



Bambule im gurkenglas (*Helter-skelter in picklejar*) and, right, **Die Schnoede Muellerin** (*The disdainful Mueller's wife*)

Slice of chaos, forms and fantasy figures

Austrian artist Philip Mueller explores the many sides to his personality and then combines his thoughts and memories with visual impressions

By **JYOTI KALSI**
Special to Weekend Review

For young Austrian artist Philip Mueller the act of creating artworks is akin to setting sail on a journey of self-discovery — into the unknown depths of his own being. As he plunges into this adventure he discovers his heroes and anti-heroes and traces how their influence is manifested in him, and how social mechanisms and structures have shaped his personality.

Explaining the enigmatic title of his show, *My Father is Many and I am Happy as a Sailor*, the artist says, “We all have different characters inside us, but we do not recognise them. I have given different names to the multiple personalities within me and I believe that all the people who have influenced me positively or negatively are the fathers of these different persons that live inside me. This show is about recognising my fathers and their impact on me.”

The first thing you encounter in Mueller’s show is a rack full of capes designed by the artist. He invites every visitor to wear a cape before viewing the show as a metaphorical way of assuming a particular identity.

His colourful, chaotic paintings are filled with a variety of human and animal figures and characters from mythology, literature, pop culture and real life such as The Pope, Grace Jones, Che Guevara, his own father and great grandmother, fish, birds and other strange and hybrid creatures.

In essence, Mueller’s compositions are a combination of his visual impressions, feelings, memories and thoughts. The artist is also displaying a diary full of sketches and collages that document what was going on in his life during the period he was working on this show, offering viewers a deeper insight into his paintings. “Every element in these paint-

ings has some meaning for me. But it will mean something else to every viewer,” he says.

In most of the paintings, the plethora of figures in the foreground combine to form a larger image such as a grinning Cheshire cat or a self-portrait of the artist. The large face filled with smaller and smaller figures portrays the multiple and often contrasting identities within a single person.

The process of construction and deconstruction that Mueller uses to create his acrylic, spray-paint and lacquer paintings mimics the way our personality is formed through our experiences and interactions with our environment, our subconscious responses to these influences as well as the conscious decisions we make.

“The process begins with chaos. I place the canvas on the floor of my studio and invite my friends over for a party, during which the canvas gets filled with footprints, marks of food and beverage spills and splashes of paint. Next, I look for forms such as mountains or rooms within these random strokes. In the third stage I put in the realistic human and animal figures from my imagination. The fourth stage is one of deconstruction and results in new figures emerging from the earlier ones and the addition of symbols such as fish, birds and oval shapes,” he explains.

The artist is also displaying a set of 14 small paintings on paper featuring a variety of interesting figures and symbols. “My large paintings tell my story. But I painted these small scenes so that viewers can use them to create their own stories,” he says.

■ *Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.*

■ *My Father is Many and I am Happy as a Sailor will run at Carbon 12, Al Quoz, until June 8.*



Grinsekatz (*Cheshire cat*)



Mother in her Favourite Yellow Sari, by Anjali Gupta
Angel with Child, by Angelina Lawless

A special show

I'm Special ... You're Special is a moving and inspirational exhibition organised by Mawaheb from Beautiful People, the UAE’s first art studio for young adults with special needs. Each painting depicts the most special person in the life of the artist and offers a glimpse into the innocent, pure and uncomplicated world of these talented and very special artists.

Most of the artists have chosen to paint their mothers. While some have paid tribute to the woman who makes them feel loved and wanted through portraits, others have expressed what she means to them by depicting her as a loving angel, a colourful rainbow, a tree of life, a beautiful rose, priceless gold, or a soft, protective cloud with a silver lining that shields them from the hot sun.

But there are other special people too in the lives of these artists. Zainab Ahmad’s painting is about her brother and the fun she has playing football with him. And Abdullah Lutfi has depicted the many activities he enjoys doing with his favourite cousin. Hussain Satwani too loves his brother because he makes him laugh and has depicted him as a clown in his painting. And the tulips in Anjali Kakar’s painting represent her caring sister-in-law.

Victor Sitali’s painting, titled *Best Friends Forever*, is about his childhood friend and the fun times they shared at a boarding school for the deaf in Zambia. And Ali Al Salhi’s painting, titled *Mawaheb Mayhem*, features his friends at Mawaheb. “My



Mawaheb buddies are special to me because they bring out the best in me and make me smile. I am so confident since they came into my life,” he says.

But the painting that truly touches the soul is Sharan Budhrani’s brightly coloured stallion. “I see myself as the special person. I see myself as a horse, running wild and free in the mountains. But unfortunately people don’t see that. They see me confined to a wheelchair, unable to do anything. They miss seeing the stallion in me — the one that enjoys freedom. The stallion is strong, determined, wild and free,” he says.

The concept behind Mawaheb (which is the Arabic word for “talented”) is to bridge the gap between society and individuals with special needs. The studio is located in the Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood, and was founded by Wemmy de Maaker, who has many decades of experience of working with people with special needs. The young artists are guided by resident art teacher Gulshan Kavarana and assisted by volunteers from the community. “This exhibition is about art that is pure and from the heart. We invite you to come and show support and respect for these special artists who just want to be accepted for who they are and be seen and appreciated for their work,” de Maaker says.

■ *The exhibition will run at Art Couture at Al Badia Golf Club by InterContinental, Dubai Festival City, until June 2.*