

THE LIVES AND LOVES OF AN ARTISTIC FAMILY.  
BY AMELIA ABDULLAHSANI-GERICK

# The Passage of Prvacki

For couples who share the same occupation, it is a daily struggle when domestic and professional concerns intertwine. However, for Delia and Milenko Prvacki, two artists who have been together for more than 40 years, and often collaborate with each other, the result is a stimulating visual treat.

Delia and Milenko are from Romania and Serbia respectively. They met when they were both students at the Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest. Delia studied ceramics, and Milenko painted. Even though they work in such different media, there may have been a seed of aesthetic commonality that drew them together. After more than four decades, it is inevitable that they influence each other artistically and support each other's careers.

They have lived in Singapore for the past 22 years. After living through years of turmoil in the former Yugoslavia, they have traded their politically branded past to become Singaporean citizens. In 1991, Milenko first came to Singapore for a short-term contract. In 1994, when the late Brother Joseph McNally offered him a teaching position at LASALLE College of the Arts, Milenko saw this as a great opportunity for his family.

Since moving to Singapore, they have contributed to the landscape of the local art scene in myriad ways. Delia has constantly been commissioned to produce sculpture for community and outdoor public areas, such as The Esplanade and the Marine Parade Library. Milenko has been acknowledged for his artistic and academic contributions to society. In 2012, he was awarded the Cultural Medallion Award for the Visual Arts, the most prestigious cultural prize for a Singaporean artist. It is presented by the National Arts Council. Both teach and work with the community — Delia in her studio, and Milenko as a Senior Fellow at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Delia comes from a creative family. Her father was a poet, and all her siblings are in the creative field. When she was younger, Delia wrote poetry and played the piano; she has published her poetry and seriously considered a career as a pianist. During the student movements in Europe in the late sixties, censorship on intellectuals lessened the appeal of being a poet, as she was not free to publish what she composed; likewise the career of a pianist faded as she realized that she would not be playing her own compositions but those of others. At 17, she discovered ceramics and a deep interest in archaeology, ethnology, and history. This ties in with her family's deep-rooted tradition of craft and sewing, preserved by her mother's collection of the family's linen and embroidery. Ceramics was then considered a 'masculine' medium, and despite her petite frame Delia has thrived. Clay is physically demanding, not to mention the extreme temperatures. Working with three kilns at home allows Delia to work on multiple projects simultaneously. At time of print, Delia is researching and developing a number of proposals for public projects that integrate community participation, as well as working on concepts for a utilitarian ceramic with educational and humanitarian purposes.

The chance to do public projects was a revelation for Delia. When commissioned for a public space, she takes it as a chance to learn more about the place — the architecture, the space, the

This page: *Exit*, 2014, Milenko Prvacki.

Facing page: Milenko (left) and Delia in front of *18 Hours*.

society, how the public uses the space, movement, and the sense of scale. Not simply a matter of aesthetics, there is a sense of responsibility when placing a work of art in public. There is a social function in public spaces, and the public art must correspond to the space in which it exists. This is a challenge that Delia readily engages — every space is different and tells its own story.

Both Delia and Milenko have always been influenced by history and their surroundings. Moving to Singapore was not only a pivotal moment in their lives but also in their artistic development. Coming from a cold European country to a tropical island, their work expanded. Influenced by light, colour, and the humidity, their colour palette changed to reflect the spectrum of shades of greens and blues rarely seen outside the tropics. For Milenko, he started working more in red, an auspicious colour in this part of the world. Before coming to Singapore, he had not seen as much red used in everyday objects. The ability to work outdoors was also a novelty they readily adapted. Delia works with her students and protégés on the ground floor of their black-and-white house.

After moving to Singapore, the couple readily immersed themselves in the rich history of the region, as they themselves originated from a place of rich history. Being based in Singapore has enabled them to travel to destinations like India, Bali, and Borobudur, to name a few. This has had a remarkable impact on their work. For example, Peranakan ceramics and Vietnamese roof ceramics gave Delia opportunity to expand her repertoire.

Recently, they have chosen to express their artistic and personal journey together. *Passage*, their fifth joint exhibition, was recently shown at the Luxe Art Museum in Singapore. Exhibiting six of Delia's monumental ceramic sculptures with three of Milenko's large-scale paintings, *Passage* is a spiritual and emotional journey of milestones. The uninterrupted exchange between the East and West was a prevalent theme in this exhibition.

Collaboration in art and life has also reproduced their daughter Ana, who is an artist as well. She has a successful career and has exhibited in such prestigious institutions and biennales such as the Hammer Museum, the Centre Pompidou, dOCUMENTA 13, and the Sydney Biennale in 2008. Recently, her work was seen at Sundaram Tagore Gallery at Gillman Barracks, with another installed at Promenade Station on the Downtown Line as part of LTA's Permanent Public Project. It comes as no surprise that Ana is married to an artist, Sam Durant. Ana and Sam currently live in Los Angeles—he is represented by Blum & Poe and teaches at California Institute of the Arts—with their five-year-old daughter, Divna, who is starting to show signs of artistic talent as well.

The life-long journey of this artistic family continues through heritage and education. We are blessed to have their work in our homes and public spaces. ■



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