

Graphic art at the Hilton

ART
by E. Fiorentino

ONE OF the most effervescent happenings to hit the Maltese artistic scene in recent years has been the attention given to it by Dame Françoise Tempira. She has on several occasions organised exhibitions, mainly at the Valletta and Mdina museums, whereby some important new names have been introduced into the Maltese artistic milieu.

Being primarily an art historian, Dame Françoise also finds time to direct part of her love for the subject with the writing of books, the monograph on the Maltese artist Turu Rizzo being among her more recent productions. The latest offering by the indomitable lady consists of a large collective exhibition currently being held at the Malta Hilton where she has managed to bring together a selection of works by no fewer than 50 artists from 15 different countries, including Malta.

Entitled "Two Centuries of Graphic Art", this extensive collection treats the visitor to some of the great masters on the European scene, starting with Goya and reaching up to several important contemporary names like Manuel Quintanilla (b. 1924) or Giacomo de Pass (b. 1938). While some of the works come from private collections, the bulk of them are being offered for sale with 10 per cent of the proceeds going to the Community Chest Fund.

Included in this collection of lithographs, engravings, prints and original drawings, many of which have had literature, history and tradition as their inspirational source, is a set of engravings by that master of the scathing comment, Francisco Goya, also represented by one of his so-called *Nouveaux Caprices de Goya*, the original drawings of which have been destroyed.

A truly remarkable drawing which is being considered as one of the highlights of the entire exhibition shows a reclining nude in a foreshortened attitude. It is dated 1919 and signed by Henri Matisse, the leading artist of the Fauves — it must be the first Matisse shown to the public in



FIVE WORKS BY SALVADOR DALI at the "Two Centuries of Graphic Art" exhibition at the Hilton.

Malta. The Spanish artist Quintanilla, whose work was first introduced in Malta by Tempira herself in an exhibition back in the mid-70s, is regarded as the founder of Essentialism, an artistic movement which, as the name implies, aims to divest its subjects of all inessential elements. He is well represented here.

Though in no way related as movements, Essentialism and Suprematism are rooted in a common shearing away of unnecessary features. It was Kasimir Malevich, the inventor of Suprematism, who painted white on white. He transformed Cubism into a purer proposition, and the coloured drawing in the exhibition testifies to this geometric face of abstraction.

Doré and Dali

I always feel uplifted whenever I come across any example from the prodigious production of that very romantic spirit that was Gustave Doré, best known for his illustrations of the Bible. Françoise Tempira calls him "one of the greatest illustrators of all time"; the few examples present are enough to confirm his reputation as a technical perfectionist who can equally interpret Cervantes

or the Fables of La Fontaine with undiminished imagination.

It was in turn a flow of outrageous imagination that characterised the legend that was Salvador Dali who died in 1989. Dame Françoise herself was acquainted with the great surrealist painter, visiting him on several occasions in his home at Port-Liege. The Hilton even includes some of the Spanish artist's lithographs which illustrate Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, apart from a special one

called *Discovery of America* which comes at a convenient time to coincide with this year's fifth centenary celebrations.

Another artist who also died not long ago is Frank Hill (1937-1990). He was once described by Tempira as "the most soft-spoken philosopher with a delightfully potent Birmingham accent, sensitive, intellectual in his understanding of life, marvellously read, poetically humorous, transcendently spiritual and unaware of the magnitude of his talent". His versa-

tility stares at us through a highly-refined line that can either sway along with the limpidity of a Japanese drawing or wobble with the stimulus of inner frenzy.

Watercolours

The interpretations of illustrious names within the art historical spectrum like Botticelli and Hokusai serve to show how a range of apparently unconnected idioms can be fully reconciled by the British artist.

A young artist, this time from Malta, who signs simply "Nikki", is represented by a number of small watercolours, the medium by which an ancestor of hers, whom the world of art reveres as the great J.M.W. Turner, is best known. Nikki (Arnett) will be having her own exhibition in late December at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina.

Giacomo de Pass makes yet another appearance among us with some of his mellifluously dynamic drawings and prints, often tinged with erotic imagery. Sporadically, one can also mention other artists whose work is replete with interesting statements, such as Zoltan Perlmutter, Rudolph Khatchaturyan, Luciano Gasper, Thanassis Akrivopoulos and Janina Baranowska. There are others of course, including three Maltese artists, Edwin Galea, Raymond Pitre and Turu Rizzo. It all amounts to an enlightening experience within the lavish setting of the Hilton.