



PHOTO COURTESY OF GALERIE ST. GEORGE

Ernesto Graditi's painting "Ship of Fools."

'Death and Resurrection,' on paper and canvas

Sicilian painter makes his American debut at Galerie St. George

By **MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA**
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

When a winemaker knows what he or she is doing, the wine tastes like the earth, the "terroir" that produced the grapes.

The same thing, maybe, can happen with an artist like Ernesto Graditi, the Sicilian painter whose "Death and Resurrection" series is at Galerie

St. George this month.

Some of his paintings are spread thickly with the colors of his island: Silvery green of olive trees, sapphire/purple of the Mediterranean, rich gold of sun-blasted fields, bright forms against deep, cool shadows, etc.

Graditi has perfect pitch for atmosphere. He could probably generate an endless series of pictures that would Tuscanize Sicily — make it look romantic, restorative and relaxing.

But at mid-career, the Palermo-based Graditi has other

ideas and some complaints. He has surrealist ambitions. Dali and DeChirico appear to be big influences. He's unhappy with contemporary life and spirituality.

There are allusions to the humanist tradition — Erasmus' hilarious rant "In Praise of Folly" is the subject of one painting. The church, that unfailingly available target in Italian art, continues to sing her siren song in several works, which present them-

'Death and Resurrection'
by Ernesto Graditi

Where

Galerie St. George
11 Phelps Pl., St. George
917-378-2525

When

Friday-Sunday,
noon to 6 p.m.

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selves as cautionary tales.

The cavalcade of wars and occupations known as Sicilian history added layers of richness to the island's art, architecture, cooking and languages. Some sense of these influences illuminates Graditi's paintings.

In an embellishment that recalls Byzantine art (not to mention Regina Pacis in Brooklyn, where parishioners have paved a Madonna icon with diamonds), he adds ropes of pearls to some com-

positions. Others may have added fabric.

But for all his energy and efforts, "Death and Resurrection" is neither persuasive nor rewarding to look at.

The clumsy drawings of lean, stringy figures look crude and juvenile. One purported tribute to Dali, with a portrait, is just embarrassing.

All but a few of paintings are flat and heavy-handed, and the compositions are bombastic. At age 37, Graditi seems 20 years younger on

canvas and paper, which is disadvantageous.

The surrealist masters whom he admires had three gifts: Big new ideas, solid technique and good luck.

Graditi, who has an astonishingly long resume, is now making his American debut at Galerie St. George. Clearly one of the gifts is his.

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