

# Manuel Felix Quintanilla: The Essentialist Artist

The Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta is hosting an important art exhibition by Spanish artist, Manuel Felix Quintanilla who is the leading essentialist artist today. The exhibition has been organized by the Tempra Academy and was inaugurated on Thursday 1 May 2008 in the presence of distinguished guests including the organizer and chairperson of the Tempra Academy, Dame Françoise Tempra, Mina Tempra, the Spanish Ambassador to Malta, H.E. Maria Isabel Vicandi, the Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism, Dr. Mario De Marco, and Fr. Marius Zerafa, ex-Director of Museums. To celebrate the occasion, after the inauguration a short concert was held by the Euro Academy Youth Orchestra, which was organized by Mro. Alan Chircop and directed by Mro. Manoel Pirotta.

Manuel Felix Quintanilla was born in Burgos, Spain, in 1924 and studied architecture and painting at Madrid University and worked for some time at the Prado Museum in Madrid. He actually started his career as a writer, in fact, when he was just fourteen years of age he published a series of tales in the popular newspaper supplement “Amanecer”. This gave him a great incentive to continue writing. During his adolescent years he interested himself a great deal in the study of the great classical writers of his homeland like Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Quevedo and others and gradually he developed a great sense of poetical expression which is strongly felt in his early narrative novels and essays.

Between 1941 and 1945 Mr. Quintanilla was writing a new book called "Rio Sagrado". During this period he also attended some of the University lectures in literary fields although he did not agree with the university teaching system at that time. The poetry of Garcia Lorca, Cernuda and that of Alberti was very influential on the young generation of the time including Mr. Quintanilla.

During the sixties, the artist participated in many famous literary competitions like: Premio Planeta, El Ateneo of Seville, El Mundo and published his literary works like, "Anatomia de la Violenza", "Un Ciudadano del Siglo XX", "Un Dia un Hombre", "Mundo Raro" and "Vida Universo" which is found in the well-know magazine "Temas". His early well-known novels are "El Retablo de las Santas Pascuas", "Serpiente de las Santas Pascuas" and the esoteric and theosophical work, "La Balada del Mes de Mayo", "Un Sacerdote Conformista" and others. His most popular artistic literature includes a manifesto on essentialism, "Manifiesto Esencialista" published in four languages.

In this retrospective exhibition (1963-2008) around 125 works are on show and include different phases from the artist's repertoire. The major theme is the female nude, expressed in many ways and in different poses, many times with an essentialist approach to express simplification of form and reveal movement. Other works include still life, allegorical themes and abstracts.

One of the best works in this exhibition is 'the dance', a lithograph showing two female nudes dancing in full movement. The beauty of finely curved lines conveyed with a

signature style render the gracefulness of the female form. This is perhaps the best example of essentialism in the drawings and prints by Mr. Quintanilla. A more interesting, painterly example is 'the Lady', an oil painting of a female portrait executed with a charming black outline and highly decorated with small, yellow, green, red and black squares and rectangles which give a remarkable effect to the whole composition. The expressive gaze of the female face is portrayed with a few lines and brush strokes which is a characteristic of an essentialist painting. It is important to mention that behind the works of Manuel Quintanilla, there is a strong philosophical element, which is that of simplifying form. He successfully achieves this in his drawings, paintings and lithographs.

Throughout the years, art historian and connoisseur, Dame Françoise Tempra met the artist several times and organized many exhibitions of his works. She recalls: "I am deeply moved by his talent and carried away by a spontaneous enthusiasm, that I sometimes regret the immutable values of the cold and objective analysis of a work of art." She continues to relate that "before meeting Manuel Quintanilla the philosopher, I had been conquered by his facets of graphic artist, painter and poet. In the case of Manuel Quintanilla, torrent and volcano in permanent eruption in the evolution of thinking and in artistic creation, and my tremendous admiration inspired by the quality, richness and versatility of his literary and pictorial output, seem substantially justified."

When Manuel Quintanilla travelled to London and Rome, he had the opportunity to meet some of the world's important figures in Art, Music, Literature and Cinema. After

this period he wrote the book: “13 Fenomenos”, which included texts on Henry Moore, Drago Cherina, Manuel de Falla, Stravinsky, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Rafael Alberti, Federico Garcia Lorca, Federico Fellini, Luis Bunuel, Ernest Hemingway, Jacques O’Hana and Alexander Solzhenitzyn. Mr. Quintanilla preferred to find his own philosophy of life amongst journalists, theatre people, friends and their parties, as well as joining them at the famous “Café Gijon” in Madrid, the famous meeting place of intellectuals.

Dame Tempra comments that Quintanilla had started a task which he continues with great enthusiasm to blend talents in cultural associations which are so beneficial to the individuals’ creativity. One must say that she believes in the philosophy that the arts should be seen as complementary to each other and that there should be cross-cultural collaboration amongst artists.

Manuel Quintanilla has been living in Beckenham, Kent in U.K. since 1972 and has works in more than 32 museums around the world. For many years, he has been actively working as a painter and writer and has published many other novels and essays, including a biographical work on Picasso, “Homenaje a Picasso”, “Proceso a Picasso” and other writings on Essentialism. His latest works are: “De Dios y de Cristo” and “Universo en Mente”. He also formed a group of international painters and sculptors. Since 1960 Mr. Quintanilla has exhibited his works individually and collectively in many countries and his works are found in many private collections and in thirty-four museums around the world. He published more than one hundred and thirty literary works and won

more than 30 awards. The exhibition at the Mediterranean Conference Centre will remain open until Saturday 24 May 2008.

**Louis Laganà**

*Dr Laganà lectures at the Junior College and the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta.*