

## The artist as intermediary

Over the last four decades, Joseph Farrugia's work has been anchored in an earnest endeavour to extract meaning from complex philosophical and scientific conundrums. His drawings and paintings have been consistently driven by a very specific act extracted from Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus' concept of "Nous," in which the artist strives to place himself as an intermediary between the transcendental realm of the One and the lower levels of reality, connecting the ultimate reality to the material world and engaging in a profound exploration of the human experience.

Observing the artist's style of production reminds one of a lively toddler engaged in solitary play. True to Joseph's playfully serious persona, his process necessitates that he immerse himself in the conceptual riddle to act as an intermediary between his tools and the meaning-making process of his game, becoming the conduit that enables the flow of concept between the profound and the ordinary. This technique, while complicated and expressive, also leaves a sliver of lightheartedness open to let his youthful rationalisation to take vent and shape the creative mix that makes his work.

During this process, he frees himself from any immediate sensory stimuli that have traditionally served as a starting point for artistic production, such as landscape, object, or the human figure, in order to freely tap into humanity's vast collective consciousness in order to re-evaluate its unifying force within society by giving its commonly shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes a new look. Farrugia confronts the enormity of the existential question by reducing it down into small packages of domestic truth drawn from his and our everyday lives. He does this to focus on a manageable number of bodies of work or collections that he revisits on a regular basis, creating umbrella titles<sup>1</sup> that serve as symbolic standard-bearers for each body of work. These collections use 'emblems'<sup>2</sup> extracted from the artist's world to connect the audience with the deeper truths concealed inside his work.

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella titles of the collections being exhibited are: Fragmentation; The Struggle; The Space Within; The Silhouette; Transformation and Clusters

<sup>2</sup> The word 'emblems' refers to the mundane, natural or man-made objects or species, phenomena, or elements that include fish, anthropods, paper planes, mosaic, clothes hangers, hanging clothes, silhouettes, and many more.

Farrugia ruminates on the inherently abstract, philosophical concept of the existential being through an extraction process that he chooses to reference through figuration, through the physicality of the mundane, natural or man-made objects or species, phenomena, or elements. These 'emblems' become the basic building blocks of his discourse, acting as glue to form a meaningful bridge between our tangible universe and the greater truths contained within the issues he addresses. Joseph's work draws our attention to his interest in the innumerable hidden dimensions of existence through a dense, interconnected matrix of allegorical links, and, by means of the questions raised by his work, he invites us to join him in his existential search as we filter his work through our own personal understanding and experience.

The artist frequently presents us with a paradox, juxtaposing opposing elements within a body of work, such as the knotting of fish, humans, or pottery shards in the 'Clusters' series, in his quest to connect this ultimate reality with the material world. This fusion of disparate symbolic iconography is evident particularly in the series entitled 'The Space Within', where Farrugia plays with metaphoric representations extracted from religion, such as the tomb of Lazarus, and others that are more worldly, such as the paper plane, the fish, or the suit of armour. This approach of metaphoric object replacement challenges our customary bounds that ring fence meaning through our visual association to form, requiring us to seek new ways of comprehending our reality and accepting the unexplained complexities of our own life.

Farrugia's paintings also expose his feeling of amazement and astonishment when considering and contrasting diametrically opposed subjects, such as the vastness of the universe and the complexities of microscopic structures. He demonstrates how, despite great disparities in scale, the same fundamental physics and nature laws control both the macroscopic and microscopic domains, and how this interconnectivity underlines the beauty of existence and the underlying harmony of the universe. Farrugia considers the meaning of our existence and the potential for meaning in our lives by balancing the cosmic scale of galaxies and nebulae with the subatomic scale of quarks and particles in his representations, such as in his 'Fragmentation' series, where he draws attention to the paradoxes of the

infinite and the finite, making us realize how our understanding of reality and our own human perspective within it is often limited by our senses, cognitive biases, and the conceptual frameworks we use to interpret the world around us.

The realisation of the magnitude of what we do not yet grasp is at the heart of Joseph Farrugia's work. Another dense layer of unresolvedness, the link between mysticism and science, generates nodes of ambiguity that spread throughout numerous bodies of work. The artist symbolises man as his own evanescent shadow in works such as 'Double Slit Experiment' from the 'Silhouette' series, as he appears to be seeking a plausible image to encapsulate the relationship between scientific discoveries and philosophical inquiries into the universe's grandiosity, while hinting at the notion that the universe, and by implication nature, has no regard for the life of a single human being.

Farrugia's work further clouds the waters of legitimacy for the search for meaning and purpose in our lives since it investigates the fundamental underpinnings of all of man's belief structures without offering any remedies. As the artist is fully aware, his paintings cannot provide any plausible respite from life's enigma, but can only add to it by probing it through a different structural form, with the sole conviction that not only do many mysteries remain, but that the artist's work, through its paradoxical incongruity, makes us wonder if any guiding light can ever be shone onto the conundrum of our existence at all.

However, we all live in hope, and like Leonard Cohen's hopeful message in 'Anthem',<sup>13</sup> as participants in his work, we join the artist's ongoing quest to keep on probing for that meaningful light of hope, as we search for that crack that somehow always lets some light in to keep us moving forward in our never-ending journey of exploring the mystery of our existence.

Vince Briffa

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Cohen - *Anthem*: "There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."