



AT THE OPENING of the exhibition of paintings by Goxwa Borg at the *Galérie Christine Colas* in Paris, from left, Mr Dominic Micallef, Ms Goxwa Borg, Dr Joseph Licari, Ms Doris Debattista, from NTOM, Paris, and Mr Clive Agius

Maltese artist exhibits in Paris

GOXWA BORG, the artistic name of Ms Josette Borg, has again exhibited some of her paintings in Paris, this time at the *Galérie Christine Colas* in the *Marais* which is the artistic hub of Paris.

Borg has already exhibited at the Zullo and the Paté Post galleries in Boston, at the Archaeological Museum in Malta, and at the Maltese embassy and the Cité des Arts in Paris.

Borg's exhibition at the *Galérie Christine Colas* was preceded by an appreciative article on her paintings in *Univers des Arts*, the leading art magazine in Paris, by the well-known critic Patrice de la Perrière.

The opening night of the exhibition, on January 9, was attended by numerous artists, art critics and collectors, as well as members of the Maltese community in Paris. These included Mr Vincent Camilleri, Malta's ambassador-designate in Paris; Dr Joseph Licari, the outgoing ambassador; Mr Clive Agius, the chargé d'affaires; Mr Dominic Micallef, Paris director of NTOM; and Mr Alex Zammit, Paris director of Air Malta.

The embassy, Air Malta and NTOM were helpful in the organisation of Goxwa Borg's exhibition.



MOTHER EARTH, one of the main paintings at the exhibition held by Goxwa Borg in Paris

Sicilian images in Gozo

CROSSING OVER to Gozo on a serene, sun-drenched morning last weekend auspiciously proved to be the right prelude to view the exhibition of watercolours, etchings and serigraphs by the Sicilian artist Angela Zuccarello Sardo at Galleria Gaulos in Victoria. For Zuccarello Sardo's depiction of her native island deals mainly with the light-saturated aspect of the Sicilian countryside, and in particular of the environs of Catania from where she hails, though she now lives in Palermo.

This is her first ever exhibition outside Italian territory, and incidentally it is also the first exhibition in which Galleria Gaulos, since its opening in 1992, is showing works by a foreign artist (if one makes an exception for the exhibition by Victor Pasmore who, on the other hand, has practically become one of us since he partly settled in Malta several years ago).

It was only last August when Ted Mizzi, who runs the Gozitan gallery, first came to know the artist in Taormina where she was exhibiting her works at the medieval Palazzo dei Duchi di Santo Stefano, seat of the Giuseppe Mazullo foundation since 1989. Unhesitatingly, she accepted the invitation to exhibit a cross-section of her work in Gozo.

Angela Zuccarello Sardo studied painting at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Palermo where she came under the tutelage of a number of Sicilian masters of the first half of the century like Pippo Rizzo, Eustachio Catalano and Michele Dixit. She has been exhibiting since at least 1950 when she participated at the XXV Biennale of Venice. She also took part in the

readings of individual personalities.

Zuccarello Sardo relates that when in the late Fifties she shifted her medium from oils to watercolours she discovered the right rhythmic feeling of her new medium in which she identified the peak of her maturity. Through her watercolours she managed to keep pace with the fleeting urgency required to fix down her images. This she does by means of flat patches of colours which one can distantly relate to the fauvist palette and method of working.

In her Sicilian images Zuccarello Sardo recalls with nostalgia those undimmed memories of her childhood at the verdant eastern part of the island – the simple farmhouses isolated among the well-tended fields, the occasional upright trees standing to attention like sentinels, and the winding country roads (*La Stradina*). In several instances they are dominated by the huge bulk of Mount Etna looming in the distance.

The patchwork of colours allows for thin streaks of the white paper to show through as they career across our vision, up the hills or down into the valleys. But in so doing they also serve to transform the countryside into a source of light that escapes out into the open as if to simulate the heat emerging out of the earth. In truth the result sends out a vibrant interaction of chromatic luminosity with *La villetta*, for instance, drowsing placidly in the enveloping heat.

It all attests, on the artist's part, to a gratitude for existence, a *joie-de-vivre* prudently displayed but which is more openly manifested in the artist's depiction of flowers. They

The walls of Malta

ROBERT WERNICK looks at the paintings of Goxwa Borg

WHY the walls of Malta? Because, in the first place, Malta is itself a wall, a strategic rock at the narrowest point of the Mediterranean Sea, a rock on which twice in the last 500 years mortal threats to the Western world have foundered.

On a more personal level, Malta is a country of walls, walls lining the streets of the metropolis which now covers most of the island, walls separating the farms on the remaining farmlands, walls of ancient temples older than any such structures on the face of the earth, walls of the fortifications of Valletta which intimidated the Turks and survived the thousands of tons of bombs dropped on them by the Nazis, walls of churches, walls of the baroque palaces of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, walls nowadays of jewellery shops and banks and Burger Kings. All walls built of the wonderful globigerina limestone which underlies most of the nation, turned a warm and lovely honey colour by the winds blowing sand up from the Sahara.

For the young Goxwa Borg, a lively, sensitive, infinitely curious girl, all her life was bounded by these walls. She played with her friends in the houses bounding the maze of narrow streets on the hillside above the docks of Valletta. She played with them in the temple of Tarxien, building doll houses out of stone fragments in what 5,000 years before were sacred precincts devoted to whatever gods or goddesses the ancient Maltese worshipped; sometimes throwing the stones at each other.

She had only the sketchiest notion of ancient Maltese history – there could have been no conscious thought in her mind that these were relics of a continuous life cycle, a struggle against stony soil and treacherous waves and armed invaders, a pattern thousands of years old. But at some level she was aware that all these stones spoke of the men and women who had lived and were living in the island, her island.

You can see almost any form you want in the patterns made by cracks, holes and stains in old walls. What the young Goxwa, daughter of a jeweller, saw, was faces, faces out of the daily life of the Maltese past and the Maltese present, smudged by the passage of time and the spattering of mud and rain, but recognisably human faces all the same, looking out with intense eyes on children playing in the street as they must have looked out at all the invaders, the Carthaginians and Greeks and Romans, Byzantines and Norman and Arabs, Turks and French and British, who have successively left their mark on the land.

The visions of these faces would remain dormant for a long time. As she entered adolescence Goxwa Borg had no thought of starting an artistic career, although she had been making sketches since the age of five. What she really wanted was to be a champion swimmer, and in the mid-1970s her sister Bernadette and her were the best swimmers on the island. Their

coaches wanted to make international athletes out of them, but, happily for the rest of us, the money wasn't there to support training until the next Olympics. Goxwa was set free to follow other interests.

At the age of 18, like so many Maltese before her, Goxwa went abroad to seek her fortune and play a role in the great world over the sea. For the next 13 years she passed purposefully over vast areas of the earth, London, San Francisco, New York, the Ecuadorean rain forest, Boston. She was tempted by the theatre, and achieved some success as both actor and director. But she kept sketching all the time, and gradually she became a full-time painter, with her first show in Boston in 1985.

By the time she arrived in Paris in 1993 she had developed an unmistakable style, dynamic patterns of colours that seemed both subdued and extravagant, earthbound and winging away to an unknown direction. In the last couple of years she has found a unique theme, one that comes out of those faces in the walls that had haunted her childhood.

Walls, she says, are like masks, simultaneously concealing and revealing the living beings behind them. The backgrounds of her paintings are mottled with splashes of colour and seemingly disordered scratchings. These are the walls. And peering out of each of them is a face, a face sometimes overrun with colours from the crumbling walls but unmistakable individual faces.

Some of them are portraits of her friends. Some of them are derived from old paintings, some of them are reminiscences of Byzantine Madonnas. But they all have that double nature which it is this artist's special gift to illustrate – the faces are all distinct and individual, they all have had their own separate histories in the hurly-burly of mortal life, with its passions and pleasures and sins. But they also hover in another timeless world, past and present and future are one, and they wake in what Yeats in *Sailing to Byzantium* called the artifice of eternity.

Yeats' image of such artifice was a golden bird:

Such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past and passing and to come.

There are no aristocratic trappings in the paintings of Goxwa Borg, no golden bough, no Emperor, only the weathered, aged and ageless walls of Malta on which a cunning hand has traced graffiti of eternity.

Mr Wernick is a frequent contributor to *The Smithsonian Magazine* and published an article on Maltese history and archaeology in the issue of September 1996

"Queen of the Flute" at the Manoel

THE Manoel Theatre Management Committee will present Elena Duran, Mexico's flautist de luxe, in a performance at the Manoel house in St. James's

