



CUPID IN FAWWARA (pen and ink gouache) by Kenneth Zammit Tabona

## It's been called Landscapitis

A COLLECTION of 19 recent pen and ink gouaches by Kenneth Zammit Tabona is currently on display at the Gallery of the Corinthia Palace Hotel in Attard. Entitled *Landscapitis*, obviously referring to an intense preoccupation with the genre of landscape, the exhibition, one of a series of regular artistic events at the verdant surroundings of the Attard venue, focuses on the Maltese countryside, or what remains of it.

It is in tune with the artist's long-cherished affection for rural nooks that speak of another age when the island could still consider itself as the 'pearl of the Mediterranean'.

I have always considered, not without a great deal of deserved admiration, that Zammit Tabona is somebody who would have easily fitted into the Maltese context of some two centuries back. There are quite a number of reasons for that. In the first place he is an individual who is sensitive enough to consider Malta's position, with its rich historical backing, as being almost antithetical to the rather insensitive inroads that have been dictated by contemporary society.

If my memory serves me right, Kenneth Zammit Tabona first came to attract my attention as an artist some 20 years ago when he charmingly illustrated the book *Lost Letters* by Nicholas de Piro. Since then his art has maintained its singular identifiable capsule, entrancingly distanced from any academic appendages and yet still clicking to a *passé* sustenance.

His nostalgia for 18th century interiors in particular (a decor that often crops up in his paintings), a more sedate rapport with the surroundings, playful childlike pastimes that could be retracing his own childhood (see *Catching Crabs at St Paul's Bay*), an interchange between an 'idealised' reality and mythical episodes as with *The Fall of Icarus - San Dimitri, Gozo*, a sweet, tranquil genuflection to immemorial happenings, are more or less the bread and butter which build up the spirit of his compositions.

As far as I know these creations have not visually changed much throughout what he has been depicting over the years. That for me at least is the essential substance of consistency. And I for one can hardly imagine them to change too much gear if they are to maintain their high appeal.

They have assuredly reserved for themselves an instant acknowledgement for those art lovers who seek the exceptional. Whatever the subject, they immediately put us with their high dose of charming fantasy on a completely different track from the usual landscape

treatment as normally observed with other artists.

Each work, fleshed out with a quasi-naïve touch, is a delectable piece for the conventions of sensitised people and the beauty of civilised sentiments. Just consider a boy standing to attention in the company of a cat in *Tender is the Night*, a young man portraying a female sitter lying on a divan in *The Portrait and the Landscape*, or else the invariably chaste demeanours of young ladies and their consorts.

The entire context will certainly prick the nostalgic instincts of people of a certain generation, like that to which I belong, who will recall a salubrious compartment of their younger days where fantasy ruled their lives and where it was still possible to dream about incantations coming from a mixture of myths made true and the solace of some religious belonging.

By all means the artist's faces of people, of whatever gender, age or social standing, follow a similar somatic pattern, each radiating a full healthy conformation. Almost invariably they look at us straight in the face for in effect they have nothing to hide except that they simply enjoy the benefits of existence.

The places which Zammit Tabona has depicted for this collection belong to some of the generally endearing rural spots in the Maltese archipelago. They are indeed old and rather out-of-the-way haunts like Fawwara, Bir Miftuh, the chapel of San Dimitri beyond Gharb in Gozo which reminds us of that charming legend of Żgugina and her son Matthew, a surprisingly empty Bahar ic-Ċagħaq where 'the birth of Venus' is unfolding, Mtahleb, Wardija or Girgenti with its former Inquisitors' summer residence.

Sure enough, but without too much obvious exaggeration, Zammit Tabona's waggish landscape creations are an indirect appeal at preserving those idylls of places, set aside as they are from the humdrum developments with which Malta and to a lesser extent Gozo have been almost irreversibly bartered for the carrot of the 'gold' pot.

Often in these paintings we notice avian creatures slithering across the pure sky without the slightest risk of being annihilated by our trigger-happy hunters. There is an atmosphere of the rapturously bucolic in all this, which somehow goes to explain the popularity of this artist's general vision. Without doubt they should serve as lingering memories of sylvan serenity long after those spots would have been consigned to a distant past.

**E. Fiorentino**

# Bringing Australia nearer to home

81-year-old meets 100-year-old mother after 25 years

AT 81 years old, Joseph Camilleri still had a dream he wished to realise – to meet his 100-year-old mother who lives in Australia. The past two years have been pretty hard for Mr Camilleri. He lost a son, the parish priest of Luqa, under tragic circumstances, and his sister died of cancer.

Another two people he used to live with also passed away, leaving him alone in Malta. But he has a son, three brothers and his mother who live in Australia.

His mother is going to turn 100 next month, yet she still is surprisingly healthy and alert.

*Tista' Tkun Int!* travelled to the St Alban's area in Melbourne, Victoria, one of the many neighbourhoods with a strong Maltese presence. Tune in to *Tista' Tkun Int!* (today, TVM at 9.45 a.m.) to watch the final outcome.

\* \* \*

The second story is about Marie, a 24-year-old Gozitan from Rabat. Marie's mother used to live in Melbourne some 25 years ago.

Following some arguments between her parents, they split and Marie's custody was given to the mother. Mother and daughter returned to Gozo for a while, went back to Australia, and finally returned to Malta.

Marie's mother has since remarried. Marie is now looking for her father. Will she find him with the help of *Tista' Tkun Int!*?

**Lufthansa – New York:** Nominate people who have relatives, parents, brothers or sisters in New York. A number of people will be chosen in the coming months to travel together with the *Tista' Tkun Int!* team to New York to be reunited with members of their family whom they have not seen for quite a few years.



RACHEL VELLA, presenter of *Tista' Tkun Int!* enjoys the company of kangaroos and koala bears in Australia (Pictures by Foto-ish)

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**Question**

In which Australian state does Joseph's 100-year-old mother live?

**Answer**

1. Victoria

2. New South Wales

3. Queensland

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Answer the question above and send it to: The Sunday Times Tista' Tkun Int! Competition, PO Box 328, Valletta. A question will be asked every Sunday till the end of the series. The answer to each question is given every Thursday during the programme on TVM after the 8 p.m. news. Each correct answer received will have a chance to win one of two boats (see details above) to be drawn live on the programme towards the end of the series. The drawn entrants will be asked a tie question on the day.