

Mediterranean Nostalgia

We know today that interest in ‘outsider’ art is continuously growing because people find art more appealing than before. During the 1970’s interest in works of art by untrained artists began to grow. Collectors of this type of work started to call artists, ‘outsiders’ because they were outside the mainstream culture.

It was British art historian and critic, Roger Cardinal, who originated the term ‘outsider’ art in 1972 when he published his book using the same name, taking as a model the concept of the French painter, Jean Dubuffet’s categorization of a type of art called “art brut” which signifies “raw art” – including the art of the naïve, the innocent, the self-taught, the visionary, schizophrenics, and other categories of artists who are mostly outcasts from society. Today, the term Outsider Art has come to include a wider aesthetic spectrum of artists who are not directly influenced by the cultural sophistication of mainstream art.

In Malta there are also an increasing number of ‘outsider’ artists who from time to time show their work in public, and establish a name and infiltrate into the art market.

An artist who recently had the enthusiasm to integrate within the local art sphere is Josanne Mifsud Pikutzki. She is a self-taught artist, born in Birkirkara, Malta in 1966. She started showing interest in drawing and painting when she was still a young girl. Art was always her main language to express her emotions and experiences of life. Although she is a relatively newcomer to the world as an artist, her work was already exhibited in Germany and later in Malta when she became a member of the

Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. In fact she took part in several exhibitions organized by the society.

At a fairly young age, Mifsud Pikutzki immigrated to Germany in 1985, when she got married to a German and settled in the town of Bad Essen in Lower Saxony. During her first years in this foreign land, the artist felt homesick and the only way to come out of this melancholic condition was to paint and express her emotions to overcome her problem. In effect, she started painting Maltese landscapes and seascapes, basing the compositions of her drawings and paintings on the photographs she took during her holidays in Malta with her husband. This became an increasing and ongoing nostalgia.

Mifsud Pikutzki's started to experiment with a variety of materials, mastering on her own the use of oil colours, using them effectively on canvas on internationally acclaimed Mediterranean seaside scenes. The artist used strongly her vibrant, sensual, blue brush strokes of colour on the famous 'Azur Window' scene, which she painted more than six times. Other unforgettable landscapes, which attracted her interest, include, the typical scenes of Mdina, studies of streets and lanes of her original birthplace in Birkirkara, Maltese churches and chapels and other beautiful landscapes found in the South of Malta.

Josanne Mifsud Pikutzki's work could be classified under three aspects: The figurative, the experimental abstract work and the stylised landscape representation. In the first type, the figurative, in her series of paintings depicting traditional Maltese life, the artist managed to show the unique lifestyle of the village people, humble and

simple, either working in the fields or resting after a long day's work in the fields. In her paintings, Mifsud Pikutzki gives much importance to the popular customary crafts and hand made clothing. Here the artist wanted to show the Maltese traditions and typical figures of men and women either basking in the sun, relaxing in the quiet atmosphere of the countryside or killing the time, gossiping and enjoying themselves relating what is happening in the village or town.

Mifsud Pikutzki's abstracts are spontaneous with bright colourful oils to elicit powerful emotions. The artist feels that a colourful environment increases happiness and this is expressed in abstract forms, repeating different nuances, therefore fulfilling the person's expectations. In her latest abstracts, the artist made use of embossed mixed media, using the palette knife and thick *impasto*, to allow her to broad down motifs very quickly. Certain forms in her compositions, like the spiral, the circle and the triangle suggest a feeling of struggle between the chaos of unfettered expression and the logic of formal relationships of abstract forms and objects within the space of the canvas.

I believe that artists like Josanne Mifsud Pikutzki should be given space and opportunities to create more work that reflect the human conditions and environment in today's world and thus their works serve as visual metaphors to find the true meaning of life. The viewers are required to look at works of art by 'outsider' artists, not with a critical, intellectual eye but unconditionally accept the narrative experiences of the artist's life expressed without contamination by culture.

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