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The 'Burning Bush', series, is a fertile document of all the aspects of celebratory activity spurred by religion on the Maltese islands. The spectacular colour and visual impact of the Catherine wheels produced by the thirty-six fireworks factories active on the small islands, belie the complex social and religious network in most of Malta's towns and villages that occasionally escalates into pique between supporters of the various saints and precipitates into riot, sometimes even leading to bloodshed during the actual celebrations.

The photographs also tap on local anthropology, where the men who practice this macho craft are regarded by many as a kind of provincial 'war heroes' and in fact given state funerals every time they become victims of their own fad and blow themselves up during the production process.

Both producers and spectators stand within a few meters of these burning installations, chanting away and eulogizing the name of the patron Saint. There is an absolute disregard to safety as the celebrants are wooed by the flames, colours and the array of firework sounds.

Fenech's biblical connotation in the title 'Burning Bush' is an obvious pun on the sacred and profane facets of festa celebration in the Maltese islands. The photographs pose many questions - Do the people need to listen again to the voice from the 'Burning Bush'?

Patrick Fenech

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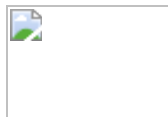
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