



# PORTRAITS OF LOVE AND VIOLENCE

*Top Spanish artist LITA CABELLUT tells Mavis Teo that despite some interpretations of her paintings, she is inspired by beauty, not pain*

**L**ita Cabellut is tiny. In a sea of people, you can easily miss her. Especially when she's surrounded by art collectors eager to meet and speak with her. The popular Spanish artist is in Singapore to launch her latest portrait collection, *The Echo of the Masters*, as part of Singapore Opera Gallery's 25th anniversary celebrations. Although barely 1.6m tall, Lita seems to fill a room with her presence when she speaks, holding people's attention with large, limpid dark eyes and grand gestures.

In a 2014-2015 Artprice report, Lita was listed as the second bestselling living Spanish artist in the world. She has not been resting on her laurels, and is fully booked with work. One of them is a collection inspired by the late Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca. It will be held in 2021 at the Alhambra, a Unesco World Heritage site in Granada, Spain.

## A WORLD OF INSPIRATIONS

Despite having come straight to the show's opening after a 13-hour flight from Amsterdam, the 58-year-old is not showing any sign of fatigue. So energised is she by passion for her art. "I will fly back tomorrow evening," says Lita, adding with a laugh that she doesn't have time on this trip to get jet lag. Amsterdam is where Lita is based and has spent her formative years as an artist after graduating from Amsterdam's Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

Lita's latest collection pays tribute to modern masters like Andy Warhol and Gustav Klimt. The *Monarch Butterfly*'s colour palette of gold leaf and silver channels Klimt's *The Kiss* immediately, but those familiar with Lita's art will also see her signature style of marrying traditional fresco with modern oil painting techniques. Then there is also the crackle of texture that Lita has spent 10 years working with paint technicians to get the right formula.

While people like Coco Chanel and Sigmund Freud have inspired Lita, she also works a lot with the man or woman on the street. "The people you walk past; they all have a story to tell and I am very interested in their stories," she says, adding that she thinks we are very much a result of our experiences.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF OPERA GALLERY SINGAPORE



*Monarch Butterfly* (2019)





From left: *Blossoming* (2019);  
*Ruud* (2019)



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AN UNUSUAL PERSPECTIVE

Lita is speaking about herself, of course. Her background has been talked about a lot in the Western art circles. Born to a gypsy mother who ran a brothel in Barcelona and had abandoned her to the care of her grandmother, the artist spent much of her childhood “as one of the street children – running errands for prostitutes, hustling street vendors and just trying to survive”.

When she was 10, her grandmother died and Lita was sent to an orphanage where she was adopted by a Catalan family who saw her interest in art after her first trip to the Prado Museum in Madrid. They encouraged her talent by paying for private lessons (Lita who had never been to school until she was adopted was also given tuition in other subjects).

Lita’s background explains to a large extent why many choose to see her portrayal of subjects sometimes in a raw, anguished state – as violent and dark, and a reflection of her childhood memories. It is as if she is still tormented by

them. However, she differs on the hold her childhood has on her. “Life is not all about pretty scenes. If violent is the way people describe the dark aspects, then I would say violence is sometimes a precursor of beauty. For example, childbirth is violent and messy but what comes after is hope and beauty,” she says.

“Without my experiences, I won’t be the artist I am today nor would I appreciate beauty, but those years were but a small fraction of my life,” says Lita, with a sparkle in her eyes. “I think I have a great life. I am very happy.” 