

Maltese countryside by Andrew Smith



Laura Swale

Blessed as we are in Malta with such spectacular scenery, the natural beauty around us can sometimes fade into the background as we go about our daily lives. Not so for the artist. The

painter observes every form, tone, texture and hue, savouring the splendour of the scenery.

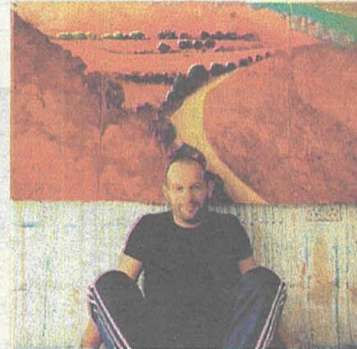
Despite the abundant inspiration, landscape painting was not popular in the Mediterranean until the 1800s, when the increased portability of paint and equipment made it possible to paint 'en plein air' (outdoors), giving landscape art a new lease



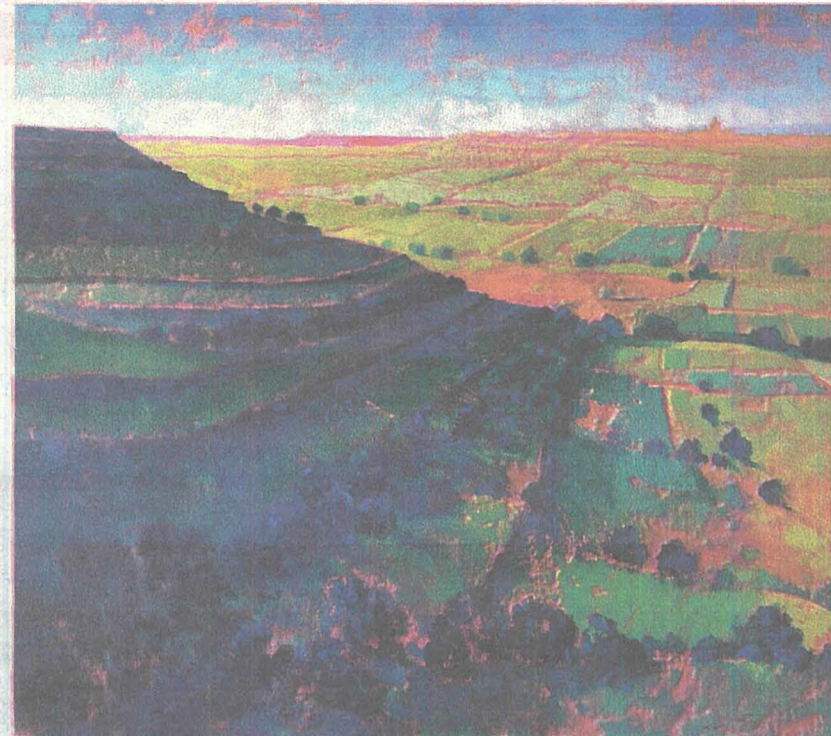
Madiena tower by Andrew Borg



Andrew Smith



Christopher Saliba



Ramla valley by Christopher Saliba



Debbie Bonello

To Malta with love

Landscapes to fall in love with

She bathes, with sunkissed complexion, resplendent in fine honey robes and twinkling blue waters. On this time-honoured day of love and appreciation, what better way to celebrate than to wax lyrical and indulge in our shared affection for our beguiling and beloved home, Malta. With the launch of **Landscapes to fall in love with**, the exhibition's five local painters talk about their passion for the magnificent vistas of the Maltese archipelago and explain why Malta is the ultimate muse.

of life. This, coupled with the advent of photography, saw the decline of studio painting and realism as artists adopted the concepts and styles of modern art movements such as Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism and Abstract Art.

Malta was no exception and had its fair share of modernist painters. Today, established artists such as Pawl Carbonaro, George Fenech and Richard Saliba all continue to make their own distinct and noteworthy contributions to the landscape genre in Malta. Historically the influence of Cubism here has been especially profound, from Esprit Barthe's rooftops to the contemporary townscapes of James Vella Clark. Already well-known on the local circuit, the five artists taking part in the



Andrew Borg

new exhibition will no doubt become the collectable artists of the future. They are Christopher Saliba, Andrew Borg, Debbie Bonello, Andrew Smith and Fabio Borg.

For Fabio Borg, whose landscapes are often urban and architectural, it was concern for the environment which spurred him to paint them. "The fear of losing the beautiful and limited Maltese countryside to development has inspired me to express my concern through this genre," he explains, "I would like to preserve some of it on canvas, in the hope that this beauty becomes an inspiration for the Maltese to appreciate and protect the natural environment."

For 'minimalist' painter Andrew Borg the attraction is the natural light. "The quality of the Mediterranean light on our limestone and garigue is just too lovely not to paint. And what about the blues in our sea? I love the Maltese terrain, it's rugged and bare, but the way it interacts with light is so inspiring for me."

Gozitan painter Christopher Saliba describes this exceptional light quite eloquently. "The radiant Mediterranean light that emblazons the varied strata of rocks and the sharp perceptual contrasts manifested by warm and cool colours make our is-

lands unique in character."

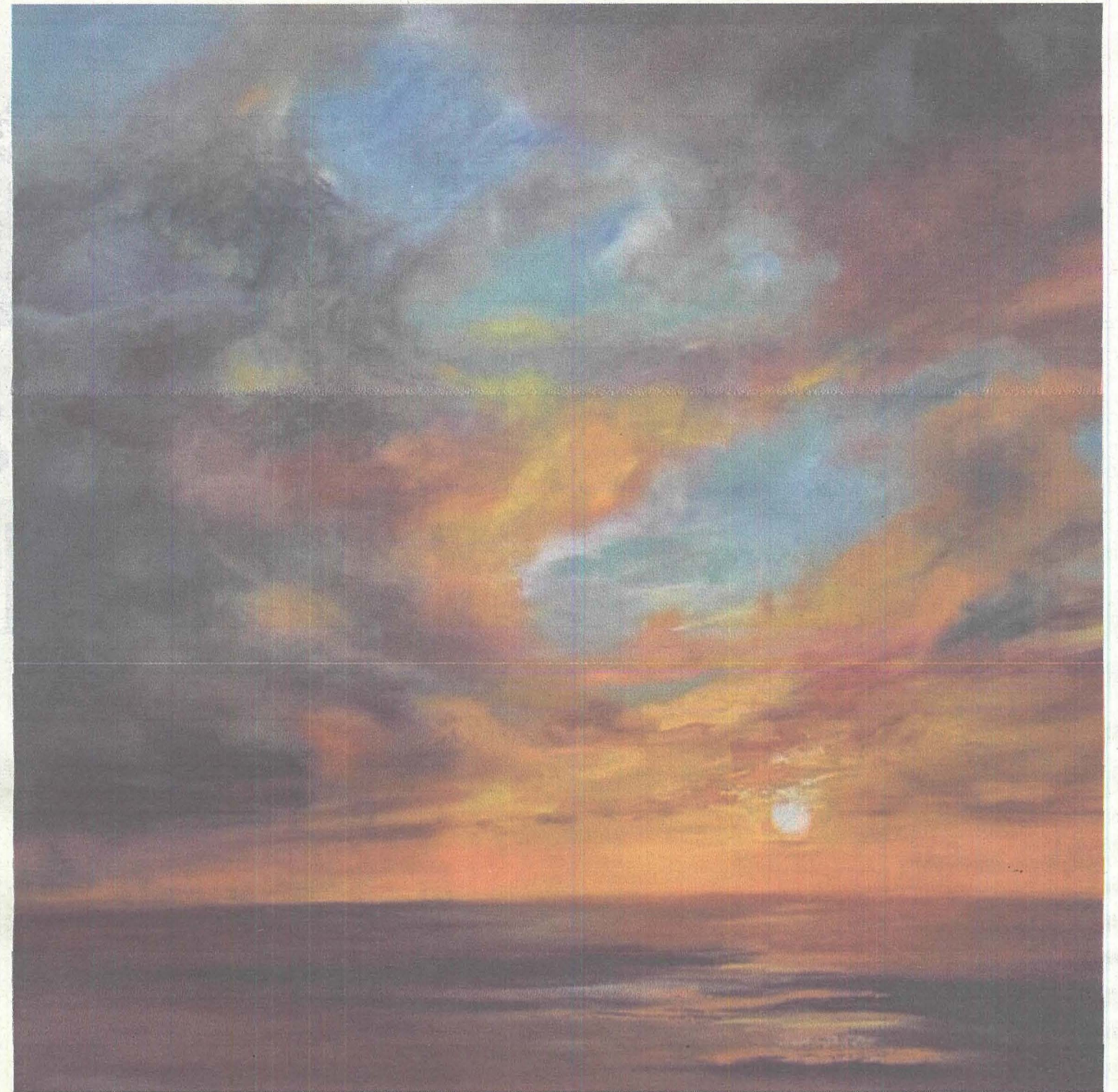
Fellow painter Andrew Smith agrees. "The landscape is all about light, warmth and architecture. Malta and Gozo combined have hundreds, perhaps thousands of interesting places to paint for any artist willing to use their imagination due to an abundance of subjects such as urban areas, countryside churches and harbours in a very small area."

"Malta and Gozo's diverse and often bombastic architecture, provide breathtaking skylines which provide an interest to both potential buyers and artists alike, as well as peaceful harbours which are full of colour thanks to the decorative boats and the shallow waters."

With so many inspiring painting locations, it could be difficult to choose a favourite, but expressive artist Debbie Bonello has no hesitation. "I painted both in Malta and abroad, namely Sicily, Italy, England and China, however my most favorite location is Mellieha, my childhood town. No surprise to anyone who knows me. I painted one of Mellieha just yesterday. I tend to go there when I feel nostalgic or want to cheer myself up. It is a pull I cannot explain. I tend to go back in time to my childhood when I'm painting there."

Andrew Borg on the other hand has many favourite sites around the island. When pressed to choose, he says he would probably paint in and around Siggiewi or Mellieha.

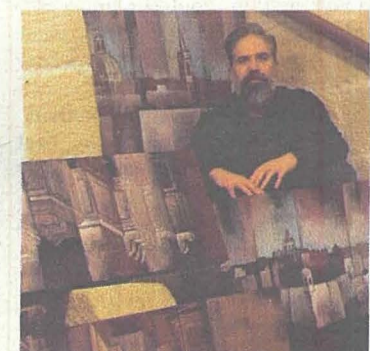
Andrew Smith is particularly prolific. "To date I have painted at nearly 300 different locations across Malta and Gozo, although, my favourite locations are when I find a small pocket of unspoilt countryside kilometres away from built up areas, traffic and noise."



Here goes the sun by Debbie Bonello

Christopher Saliba's favourite locations are in Gozo, but, like his fellow artists, he is aware of the encroaching noise and destruction that comes with development. "Human intervention on the sister island and the impact of man-made configurations on nature are still relatively less apparent than in Malta. Through my works I want to bring forth my environmental concerns, namely the tragic reality of local scenery being threatened by more persistent speculation and urbanisation."

Original paintings are beautiful and timeless mementos of



Fabio Borg

our most cherished places, captured forever and preserved on canvas for generations to come. Original art can also be a unique and tasteful gift for a parent, partner, sibling or friend. Artwork featured in this article is

part of a larger collection available at www.allura-art.com.

Original paintings by Andrew Borg, Fabio Borg, Debbie Bonello, Andrew Smith and Christopher Saliba are available

at www.allura-art.com. The exclusive online show **Landscapes to fall in love with** runs until February 28 at <https://www.artsy.net/show/allura-landscapes-to-fall-in-love-with>



Valletta, an aerial view by Fabio Borg