

Looking at Malta, through fresh eyes

Upon a visit to Malta as an art director for the film *Judas*, Russian painter Alexander Telin was struck by the island's beauty and the harmonious way of life of its people. This inspired him to paint a series of striking paintings depicting Maltese subject matter, which he plans to exhibit next month. **Sarah Micallef** catches up with the artist to talk technique, achieving harmony, and just what it is about Malta that caught his attention.

Alexander has been painting since he was a boy, with his father and grandfather before him both being artists in their own right. When it comes to favourite artists, Alexander maintains that he has many, and every time he sees a work of art in person, as he recently did with a painting by Caravaggio, that piece appears to him like a miracle, and becomes his new favourite. Having said that, rather than note favourite artists, he rather cite the schools that most influence his work, namely Impressionism, Byzantine iconography and the Renaissance.

Aided by his daughter, who helpfully acts as translator throughout the interview, the painter describes his work as "presenting the impossible as something that is possible", maintaining that for him, painting is like meditation and almost even prayer. The process is triggered by witnessing a particular scene in real life, which is followed by a need to portray that scene and capture the perceived impossibility of it. Once the process has begun, it is the painting that leads him in the direction it wants him to go. "It is not just me," he explains, "I work with the idea of the painting to bring a piece to life."

When asked what his preferred subjects are, Alexander maintains that while he likes to paint portraits and landscapes, the most important thing is harmony. In fact, many of his paintings make use of several aspects, amalgamating people with landscapes to create a harmonious scene.





When it comes to his Maltese of painting, Alexander explains that here, he doesn't have to try hard to seek out an idea for a painting, stating, "An artist sometimes needs to zoom in on their surroundings to find inspiration to paint a particular scene. Coming from Russia, Malta presents a beauty that is unexpected for me. Some things I encounter in Malta are familiar and others aren't, making them unrealistic in a sense, almost like a fantasy. I like to combine the two in my paintings." He demonstrates this by making reference to a colourful painting depicting a scene from a village feast. It shows two feast enthusiasts hauling an angel statue off the back of a van – a scene which may appear fantastical to those unfamiliar with such aspects of Maltese culture and traditions, though possibly taken for granted by the Maltese people.

According to Alexander, Malta has a specific kind of harmony and beauty that he values and attempts to tap into and celebrate through his work. He goes on to direct my attention to another, as yet unfinished painting he calls 'Flame of Golden Bay', in which groups of people having barbeques on the beach are depicted by means of a series of orange flame-like dots. The harmony of these families, who bring their children to the beach to enjoy one another's company, appeals to him as aspirational. In the artist's view, Maltese people's way of life is exemplary, in that the country may be small and not excessively rich in terms of resources, but it's people appear to live an enviable and harmonious life, even when compared with people in richer countries like his native Russia.

On the subject of his upcoming exhibition, Alexander maintains that his paintings depicting Maltese subject matter are his way of thanking the Maltese people and Malta itself for proving such a rich source of inspiration. Moreover, he is also planning to exhibit these paintings in other countries in the future, via an international exhibition featuring the work of other artists from around the world. Through this exhibition, he explains, he aims to display Malta's beauty for the world to see. ▀

An exhibition of Alexander's Maltese series of paintings will run from April 11th to May 10th at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture, Merchant Street, Valletta with the support of Film Production Services Malta Ltd.