

## Lazzaro Pisani at Museum of Fine Arts

George Cini



### The Death Of Abel

Eleven paintings by Lazzaro Pisani are on show at the Museum of Fine Arts in South Street, Valletta.

The oil on canvas paintings were donated to Heritage Malta by the artist's daughter, Maria.

Pisani (1854-1932) is considered one of Malta's most important artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

He started his studies with Mikiel Bellanti and Nazju Cortis and won a scholarship at the Accademia di San Luca and the British Academy in Rome.

His career was, however, largely overshadowed by Giuseppe Cali (1846-1930) who netted some of the most lucrative and prestigious commissions.

In spite of having such a formidable competitor, Pisani got his fair share of sacred art and portrait work.

These include most of the paintings at the Nadur parish church and portraits of Maltese personalities.

The bequest includes *The Death Of Abel*, *The Letter*, *St Dismas*, the artist's self portrait, *Mrs Maria Concetta Pisani*, *Maria Pisani*, *Robbie Pisani*, *Cav. Paolo Bonici Mompalao*, *Lady Edeline Strickland*, *Mrs Gauci* and *the Pietà*. In his book *The Iconography Of The Maltese Islands 1400-1900*, Mario Buhagiar notes that a milestone in Pisani's career was the colonial exhibition held in London in 1885 where *The Death Of Abel* won him a silver medal.

In the work, the lack of spontaneity is more than compensated by "an almost impeccable composition and excellent draughtsmanship," Prof. Buhagiar notes.

Pisani's greatest achievement is the ceiling of the Nadur parish church "where the whole scheme constitutes one of the most successful exercises in church vault painting in Malta".

A catalogue of the exhibition, with a study by Lino Borg, has been published by Heritage Malta and MidSea Books and is available from the museum itself, from Heritage Malta's head office in Merchants Street, Valletta, and from leading bookshops.

The show runs until March 3. Opening hours are from 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. daily.