

ḤARBAḤOLMA

Images of a Wistful Escape

Silvio John Camilleri



Dingli from the limits of Rabat (50 x 50 cms)

Exhibition Curator: Dr. Christian Attard

**Palazzo De Piro, Bastion Street, Mdina
January - February 2020**



PALAZZO DE PIRO

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In this collection of images, Silvio John finds nurturing solace in the representation of either time-forgotten nooks, or else, conversely, in places overlooked because of over-familiarity. There is a quest for a simple beauty, for a nature unspoilt in these images that one might start wondering whether this is solely the result of an aching nostalgia rather than the result of hard, factual observation. As a matter of fact, these images record places that do exist, and even if one might think otherwise, they 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.

- *The Islet of Filfla from Dingli Cliffs* (50 x 59.5 cm)

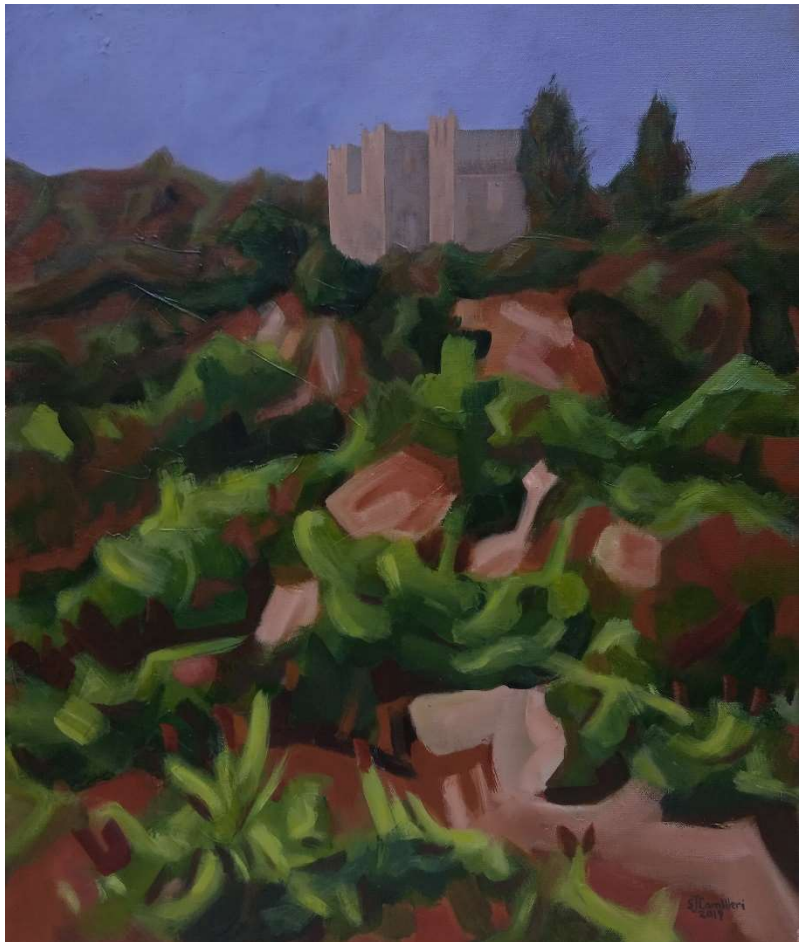
- *Returning from the Blue Grotto No. 6* (50 x 60cms)

- *Il-Munqar: Beak-Shaped Rock Formation, Żurrieq (No. 1)* (25 x 30cms)

All artworks were painted in acrylics in 2019, except where stated otherwise.

Measurements exclude framing, with height preceding width.

In most of these images, Silvio John chooses to pull our eyes right into the picture. We are led, typically through some receding pathway that loses itself in the distance, towards the sea beyond. Thus, while the artist meditates upon the singular beauty of the ragged rocks or the wild flora present in the foreground he still stretches his sight towards the sea. I feel that, for the artist, the sea is a metaphor of escape; of the thrill of possible lands and alternate existences that might lie just beyond one's reach. In other instances it is a black, asphalted road that does the trick. For the artist does not shirk away from including cues of an encroaching modernity. He does not choose, for example, to ignore electrical utility poles. Such nondescript poles, which most people might consider as ugly, are perfectly integrated with the natural landscape; it looks as if they were meant to be there.



Silvio John's brushstrokes describe the forms and textures without ever going into superfluous detail. They choose to 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. Christian Attard

- Above: *Girgenti No. 2 (60 x 50 cms)*

- Below: *Il-Munqar: Beak-Shaped Rock Formation, Żurrieq (No. 4) (20 x 60 cms)*





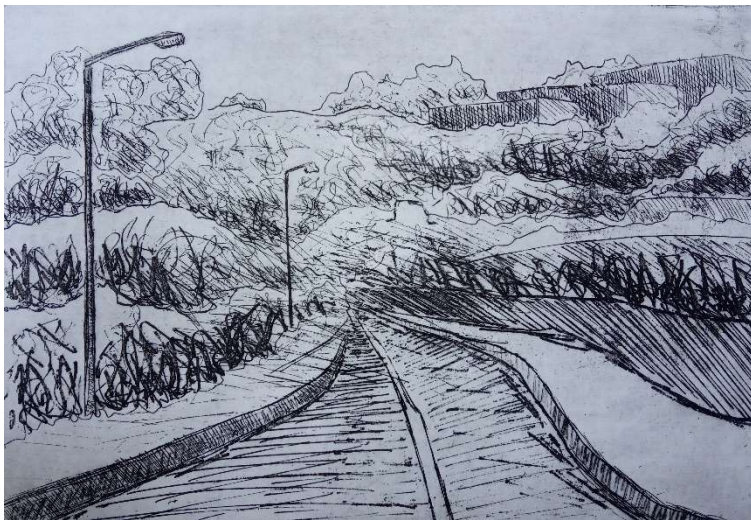
- Fireworks Factories at Żurriq No. 1 (50 x 59.5 cms)
- Girgenti No. 1 (40 x 50 cms)





“The real voyage of discovery consists not of seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes”

Marcel Proust



- *Returning from the Blue Grotto*
No. 4
(25 x 30 cms)

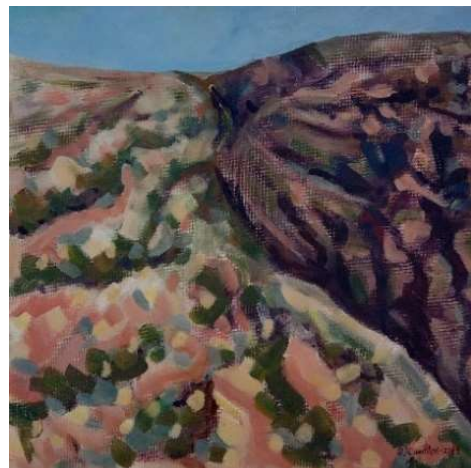


- *Returning from the Blue Grotto*
(Etching;
15 x 22 cms)

- *Gunpost at the Blue Grotto*
(40 x 60 cms)



I am particularly intrigued by the immediate surroundings since I find that their interpretation helps in assimilating the mundane environment while creating a personal visual diary. This series of works started with the smaller-sized ones meant as rather quick interpretations, while pondering about the influence which our surroundings exert on our daily life. Probably there is no particular reason why I chose to focus on the particular locations, other than being somewhat familiar with them. Despite that 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. Nevertheless, I do hope that these paintings may serve as a form of liberation from contemporary routine – even if such catharsis may be confined to some occasional dreamy moments.



Whilst acknowledging the public connotations of these places (some of them serving as 'postcard sites') I also think of them in terms of my personal presence when nearby. For instance, the memories of being close to the location for a short while when commuting, linger in my mind and make me eager to take a closer look each time I re-visit.

Apart from the reminiscences of the locations themselves, these works generate memories of the process of their execution. Some of them were painted in a relatively short time whilst others entailed multiple sessions of refinements or re-workings. The act of laying brushstrokes on canvas while consciously or subconsciously thinking about the resulting imagery may be considered as a form of meditation, and it is also this labour of love which I would like to share with the viewer.

Silvio John Camilleri

Previous page:

- *Returning from the Blue Grotto No. 1 (23.5 x 39.5 cm)*
- *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 4 (50 x 50cms)*
- *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 5 (50 x 50cms)*



- *The Islet of Filfla as seen from Żurrieq (30 x 40 cms)*



- *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 2 (30 x 40 cms)*



- *Returning from the Blue Grotto No. 3*



- St. Mary's Chapel in Bir Miftuħ, Gudja No. 2 (60 x 50 cms)
- Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 7 (20 x 60 cms)





- St. Mary's Chapel in Bir Miftuħ, Gudja No. 1 (50 x 50 cms)
- St. Mary's Chapel in Bir Miftuħ, Gudja No. 3 (40 x 50 cms)

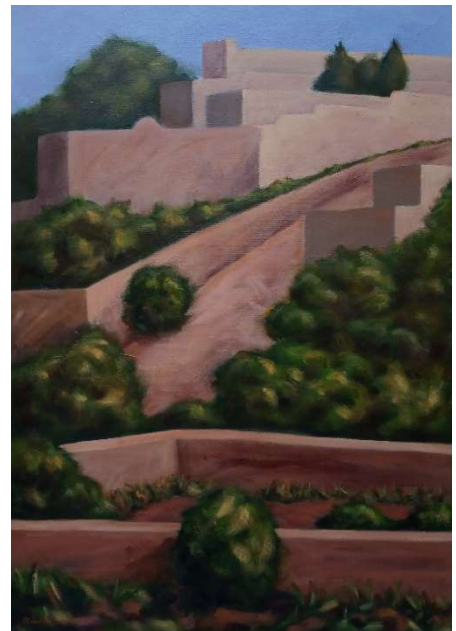




Silvio John Camilleri started attending the Malta Govt. School of Art in the late 1990s and following a break of some years while reading for a doctoral degree in finance, he resumed classes at the Malta Society of Arts in 2007. He studied human figure drawing under Eman Grima, Jesmond Vassallo and Dione Borg, printing techniques with Lino Borg, and followed other courses under the direction of Noel Azzopardi, Roderick Camilleri, Joseph L. Mallia, Joseph Mark Micallef, and Tony Sciberras. In his art, Silvio John is particularly keen on re-interpreting his renditions of any particular subject since he finds that when doing this, the emphasis shifts on the inquisitive artistic process rather than on the subject itself. This is the first solo exhibition by the artist, following his participation in various collective initiatives.



- Above: *Returning from the Blue Grotto No. 5* (20 x 60 cms)
- Below Left: *Chapel at the former Luqa Airport* (50 x 60 cms)
- Below Right: *Fireworks Factories at Żurrieq No. 2* (100 x 70 cm)





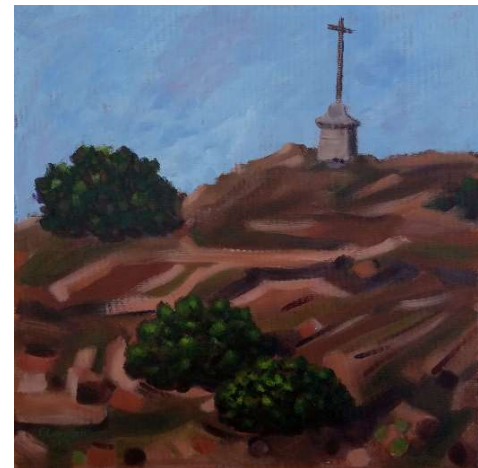
- Il-Munqar: Beak-Shaped Rock Formation, Żurrieq (No. 2) (29.5 x 29.5 cms)

- Returning from the Blue Grotto No. 2 (30 x 30cms)



- Il-Munqar: Beak-Shaped Rock Formation, Żurrieq (No. 3) (50 x 50 cms)

- Laferla Cross, Siggiewi (50 x 50 cms)



- The Islet of Filfla No. 2 (30 x 30 cms)

- The Islet of Filfla No. 1 (30 x 30 cms)





- Upper left: *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 6 (40 x 30cms)*
- Upper right: *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 3 (50 x 50cms)*
- Middle: *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 9 - Wintry (50 x 50cms)*
- Lower right: *Wied Babu: A Gorge in the South of Malta No. 8 - Nocturnal (40 x 50cms)*

Silvio John Camilleri

Contact Details –

Mobile: 7933 7178

Email:

silvio.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt

Exhibition Credits:

Dr. Christian Attard, Jean Pierre Cassar, Palazzo de Piro staff, Joe Philippe Abela, Victoria Agius, Lino Borg, Adrienne Cassar, Maria Rossella Dalmas, Ryan Falzon, Nicole Pace, Malcolm Saliba, the late Ġuzeppi Theuma, Ramon Vella Bamber.

