

Kapo's art — a natural extension of his personality

By Ignacy Eker

When Mallica Reynolds or "Kapo" as he has styled himself, (having heard a mysterious voice) held his first one-man show at the Hills Galleries in 1961, my review of it was not very enthusiastic, and I clearly expressed some doubts about his perceptiveness in the handling of form in his carvings.

In those days a letter L was still attached to my critical writings and yet now, examining his current show of paintings and carvings, done in the last seven or eight years, at the Stony Hill Hotel, Hermitage Dam Road, I don't think I erred outrageously, for indeed at the core of his small and large figures, or group of figures, there is a weakness which no amount of naive and charming folksiness can hide or disguise.

Kapo, in case you don't know, is one of our pioneers in self-taught art who has over the years established a formidable reputation both here and abroad by a dedicated devotion to his craft in face, at the beginning, of not very friendly reception. Eventually, however, his undoubted talent and colourful, exuberant personality, (he

is the Shepherd of a revivalist cult) won over the public and he has now a secure niche in the Pantheon. Indeed, something of a legend has grown around him, so that now it is difficult to sort out the man from the artist and to establish from where the pulling force of his art emanates, though looking coolly and objectively at his work, I would say that in my case it flows from his paintings rather than carvings, for I've come to admire his vivid colours, his unerring sense of pattern and, above all, his simple yet profound lifeworld.

Unlike most of our middle-class, more intellectual artists, he has no identity crises, hankering after or hating some elusive White Goddess, nor yet does he pine for a Black Zion in its literal or metaphorical sense. He feels himself a Jamaican and knows instinctively that Jerusalem can be established in Jamaica's green and pleasant land which he loves and understands.

A God-fearing man, he nevertheless sees his Maker as a bountiful, benevolent force to be served and glorified not on a part-time basis, but completely, totally. Thus Kapo's art is a natural extension of his personality, a joyous ritual in which he accepts life as it is with confidence and tries to make the best of it.

The exhibition is comprised of 83 paintings and some 40 carvings and in the former religious themes predominate, drawing their subject-matter from traditional, as well as personal mythology. Some of it is autobiographical, as when Kapo reminisces in *When I was young*, seeing himself as a youthful Shepherd, but in the majority of pictures he concerns himself more objectively with his calling, its struggle with Evil (he is very conscious of this), its healing rituals, preaching and good works.

It is a world in which there are no boundaries (most progressively) between sexes, so that you can meet a She-Satan or a woman-priest, whilst sexual intercourse is looked upon as a holy act that must bear fruit if it is not to be meaningless. In a painting, titled *Creation*, a couple makes love in lush garden scenery, setting up an equation between man's and Nature's growth.

Kapo expresses his

thoughts and ideas with admirable directness and seldom resorts to symbols, but if I were to point to one of them I would be inclined to single out his predilection for oranges. They appear with great frequency in his pictures and even when he is not specific about them by painting them explicitly, he somehow hints at their presence in the greenery with glowing, rounded shapes that resemble them rather than any other fruit.

Indeed, in the exhibition's set-piece, titled *Orange Paradise*, he breaks two records, first, by painting more oranges in it than he himself or any other painter ever painted in a single picture, and second, by pricing it higher than any other Jamaican painting has ever been priced — \$10,000.

It is a beautiful work, a sort of orange fantasia which on me at least had a strange effect, so much so, in fact, that I began counting them in the hopes of calculating how much, given the above price of \$10,000, each orange would cost. Needless to say, I had to give up half-way into the composition, for good as my eyesight is I lost the count amidst the fantastic profusion of fiery circles. When I came to I was in no doubt that the orange for Kapo is the symbol of Life Force itself. A fruit that stands for happiness, contentment, love and all that is good.

I've already hinted at my sentiments about Kapo's carvings. They are very sin-

cere and, at times, very amusing, the intimate portrait-busts especially, but I do not find them as arresting as his paintings, owing mainly to their essential amorphousness and too great a dependence on the shape of the wood from which they were fashioned.

Space does not permit me to review the the exhibition of paintings and drawings by Judy Ann MacMillan which opened on Wednesday at the State Theatre Gallery, Cross Roads. It is comprised of portraits, and male and female nudes and is quite innovative in that, for the first time, the artist displays her skill in draughtsmanship. I shall write about this show at length next Sunday and in the meantime I commend it most warmly to viewers.

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