

Olaug Vethal at Carafa Stores

The following is the speech which DR JOSEPH PAUL CASSAR gave at the vernissage of Olaug Vethal's exhibition, on Sunday 20 June at the Carafa Stores, Birgu

"Welcome to this exhibition which focuses on the artist's response to some of the works and events as depicted by Caravaggio in his art...

This is an exhibition about her challenge at looking at the past with fresh eyes.

And this freshness and freedom is evident anywhere you care to look for it in her paintings. For instance, the drama and contrasts of dark and light areas in Caravaggio are transformed by Olaug into what I would dare to refer to as joyful events of vibrant colours. One cannot in any way interpret lightly the violent act of St John the Baptist's beheading, but I think that she managed



The artist Olaug Vethal and Dr Joseph Paul Cassar

more than once to transform the event into some form of dance. She intelligently manipulated the composition, put it on its side, creating a sense of reflection, probably after analysing the Narcissus painting and in the end she even turned the composition upside down.

Olaug's art is about rhythm, we can follow the gestures of her hands in the very art of painting through the sweeping brushstrokes and flow of paint. Her

movements do not come just from the hand, but involve shoulder and hip movements her body as a totality. I can confirm this because I have seen her work for these last two years where a group of us – artists and friends meet at Alfred Briiffa's art studio in Mosta to work from live models on a weekly basis.

Olaug is tremendously prolific and moves about her works in order to get hold of her painting completely.

I think Olaug has the following characteristics:

- *Speed* in execution. This is very important for her because she does not want to think too much about what she is doing but wants to record the immediacy of how she feels at that particular time she is working.
- Consequently she reduces premeditation as much as possible, for she wants *freedom* to predominate.
- Her work is about *energy* translated into concrete forms, in this case from episodes inspired in Caravaggio's art

Her works record without any embarrassment her second thoughts, she is not afraid of making alterations, to cancel or even destroy an image. She even paints over an image again and again. This is because she believes that painting has a life of its own and she lets it manifest itself in her self-expression.

You can see that her self-confidence grew as she worked more and more on this series. It is evident in the control of the technique and I also knew this

because the artist has kept me informed of how the work was progressing.

So in the end we have new paintings with new stories – stories of how Medusa's head encounters the head of St John the Baptist or about Judas' kiss to Jesus which turns into a kiss to Caravaggio himself and in the end even Olaug features in the paintings.

A final comment to substantiate this is that all the works you see here have been produced in these last four weeks. I do not mean to reduce any of the artist's merits, on the contrary this is a great achievement. Olaug accepted the challenge when she was informed by the organisers and I know of very few artists out there who can meet such a challenge. In addition Olaug made the wooden stretchers herself, prepared the canvases with water and glue and all it takes. A remarkable example of energy made manifest."

For photos of the vernissage, please turn to Page 11

Inspired by Caravaggio

The prolific and original artist, Olaug Vethal who has been passing on her artistic knowledge to our youngsters for a good number of years, was inspired by the Caravaggio exhibition *La Mostra Impossibile* at the Carafa Stores and held her own exhibition there. These photos are from her vernissage. For Dr Joseph Paul Cassar's speech that evening, please go back to Page 5.



The artist Olaug Vethal, Bro. David Mizzi, Mr Ivan Portanier and Mr Mark Debono



Mr Navarro, Mrs Navarro and Ms Justine Navarro



Mr Savio Deguara, Bro. David Mizzi, Ms Daniela van Hees, Ms Anna Pullicino, Mr Ivan Portanier, Ms Auriol Pullicino, Ms Josette Baldacchino, Ms Theresa Sciberras, Ms Benny Vassallo and two unidentified friends



Mr Steve Vella



Mr Antoine Gambin and Mrs Michelle Caruana Dingli



Mrs Juliet Panton and husband Bob



Ms Celia Borg Cardona and Ms Francesca Balzan



Ms Ilona Attard and Mr and Mrs Attard



Mrs Paulette Crockford



Mr Mark Schembri, Mr Lino Magro and Mrs Magro



Ms Denise Azzopardi, Ms Anna Cremona and Dr Joseph Paul Cassar



Mme Dujardin