

The language of colour

Artist Josette Caruana (b. 1959) was recently invited by Volksbank Malta Ltd to exhibit her works in their new premises at 53, Dingli Street in Sliema. It was an occasion to view a comprehensive collection of her main successive phases, one based and leading on to another, intended to elucidate the inner consistency and logic in her artistic development.

This exhibition, entitled *Colorama*, was a manifestation of the importance the artist gives to the intensity of colour.

Paul Sant Cassia, who wrote an introduc-

Joseph Paul Cassar

tion to her brochure, remarks: "Josette Caruana understands colour – iridescent, exuberant, controlled, intense yet relaxed, mature yet childlike."

Her preoccupations focus on the language of colour as can be understood from some of the titles given to her works: *Colore rende liberi oltre la rete*, *Luce uditivo*, *Sogni di luce*, *Colorama* and *Glass Sculptures in Red, Orange, Turquoise, Green and Pink*. With subject matter set free, Josette Caruana focuses on different colour hues.

It was Vincent van Gogh who, back in 1885, wrote that "colour expresses something by itself." In Caruana's work, colour renders volume, defines form and, once laid flat on a canvas, it creates a pattern. These have become her prime constituents in painting.

It is no surprise that today the more one looks into the fundamentals of art, the more consistently colour turns up at the very centre of enquiry. Heightened colour is energy, waiting to be released. It has become so important in our lives.

On viewing Josette Caruana's colour composition, Claude Monet came to mind (incidentally, a reference to Monet's *Water Lily* paintings is made in the brochure). When Pasteur was discovering the existence of microbes, Monet and the impressionists were discovering what was the real colour of shadows, how colours reacted upon each other and how far they penetrated within each other or remained separate.

This is all very evident in Caruana's *Turquoise Yellow* (1997) series in oil pastels which the artist told me were inspired from the colourful flags of various European countries while attending an art symposium in Austria. She explores the pictorial possibilities of curved and straight lines within a framework of a colour chart to investigate



Yellow Blue 1995

the power of colour alone. In this way she suggests a mood, reflective or dynamic.

The optical analysis of prismatic and complementary colours, as discussed in Michel-Eugene Chevreul's treatise: 'On the Law of the Simultaneous Contrasts of Colours' (1839), is put to work in certain colour juxtapositions which intensify the adjoining hue, creating quite different effects depending on their placement.

For instance, a dark blue (which the artist loves to use) will make an adjoining yellow appear more green, while a light blue will create a more orange effect on the same yellow. It all becomes an exercise concerned with the rhythmic and musical associations of a symphony.

Josette Caruana is currently taking part in *Frequences* – a group of European artists exhibiting at the German Maltese Circle and at the National Museum of Fine Arts respectively. She plans to hold a solo sculpture exhibition in the same museum next November.



Turquoise Yellow 1997