

Portrait

TONY SCIBERRAS (Part one)

The impression given by Tony Sciberras in his work is essentially a poetry of silence with a deep love for nature. A contemplative silence, a mood geared towards reflecting nature's animate and creative urge.

This atmosphere of serenity, peace, quite is achieved mainly through diffused colours and delicate hues. A perpetual haze hangs over his valleys and way-side chapels; mist envelops his seas, fields and paths. An early morning and evening haze with mitigated half-light that echoes the land of the Lotus Eaters.

Though his landscapes are a fleeting impression of acutality they are pregnant with a nostalgia for a past reality. For the artist is a conservationist. His work is a silent protest against the polluted modern technological bull-dozing world. It is a study in escapism. A positive escapism emphasising the beauty of nature in its primordial essence. A positive

protest by silently demonstrating what we have lost.

In a way the artist is a traditionalist. His subject matter is visual reality. Yet in many ways he is modern and even abstract. Forgetting for a moment the subject he illustrates one finds a meticulous and harmonious balance of shapes, forms and spaces with an affinity for Braque. This mathematical and geometric music flows from persistent and consistent endeavour towards perfection. His tendency to lay down a composition of horizontal constructed layers obtaining planes, distance, space and harmony points to early Tuscan Renaissance artists.

Yet his heart lies with the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Of Pissarro he is enamoured and like him his palette is based on earth colours. Like Cezanne he is not concerned about Man but about character and life in objects. His fruit have weight, solid flesh bursting with juice under the peel, his bluish-grey hills speak a language of stones, of rock, his flowers are particularly unique, his fields are fertile yearning to receive the seed, his air is crisp or moist and filled with sensuous subtle light.

His prudent, cautious and serious approach is felt in almost all his work. He has given so much so early that he is bent to reward us in future. He is budding with promise.

Several years have rolled by since my personal interpretation of Tony's works. The time factor helps us to reflect over past actions and thoughts and neatly puts everything into perspective, into relief. Tony's philosophy has changed very little since then. Though there might be slight changes in technique and a subtle development in concept.

My personal interpretation of Tony's art was accepted as valid by most art correspondents and favourably commented upon. In a way this was most unfortunate as it troubled the artist quite deeply. Sciberras' primary concern in art is painting as an end in itself. He is a painter first and foremost. For him painting is a natural urge, a need to be satisfied such as eating and sleeping, to be able to survive. Any consideration which goes beyond the scope of the act of painting, even when meaningful and positive is of secondary importance to him.

The trouble started when I emphasised Tony's conservationist concern for the local landscape. This was an unconscious feeling on his part and so he hoped that the shift of interest from his work to my subjective interpretation of it would not take root. Since he is not a social reformer or a social realist and does not feel the need to comment directly on man's





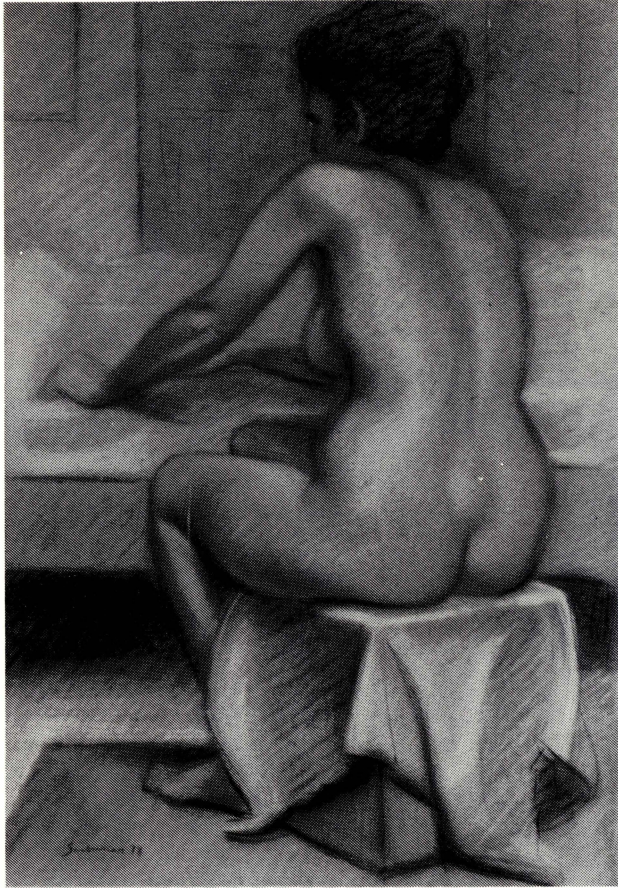
Landi – still life, 1977

(Photo Credit: P.E.G. Picture Library)

Flieli – still life, 1976

(Photo Credit: P.E.G. Picture Library)





Female Nude, 1978

(Photo Credit: P.E.G. Picture Library)

predicament he has ignored completely J. Bartolo's harsh criticism: "Bourgeois 'art', still life, love of nature, have nothing to do with our aesthetic needs of today. Art is for the people."

In his one-man exhibitoin of 1979, two years after such criticism Tony continued on his personal interpretation of visual reality. Tony Demicoli (b. 1946) in his catalogue essay for this exhibition mistakenly attributes the artist's endeavours in depicting the female nude as a sign that Sciberras is moving towards an analysis of man's condition, conflict, soul and feelings. For Tony Sciberras this was another serious exercise about the character and nature of objects, objects with a force within. His concern is not 'woman' but the female body with the life force that animates it. For Tony's paintings are all a study of shape and form rendering character, thus the abstract quality in his works. Contrary to common theory, he holds that abstract and figurative are neither parallel nor opposite to each other but essentially one. A work of art of whatever period depends as much on its abstract qualities as on what it actually represents and thus has a life of its own. In this sense we can still enjoy Botticelli's pictures even though we do not fully comprehend the meaning of the allegories they represent.

Tony's concern about the physical in nature does not prevent him from flights into the realm of lyrical, poetic essays. In fact his romantic vein is quite explicit. His humility, his simplicity on looking at nature verges on the lyrical. His art is unpretentious as Caesar Attard said. Dr Paul Heywood sums up his art with a deft stroke of his pen: "A breath of fresh air. The artist has shown that you can operate within the bounds of a tradition and create work that is fresh and original." Tony's work, unlike certain modern expressions, does not strain the relationship between artist and public.

The artist has already set high standards for himself. Tony will find it very difficult to outshine himself in the high level he has reached in his still lifes although, naturally he hopes to keep doing so for as long as he lives. Many agree that Tony excels in still life where he succeeds to endow inanimate objects with character and life. But his painstaking, patient and loving approach leaves little to chance and this is testified by his studies of landscapes, fields, flowers, clouds and sky as well as by his nudes. Neither has his interpretation of these subjects been overlooked. The comments made by the general public in the visitors' book of his exhibitions portray this quite amply.

"True to nature. Most scenes reveal a trend towards escapism. We need it!" This comment by Peter Mayo on Tony's work rings true. Attributing escapism to an artist is not criticism. Tony studies nature and visual reality to escape into the infinite. Man does not live on bread alone but hankers for the solace of the eternal and the permanent (spiritual communion) as much as his spirit is bound by the ephemeral, mundane, physical existence.

(to be continued)

E.V. Borg

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