

The Art Unit salutes Victor Pasmore

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The shocking news that Victor Pasmore passed away on January 23, aged 89, reached me in Brussels, Belgium where I was lecturing to a group of international baccalaureate art students.

On my arrival in Malta, Dr Mario Buhagiar, head of the Art Unit at the University of Malta, phoned me up and asked me to write this short tribute and appreciation in the name of the department. I couldn't be more honoured, for this champion of abstract art always featured prominently in the exercises in art appreciation and criticism classes.

Victor Pasmore – a pioneer of abstract art – took up residence in Malta in 1966. Apparently, the first among Maltese artists to meet him was sculptor Victor Diacono who at the time worked at the counter of the Hotel Phoenicia.

Diacono recognised Pasmore straight away for he had read about him in books and magazines. Through this first contact Pasmore came to know architect Richard England and sculptor ceramist Gabriel Caruana – two of his closest friends in Malta.

His presence in Malta has also been very influential in promoting modern artistic expression on the island. His personal shows at the Society of

Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Cathedral Museum, Mdina and at Galleria Gaulos in Gozo are recorded in art history books as important landmarks in Pasmore's career.

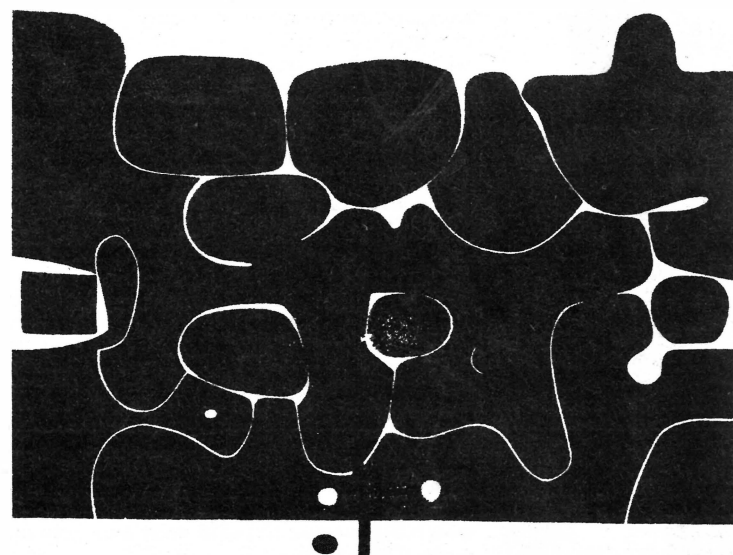
He encouraged Maltese artists by purchasing their works, and always praised their high standards even abroad. This he expressed in his speech when he was awarded the golden medal at the Institute of International Studies, University of Malta, Valletta.

Victor Pasmore's playful and poetic explorations do not necessarily show a direct reference to Malta. However, works such as *Blue Symphony* (1986-8), *Silent Sky* (1989), *Blue Water* (1990), *A Garden in Malta* (1990), *Old Trees in Malta* (1990) and *The Temples of Malta* series (1992) are clear references to themes that have inspired some of his works.

His painting, although abstract in essence, was very much based on observation – studies of flowers, portraits, drawings of his wife – which he experienced as the growth of form, the relationship of line, whether thick, thin, straight or curved.

In Pasmore's words, "the rejection of objective method in visual

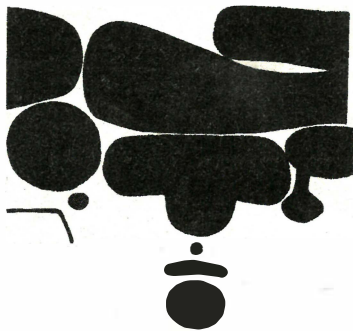
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Champion of abstract art

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representation, initiated by Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism, released the irrational factors inherent in the creative process and, in so doing, enabled them to achieve unprecedented freedom in painting. But in fact this does not mean that all objective standpoints and rational methods have become redundant; it means only that their function has changed in order to serve intrinsic processes of development. Modern painting, therefore, has evolved as both a new naturalism and a new humanism in which independence is the key inspiration" (1992).



"Points of Contact" (1980)

Pasmore dedicated many years to art teaching. He was a great teacher, lectured extensively, was in charge of the Department of Painting of King's College, University of Durham, and ran short courses in summer and winter schools with his wife Wendy, organising what he called Didactic Exhibitions.

His foundation course at the Central School was based on Kandinsky's treatise: *Point and Line to Plane* (Dessau 1926) and his discovery of Klee, Turner and Mondrian, who made him realise that in art there is not one solution but a process of various possibilities.

Richard England in his appreciation (*The Sunday Times*, February 1) wrote: "Pasmore's art was an art where nothing was superfluous, nothing could be added, nothing subtracted – no more and no less. Yet, it was an art which, at the same time, was constantly in a state of flux; renewing itself with echoes and pre-echoes in a metamorphosis of meanings towards the ultimate goal of complete subjective freedom: a freeing in material form of moments of consciousness."

Incidentally, I realised that in the appreciation published in *The Guardian* of January 24, by



Victor Pasmore

Norbert Lynton, a work by the artist, Senza Titolo (1982), appeared upside down... and yet, nothing of its splendour, harmony, space and magic seemed to be affected. The answer to this secret lies in what Pasmore was searching, as appears in some of the titles given to his works: *Harmony of Opposing Forces* (1962-3), *Metamorphosis* (1985), *Linear Image* (1986), *The Space Within* (1987-8).

Dear Victor Pasmore, the Art Unit and its students at the University of Malta bids you farewell and thanks you for your art.