

A colourful realm of images

by Louis Laganà

In my writing about art criticism, I always stressed the importance of the unconscious as a source of inspiration for many artists. We know that works of art are the result of the most complicated psychic activity and that artists create works of art expressing powerful emotions, suffering, passions and crucial human experiences.



Liliana Fleri Soler, a new name in the Maltese visual art scene, is showing her series of paintings, sculptures and ceramics in an exhibition entitled *From the Cupboard* at the foyer of Hilton Malta. She has been working for some time with a variety of media, exploring drawing, painting, sculpture and ceramics. She has also experimented with different themes ranging from spiritual and sacred works, like the theme of the Apostles and the Virgin and the child, to figure painting and abstracts. Surely, her inspiration comes from different sources, especially images that arise spontaneously from the unconscious. Ms Fleri Soler maintains that "we tend to hoard memories and feelings without knowing and these trickle out when we least expect them".

In this exhibition, the artist is showing her latest explorations in ceramics. Four ceramic plaques elaborate on religious themes like the four gospels. In this work, Ms Fleri Soler wanted to compare the way each gospel begins with respect to the sort of people the evangelist was writing to. The artist argues that the spiritual nature of her art reflects the mysteries of the unknown and that her aim is to instil curiosity in her viewers and provoke interest in questions to which there is still no answer. It is worth mentioning here that Ms Fleri Soler was also commissioned to work on a series of panels of the Twelve Apostles and a painting of the Virgin and Child which are found at the Capua Hospital Chapel in Sliema.

In Ms Fleri Soler's abstracts we clearly see her personal response to materials. For example, in the work entitled *Wooden Blocks*, she constructed four colourful square panels composed with blocks of wood made from a discarded wooden beam. The inspiration comes from the way humans are manipulating space by transforming it into an urban environment and losing the balance between "construction and aesthetics". The artist is very aware of the changes that are happening in towns and villages. This idea is also reflected in three panels called *Metropolis*. The artist created three pieces of relief sculptures composed of synthesised shapes of streets, houses and other constructions, which make up an urban structure. These works are overlaid with patterns and geometric shapes derived from found objects. She is mostly interested in the overall compositional effects and the way she conveys a psychological mood to express the idea inspired by the experience of living in an urban environment. The colours used in these works mimic the graphic surfaces, vivid hues of signs, neon and light-emitting diodes. Is this the artist's vision of a provocative "reality"?

Ms Fleri Soler also created a series of pot-bellied female figures, which I find similar to the Russian matrioshka. Matrioshka is the diminutive form of *Matrona* or *Matriona*, which in Byzantine and ancient Roman means "well-respected woman". These "fat ladies", as the artist called them, are also a symbol of motherhood and fertility. The artist decorated them with colourful textures and shapes that look like multi-coloured ethnic dresses. They also have an

astonishing primordial grace and the artist symbolically echoes the archetypal idea of the female body as a vessel.

It is clear that the female figure is a very important element in the works of Ms Fleri Soler. In this exhibition two interesting paintings of a young girl are in my opinion a fundamental aspect of the artist's creative journey. These compositions are not meant to show a detailed analysis of the figures but they create an immediate effect of the whole as a unit. In the first painting a sign of coldness is felt through the way the seated melancholic figure with arms crossed on her lap is situated in a bare room. This slim girl is depicted in a blue dress and the pale blue background conveys a sense of expectation.

The symbolic atmosphere of the second work is given partly by the hanging picture of an elongated face with an orange pointed hat and the sign "open" behind the girl's head. The particular slight turn of the head shows her loneliness or suffering. The artist captured with great skill the transition stage from adolescence to adulthood by synthesising form and using a straightforward simplicity with the elegant and graceful planes of colour. Both paintings tell a story. In these works Ms Fleri Soler crystallises the archetypal female to transmit an existential experience.

Inspired from coloured broken glass, Ms Fleri Soler showed an interesting section of three large collages made with mixed media. She used paint applied back and front, in layers of coloured shapes of various pigmented materials and brush marks involving both illusionistic and physical space. They are sophisticated but yet paradoxically crude. These works are a lexicon of methods, kaleidoscopes of fractured references, which evoke interest in the viewers.

For the artist the end result of her mixed media collages was to achieve a feeling of balance and serenity through colour and to metaphorically signify a long time quest to reconcile what have been lost.

One can assert that Ms Fleri Soler's art is deeply inspired by the philosophical attributes to the symbolic attachment of the unconscious regions of the psyche. For her this exhibition is an important landmark in her artistic endeavour and this will pave the way for future explorations in creativity and the way to realise her dreams.

- *From the Cupboard runs at the foyer of Hilton Malta until December 31.*

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