four artists: Albert Joseph Caruana, Doranne Alden Caruana, Giuseppe Cassar and Maria Rossella Dalmas, I will be focusing on the creative process of each artist by analysing their landscape and portrait art. These artists come from different backgrounds and one must say that the father and daughter relationship had a particular influence on their works.

I will be employing theories by different psychoanalysts to analyse and discuss the works of the four artists. The concepts of sublimation by Freud, Jung's theory of individuation, archetypes and symbolism, Lacan's 'symbolic order' principle, Winnicott's object relations theory and other notions of the unconscious, are crucial for my evaluative criteria.¹

Maltese Landscape painting, identity and memory

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock (Schama 1995: 239).

The sense of identity and belonging of all human beings has a common denominator and attachment to the landscape. We find identity in landscape and place. Landscape is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing. We see it with our eyes but interpret it with our mind, and attribute values to landscape for intangible, spiritual reasons. Landscape is also a cultural construct in which our sense of place and memories become an important aspect to think of who we are. Therefore landscape painting is there as a memory of what existed before, and of what remained. It can be associated with pleasure, loss and sometimes even with pain.



Carl Gustav Jung, 1875-1961



Leonardo Da Vinci, *Self-portrait*, 1452-1519



William Turner, *The Grand Harbour*, Malta, 1830



Edward Caruana-Dingli, *Landscape*, undated



Aldo Micallef-Grimaud, *Landscape*, oil on canvas, 1980



George Fenech, *Il-Bispra*, oil on canvas, 2005

Before discussing the individual artists and their work, let us have a look at how landscape painting developed in Malta throughout these last three centuries.

Landscape painting in Malta

The history of landscape painting in Malta dates back to the 15th century, but it started as a genre after the 18th century. When the Knights of St John left Malta, around the year 1800, the British took over and many foreigners visited the islands. One of the well-known British romantic painters who visited Malta was J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851). His famous watercolour painting depicting the Grand Harbour is displayed at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta. Other artists who painted scenes of the islands are David Roberts (1796-1864), who stopped in Malta in June 1839 on his return journey from Egypt and the Holy Land, Edward Lear (1812-1888), on one of his many journeys in the Mediterranean, and Thomas Lyde Hornbrook (1780-1850), whose works bear a great similarity to compositions by his contemporary Maltese artist John (Giovanni) Schranz (1794 - 1882), a marine/landscape painter. Anton Schranz, John's father, was born in Ochsenhausen, Germany in 1769. The artist later settled on the island of Minorca, Spain, where he spent most of his life until he finally moved to Malta in his last few years, where he passed away in 1839. He is mostly known for his Grand Harbour scenes with sailing ships of the time (Heritage Malta 2014).

There were other foreign artists who painted marine views in watercolours and oils, such as John Wilson Carmichael (1800-1868). Little is also known about the British artist Col. V. Godfrey, whose watercolours of Malta were painted mainly around 1890 to 1910.

After this period, other painters who worked on marine and landscape views include Girolamo Gianni (1837-1895), Edward Caruana-Dingli (1876-1950), Robert Caruana-Dingli (1882 -1940), Gianni Vella (1885-1977) and other lesser known local artists.

The Maltese landscape has been based on an evolution of reflecting changes in the environment. Throughout the years, the socio-political conditions were also changing within the islands and this was reflected in landscape painting. After the Second World War and then Independence in 1964, local artists started to explore further landscape painting and tried to construct a new post-colonial identity. With the formation of the first modern art group in 1952 (the Modern Art Circle, and later the Atelier '56 in 1956, which was formed by a group of young artists who frequented the School of Art at that time), changes were felt in the way the local landscape was interpreted. Artists started to move away from the conventional representation of landscape painting. The new approach was basically divided into two genres: those artists who kept within the topographical tradition, like Aldo Micallef-Grimaud, George Fenech and Giuseppe Arcidiacono, and others who emphasised the expressionist, cubist and abstract expression. Artists like Esprit Barthet, Frank Portelli, Antoine Camilleri, Harry Alden, Joseph Mallia and others changed the way how one could interpret and represent the local landscape.

Although the four artists in our discussion are different from each other, they have one thing in common, which is their love for the environment and the conservation of the Maltese landscape. Stylistically, the four artists are more acquainted to the topographical element of landscape painting, however in some instances one could feel that they want to express a more metaphorical facet of the landscape.

When we look at Giuseppe Cassar's landscape paintings, we see how he captured the beauties of everyday life. In most of his landscapes, whether urban or rural, there is the experience of reality rather than a representation of it. A busy street scene like *il-Monti fi Triq it-Teatru* conveys moments of feeling rather than the truth of observation, yet the search for an unexpected moment of beauty is achieved and conquered. It is 'the "primary conception", a psychological state of inspiration - in which the heightened self-state, not the actual object, was the creative spark' (Hagman 2010:48). Cassar's art demonstrates a psychological dilemma, a moment of attraction that inspired the aesthetic experience which does not survive the object. We know that the artist's creative process starts at the place where he captures the scene by taking a photographic shot or a quick sketch of the place, and then retreats to his studio. Therefore the image which is then reconstructed on paper or canvas is far from the 'object's oppressive reality'. The artist then recovers the essential which has been lost - 'the primary conception', which he captured in his sketch or photograph. Cassar slowly continues to paint the empty space of the paper with his aesthetic experience - the sensation of beauty. It is the experience of the idealisation which characterises the 'self-object experience'. What the artist idealises in his paintings is felt to be perfect, and what is perfect is beautiful.

We must remember that Cassar passed through a hard time during his early days while he was studying medicine in Italy. The trauma he suffered while he was interned in various prisons in Italy left a psychological mark on the artist. One could also include the manifestation of the oedipal conflict, especially when his father wanted Cassar to become a medical doctor. This conflict was mild because of the circumstances of the war. Later, Cassar took up photography, which seems to be a continuation of his father's career and also the means to have an income, and continue the family business. Then there was a time when the artist decided to leave photography and find refuge in painting. He saw in painting an avenue for his lifelong efforts to recapture beauty. For Cassar, painting could be viewed as the creative opportunity for a transcendent state of fulfilment. For him it also became the possibility of self-healing and a fantasy of immortality. This sense of immortality is strongly felt in many of his watercolour paintings. He always wanted to convey what was, and still is, beautiful, especially the untouched physical environment of the Maltese rural landscape but also the built heritage.

In her approach to landscape painting, Maria Rossella Dalmas is somewhat different from her father. The artist symbolically uses great contrasts of light and darkness. Shadows dominate most of her work. A fine example is her acrylic



Giuseppe Cassar, *Triq it-Teatru*, 2001



Maria Rossella Dalmas, *il-Lunzjata Żebbuġ*, 2006



Maria Rossella Dalmas, *il-Lunzjata, Żebbuġ*, 2006



Albert Joseph Caruana, *Bingemma*, 1991



Albert Joseph Caruana, *Farmhouse at Żebbieġh*, 1992

painting *il-Lunzjata Żebbuġ* (2006) where the artist focuses mostly on the lower part of a column, rather than on the whole structure of the architecture. Dalmas claims that 'in her paintings she tries to concentrate on a detail rather than the whole picture' (2016). In her studies of architectural renderings of churches, chapels, narrow streets, and local buildings, the artist emphasises the shadows so to create a strong dramatic effect. In Dalmas' constructs of buildings, we find static shadows. Sometimes I see a similarity with the work of the great metaphysical artist, Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978). Shadows helped to convey the themes of 'departure, melancholy, strangeness and emptiness' (Krystal 1965:215). Symbolically they represent the state of mind of the artist whilst painting; it is the intensity of the experience at that moment when ideas and images emerge into consciousness. Like her father, Dalmas first captures the image of the landscape in photographic form, then she continues working on the painting at her studio by filtering the image, leaving the unnecessary out. It is a process of research and gestation. This is the moment when the concept of 'transitional space' comes into force when space and illusion are merged into one. Winnicott 'saw illusion as a space in which reality (the outer world) could be creatively transformed by inner experience' (Towsend in Kuhn 2013:179). In her paintings, Dalmas is preoccupied by the value of illusion which is necessary for symbol formation. It is an intense experience for the artist when ideas and images emerge into consciousness. 'The artist puts a part of her experience outside herself into the artwork where she can recognise it and relate to it' (183). Dalmas provides the right conditions to set the right 'mental space' which is separated from daily life. It is that very moment of the process of art making when the boundaries between inner and outer experience dissolve.

The process of personal integrity in analytical psychology is individuation² and is sometimes connected to creativity and art appreciation. The understanding of individuation in our context is the great experience of aesthetic fascination which fulfils instinctual impulses. In his landscape paintings, Albert Joseph Caruana tries to express the fundamental truths that the artist, as translator of images, learns how to simplify shapes and masses, which convey the essence of a subject better than its details. In fact, the essential practices of landscape painting are ranked in order of importance, that is, the ability to translate nature's complexity into fewer and more readable shapes and patterns. The experience of this process is greatly felt by many artists who move into the realm of expressing these artistic truths in their work. There are some fine examples of Caruana's watercolour rural landscapes which express this process well, such as *Bingemma* (1991), *Għajn Rihana* (2006), *Gnien Ingraw* (2010); and a series of farmhouse scenes like *Typical Farmhouse* (2000), *Farmhouse at Żebbieġh* (1992), and *Farmhouse at Wied Ghomor* (1994). As a visual translator, the artist emphasises and anticipates how to present information through reduced surface stories to the lowest common denominator about the landscape, as perceived in the mind of the viewer. The spots which the artist usually finds where to paint are unspoilt landscapes where freedom and space dominate the place. The sense of 'wilderness' in the artist's landscape paintings are not a mere landscape, but a 'state of mind' by Caruana himself. Whether consciously or not, he adopts it as part of his national, cultural and personal identity.

Albert Joseph Caruana creates exquisite landscape paintings that explore Malta's natural environment, architecture, heritage and local identity. While his works are autobiographical, they are also a narration of his personal psychological journey of individuation. The archetypal aspect of his own experiences is to illustrate the inner vision of life. This is reflected and seen when the artist includes the presence of a figure on the scene. While remaining true to his visual interpretation of the landscape and his clear palette, there is a kind of energy which suggests an inner vision freed from the constraints of representation. His watercolour landscapes became a symbol and a personal archetype.

Like her father, Doranne Alden Caruana enjoys *plein air* painting and frequently visits particular places around the islands. Her impressionist style is well suited to *plein air* painting and leaves the challenge to race against the changing light which is typical of Malta. Through ritualistic and repetitive actions, Alden Caruana explores the interdependence of imaginative and tangible spaces which surround her. Seascapes like *Ghajn Tuffieħa*, *The Grand Harbour from Roy's Room*, *Blue Lagoon*, and a vast collection of watercolour landscape paintings depicting Malta, express beauty, harmony and the sublime. In her work, she also portrays a metaphorical content that illustrates a sensitive and accurate idiosyncratic experience. Attractive landscapes are an example of the pleasure principle operating spontaneously and completely on the subjective pleasure. Through culture, we determine the principles of pleasures and preferences.

We know that the pleasure principle is central to Freud's aesthetics. He observed that the life-enhancing pleasure principle seems disrupted by something internal to the psyche. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*³ and its attitude on our understanding of the experience of art, we also need to consider the psychoanalytic conception of pleasure and Freud's theory of art which involve the sublimation of more primeval forms of pleasure.

Sublimation, a term coined by Sigmund Freud, is a process of redirecting psychical energy from ego-desire (sexual gratification) to the satisfaction of cultural aims (literature, art and politics, etc.). This psychical energy is necessarily withdrawn from sexuality. The sublime has also been described and adopted to understand landscape painting and their romantic propensity. The artist is in continuous search of external objects, like natural vistas, to reveal the grandeur of nature. In Alden Caruana's watercolour landscapes, we find that at first glance her approach to art appears to be freer than that of her dad's. The artist emphasises the natural free-flowing characteristics of watercolour to create more vibrant and expressive paintings.

To sum up, the four artists in our discussion represent the sublime in its various aspects. In his watercolour landscapes, Cassar offers us a movement from sublimity to beauty, as his own pictorial narrative has implied. Dalmas presents her symbolic landscapes through an alchemy of metaphor, which undergoes a process of idealistic sublimation. Caruana's watercolour paintings represent



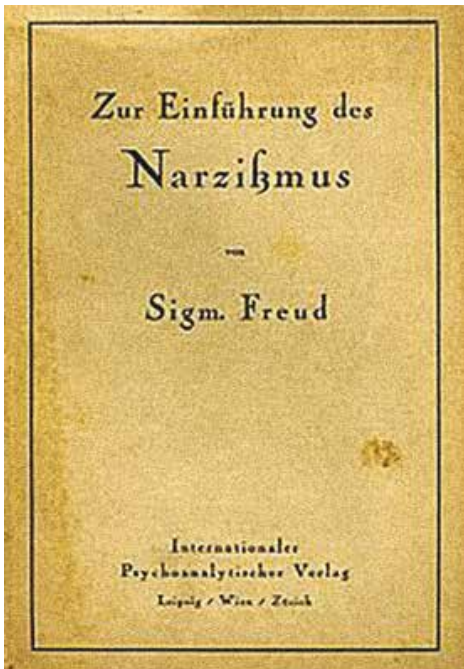
Doranne Alden Caruana, *Blue Lagoon-Comino*, 2013



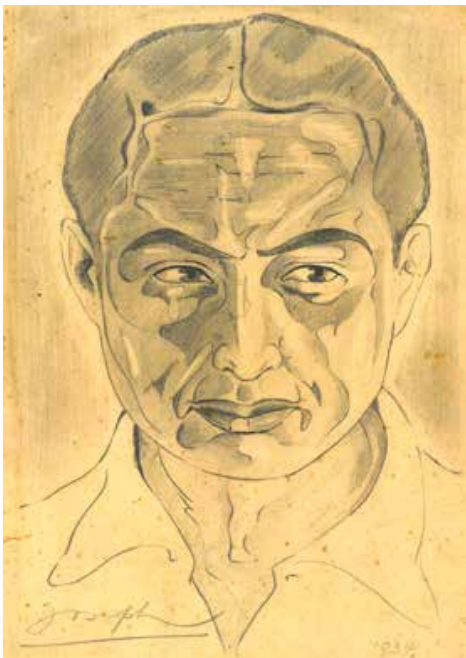
Doranne Alden Caruana, *The Grand Harbour from Roy's Room*



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Ghajn Tuffieħa*, 2013



On Narcissism (German: *Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*) is the 1914 essay by Sigmund Freud. It is widely considered as an introduction to his theories of narcissism. In this work, Freud sums up his earlier discussions on the subject of narcissism and considers its place in sexual development.



Giuseppe Cassar, *Self-portrait*, 1934

the instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings. It is a powerful and sublimated individuation which expresses tranquillity and calm. And finally, Alden Caruana seeks to express a romantic paradigm cast upon the landscape as an environment for humans to enhance the sublime aesthetic experience. In their creative processes, all of the four artists look for the truth and depict it in their own manner.

A Portrait of the Psyche

It is possible, therefore, that a work of art of this kind needs interpretation, and that until I have accomplished that interpretation I cannot come to know why I have been so powerfully affected. I even venture to hope that the effect of the work will undergo no diminution after we have succeeded in thus analyzing it (Freud 1914).

While Freud was visiting the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1908, he looked at the portraits of very famous artists and scientists and tried to search for signs of their character. He jotted down unsystematic observations which he entitled *Notes on Faces and Men*.⁴ Through these portraits, one could get a glimpse of the cultural achievements as creative transformations, or sublimations, of basic desires found in society. Freud attempted to find traces of these transformations left behind on the faces in the portraits. The encounter with art brings up the question of narcissism, which was a significant point in the development of Freud's theories. *On Narcissism* is the essay he wrote in 1914, which sums up narcissism and considers its place in sexual development.

Furthermore, in 1919, Freud wrote one of his rare discussions on the psychology of aesthetics which is 'The Uncanny'.⁵ Although he takes examples from literature, this is equally applied to images and their aesthetic power. He explores the psychology of the uncanny on two levels of child development: the pre-oedipal stage of primary narcissism and the oedipal-level of castration fear. They are both applied to the power of visual imagery and certain literary impressions. From this primary form of narcissism, which originally emerges as friendly and pleasurable, it re-emerges as terrifying. 'It is an unbounded self-love, which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind, the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death' (Freud 1919:387). The Uncanny stage introduces a notion of the mirror stage with the concept of the double [*doppelgänger*] (234). Freud further defines the narcissistic personality as 'one obsessed with a) What he is himself (actually himself), b) What he once was, c) What he would like to be, d) Someone who was once a part of himself' (71).

As we already know, photography played a very important role in the artistic development of Giuseppe Cassar. This is somehow reflected in his drawings and paintings. The preciseness and accuracy of his realistic imagery achieved in photography, is equally found in his numerous drawings and watercolour paintings.

Giuseppe Cassar worked on many portrait photographs throughout his career as a professional photographer. Among his portrait photographs of many clients, including a number of prominent people in Malta, we also find his self-portrait. Cassar interpreted his own photographic image in a painting which he executed in 1992. In his *Self-portrait with the Camera and Brush*, the artist shows his half-hidden face holding the camera placed in front of his face. It is a comfort zone for the artist. Cassar could not feel better than when he was representing himself accurately. It is a mirror shot of himself. The painting was executed in pencil and in black-and-white watercolour, with subtle washes of grey colour in the background. On the left hand side of the painting, we find the image of a vertical brush which symbolises his painting vocation, and the camera which represents his daily work.



Giuseppe Cassar, *Self-portrait with the Camera and Brush*, 1992

Cassar's self-portrait projects the mirror stage, which is an important moment in the construction of the self. I consider his self-portrait as an 'intellectual narcissistic' expression. It expresses the idea of fragmentation, the search of coherence and the formed-self. For Cassar, photographs were a medium of discovery and illusion, and at the same time were also found in the mirror stage. It is a constant search for unity and meaning.

Drawn from Freud's theories on narcissism, Lacan's 'mirror stage' seems to be a natural extension of the Romantic ideal of searching for the self (both in childhood and adult experiences). Cassar's narcissistic omnipotence was anchored in his parents' narcissistic needs and expectations. The artist wavered between opposites, between detachment and attachment, independence and dependence, and other aspects between his past and present. Cassar's departure from his family to a foreign land during adolescence, and the traumatic experience he suffered when interned in Italy, contributed to his sublimated artistic development.

Portraiture has always been chiefly about the individual and focuses on the facial character of the person, with enhanced attributes of identity. In Maria Rossella Dalmas' full-length self-portrait, we see a frontal view of the artist seated on a low stone wall. Her arms are crossed and resting on her black handbag and knees. The figure is ultimately an iconic representation of herself, executed in an expressionistic style. The artist is wearing an orange woollen jersey and a bright blue skirt contrasting deeply with the green vegetation of the background. Her typical round glasses mask her facial look which seems to be impassive with a touch of resentment. A sense of melancholy is transmitted to viewers. Dalmas's gaze remains self-absorbed and aloof. This sense of uneasiness is also found in some of her landscape paintings, especially in her street scenes. The mirroring aspect of the self is also, as Lacan stated, a 'narcissistic satisfaction in seeing oneself seeing oneself was a defensive effort aimed at eluding the objectifying consequences of the outside gaze' (Levine 2008:73). He continues to discuss the mirroring aspect of the artist by alluding to the three psychoanalytic orders:



An art lover in search of quality who stumbles upon the unusual self-portrait of Maria Rossella Dalmas might take a second look. It is merciless and should excite an intelligent observer to look deeper into what results as a true work of art. It ceases to be a usual flattering self-depiction and becomes attractive and collectable for its high level of sophistication.

Nicholas de Piro



Albert Joseph Caruana, *Self-portrait*, 1990

When as an artist, I look in the mirror to paint my self-portrait I see myself seeing myself; but what I do not see is the invisible gaze of the Other to which I am unconsciously showing myself in order to be acknowledged as worthy of recognition. Firstly, at the level of the Imaginary, the other, the little other, is someone like me, my ideal Ego, on the pattern of which I fashion myself as alter Ego. Secondly at the level of the Symbolic, the Other; the Big Other, the communal storehouse of signifiers from which my mother and father selected a name before my birth and set of descriptions thereafter that circumscribed me as the anxious object of their enigmatic desire. Thirdly, at the level of the Real, the other, the lost object or object 'a', is fallen fleshly part of me from which I was severed upon my forced entry into the Symbolic order of speech (ibid).

In a Lacanian sense, in her self-portrait, Dalmas reflects on her self-awareness and self-scrutiny based on an inner dialogue between herself and the other self. This is to say, that Dalmas' image on canvas is like a child in front of the mirror. 'The ambivalent nature of the mirror and its consequent ability to arouse feeling of uncanniness is given visual form' (Adams 1993:52). The process of creating her self-portrait is the process of identifying that the portrait is herself. It is also the process of communicating with herself as the other. Such communication contains both her narcissism and her enmity to herself. This is an inner conflict happening in her inner world which is reflected in the canvas: her self-portrait. The expressionistic brush strokes and the colour she used in her work, were not by pure chance, but are the reflection of signs and symptoms emerging from the artist's inner life.



Albert Joseph Caruana, *Self-portrait*, undated

My observation of Albert Joseph Caruana's self-portrait, executed in 1990, is that the shrewd look is actually the contrary of what the person is in real life. The artist here paints the contrary of what he is in character. His somewhat patronising look suggests a conceited confidence which is reinforced by the *contraposto* position and *bravura* painting of the foreshortening of his shoulders. His right hand is lightly supporting his face signifying genuine interest and critical thoughts, and his gaze, which is directed to viewers, creates tension. It is a confrontational portrait. In this self-portrait, Caruana tries to guard his inner contents, his feelings, by producing a different outer appearance. The face, like the painting, is what Lacan calls 'the curtain that hides the beauty' (Golan 2002). Even Jung elaborates on what he termed as 'persona', which is the individual presented to the world: 'a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual' (Jung 1953: 190). Those who know Caruana, know him as a timid and soft-spoken person. Therefore, my interpretation of the artist's self-portrait is attributed more to the objective aspect of the investigator's understanding of consciousness. So here, we have a situation where the conscious ego (objective) is observing the unconscious self (subjective). The artist identifies himself in his subjective interpretation of how he wants to show himself to the viewers. Without knowing, or even in a metaphorical sense, the artist creates an image of his 'ideal' self. Artists depict themselves as they want to be seen by others, but also as how they want to distinguish themselves from others. I do not consider this as a narcissistic act or process, but rather one of self-exploration.

Self-portraits are generally considered as an act of introspection, a search for the self and the truth. It is the artist facing himself or herself and society. But according to Lacan, there is no longer a truth of the self, but only its imaginary. Narcissism is a psycho-pathological expression and many times, it is used incorrectly to describe health psychic activities. Jung's approach to narcissism in his 1922 book, 'Analytische Psychologie und dichterisches Kunstwerk', explains that the term is mostly used in a false way. He dissociates himself from Freud's reductionism to explain art or religion through psychoanalysis, as he did in 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' (1910). Jung argues that 'only that part of art that is identical to the process of artistic creation can be an object of psychology, but that one that represents the proper essence of art' (75). He did not agree that each artist is a narcissist.

For example, meditation and contemplation are definitely not narcissistic. Sometimes, painting a self-portrait can be regarded as a form of visual contemplation. This is exactly what I see in Doranne Alden Caruana's self-portraits and other works, where the contemplation and representation of the maternal relationship as mother and daughter is evident. This duality of representation is found in some of her paintings like *Tutzing - Mum and Dora* (1997), and *Golden Bay* (2014). In these two paintings the artist depicted her mother and herself. One painting characterises their stay in Germany, while the other is the beach in Malta. The artist's paintings reflect her personal experiences and life.

Alden Caruana produced very few self-portraits, some in pencil and others in watercolours. The artist mostly explores the facial features of herself in a frontal position. In her self-portrait published in *The National Portrait Gallery of Malta* by Marquis de Piro, the artist used her favorite medium, watercolours. It is an expressionist interpretation of herself with a strong gaze and a slightly opened mouth. The artist is wearing a red blouse, which also suggests a confident expression of her personality, although in reality she may seem introvert. A painting similar to this one is another self-portrait in a blue top executed in 2011. In this instance, the look is directed straight at viewers. The face, the closed mouth, and even the colours, are stronger and imply a self-conscious embodiment of herself.

Stylistically, Doranne Alden Caruana's paintings range from a fluid version of impressionism to an expressionistic topology where the vibrant, yet liquid and loosely calligraphic imagery remains attached to nature. We know the artist as primarily a landscape and still life painter, but occasionally she produces a number of portraits and figure paintings. When looking at her work, one realises that the artist is inclined to paint inanimate objects, which surely suggest feminine consciousness rooted in the idealised mother archetype. Alden Caruana confirms that 'the maternal aspect is present mostly in the still life paintings with flowers and fruit, and the garden scenes' (Alden Caruana 2016).



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Tutzing Mum & Dora*, 1997



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Golden Bay*, 2014



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Self-portrait*, undated



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Self-portrait*, 2013

In another work, the artist illustrated the trigenerational aspect of the female: the Child, the Mother, and the Crone (the three aspects of the female as: *Virgin, Mother* and *Crone*), shown standing at the door of the house. This painting entitled *The Stivalas of Naxxar*, represents the three figures standing on three different levels, three steps which symbolically attribute to the three stages of life. The maternal protection is in the mother's gaze at the girl.

In some of her figurative work, she also employs symbols and motifs which are associated with femininity, like flowers, fruit, fields, gardens and still life objects which represent the self. Alden Caruana argues that the 'self' is also reflected in the people she depicts in her paintings. Her childhood memories are created through an array of figurative imagery. I argue that the artist's self-portraits and some of her figurative works, are part of her cultural formation and her relation with society. They also represent the maternal side of life.



Doranne Alden Caruana, *The Stivalas of Naxxar*, 2008

In psychoanalysis, self-portraits tell us about the 'self-objects' for the artist. It continues with the cohesion and continuity of the person's sense of self. We have seen that self-portraits are expressed in a symbolic manner to project ideas, feelings, memories or personality qualities into these objects and scenes. Artists see them as visually representing something important about their identities. They also create their own image in works of art for a number of reasons. Artists do not just explore their own identity, but also history, politics and the overall human experience in a very personal and special way. By exercising subtle control to express their moods, they reveal how they, as artists, see themselves. A self-portrait is intriguing because it is much more than a mirror reflection. Many times, it signifies as an intellectual guide to the otherness of the Self.



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Self-portrait*, at age 5, 2013



Doranne Alden Caruana, *Self-portrait*, 1987

Endnotes

¹ See my discussion on Lacan's 'symbolic order' and Winnicott's 'object relation theory' in the essay *The Creative Psyche and the Representation of Reality*, in *Two Generations of Maltese Artistic Families* (2015), pp 9-24.

² Von Franz, M.L., *The Process of Individuation*, in Jung, C.G., *Man and His Symbols*, 1964, p. 207.

Jung, C.G.

³ *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a 1920 essay by Sigmund Freud that marks a major turning point in his theoretical approach. Previously, Freud attributed most human behaviour to the sexual instinct. In this essay, he went "beyond" the simple pleasure principle developing his theory of drives with the addition of the death drives.

⁴ These notes have been published and discussed elsewhere (Molnar, 1998, pp. 41–2; Tögel, 2002, pp. 250–255).

⁵ In Freudian terminology: the uncanny is the mark of the return of the repressed. Freud's thesis: *unheimlich*, the uncanny = revelation of what is private and concealed, of what is hidden; *hidden not only from others, but also from the self* (See "Uncanny" 217).

⁶ In art, the term 'self-object' has a psychological meaning, an experience which mirrors one's value and specialness (the ideal self) and bring with another who is felt to possess a high degree of value and specialness (an idealised other). 'The artist feels in the presence of an ideal object that reflects back an experience of the ideal self.' See Hagmann, G., *The Artist's Mind*, (2010), 28-31.

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