

Pictures of myth and the unconscious

Chris Zarb is a very active artist and during these last few months he produced a body of work, which enabled him to show again to the public his recent artistic explorations. His third solo art exhibition is being held at the Hotel Le Meridien Phoenicia. This is a continuation of his artistic journey, from his last exhibition held at Heritage Malta in September 2005. The title of the exhibition is 'Reveries' which explains the artist's dreams and visionary experiences. Mr. Zarb's work continues to surprise and delight us. He derives his creations from the intuition of unconscious sources and also inspiration from ancient myth. In fact in this exhibition he is showing ten new works, all representing some kind of connection with the artist's yearning for mythological subjects and dream-like imagery. Mr. Zarb's artistic language remains figurative with strange meanings, allegories and symbols.

In the painting called *Creation*, the man and the woman symbolise the anima and the animus. For the artist, the sphere behind them represents a planet but it could also signify unity. The man is symbolically shown with one hand in the form of a fist expressing war and hatred and the other hand with the open palm suggesting work and peace. The woman is more in a relaxed and sensual posture, which could be attributed to femininity and fertility. Beneath the planet one could also see a kind of fire or 'tentacles'. This was inspired by the famous poem by *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). Mr. Zarb is fascinated by ancient mythology and literature derived from ancient myth. Here, the use of enigmatic and archetypal imagery is expressed by the artist so that this would allow him to attain an

even greater pictorial unity, that is, poetry and rhythm. The real meaning that the artist wanted to convey in this painting is that “not everything is nice and beautiful but unfortunately there is pain amongst other things which is part of our being and life.” When interpreting the figure of the man and the woman in the painting *Creation*, in a religious sense one could easily relate them symbolically to Adam and Eve. From a mythological point of view they could represent Apsu and Tiamat, the creators or ‘parents’ of all gods.

One of the best and favourite works of the artist exhibited in ‘Reveries’ is *Envisage*, a representation of an angel in despair or it might be another reference to the famous *Icarus* who was already depicted in the previous exhibition. This dramatic winged male figure is ready to escape from the prison-world of pain, sorrow and disorder. Like many other visionary artists, Mr. Zarb works unconsciously on this subject. In fact when asked what meaning lies behind the representation of this male winged figure, he remarked: “This painting represents our life, our decisions and the path which we decide to choose, for better or for worse. Is there really a destiny written for us, or are we the makers of our own destiny?” Symbolically the painting is a call to humanity to decide to choose between good and evil.

Female images are also a frequent feature of Mr. Zarb’s works. In his work called *Yggdrasil*, the anima - ‘lady soul’ is seen carrying a light in her hands. She is accomplishing her task to bring man the divine light and its creative power. She is depicted emerging from the earth, taking the shape of a mortal being. The bright light coming out of the tunnel epitomises the journey towards the absolute. The painting suggests the “passageway” through which the human soul traverses after death.

Moonchild: is a silhouette of a female symbolising again the immaterial anima in a state of meditation. This is also repeated in another work called *Nightfall* showing a beautiful sensual woman sitting on the moon. She represents 'the moon goddess and is a bringer of dreams'. She is the most visible symbol of force and represents the woman's reflective nature. In fact Chris Zarb created another painting called *Reflections*, where he shows us two female figures walking in space and sowing seeds of glitter. They are metaphorical bodies that signify fertility, abundance, vitality, nature, and beauty.

Looking at the painting called *The Journey* one sees that it has a surrealistic approach expressed with floating pointed rocks in the shape of a funnel, floating in space above the primordial sea. On one of the rocks the 'winged' anima is seen in a posture of departure, ready to fly above everything and continue the 'journey' into the unknown. This is perhaps one of the strongest works which confirm Zarb's great love for freedom of thought and expression. The 'winged' female will always remain a source of inspiration for the artist. Mr. Zarb stated "I see wings a means of transport from reality to fantasy or some sort of escapism. After all that's what I feel when I paint, I am transported from the real world."

Reveries is another exhibition by Chris Zarb which demonstrates the long artistic journey seeking a profound fantasy of mythical and archetypal creatures that evoke in us great reflections on life. It is the artist who digs deep in the unconscious and sets free the innate possibilities of ideas. This is the value of great art. In his writings Carl Jung strongly argued that the secret of great art is in the unconscious activation of an

archetypal image, which is shaped into the finished work. The artist 'translates' it into the language of the present and therefore makes it possible for us to understand it.

Louis Laganà

Times of Malta:

file:///C:/Users/Mr.Lagana/Documents/publications/weekender%20reviews/article.php%20Chris%20Zarb%204.2006.htm