

Alfred Chircop's meaningful abstractions

After the great success that artist Alfred Chircop had with his exhibition of paintings at the Studio Seven Complex in Birkirkara in 1996, and the subsequent one of monoprints executed between 1993 and 1998 at the luminous loggia of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta, the artist has now chosen the Xara Palace in Mdina as his new venue to serve as a showcase for his paintings.

I remember vividly in his last exhibition (1998) the passionate speech by Prof. Joe Friggieri, an admirer and friend of the artist, who spoke of the artist's fertile imagination, its aesthetic pleasure in the rich harmonies of form and colour, its sense of unity, clarity and harmony. The whole point was that Chircop's art does not wear off because in the artist's style and vision of painting one experiences the constant evolution, the subtle changes and the more dramatic ones.

In the present brochure, art historian and art critic Emmanuel Fiorentino states:

"Whenever Chircop comes with new material, I never cease to stop, ponder and wonder. Rarely have I witnessed a consistency of production which equally builds on itself with such apparent spontaneity and yet with a sustained perception that leads to aesthetic contemplation."

So far as I go, I'm convinced that my observations are inadequate to describe the complex phenomenon of

Chircop's magical operations of creating these paintings. There is, I feel, one serious drawback to my contribution: Chircop's abstractions are not concerned with words. Words are useful in so far as we place his creations before the written word. Having said this, I'll pass only a few reflections.

Chircop peels away the formal sheath from an image to suddenly gain access to natural forces in all their rawness and purity. He captures on plywood the deep murmur of the cosmos itself, the nestling shadow of full-leaved branches, the bending reeds in the eddying stream. One can sense all these things without their being explicitly represented.

His images hover somewhere between background and foreground. Their obvious freshness and spontaneity is due to the fact that there is nothing to distract the observer. We are left free to contemplate the quality of this and that, red or blue, their richness and opulence, the various harmonies they create. For what is shape *per se*, a colour *per se*, the clear evidence of brush marks, if not the fundamentals of painting, the very stuff of art?

Their plastic evasion arouses interest in the smallest



Untitled

Acrylic on board 42 cm x 59.3 cm

of forms, in the phenomenological aspect of form. A single sign, no matter how rudimentary, can activate a thousand other vibrations, thus richly extending our visual repertoire. Our bleared vision is forced to see afresh. Close examination leads us to the discovery of related rhythms and relationships manifest in the wider nature of which we are part.

Line, shape-form-mass, pattern, scale-proportion-space, analysis-dissection, lightness-darkness, and colour: these are the keys to nature's expression and secrets. Immaterial whether his work reflects nature like a mirror or is an altogether inner vision, his lines are tracks for the eye to follow; we speed ahead or linger.

His graffiti come alive; they bend and move alongside the forces of gravity and the force of levitation, adjusting between upward thrust and the downward pull of mass. Our eyes gauge everything in terms of the balance achieved – the energy caught in between, the countless expressions produced.

Chircop stays in control and guides the viewer's eyes over the forms. We wander momentarily, pause, are invited to concentrate on an area; we are led to a point or centre. We read these lines, forms and spaces at the pace and in the sequence that the artist has plotted in

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Untitled

Acrylic on board 60.5 cm x 45.5 cm

A pleasure to the eye

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his composition. The eye scans and reads the data that it comes upon and instantaneous decisions are made about the meaning or value of what is seen.

My eyes zoomed to the junction and jumped off along the course of the second line of forms; a sense of jagged starts and stops; the voyager's delight; a pleasure to the eye, stirring up the soul!

The hidden forces of wind and water spin in movements of life. His marks curve forward, then loop backward upon their own track, then curve forward again in a four-beat

rhythm – a sequence of tension, charge, discharge, relaxation. He blends everything together to form a united inseparable whole.

As forms overlap, there are not always clearly defined boundaries. Other forms hit, push and pull, capturing the energy of life that surrounds us everywhere, in the air we breathe, in the rain that falls. He suggests birth and growth, sprouting and blossoming, the way we watch cigarette smoke curl and spiral in dreamy rhythmic waves.

It is a secret magnetic field that holds the relationships all in balance, the ultimate in meaningful abstraction.