

## In Search of Nature's Vitality

After her last exhibition *Creation* at the G Gallery in Lija, German-Maltese artist Ebba von Fersen Balzan is currently showing her work at the Galerie 22320, Ancienne Ecole Jeanne d'Arc in Plussulien, France. The exhibition will be inaugurated on Monday 4 September 2006 by Dr. Vicki Ann Cremona, Maltese ambassador for France in the presence of Jean Le Pommellec, mayor of Plussulien. A number of Maltese guests will be attending the opening. This is not the first time that Ms. Von Fersen Balzan exhibited her work in France and other European countries. In this collection of paintings the artist focused mostly on themes related to nature. In fact the title for the exhibition is in French, *Vitalité*, the vitality of nature.

We know Ebba von Fersen Balzan as one of the few artists, who derives her inspiration directly from the Maltese Prehistoric temples and other archaeological sites in France. She showed her work in a number of personal and collective art exhibitions related to the Neolithic temples. Perhaps the most important one was "*Temples – Malta, Seven Women – Seven Temples*" which was held at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta in 1999.

Like other artists who continue to celebrate the central role of 'stone' in art, Ms. Von Fersen Balzan is absorbed by the evocative power of the megaliths and other prehistoric objects which are directly reflected in her work. In some of her works in this exhibition, the artist uses prehistoric motifs or 'swirls' which come from Gavrinis, a breathtaking beautiful site on a small island in the Golfe du Morbihan. The decorated standing megaliths inside this Neolithic cairn are probably the best

preserved in the Brittany region in France. On these slabs one could see symbolic references to life and creation which are expressed through circular motif, chevrons, zigzag lines and other textured patterns. A fine example of these motifs expressed in an outstanding work in this art show is a decorative composition called *les rêves anciens*. The decorated rectangular stripes or blocks in this painting have a strong layering of transparency achieved through the use of a palette of light and dark hues of blues, reds, oranges and greens. It is an exercise in repetition and variation and these contrasts also contribute to a sense of spirituality. Two other similar canvases worked in this manner are *les coquilles* and *rencontre*. The artist uses lino-cuts and other printing techniques and mixed media in the process of completing a work of art. The quality of the work is high and is constantly evolving.

The sea is another source of inspiration for Ebba von Fersen Balzan. The artist argues that the sea is the source of everything. In the works entitled *fish tales*, *Homage a l'homard Breton* and *les coquilles*, the artist uses the motifs of fossilized fish, sea shells and urchins in an interesting manner, creating harmonious patterns to metaphorize the passage of time. She looks deep into time and history, thus acknowledges both the quantifiable and immeasurable aspects of creation. The earth is full of extraordinary images and Ms. Von Fersen Balzan is after searching for the best forms and colours which nature has produced.

The study of the human form is a very important element in the work of Ms. Von Fersen Balzan. The human body is central to her vision. For example, *Le Matin*, is an outstanding work, showing a nude female figure depicted from the side in a very sensual posture. The “symbolic metaphors” that arise out of this composition are

related to the harmony that exists between the figure and nature. The space in which the figure appears is like a kind of creative dreamscape, furnished with decorated intricate networks of vegetation. Light plays a very important role in this work. The blue light coming from the background has a very strong colour cast which affects everything in the scene. A similar painting with nearly the same structure is *La Promenade*. This time the artist used the effect of red to romanticise the female nude. This canvas has a delicate quality of lighter and darker areas of red broken up by irregular “cracks,” through which we see the bright blue light penetrating sharply behind the figure.

But why Ebba von Fersen Balzan so interested in exploring the female form and its relation with nature? The connection between the form of the female body and the undulations of the earth, was a major theme explored by many artists in the past and today a renewed interest in women’s political identification with the earth seems to be re-emerging in the works of contemporary artists. Ms. Von Fersen Balzan is concerned with the way humans are treating nature. She stated: “Although humans are very inventive and creative, and have created beautiful things out of nature’s gifts, but also invented the most horrible and destructive machinery, and this is not only war against an enemy, it manifests itself in the way we treat nature.” So the interest in nature and what humans are facing today is part of a prevalent concern of the artist. Ms. Von Fersen Balzan’s art is not only a generalized expression of body-earth identification, but it also shows her intense interest in prehistoric symbols and sites found in Malta and other European countries.

The figure in the work entitled *viola* expresses a 'primitive' appeal, which could be attributed to the emphasis on the value of spontaneous and emotional use of materials. The nude woman at the centre of the composition implies hypersexual visual signs, for instance, the model's position of the arms around her head and the large buttocks evoke a 'primitivistic' mode of representation. This work confirms that Ms. Ebba Von Fersen Balzan is also in a continuous search to reconstruct the 'primitive' through the use of fragments, which belong to the prehistoric past and perhaps place her in a context of bohemianism.

The central piece in this exhibition is *c'est la verite*. The artist managed to capture the beauty of the standing female body with the intense light kissing the surface of her body. The gaze and elevated look creates an atmosphere of suspense, a sense of waiting in the spectators. The colourful reflection of the lacy decoration of leaves and ferns falling on the body of this young creature and the intricate patterns of the detailed background express a poetic yearning.

Ebba von Fersen Balzan has created a body of iconographical images that place her in a position to continue her art-making process which will lead her to some of the most profound breakthroughs in the Maltese art scene. She avoids isolationism of artists who just look into the past and forget the present. In her artistic journey Ms. Von Fersen Balzan proceeds to develop new ways of using ancient symbols and to bring a refreshing change in the art of contemporary culture.

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<file:///C:/Users/Mr.Lagana/Documents/publications/weekender%20reviews/article.php%20Ebba%20Sep%202006.htm>