

RICERKA

Mrs. Aurelia Brockdorff (imwielda l-Polonja, miżżeġa u toqgħod hawn Malta) qed tagħmel Kors ta' B.A. fl-Arti fl-Università ta' Malta mal-Professur Mario Buhagiar. Parti mill-istudju kien li kull student jagħżel knisja partikulari f'Malta u jaġħti deskrizzjoni u nformazzjoni dwar żewġ Artisti Maltin li l-pittura tagħhom tkun tinsab f'dik il-knisja partikulari.

B'sodisfazzjoni kbir, Mrs. Aurelia Brockdorff, għażlet il-Knisja Parrokkjali tagħna tal-Kalkara. Bħala pitturi għażlet il-Kwadru Titulari ta' San Ġużepp xogħol ta' Giuseppe Cali u l-Kwadru ta' San Filep xogħol ta' Lazzaro Pisani.

Biex ma jintilef xejn mis-sens ta' dan l-istudju interessanti, qed nippubblikaw dan l-artiklu fl-istil originali tiegħi, jigħiġi bl-Ingliz.

The Parish Church in Kalkara is positioned on the edge of the Kalkara Creek. Its building was finished in 1954. The Church is rather spacious for its 2800 parishioners. It is modestly decorated except for fine work in stone forming freeze like effect close to the ceiling. Ones attention is quickly directed to the paintings which adorn the walls and the main altar.

GIUSEPPE CALÌ **“ST. JOSEPH AS PROTECTOR”**

This is my first choice of the painting, I wanted to discuss Cali's "St. Joseph as Protector" since I have seen some of his works and was rather impressed by his versatility.

Giuseppe Cali (1846–1930) was born to a Neapolitan family which settled in Malta. His family was artistically gifted and when Giuseppe showed artistic talent his parents were urged to send him to study abroad. A generous financial help to this venue came from Guglielmo Eynaud. His studies took him first to Rome and then Naples. On his return to Malta in 1867 Cali started his prolific career as a painter. He was named by Ignazio Carlo Cortis with whom he worked closely as "the devil of the brush". He produced more than 600 works of art. Many of them are considered as masterpieces of Maltese Art.

Cali's work made a great impact on the Maltese society and commissions were forthcoming. His probably finest work is "The Death of Dragut". "St. Joseph as Protector" was commissioned by British Admiralty for the church in Kalkara. The titular painting is placed in the main altar, framed in an imposing stonework (lavur). It's a focal point of the altar and it measures 381cm by 178cm.

Painting is composed of two tiers. On the upper tier there is St. Joseph and Jesus as a little boy. They are standing on a nimbus to achieve certain balance. Since the



figure of Jesus is relatively small, to maintain proportions of the composition his nimbus is strikingly large.

The lower tier represents St. Peter holding keys in his right hand and a female religious figure who most probably portrays allegory of Christian Church. In one hand she is holding a wooden cross and in the other a chalice with illuminated host. I have tried to establish the identity of the female figure on the basis of the symbolic objects that she carries and was given two other options: St. Clare and St. Liberata. The figure on both tiers are schematically organised to give a coherence to the picture.

St. Peter and the female figure are sitting in the boat which is surrounded by furious green-blue seas, the waves are intensely fearful. The faces of St. Peter and the female figure are turned towards the towering figure of St. Joseph and Jesus. St. Joseph has his arm outstretched as to calm the tempestuous sea. There does not seem to be any sign of fear and despair on the faces of the two figures of the boat. One tends to believe that only nature here shows its power and in spite of this terrible storm nothing wrong can

happen to the people on the boat – they feel protected.

There is naturally overcast and dramatic atmosphere set around the figures and only a tiny ray of light can be seen just behind the head of St. Joseph. The painting was executed in oil on canvas dated 1898 and restored in 1990 by Mr. George Farrugia.

Rather peculiar feature of this work is the reversed signature of Cali.

Lazzaro Pisani was born in Żebbuġ in 1852. Although he was a painter of a great

standing, he never achieved the fame of his contemporary – Giuseppe Calì. Pisani trained under Michele Bellanti and Carlo Ignazio Cortis. Later he obtained his further schooling in art at Accademia di San Luca and British Academy in Rome. Pisani paintings and his style is described as scholastic and belongs to the purist era. At a Colonial Exhibition which was held in London in 1885 Pisani's canvas "The Death of Abel" was awarded a silver medal.

The spreading fame of Calì made him depart from his usual academic approach and tried to reach for a new expression in his artistic career. A strong evidence of this is reflected in the painting "St. Philip of Aggira".

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JOSEPH – KALKARA: ST. PHILIP OF AGGIRA



This is Pisani's finest painting and without doubt a splendid example of Maltese late nineteenth century art. It represents a group of three youths and a saint in the foreground. St. Philip who is dressed in pontifical robes exorcises a young man whose face expresses a great torment.

The Saint is resting his right hand on the head of the possessed youth. He is holding a prayer book in a left hand. The figures of three men which are modelled with a great emotion and that of the saint appear to create an inverted triangle. Pisani managed to envelope the figures with the landscape which seems to add to the drama of the moment.

The entrance of the cave is lit up by flicker of the oil lamp. Pisani to

emphasise the solemnity of the act placed vertical figure in “penumbra” behind the figures of St. Philip. A very powerful element of the landscape in the background is the eruption of the volcano which the painter created by means of an aerial perspective.

Pisani in St. Philip of Aggira successfully achieved a fine balance of the composition and a brilliant use of colour.

The painting is executed in oil on canvas and measures 232cm by 150cm. It is signed and dated – 1896. A rather interesting detail is a coat of arms shape in the left corner of the painting which depicts a lily.

CONCLUSION

I have enjoyed the fact finding part of the assignment and with the help of available literature practically established most curious coincidence. Lazzaro Pisani’s “St. Philip of Aggira” so highly influenced by the work of Calì in “The Death of Dragut” shows Pisani’s impeccable draughtsmanship and generated a great admiration.

Calì’s “St. Joseph as Protector” was probably executed with a rush and restorer Mr. Farrugia apparently can confirm it. Nevertheless, both paintings are a great example of Maltese Religious art of late nineteenth century.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- * In 1896 after the painting was exhibited at the Public Library, an art critic voiced the following opinion of Pisani’s work:
“col valore delle sue opere e non coi soffietti più o meno interessati della stampa mercenaria, da testimonianze dell’arte.”
- * The work was commissioned in 1896 by Master Mason Cilia, who was a builder of the Old Parish Church of St. Joseph and hailing from Żebbuġ. Cilia also paid for the installation of a side altar which was dedicated to St. Philip of Aggira which houses the painting.
- * During the war years, in anticipation of bombing, the painting was carried to Gozo to ensure its safe keeping and placed under the care.

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3. La Gazzetta Di Malta, 20.2.1912: “L’Arte in Malta”.
4. Emmanuel Fiorentino, Louis A. Grasso, “Giuseppe Calì 1846–1930”, Saint Int. Ltd. 1991, p.61.