

Escaping into the familiar



STEPHANIE FSADNI

Artist Silvio John Camilleri likes to wander away with his paintings... not to any particular far-flung destination but rather to places close to home.

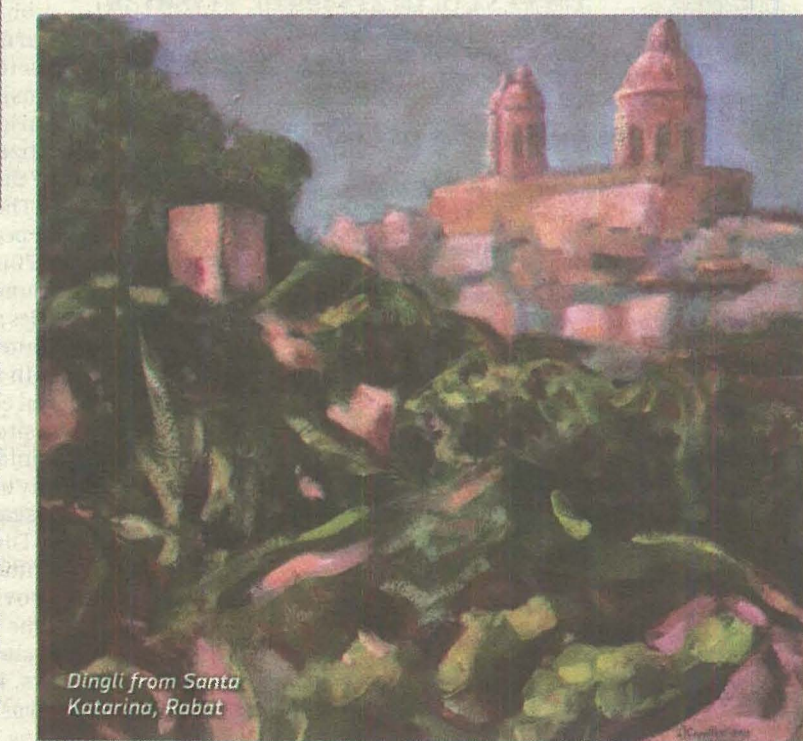
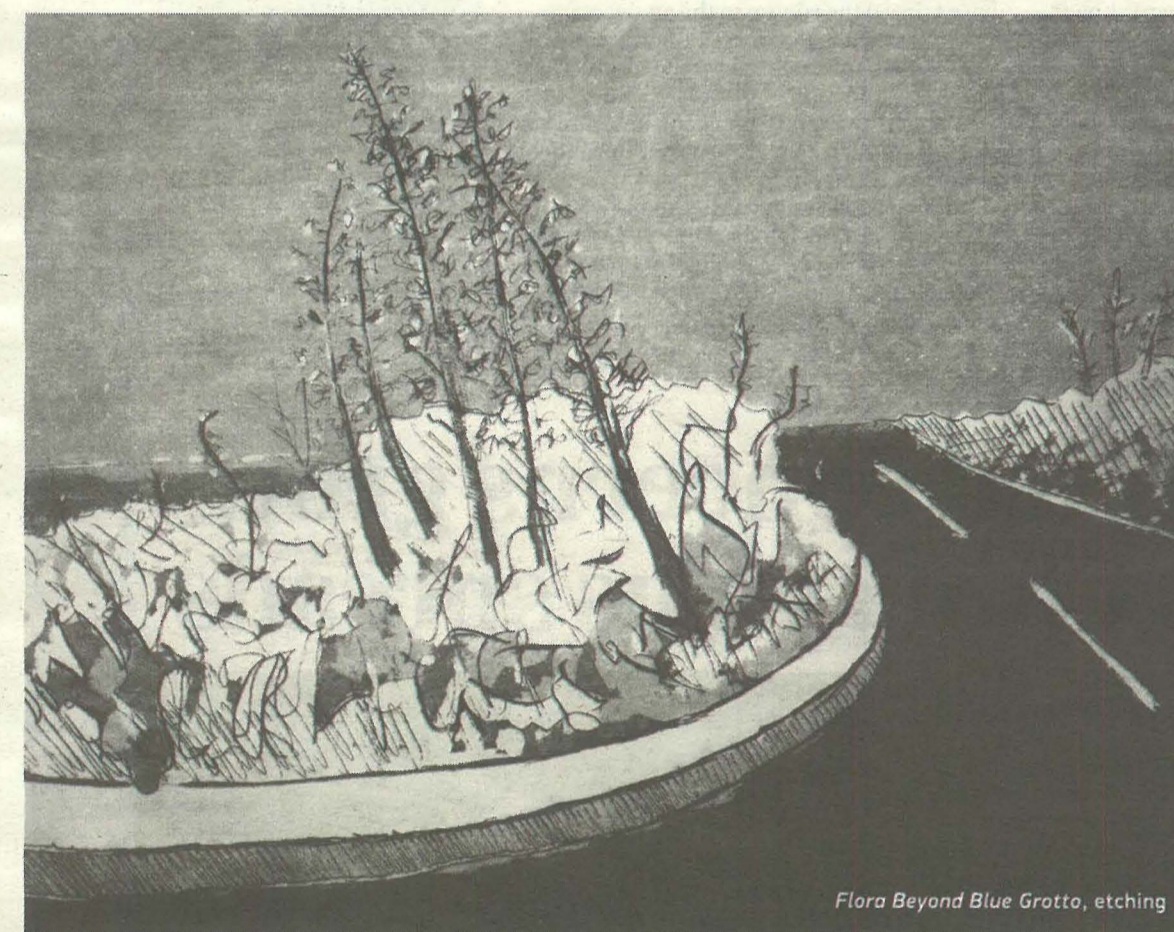
In his first solo exhibition, titled *Harbaholma - Images of Wistful Escape*, Mr Camilleri presents a personal visual diary, charting his multiple visits to Bir Miftuh in Gudja, Wied Babu in Żurrieq, the Laferla Cross in Siggiewi and Blue Grotto, among other localities.

“The real voyage of discovery consists in having new eyes”

Most of the 35 artworks – 33 of which are painted with acrylics and two are manually-printed etchings – inevitably include wild flora, secluded chapels, rock formations, country roads and the sea.

“I am particularly intrigued by the immediate surroundings,” the artist admits.

“I find that their interpretation helps in assimilating the mundane environment... Despite the fact I consider them as ordinary settings, these landscapes are strikingly



different from the urban context which we are persistently surrounded by. In this sense, such works may be interpreted as escapist – hence the title of the exhibition.”

Mr Camilleri reinterprets the same subjects various times, showing how familiar sights might repeatedly offer something new upon closer inspection.

Quoting Marcel Proust, the artist says that “the real voyage of discovery consists not of seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes”.

Curator Christian Attard reiterates that Mr Camilleri’s paintings “reassure us that if we were to stop

and look closely, with open hearts and minds, there are still localities of immense poetical beauty on these admittedly overbuilt islands”.

Dr Attard, however, adds that the artist does not shirk away from including cues of “encroaching modernity” and some paintings, for example, include electrical utility poles, which are well integrated with the natural landscapes.

Describing Mr Camilleri’s painting technique, Dr Attard says that his brushstrokes describe the forms and textures without ever going into superfluous detail, and

focus on capturing the “planes, shapes and forms”.

“What we end up with is far from a mere snapshot. It is the artist’s vision through and through,” Dr Attard says.

Mr Camilleri also considers the act of painting to be a form of meditation.

“It is also this labour of love which I would like to share with the viewer,” he concludes.

The exhibition runs at Palazzo de Piro in Bastion Street, Mdina, until February 28. For more information, visit the Facebook page *Harbaholma - An Art Exhibition*.