

## ARTIST TO THE QUEENS

Richard H. Wagner

Prominent amongst the maritime art, portraits of the royal family and other works in the art collection on QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 are three large murals. They feature bold, bright colors and depict scenes of people mingling on an imaginary cruise ship and at other nautical events. The figures are not realistic but rather are flat, geometric shapes, devoid of facial features. The paintings are striking and lively but at the same time, give one pause.

On QUEEN MARY 2, passengers come across similar works. Again, the colors are bright and the scenes depicted festive. Again, one wonders why the figures in the painting are shown as glamorous but faceless. The works are beautiful yet challenging.

These are the works of Giancarlo Impiglia. They were commissioned by Cunard for QE2 and QM2. His works will also be seen on the forthcoming QUEEN VICTORIA. "We commissioned it on Queen Victoria, as we like the style of his work and it adds a good contrast to the other work we have planned for this ship. Regarding QE2 and QUEEN MARY 2, again, the style of his work was liked, as it is stylish and different in its approach," explains Carol Marlow, President of Cunard Line.

Mr. Impiglia is a New York-based artist, born in Rome, Italy. He studied at the Liceo Artistico, and at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma, where he specialized in murals and mosaics, under the direction of Italian postwar artists such as Giuseppe Capogrossi, Giuho Turcato, Umberfo Mastroianni and Mario Mafai. He then expanded into photography and cinema, receiving degrees from the Technical School of Photography and the Italian Center of Cinematography of Rome.

A commission for the Great American Insurance Building in lower Manhattan launched his American art career. Other commissions include Fortunoff's "Revisiting 5th Avenue," and "The Flight" for USAir Club in LaGuardia Airport. However, what first brought him to widespread public attention was probably "Absolut Impiglia," an Absolut Vodka advertisement that ran in 1992.

In late 1994, a \$45 million refurbishment of the interior of QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 was undertaken. Over the years, the interior of QE2 had been altered in a piecemeal fashion and a number of different styles were now competing in different areas of the ship. Accordingly, in addition to expanding the Yacht Club, replacing the Magradome and Upper Deck pool area with the Lido buffet, adding the Pavilion and the Crystal Bar as well as upgrading many of the passenger cabins, Cunard sought to unify the interior. This included adding wood veneer paneling to many areas and redecorating the Queens Room, the

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Chart Room (until then the Midships Bar), the Golden Lion (until then the Theater Bar), and the Midships Lobby -- in short, making a consistent style throughout.

An important part of this de-fragmentation was enhancing the ship's art collection. "It was during the refurbishing that I was commissioned," Impiglia said when I spoke with him recently onboard QM2. "The Lifestyle Murals" were placed in the promenade areas leading from the Queens Room to the new Lido and "The Henley Regatta" was displayed in the new Pavilion light fare restaurant, which overlooks the One Deck pool. Mr. Impiglia came onboard to lecture about his works during QE2's 1000th voyage in June 1995.

Following the acquisition of Cunard by Carnival Corporation in 1997, work began on designing a new ocean liner. "When the QUEEN MARY 2 was still a project on paper, the architects and the designers were aiming to re-create in some way a form of re-make of the great ocean liners of the past like the glorious NORMANDIE of 1935, the first QUEEN MARY in 1936, the QUEEN ELIZABETH and all the other ocean liners that became part of history for their beauty. These ships sleek design and opulent interiors were the finest examples of Art Deco. The desire for the QUEEN MARY 2 was to offer the passengers, like in the past, the most elegant, luxurious, comfortable and fastest way to cross the ocean."

"Since the late sixties and seventies, as an artist, I have been working to develop a very personal style containing elements of the Art Deco style. By use of the dramatic language of the Cubists combined with the sense of motion of the Futurists and the stylization of the neo-classic period, [his style gives viewers] the feeling of the past." Accordingly, "I [wanted] to be part of this revival of Art Deco on the ship because my style has always been part this Art Deco. Actually, I was the first artist since the war to paint in this revival of the Art Deco. So, I created my work, I proposed it and they accepted it."

"Walking around the QUEEN MARY 2, we feel like we have stepped back in time. The Britannia room is breathtaking, with its stained glass ceiling, giant tapestry, the elegant interior decorated with the works of prominent contemporary artists and artisans. The Royal Court Theater is one of the most beautiful theaters on the ocean today, in many cases, comparable to any of the Broadway theaters in New York. The Planetarium, the Queens Room and all the public space on this ship appeal to the elements of and are reminiscent of the Art Deco era."

"And, there is a return to the formal time that carries the extraordinary eclectics of Art Deco. It was not a single type of style. It was eclectic, anything that carried on a certain set of values that was born between the two

world wars is included in this style, this formal Art Deco. So, there is not really a specific image that can define Art Deco, it is very eclectic."

"Architects, designers, artists, and builders worked side by side to build this amazing ship, offering to all of us the opportunity to cross the ocean in a very elegant and comfortable environment very reminiscent of the elegant ships of the past but with a difference. Here, the décor [contrasts] sharply with the technology of the 21st century with which the ship was built."

As noted earlier, Mr. Impiglia's work is not merely decorative. "I am essentially an artist questioning existing artistic and societal values. My work is based on my observation that costumes reflect culture, and occidental costumes reflect the influence of western values throughout the world in general," he has written. "My representational paintings are more than merely symbolic statements about social values - they underlie our preoccupation to hide reality behind our superficial appearance."

Consequently, there are three reasons why the figures in Impiglia's works are devoid of features. "First of all, I am not painting portraits, I am painting situations so there is no need for physical features. Also, the images are very stylized and flat. Also, they reflect the idea that we live in a society that is faceless. We do not pay much attention to faces, we pay more attention to other things."

Yet, he has departed from his normal style for his centerpiece work for the QUEEN VICTORIA -- a portrait of the 19th century Queen-Empress as a young woman. As such, it depicts her before the age of photography. Therefore, Impiglia studied contemporary portraits of Victoria in order to derive a new image of her. The work's realistic style is a return to Mr. Impiglia's early roots when he was studying art in Rome.