

For Art's Sake

Scenes of starving artists languishing in the gutters may not be commonplace these days, but many do suffer other forms of pain to produce their best works, as did Milenko and Delia Prvacki.

Last year, when Milenko and Delia Prvacki trundled off from Singapore to Australia's northern territories with 20 local artists, they never dreamed that they would be sleeping within spitting distance of kangaroos, cockatoos, fruit bats, crocodiles and dingoes. Were it not for the protection of their thin nylon tent, mornings would have been spent cleaning droppings from their sleeping bags, following the nocturnal smorgasbord of activities that the area's treetop inhabitant engaged in.

Artists, braving the elements and communing with nature, obtain an intimate feeling for the environment they are attempting to render. As the group of artists, organised by Marjorie Chu of Art

Forum, were intent on capturing the vast beauty of this magical region, camping by night and painting by day filled the itinerary while wine and barbecued fish filled stomachs during less rugged evenings. The trip gave birth to a body of work by Milenko and Delia entitled *Fire in Kakadu*, which was later exhibited at the Art Forum Gallery in Singapore.

Fire in Kakadu was the couple's second joint exhibit in Singapore, though each has held numerous solo exhibitions over the past years. The exhibition presented oil paintings and stoneware ceramics based on the couple's experiences in the northern territories. Milenko's oil paintings, known for their calming colours and abstracted forms, focused on the fires that flare-up in the bone-dry environment of the northern territories. Delia's ceramics seized on the grandeur and simplicity of the vast open skies, showcasing millions of stars, which blaze in the night sky. All the works offer a rich palette of colours and textures in paint, stoneware and metal. More than just beautiful works of art however, the 'fire' theme subtly signals an alarm, and a call to action—a fight for survival which continually wages under the vast sky.

Milenko and Delia are now permanent residents in Singapore. Having arrived seven years ago from their war-ravaged countries of Yugoslavia and Romania; the couple has thrived in Singapore's soothing environment. It is the first time that the two have been able to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their art. Both artists are masters of their respective techniques, while their lives and ambitions are complementary. Their daughter, who studies

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sculpture in the United States, completes the circle of artists. Living and breathing art 24 hours a day is great, but "a little bit ridiculous" admits the Prvackis. Even so, the family or artists would not dream of having it any other way, and believe that their companionship and connection to art helps them produce better work.

Prior to Singapore, Milenko, a painter by profession, exhibited extensively throughout Eastern Europe, receiving numerous awards and prizes from art institutions. Besides painting, Milenko enjoys teaching as well. A man with a large heart not only for art, Milenko is a favourite teacher at LaSalle College of the Arts where, as a warm and artistic version of Father Christmas, he inspires students.

Of his students, Milenko believes, "we need to support them because they are bringing a new spirit to this country".

Delia, a ceramist by trade, also teaches at the college between working on the numerous commissions that she is continually being asked to execute. She too exhibited extensively throughout Eastern Europe prior to arriving in Singapore. Very organised and professional in her work, Delia's pieces range from small, tabletop ceramics, to huge interlocking slabs which extend for hundreds of feet. Though the medium may appear masculine, Delia's sensitivity to colour and texture incorporates the Ying and Yang. She looks for inspiration to works done in China, Africa and Europe. Simultaneously, she feels that there is universality in art and that the role of the artist is to, "observe, question and react to society, giving answers where appropriate".

The couple lives in an old black-and-white home in Woodlands with their faithful German Shepherd and a 'Singapore exterior' dog which was rescued from the streets. As Milenko laughingly complains, "Every house starts out as a home, and then after two or three months it disintegrates into a studio."

Milenko, who admits his preference to a stable living and working environment, says, "To do well, I need the feeling of home."

Delia believes that, "Each person has a responsibility to the people around them." For this couple of artists, having made their home in Singapore, enriching the lives of those around them, while scaling the peaks in their respective artistic careers, will continue to fuel the fires within their souls. ▲