

Visions of humanity

Louis Laganà previews an important retrospective exhibition by French artist Giacomo de Pass, who is considered as the 'mascot' of the great artists at the Atelier Guillard in Paris



Art historian and connoisseur, Dame Françoise Tempra organises several art exhibitions in Malta and abroad. The Tempra Academy is currently holding a retrospective art exhibition by the famous French artist, Giacomo de Pass. It is an avant première exhibition at the Mediterranean Conference Centre, in Valletta, showing a selection of works from 1955 to 2008, before the official exhibition which will be held at the Tretyakov Gallery National Museum in Moscow, Russia from May 20 till June 15.

Mr de Pass, who is a distinguished artist in sculpture, painting and lithography, started his initial training in art in 1954, at the Beaux-Arts in Casablanca, Morocco. During this period his work quickly received recognition and he furthered his artistic studies in the free academies in Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, and then in the Beaux-Arts Schools of Venice and Milan. In 1958, Mr de Pass joined the l'Atelier de la Bâcherie under Frochot, Jullian, de la Grande Chaumière and also studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de dessin in Montparnasse, Paris.

In his works of the early 1960s, Mr de Pass embarked on a series of themes linked with maternity. The figures in his paintings are crude and often expressed in thick, glutting strokes, similar to sculpting an image from paint. In some works like *Grossesse* (1960), *l'Enfant des commères* (1961), and *Le vieillard et l'enfant* (1964), the colours are mostly monochromatic. The artist uses a very limited palette, like blue or purple and earthy colours. The figures have also a primitivistic tendency and therefore the artist eliminated the

unnecessary details and created a direct and more raw expressive representation. Mr de Pass worked on other themes like prostitution, deviations advertising, beaten children or women's love. Certainly one sees a kind of paradox in many of these works. In past years the artist had already shown these characteristics. He argues that during this period his continuous struggle was to overcome his internal conflicts which seemed inherently insoluble. "The titles of my creations were therefore reflecting this state of mind, provoking my painting action: Revolt and resignation, desire and refusing, temptation and fleeing..."

In the years that followed Mr de Pass worked on surrealistic images of humans which were symbolically related to "Darkness, Light and Life". This series called Ombres, Lumi re, Vie, depicted different aspects of the situations in life which the artist experienced and expressed in visionary form. For example, in the work Lumi re et pr sences, the artist shows a female figure emerging from darkness; she is the divine creative power who comes to the painter at night out of cosmic space. She is also the anima, a messenger and bringer of new light. Archetypal figures frequently emerge in Mr de Pass' compositions, which reflect his persistent vision of humanity in general, as if seen through the blurred and dehumanised vehicle of a surveillance camera.

Perhaps today Mr de Pass is more well-known for his bronze sculptures. Like we find in his paintings, the artist uses curvilinear lines in his extraordinary compositions of figures, most of which look as if they are in flight. He managed to capture energy in motion and rendered the beauty of the human body through movement. A good example of this is found in his Etude series where the artist focuses mostly on the athletic and symbolical aspects of sports. Related to this theme, Mr de Pass executed a number of trophies and monumental sculptures for public places. His sculptures are also considered a reflection of the dynamism of humanity. Dame Tempra stated: "In his giant bronze sculptures, Mr de Pass becomes the eternal mirror of life: he judges our inadequacies, points out our failure to hear and listen to each other, he foretells our dissension leading to wars, he becomes the philosopher who understands our passions, our talents, our weaknesses... and our fate. But, above all, Mr de Pass remains the magician that makes the bronze perform our wildest dreams of today and tomorrow."

String instruments are particularly depicted in many ways and they seem to emerge in many paintings, lithographs and sculptures by Mr de Pass. We know there is an analogy between the female form and the shape of the guitar, violin, viola or any other string instrument. We see this in many famous works especially that of the Surrealists, for example, in the works of Man Ray, Chagall and others. This symbol is repeated and used in many ways by Mr de Pass especially in his lithographs. We should not forget that Mr de Pass was well grounded in the art of lithography during the 1960s. In fact at that time he worked at the Atelier Guillard in Paris, where he succeeded in mastering the art of lithography and the place which offered him the opportunity to prepare some graphic stones for well-known artists like Van Dongen, Foulon, Foulon, Dali and Picasso.

The artist commented that this experience made him grow artistically. He stated: "It was an incredible way to observe, analyse and live with these great artists with their diverse and own behaviour and creative motivations, which pushed me ahead on the way to reflection on art and creation." Today, Mr de Pass is considered as the "mascot", the youngest of the great artists of the Atelier Guillard.

This retrospective exhibition at the Mediterranean Conference Centre will be a great

opportunity for the public to have a closer look at the evolution of the art of Mr de Pass and his insightful vision of humanity. It also presents all aspects of the artist's remarkable Åuvre, including sculpture, painting, lithographs and drawings of figures, allegorical narratives and visionary art.

The works illustrate the artist's fascination with thoughts derived from the unconscious. Mr de Pass, the "eternal visionary", as Madame Temptra calls him, will be the first foreign contemporary artist invited to show his work at the most prestigious National Museum of Russian Fine Art, Tretyakov Gallery, under the auspices of the Municipality of Moscow, The Academy of Arts and the Association of the Russian painters "Art Fund".

The exhibition will run at the Mediterranean Conference Centre from Tuesday to April 30. To celebrate the exhibition, a vocal recital by the Russian ambassador's wife Tatiana Granovskaya and Vladimir Komarov will be held at Villa Temptra at 8 p.m. tomorrow.

Times of Malta:

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20080412/arts-entertainment/visions-of-humanity.203844>