

Painting a Dream

Sicilian artist who fell in love with Malta depicts myth and history with a romantic flair. Louis Laganà writes:

A Sicilian artist who made Malta his second home is Salvatore Montanucci who hails from Aci Catena, a province of Catania in Sicily. Although today the artist resides in Malta, he occasionally commutes between the two countries. He speaks with a kind of nostalgia for his country, in fact he stated: “Sicily is my native land. It gave me a lot, its culture, colours, its paradise made of nice parks and landscapes full of nature. When last year I took a group of Maltese students for a painting course in Sicily at Parco Jalari in Barcellona of Messina, and I drove throughout the Nebrodi Mountains, they were enchanted by the wonderful natural aspects of a Sicily unknown before. I always preferred small places, like Malta, where people have a big heart.”

Montanucci was born in 1965 and spent his childhood in the region of the small villages surrounding Mount Etna where he learned to admire and love nature. His artistic talent was shown when he was barely fourteen years of age and later in life he had his artistic training at the Art Institute in Agrigento, from where he obtained his Art Diploma.

His first personal exhibition was held in 1984 and later the artist held a series of other exhibitions in many Italian cities and also abroad. Between 1997 and 1999 Montanucci moved to the enchanted area of Colli Euganei in the province of Padova. Later in 2001 the artist came to live in Malta where he continued painting in his studio in Mosta and spent some time teaching art.

‘Dream is Reality’ was Montanucci’s latest expression and retrospective exhibition which was held last September at the Auberge d’Italie, in Merchants Street, Valletta. His works span from the period 1991- 2009 which coincided also with his stay in Malta. The artist showed a series of paintings expressing Mediterranean culture saturated in light and colour.

One of his favourite works which forms part of his latest collection is a representation of a well known square in Messina. The painting entitled *Messina - Palazzo Reale*, which was produced in 2000, was executed with oil on wood board. It is an interpretation taken from an old black and white print of the 18th Century, a time when artists used to travel and paint around Italy, Malta and other countries, collecting paintings of cities and places to offer people the opportunity to know places unknown to them before, as photography had not still been invented. In this work Montanucci successfully shows not just a typical Sicilian *piazza* as seen in the past but he captures also the soul of the place expressed with freshness of colours and light. The scene is tranquil and a slow life prevailed.

Montanucci uses various styles in his paintings from Naïve to neo-realistic interpretations of landscapes, architectural structures, people and cultural representations of Mediterranean countries. When asked about his naïveté style in his painting he pointed out: “I started to paint in the naïve style only after a long period of a career painting realistic and architectural themes. But from 2001 onwards I felt the need to enable adults to dream again like when they were children. Forms and colours are not there by coincidence but as a result of a study on the importance that they have in the human being’s life. When a child dreams after his mother narrates a fairytale, he imagines that all is reality and when he turns into an adult, he some times needs that reality becomes dream.”