



## ART

# A celebration of our landscape

**A**LTHOUGH Kenneth Zammit Tabona's most recent exhibition spans the output of a relatively short space of time and is quite limited due to the size of the winebar venue, it covers an almost disarming variety of styles.

These changing styles are not, I feel, due to any indecision on Mr Zammit Tabona's part, but due to a light-hearted approach to art. Mr Zammit Tabona is no dilettante, he has worked hard at his craft, but is not heavy on the philosophical aspirations of his art, and contrary to what many may imagine, Mr Zammit Tabona is surprisingly humble and unpretentious about his works. However, ever since he took the major step of shaking off the shackles of his "Baroque" style of painting, where he literally painted himself into a corner, the victim of his own success, he seems to be revelling in his new-found freedom where experimentation is the order of the day.

Although this can produce a few near misses, it also produces paintings that speak to us of happiness and spontaneity, movement and light. The range begins with Mr Zammit Tabona adapting his "Baroque" painting skills to garden "interiors" rather than domestic ones, painting these lush garden displays with as much, if not more aplomb than his earlier interiors, and lavishing all his skill in producing a scene just as rich as his wealthy interiors, as plants climb and intertwine in painterly embroidery.

Painted with very few shadows or lightening of palette, these busy scenes share that rather one-dimensional, childlike quality of the earlier interiors. In Argotti Herbarium, a riot of colourful plants compete with each other for attention, while the artist seems to revel in highlighting the different forms and colours of plants, in an almost naïf set-piece. I have to admit to finding some of these paintings too dense and overpowering – however, in other paintings one cannot help but admire Mr Zammit Tabona's verdant filigree.

In departing from this style, Buskett After The Rain is a lovely milestone, where Mr Zammit Tabona's

evident love of all things green is still in evidence, but dense shrubbery is replaced by fresh colour washes, a strong composition and a much more subtle and mellow palette. Here both line and colour lead us to the focal point of the painting, a much more satisfactory rendering of the plant landscape theme.

In other paintings it is skies and seas that dominate, where Mr Zammit Tabona's style tends to be far looser, allowing his medium to take the lead with some very happy results like that of The Tower At Xlendi, where a beautiful winter's sky of scudding clouds is reflected in a translucent indigo sea.

Another impressionistic tour de force is Mдина Landscape where loose brushstrokes, so much more difficult in watercolours or Mr Zammit Tabona's trademark inks, than oils, create a dynamic, charged atmosphere.

Then again Road To No-Where is completely different, a small, very stylish, static work where form and colour take over to produce an almost geometric rendering of a road lined on one side by Aleppo trees, whose characteristic shape Mr Zammit Tabona has captured, this time with minimalist beauty.

The common thread that binds these paintings that range from "painterly embroidery" to "minimalist beauty" is of course Mr Zammit Tabona's plein air painting theme; irrespective of the attributes of the individual painting, it is so evident throughout the exhibition, that Mr Zammit Tabona derives great joy out of this activity, a joy he succeeds in transmitting to the viewer in many different styles and guises, but always there, a celebration of our landscape, our world.

**Astrid Vella**

■ The exhibition runs at D'Art, Amery Street, Sliema until February 29. Opening hours: Monday to Thursday: 4 to 7 p.m., Fridays 4 to 11 p.m.

## Fauvist or not, it's all about colour

**J**ANUARY took me around to view two strikingly different exhibitions, both of which carry works by relatively newcomers to the local art scene. My second viewing took me to see Expressions at Cosmana Navarra in Rabat. The work of Raymond Borg, presenting his second solo with a stock of 20 paintings on show, this is an exhibition whose colours strike you right in the solar plexus of your eye.

As Mr Borg candidly admits, "I love using colours and using Maltese subjects and bright colours which keep me attached with our lovely small island. I hope that my art gives that positive and happiness feeling to people".

The first painting to catch my full attention is a canvas of acrylic tulips vaguely called Flowers, executed upon a base of gesso and sack, fresco style. There is a clever use of colour combinations that, contrary to some still life specimens on show, are neatly wrapped up in stylistic carefulness. The colours are right, the composition is vibrant, and the take is quite innovative at least for a Maltese artist.

An abstraction of colour comes through in an abstract work called Maria, which Mr Borg explains away as "...a special mix of



gesso with other material, thrown on the sack at one go using acrylic as medium. By using special varnish I get that enamelling effect." I particularly liked the enamelling effect that blends the colours so deliciously... that you'd like to reach out and touch. This is more than mere

abstraction however – it is Mr Borg's own tribute to his mother who died when barely 32.

On to some Maltese scenes which wouldn't seem Maltese if you didn't live on Malta. Some seem a veritable Venetian depiction, such as *Il-Luzzu*, which extracts

just one aspect of the Maltese boat and repeats it to grab the attention of the viewer. Mr Borg plays about with a plethora of suffused and gradated colours that, juxtaposed against a blend of frothing sky, turn the picture into an exciting schematic adventure.

With a background that has seen him achieving certification in jewellery and design, as well as a diploma in art and history of art, the artist has dabbled with clay modelling, stone and wood carving, and the repainting of antique dolls.

His painting on fabric incidentally featured on dresses in Maltese song festivals. Presently working on an art exhibition to be staged in Vittoriosa and another in London, he is keeping pretty busy.

■ Expressions – Art exhibition by Raymond Borg is open until the end of March at Cosmana Navarra, St Paul's Street, Rabat, Malta. It is open Tuesday to Thursday from noon to 3.30 p.m. and from 6.30 to 10.30 p.m. and on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 3.30 p.m. and from 6.30 to 11 p.m.

**Marika Azzopardi**