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The
Art
Issue



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DIFFERENT STROKES | Will Always Wait for You; The Fossil;
Gines Serran-Pagan

My Life as Art

For **Gines Serran-Pagan**, the line between life and art blurs; **Sunshine de Leon** writes about how the Spanish artist looks at life and translates this into his art

WHEN YOU LOOK at a painting by Spanish artist Gines Serran-Pagan, what you see is not just a work of art, but also the life of an artist. He says, “As an artist, you have to become art yourself.” Being an activist, a poet, a writer, and anthropologist, the artist finds his inspiration in his world travels as much as in his pursuit of an examined life. Thus, his works tell of universal stories in which vibrant colours, layered textures, and shapes draw you into a world without borders, where what is

real merges into what is imagined in a seamless blur.

Serran-Pagan believes himself to be an artist who translates his intense life experiences into his paintings, sculpture, ceramic works, etchings, and lithographs. He has had over 215 exhibitions in 25 countries, and many of his works are in the possession of over 2000 art collectors in 35 countries. And the 4000 pieces of art he has created in the past 35 years show us what he sees, what he thinks, what he imagines, and what he feels.

“I see art everywhere,” he muses, “In a child or a flower, in the beauty of old people,



the sky full of stars, the shape of rivers, the landscape covered by snow, in the anatomy of an animal.”

A sensitive soul, Serran-Pagan is not beyond venting his emotions through his art. “If my heart is broken because of a girlfriend or I am happy because I realise how beautiful my child is, all these emotions are translated into my canvas or sculpture. I want to communicate through art the powerful mystery of my existence with all its contradictions and drama.”

Born in Ceuta, a Spanish city north of Africa, Serran-Pagan grew up in a melting pot of cultures and religions. “It was a mosaic, a land of legends and myths. We had Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Africans living side by side.”

Following the advice of his father, who is also an artist, to develop his own creative language and technique rather than study art, he set off on his journey to self-discovery at age 18. With his innate curiosity and openness, he embarked on his study of life, hitch-hiking in Europe first and working at a kibbutz in Israel later. Finally, he settled in academically in the United States for higher studies in archeology and anthropology at the New York University. He explains, “It was for



me to explore, to know the world, to study culture, to realise why we are so different socially and culturally. Anthropology taught me to interpret human behaviour.”

According to him, living in New York in the 1970s made him realise an “emptiness of art in the city depending on curve and movement and intellectual ideas.”

He then developed a close relationship with the American Indians as he endeavoured to defend their human rights. He became a friend who opened his home to them as much as he was a frequent guest at the reservation sites. To this day, Serran-Pagan credits his Indian friends for helping him find his own language as an artist.

He has deeply internalised the Indian tribes’ affinity with nature so much so that he remains strongly influenced by “native” art in any corner of the world.



CLOSE TO THE HEART *The Bathing of the Blue Horse is just one of his depictions of a favourite subject, galloping horses*

“There was a power in art that was very close to earth, to their rituals and daily life, to the spirit, to the religion. And they reinforced the fact that we are all related.” He declares, “Animals, trees, insects, birds... we all are family, we all live in the same planet, breathe the same air.” In Thailand, Serran-Pagan lived next to an elephant farm and so he painted elephants, just as boats and horses fill his canvases.

“Galloping horses are symbols of travel and experience. They move from country to country searching for freedom. And I was born by the sea,” he relates. “Boats signify adventure—escaping from a world of borders and injustice.”

Serran-Pagan felt an immediate connection to the Philippines during his first visit in 1993, and since then, has been

exhibiting regularly. His work can be found in Malacañan Palace and in over 100 art collections all over the country.

Fascinated that his Spanish roots resonate in the Philippines, he speaks of this connection with affection. “It’s not only the beautiful landscapes, seas, colours, and people. I found myself interconnected with this cultural print made by 300 years of history.”

Beyond art, historical ties bound Serran-Pagan to promote closer cultural and economic relationship between the Philippines and Spain. He had published a book and hundreds of articles before delving seriously in painting, so now, his words are finding their way from pages to canvases.

He says, “Each painting contains a hidden message. The poetry becomes art, and the art becomes a poem.”



ACTIVE MIND The Memory of the Wind, Memories of Palawan

The luminous colours of his work also reflect his chameleon-like persona. Though he paints with a similar language, the colours vary according to what he sees and feels. In New York, he uses dark colours; in Japan, mostly greens. In China, reds and golds, and if he is close to the ocean, everything is light and blue.

Some of his works are so deeply texturised that they look like reliefs, because he “wants the painting to escape free from the canvas.”

He clarifies that he likes to provoke accidents. “I don’t have any idea which colours or forms I’m going to use or how I’m going to finish it. I leave the painting to talk by itself. If I add a colour, and then another, and I throw a little bit of water, I leave water to mix those two colours, and if I like the accident, I leave what nature created.”

His work ranges in style that he can be called a realist at times, or an expressionist, or pure abstractionist. He is not attached to any art movement and has coined “magic realism” to describe his body of work, saying, “I feel more like a magician than an artist.”

The painting *Woman of the Sea* illustrates this style. “It’s where forms and colours are expressions of inner emotions, ideas, and the freedom of the artist to reflect his life experience depicted metaphorically.” It is Serran-Pagan’s homage to women as life givers, the sea being life itself. The painting also reminds that water has no colour, its hues a mere reflection of the lights from the sky. He expounds, “The woman is looking at the horizon and the ocean but you don’t see her eyes. She is in the sea, but she is blue and is also becoming the ocean.”

“Sometimes, I feel more like a magician than an artist,” Serran-Pagan says

He adds, “When you contemplate this immense mass of water, it’s a road where everything is open, with no ending. Its not like driving on a street with signs to follow. The sea is like life. We don’t know where we will end up.”

Having lived in villages and cities in five continents, he has formed a human patchwork of all the cultures he has seen and experienced. He unites them all in his works, a universal approach to life that has become his advocacy.

In his 26-foot sculpture *The Union of the World*, the largest bronze sculpture of classical mythology in the world today, he depicts Hercules as a force for peace.

“I want us to put the world together, to unite people and cultures. I have learnt through travelling that we all are the same. We have so much more in common than we sometimes see. We are all part of the same family.” ❶