

# SEA OF CHANGE

Like the Mediterranean Sea, PATRICK FENECH is an artist enriched by his quest for constant change. And, like true artists, he has many stories about what inspires him. CHARLOTTE STAFRACE caught up with him at St. James Cavalier, about to embark on another project, another journey.



ABOVE: THE WIDE FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY: COMPOSITE X 3 SIZE: 42CM X 150CM

I could not help asking about Patrick's fascination with the sea, since a lot of his latest work depicts it in various ways. 'It's inbuilt in my genes', Patrick joked. His grandfather was a ship chandler and his uncle a geologist, inventor and educator who spent most of his free time fishing out at sea. His father Gianni, who formed part of "Atelier" and the "Modern Art Group", was a furniture manufacturer, painter and model maker. He was awarded first prize for decorative carnival floats and won the King Carnival award three times in succession back in the sixties.

In his youth, Patrick was fascinated by the writing of Desmond Morris who had conducted a scientific study of Maltese boatyards. What followed was a photographic study of fishermen at work and anything they used, from recycled paint tubs to discarded fishing tackle, mainly around the Marsaxlokk area. Patrick would spend hours mingling with the fisher folk listening to their stories. "The boatyard itself is like an ongoing exhibition - colours interchanging constantly or an installation of modified wood ready to float'. His interest soon turned to sculpture; he would pick up pieces of driftwood or other boat material which the fisherman discard or a storm transforms, and combine them into installations or photograph them in his studio. Patrick recalls being attracted to this "new art" from a tender age - he remembers a particular exhibition he visited as a child at the Museum of Archeology in Valletta - 'it was made out of enlarged bus tickets and inflated rubber tyres' (it was an installation by Gabriel Caruana). That image remained ingrained in his mind ever since.

Patrick was educated at St. Aloysius College, but he quickly

felt restrained and awkward following the normal path since in those days you either became a lawyer, doctor or a priest. A first job landed him in the insurance world - a far cry from the artist he would become, but nonetheless it did teach him important business skills. When he was awarded a scholarship in art, he was quick to pack up and settle in Florence after which he moved to study in Milan.

An important phase in Patrick's career has actually been a 12-year period between training in Italy and his involvement in art and publishing. That period was influential for him as he read a lot about art and visited important exhibitions in galleries and museums abroad. In fact, travel has been a constant source of inspiration. Patrick feels challenged and stimulated encountering different cultures - especially those of the Orient. Participation in various exhibitions abroad has also brought home a regenerated form of expression.

Patrick recently participated in Les Nuits d'Arles in France, where the best creative photographers from the 27 European Union nations exhibited various works under a theme - 'Photographical Identities of Europe'. These annual shows, which generate a lot of tourism, are eye-openers for both visitors and artists.

When I asked what's fashionable these days, Patrick said that 'There seems to be a desire to go back to the Diane Arbus and Edward Weston type of photography'. Patrick must be happy, I thought. Next year will see him participating in a collaboration in Boston - 'Here, There & Everywhere', with the theme 'Devotion'. 'Collaborations with foreign artists is vital and opens up other



I CAUGHT A RAINBOW IN MY NETS - 2008 PHOTOGRAPHY: MONTAGE SIZE: 86CM X 77 CM

venues for practicing artists – it's like seeing art through a fresh pair of eyes', says Patrick, adding that without sponsors, however, it would be difficult to participate in any of these important art events.

And where is his art at today? After 26 years in photography, Patrick feels he has only just started to tap the potential of photography. His oeuvre consists of social documentary photography, erotic art and abstract work which uses stock photography from the boatyard and are then turned into fascinating composites. Asked in his most recent exhibition at the Auberge D'Italie when producing '9 pieces', how he sets about creating these composites, he mentioned that he is initially attracted by shape, form and colour. These are put in his sketch

Finally turning to what's up his sleeve, Patrick rounded up our time talking passionately about his upcoming project – He is the curator of 'PICTURES IN MY MIND' a project to celebrate the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue (EYID). He has held a series of photographic workshops with 13 young participants who hail from different walks of life (university students/Mcast/refugees/ Indian and Chinese residents). With the help of the British Council and St James Cavalier who are coordinating the project, these 'students' were coached on the effective use of photography in today's business world. The project started off scanning the history of photography till the present day and learning how to operate a camera. What followed were studio sessions in still-life photography and other disciplines. For



PILLARS OF HERCULES - 2007  
PHOTOGRAPHY: MONTAGE  
SIZE: 75CM X 114CM

BELOW LEFT: WINTER SOLSTICE - 2007  
PHOTOGRAPHY: COMPOSITE X 3  
42CM X 150CM



[www.patrickfenech.com](http://www.patrickfenech.com)

book, where they can lie dormant for a while. A lot of juggling is applied to the group until they come together in a definite new shape. He uses very high apertures to produce high definition images which are completely 'in focus' on all plains hence totally 'flat'.

When I dared enquire what he thinks of the change to digital in today's photographic world, Patrick was quick to respond that this has given new life to creativity as limitations are now boundless. For this reason, Patrick feels strongly that photography should have its rightful place on the syllabus at University, especially in the faculty of arts and architecture. Being a visiting lecturer at University he finds working with students exciting – although lacking in technique, very often these same students have a knack for looking at things differently. He hopes they find the right impetus to keep themselves challenged.

Never one to stay still, Patrick Fenech is also well known for his book publishing, and amongst the many works he has collaborated on, we could not help but mention a recent love – that of 'Richard Ellis The Photography Collection'. He described the experience nothing short of 'magical'. Sifting through 40,000 images of Malta, Patrick and two other experts had to decide what was to go in the first issue of Ellis' photography about Valletta and Floriana. Excited by the fact of getting firsthand insight into such a worldly pioneer of photography, Patrick set about digitising the archive. Customers who have already acquired this fascinating first edition featuring Valletta and Floriana can look forward to the next one – Grand Harbour & Cottonera.

this exhibition each participant was given a brief on linking the intercultural backbone with their own cultures. In this exhibition, which will take place at St. James Cavalier from September, Patrick has remarkably made use of the first attempts in creating an image going back to the Victorian Cameo of creating a silhouette image and connecting it to the present digital age.

Throughout our interview Patrick spoke about many people he came across, people who had influenced him, inspired him in many ways, and one quote that has surely stuck along all these years is that of Maltese artist Gabriel Caruana, who advised Patrick when branching away from mainstream art to 'be brave and do your own thing.' Those words still ring true today. ☺



BELOW: ULYSSES RESISTANCE - 2006  
PHOTOGRAPHY: COMPOSITE X 9  
SIZE: 87CM X 139CM

