

THE
MDINA
CATHEDRAL
CONTEMPORARY ART
BIENNALE

Christianity, Spirituality and the Other
Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale

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ISBN 978-99957-63-07-7

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Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2015*



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CATHEDRAL
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BIENNALE

CHRISTIANITY, SPIRITUALITY AND THE OTHER

EDITED BY

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

Irene Biolchini

Nikki Petroni

Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2015

13 November 2015 - 7 January 2016

Under the Patronage of

The Mdina Cathedral Chapter

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Fr. Rev. Dun Edgar Vella

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The Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale would like to thank

Marjorie Trusted (Victoria and Albert Museum, London); Wally Caruana (Senior Consultant on Aboriginal Art to Sotheby's Australia); Ilia Galan (Universidad Carlos III, Madrid); Antonio Sparzani (Milano State University); Olivier Plique (Paris); Keith Sciberras (Head of Department, History of Art, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta); Nadia Echiguer (Morocco Fine Arts, London)

A special thanks goes to

Paul-Gordon Chandler (CARAVAN); Andrew Hancock and Tani Burns (ARTNAKED)

The Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale would like to thank the following for generously lending works to the exhibition

The Camilleri Family; Ray Debono; Dario Fo; the Kalleya family; the Mangion Family

The Projects of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale were supported by

Antonio Bartolo; Chilean Copyright Society of Authors (Sociedad Chilena del Derecho de Autor); Chilean Association of Painters and Sculptors (Asociación de Pintores y Escultores de Chile); Estonian Department of Culture; History of Art Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta; Istituto Italiano di Cultura; Joseph Lia; Lumen Design; Malta International Organ Festival; Malta Philharmonic Orchestra; Malta Tourism Authority; Marigold Foundation; The Microphone Company; Ministry of Education and Employment (Malta); Neumann.Berlin; PSA Insurance Limited; Salvo Grima Group; The Donkey Sanctuary; United Religions Initiative (URI); The Waterfront Hotel; Valletta 2018 Foundation

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INTRODUCING
THE *Mdina*
Biennale

We are here at a time when Malta's cultural scene is becoming increasingly dynamic, growing in ambition, and ever more active on the global stage. The Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2015-2016 possesses all these characteristics. It is based on these merits that I do not hesitate to envisage the Mdina Biennale becoming one of the most important artistic projects of recent years. Mdina's unique cultural and architectural history is being injected with an unprecedented vitality and modern spirit. It is with such a vigorous attitude that we are able to contemplate our past, our traditions and customs, through art produced in recent times. A nation able to reflect upon itself critically, and which allows others from outside its intimate community to do likewise, is a mature one.

The theme of the Mdina Biennale tackles a subject of great consequence: religiosity, spirituality and all other secular or non-secular worldviews and how these are manifested in art. This means that Malta's longstanding Roman Catholic national identity will re-interpreted, questioned and given new meaning in relation to present-day perspectives and exigencies, as will the religious identities of numerous other countries. In fact, one of the most remarkable aspects of this large-scale cultural event is its surpassing of national territorial boundaries whilst being physically realised on Maltese soil. The Mdina Biennale is not only socially and culturally relevant for Malta, but for all nations. During a time of political and religious turmoil, the Mdina Biennale is creating an artistic and discursive platform to address religious, cultural and political difference with dignity rather than with an antagonistic temperament.

Thanks to the steadfast efforts of Artistic Director Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci and his dedicated team, the Mdina Biennale has developed into an event

of national significance. A sizeable number of both Maltese and international artists coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and artistic disciplines are gathering in Mdina for a two-month period to present their works collectively.

This project has generated a positive image for Maltese culture and society. Many artists have engaged with our past and present in order to pave the way for a prominent future, whilst several Maltese artists have been given the opportunity to encounter reputable foreign artists and their works. It is important that we do not lose sight of the greater picture. We must strive to improve ourselves and become leaders in the global cultural sphere. The Mdina Biennale should serve as a model upon which related arts and cultural projects could develop further.

I would like to congratulate all those involved in creating such an incredible project.

The Hon. Dr. Joseph Muscat
PRIME MINISTER OF MALTA

It is with great pleasure that I am here offering a short reflection to introduce this extraordinary and new experience: the Mdina Biennale 2015.

Art is a language which speaks directly to the spirit, the heart of man.

Art not only creates beauty but is many times capable of expressing the reality of humankind in a profound way, and is moreover able to convert one's perspective on reality, to provoke a new way of viewing the world.

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel', talks about the path of beauty as a pastoral and catechismal means, as well as a means of evangelisation. The *via pulchritudinis* is a road which leads us to the heart of God, which is good and true, and goodness and truth are themselves beautiful. The Pope says these words in paragraph 167, and I would like to share it with you:

"Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the "way of beauty" (*via pulchritudinis*). Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. This has nothing to do with fostering an aesthetic relativism which would downplay the inseparable bond between truth, goodness and beauty, but rather a renewed esteem for beauty as a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it. If, as Saint Augustine says, we love only that which is beautiful, the incarnate Son, as the revelation of infinite beauty, is supremely lovable and draws us to himself with bonds of love. So a formation in the *via pulchritudinis* ought to be part of our effort to pass on the faith. Each particular Church should

encourage the use of the arts in evangelisation, building on the treasures of the past but also drawing upon the wide variety of contemporary expressions so as to transmit the faith in a new “language of parable.” We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, and different forms of beauty which are valued in different cultural settings, including those unconventional modes of beauty which may mean little to the evangelisers, yet prove particularly attractive for others.”

I wholeheartedly wish that the experience of the Mdina Biennale 2015 will be an experience which brings us closer to the beauty of the Risen Lord, and which helps us to appreciate the dignity of each and every one of us.

Charles J. Scicluna
ARCHBISHOP OF MALTA

Since the dawn of Christianity, the Church has been a patron and promoter of the arts. The Church of today is still pursuing this marvellous project for the promotion of contemporary Christian art. Following the symposium ‘Cathedral Museums: Crossroads of Faith and Culture’ organised by the Metropolitan Chapter to mark the 25th anniversary of its museum, the first Contemporary Christian Art Exhibition was launched. This initiative gave local artists the opportunity to create new and original works of art based on sacred themes, to express personal religious experiences and to deliver a spiritual message to viewers.

Twenty-one years after the first edition, this exhibition is now known as ‘The Mdina Biennale’, and allows a wide range of artists to participate. The exhortations of Pope Francis, which follow in the footsteps of Pope St. John Paul II, have encouraged the Catholic Church to embrace all denominations and beliefs. This exhibition allows its participants to freely express their spiritual, social and philosophical experiences.

This edition of the Mdina Biennale has provoked artists to question the very essence of being, to look at their inner self and reflect on that which is spiritual. Moreover, it asked the artists to be sure of themselves and to engage with the joys and pains of life. It asked artists to harbour creativity and to express themselves through their work. Christianity and the Catholic Church embrace spirituality, which is a common denominator of all religions.

Held in Mdina, a cathedral city of continuous evolution, the Mdina Biennale has incited artists to reflect on the past and to present their work within the context of a cultural space. The cathedral is opening its doors to art and is

celebrating artists and their work, work which provides insights through visual form, as well as through other art forms. Both art and music are considered to be international languages which permit universal communication.

We do hope that this 2015 edition of the Mdina Biennale will be another milestone in the pages of our contribution to the arts and to the promotion of culture.

Monsignor Aloysius Deguara

CHAIRMAN | MDINA CATHEDRAL MUSEUM

This edition of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale aims high. Under the artistic direction of Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, it has widened the scope and vision of this two-month exposition of artworks and events. Artists from various countries and cultural fields share their perception of life and their underlying beliefs with the discerning public.

Entitled 'Christianity, Spirituality and the Other', this Biennale extends the range of themes proposed and their treatment in ways that did not feature in earlier editions. In particular, the globalisation of participation, meaning the exhibition of works by several foreign artists, emphasises the commonality of human values expressed in cultural idioms which find their roots in the artists' respective societies. Messages of hope, joy, solidarity and anguish are expressed through paintings, ceramics, sculptures, musical scores and photography.

It is with pleasure that APS Bank is again supporting the Mdina Biennale. The Bank receives many requests for sponsorship. While it acknowledges the validity of every one of them, it has to be selective and allocate its resources to those projects which can contribute to the development of a national cultural identity based on the universality of ideas and diversity of self-expression.

The Mdina Biennale fits this condition comfortably. It aims to present works of high standards and to encourage the exchange of ideas. It brings together Maltese and international artists to discuss art *per se*, but also to collaborate as a group when debating particular themes, such as Peace and Solidarity, yet all expressing themselves in their own specific ways.

We consider the Bank's partnership in this Mdina Biennale as complementary to the Bank's own initiatives which support upcoming Maltese writers, music

composers, photographers, and visual artists. In the case of the Biennale, the project is more ambitious. The Bank also strives to resurrect Malta's cultural past, in particular its rich musical heritage.

This support is also complementary to our role as a financial institution based on the stakeholder model of the firm which sees a company as fulfilling the needs of a society, apart from those of its shareholders.

Professor E. P. Delia

CHAIRMAN | APS BANK

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2015-16 edition of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale. From its beginnings in late 2013, this project has strived to investigate and debate a number of challenges and issues idiosyncratic to international contemporary art biennales, which have come to dominate the global art scene.

This edition has attempted, modestly yet determinedly, to give a new ideological character to the previous editions of the Mdina Biennale, established in the early 1990s, and to even propose new definitions of how to realise an international art biennale.

The first of these challenges, or alternative trajectories, was the design and implementation of a holistic art project within functional spaces. Furthermore, with functional sacred spaces, places of worship, and their everyday commitments. These spaces were not encountered unclothed; they were and are not neutral as is the white cube, but rather laden with an extensive cultural and religious history, and with objects and images which are themselves visually and conceptually rich. Artists had to consider all these elements when preparing their projects. Those from non-Catholic backgrounds had to deal with beliefs and imagery alien to their own culture in order to search for a common ground through the arts. Those who hold no particular religious beliefs had to conceive ways of dealing with the Catholic identity of the majority of the Mdina Biennale's spaces. The Mdina Biennale is an interference into the quotidian flow of activity in the city. There exists no distinction, physical or conceptual, between Mdina and the Mdina Biennale.

The second challenge, and probably the most fascinating point, was the relationship between all participants and the Church as an authoritative Catholic institution. For the first time the Church opened up several of its

spaces in Mdina for art – not a sacred type of art – but that produced by artists from all cultural and religious backgrounds, from all faiths, religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, even non-beliefs. It is the first time that a multinational aspect has come to characterise the Mdina Biennale since its founding. There has been a profound widening of the project’s spiritual spectrum. The approach has been a multicultural one, welcoming inclusivity and diversity, and encouraging interaction between pluralities of artists and curators.

The cooperative character of the Mdina Biennale was another part of the efforts to propose new alternatives to the established biennale structure. All artists were, at varying levels, involved in the development of this project. Agencies, galleries and commercial mediations were bypassed as much as possible. This means that all artists could play a direct role in designing an artistic, creative, intellectual and discursive platform upon which ideas could flourish uncontaminated.

These principles and ideas have matured over a two-year period. The whole project has served as an incubator for new approaches and perspectives, even though faced with adversity from several angles. It is fundamental that once the Mdina Biennale officially closes its doors, these developments continue to mature, take on new identities, be appropriated, challenged, confronted. It is important that they are kept alive, in whatever form the future determines.

Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Spirituality, Materiality and the Market

THREE PROVOCATIONS DEBATED BY THREE SCHOLARS

Dr. Valentino Baldi

Professor Keith Sciberras

Dr. Thierry Tremblay

1. Is there an inevitable connection between spirituality, whatever and however defined, and the arts as creative praxis?

TT: The meaning of the word *spirituality* first needs to be defined. Its definition encompasses an ontological position and a set of philosophical beliefs. In a *Zeitgeist* where the material grounds of experience tend to be underlined in every operation (be it material or “mental”), only to be eventually relativised by a desire for something ultimately material, there isn’t much place for a spirituality that would not be captured by organised religion or by fragmented popular esotericism. Hence, this relativisation directs the very potentiality of the spiritual towards goals which are intrinsically foreign to spirituality *per se*. If by spirituality one means that which exceeds the pure mechanics of materiality, and the necessity to consider a dimension which cannot be reduced to material combinations, ‘art as creative praxis’ can certainly be linked to spirituality, and have been in the past by artists at the origin of what later came to be named ‘abstraction’ (Kupka, Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian etc.). Such spirituality is less a spirituality that reflects itself (i.e. a spirit dealing with the spirit inside a conscience, – contemplative or active), than a spirituality which lays itself within a transfigured materiality by a presence which surpasses, transcends,

materiality (or creates a redundancy in materiality itself). There is a donation, in the phenomenological sense, which gives presence to 'something else'. We are therefore far from pure religion, where spirituality is the very *cause* of all materiality; but we reach this cause, through a cognitive experience, in the experience of art.

KS: I do believe that art is the most powerful personal expressions of the spiritual, of how to explore the inner self and of how to search for a deeper impulse, rather than solely a relationship with the physical world. Of course, materiality is an inextricable component of art, something which it must deliberate and investigate continuously. However, the ultimate result of an artwork, or, let's say, the experience of actively engaging with an artwork, is a spiritual one which incites awareness of self and of a collective consciousness. Artistic creation is therefore the result of this complicated marriage between the creative process, this process being the conceptual and the material development of the art object itself, and the search for the spiritual.

VB: What we are today, as individuals, is the result of economical, social and cultural revolutions. Revolutions which started more than one century ago and which are philosophically linked to two names which have become metonymies: Marx and Freud. What was created after them, especially in the spheres of cultural studies, theory of literature and aesthetics, had to confront the works of these two authors, and, I would also argue, those of Saussure. If we adopt this perspective, it seems that there are few possibilities which permit us to speak about spirituality. Marx, Freud and Saussure adopted empirical, materialistic and scientific approaches; they built up their theories by going back (especially in the case of Freud) to the Enlightenment and its vision of the world or by adopting theologies that do not leave any space for doubt (as in the case of Marx's proletarian dictatorship). Saussure's philosophy determined the end of the spiritual and naïve interpretations of language. Nevertheless, even when keeping all this in mind, I think that their theories allow space for certain aspects which are not restricted to this all-embracing materialism; there are some passages in which their vision of the world is emancipated from matter, which seeks 'beyond' matter. We can find it in Marx's idea of utopia, or in Freud's concept of the non-repressed unconscious, the unconscious which is immanent to men and pre-existent to every form of repression (and

a mysterious, complex and indefinable universe). I think that these passages constitute the most intriguing part of similar approaches towards culture and the arts; these small gaps can be defined as spirituality and it is incredible to find them in the works of thinkers who are so deeply concerned with materiality. I think that today we have to find and protect those spaces, especially when new sciences are entering into the field of art (as in the case of cognitive neuroscience). I think that to pursue, at any cost, an exact point of intersection between art and science is a mistake.

2. Biennales should stop being centres of global consumer marketable goods and transform themselves into a forum of art and artistic debate.

VB: What first comes to mind when reading this question is Benjamin's definition of Baudelaire as the first modern poet, but, at the same time, as the last author able to write poetry and produce a bestseller, 'Les fleurs du mal'. I always thought that the social statuses of the lyrical and the visual arts are very similar, and Benjamin's pages reveal several things to us. By following the rules of the market, modernity destroyed more than one established genre. Baudelaire was an author who worked, and lived, on the threshold, he continuously oscillated in and out of the modernisation process, and he was able to transform the physical world in which he was living into allegory. Benjamin's interpretation begins with the evaluation of the influence of the mass market: Baudelaire was one of the first poets to address a limitless public, and he established the category of the mass intellectual, which comprises other names quoted by Benjamin, such as Hoffman, Poe, Proust.

KS: The rise of the materialistic and the production of art as a consumer object have somehow conditioned the character and also the purpose of recent art fairs and exhibitions. The art market has managed to take a strong hold over artistic production. The beauty of the Mdina Biennale is that it is essentially anti-materialistic and its very essence challenges artists to explore art directly, an art which is unmediated by the market mechanism. It encourages artistic debate and allows artists to confront their own practices, a confrontation which will consequently challenge their audiences and fellow artists, and also art itself.

VB: I do not myself think that the market can be challenged, or even surpassed. We may not agree with market rules, but at the same time it is undeniable that it adds symbolic value to the works. All the experiences I know which began with this assumption have all failed, or else they were not at all central to Western dynamics. The question of the market always makes me think of the presupposition of common sense: everyone condemns it, but it exists. And it has to exist because the symbolic capital of one work passes, and is also filtered, through the market, as well as through other spaces of exchange. It is clear to me that, being a critic, it is fundamental to discuss or subvert market dictates, but I do think that it is a practical path to follow.

3. The definition of visual art should be challenged.

KS: The visual arts concerns those objet d'art, regardless of whether they are painting, sculpture, installation, photography and so forth, essentially and intentionally created for a visual perceptive experience and, perhaps, for visual delight. A major goal should be for art to provoke, to provide intellectual stimulus, and also intellectual delight. It must invite audiences to think and to use their mind's eye rather than solely restrict appreciation to tangible absorption by the physical eye.

TT: Absolutely speaking, there is no such thing as 'visual art'. To formulate it in a more straightforward way: 'visual art' does not address itself to vision like any random cognitive stimulus would. It's not the visual which makes something specifically art, it's the interpretation which dislocates the apparent simplicity of what is given and reconfigures the experience, through the artistic process, between a conscience and its object. This reconfiguration of the artistic experience was made apparent with the work of Marcel Duchamp, where the obvious was subtracted from its essence by redefining the nature of a given object. 'Visual art', after Duchamp, could be more accurately named 'material art'. And if we go back to the point made regarding spirituality, 'material art' could be understood as an oxymoron, since what makes art, art, is precisely not to be found in the vision of materiality itself. If the truth in philosophy takes, ultimately, the form of a *tautology*, the truth of art takes, ultimately, the form of a *contradiction*.

VB: I am no expert in the visual arts, so I will be very brief in answering this statement. I completely agree that in today's world it is not possible to create a distinction between video art, and all new media for that matter, and traditional media since video and photography are a strong part of our daily life. I think that the real question today is how one could create a distinction, in terms of quality, between the numerous images that we produce and consume daily and a work of art. This is also the objective of latest work by Carlo Ginzburg entitled 'Fear, Reverence and Terror', which I find to be a perfect example.

TT: The fundamental question of medium in general, and the question of image in particular, takes us back to the above deliberation on spirituality and materiality, on a polarisation of experience where interiority would be understood as spiritual, and exteriority as material. When Hegel wrote that art was "something of the past", he meant that its experience was henceforth linked to representation, and as such, contradictions were "something of the past", because there are no contradictions within pure representation (e.g. the question of factual truth is irrelevant within the fictional frame), like there are no contradictions in materiality. Yet, contradictions still subsist in our experience of art, despite Hegel's formidable effort to draw an encyclopaedic science which could resolve the intensity between the material and the spiritual. And there, in the embodiment of contradictions, resides the hermeneutical potential of art to transform our 'vision' of the world, and what was yore called its revolutionary vocation.

MODERN DIRECTIONS



The Spiritual Dimension in the Art of Antoine Camilleri

Joseph Paul Cassar

General Introduction

Art for Antoine Camilleri (1922-2005) was a religion. It was sacred. Creativity made the artist feel like a god, bringing order out of chaos. The creative act itself was considered by Antoine Camilleri as a gift to humanity to be like God Himself, to have the ability to be a maker of things, indeed, a supernatural act. Antoine Camilleri realised that the nature of his materials, particularly the use of thin layers of clay on his wooden panel paintings, recall the scene in Genesis, wherein life is created from the dirt of the earth. A rich symbolic language developed throughout the artist's career in which everything became sacred. What the works represented was immaterial. It was not the subject that made his art spiritual, but the mindset, the deep-felt approach within, the spirit behind it all. For the artist, art was a sacred profound encounter, where art led his creative impetus, informing him of what the next step should be, of what he should create. He felt that he was completely controlled by the creative act, claiming:

“Art is love. It is a religion. I cannot live without it.”

And in another instance:

“Art is so strong that it forces me to do what it wants...

It commands me.”¹

In this edition of the Mdina Biennale 2015, a special exhibit has been put up to commemorate ten years since the artist's demise. A modest collection of his works, mostly small studies, have been selected for this purpose because they are unique works that reveal the strong religious commitment of the artist. The works are mostly drawings, preparations for larger projects, especially for churches, schematic concepts for stained glass windows, designs for crucifixions as well as liturgical furniture, particularly designs for an altar and a tabernacle. Most of these drawings have never been exhibited in public making them a special feature of this exhibition.

The Crucifixion Scene

The Golgotha scene showing the site where Christ was crucified features in many works executed by Antoine Camilleri throughout his career. For him, the crucifixion represented a graphical phenomenon where a vertical line intersects a horizontal one. The latter meant death, the former meant salvation and resurrection. He saw these lines in the structure of his very easel as seen in *Deep in Thought* (1984). It was significant for the artist to sometimes record the day and year when he executed the art piece. On the top right-hand side is recorded the date Sunday 25th October 1984. Antoine appears deep in thought and the various incised marks in the background represent crosses. The artist is lost in contemplation and prayer with his arm partially covering his face and with his eyes closed. A deep spiritual dimension emanates from this piece.

Many times the artist represented the crucified Christ, with outstretched arms blessing the figures at the foot of the cross, mainly his mother, St. John and Mary Magdalene.² This is seen in the painting entitled *Blessing* (1983). I

1 Interview with the artist conducted by Joseph Paul Cassar first published in *The Times of Malta*, June 23, 1999. Consequently this interview appeared in two books “Antoine Camilleri: His Life and Works 1922-2005” (2006) and “Conversations with 12 Maltese Artists”, (2007) both by Joseph Paul Cassar.

2 Christ's right hand shows the gesture of blessing and forgiving.



Deep in Thought, ink, clay and resin on wood, Sunday 28th October 1984, Private collection



Blessing, ink and wash on canvas, 1983 , Private collection

remember this work executed in free flowing washes, shown in a glass showcase at St John's Co-Cathedral Museum in June of 1985. The majesty of the elongated figure of Christ and also of the accompanying figures reveal Camilleri's artistic characteristic of simplification wherein line, grace and colour merge together. The work is executed in ink, built up of transparent washes. The dominant purple (the artist's favourite colour) points to the artist's aspirations of hope which outrival the tragedy of the scene. A sun-disc rotates in spiral forms in the upper right-hand corner of the painting, symbolising ever-lasting light and eternity itself.

In other instances, as in his sculpture *Triumph over the Cross* (1985), Christ does not truly hang on the cross but rises above it, transcending suffering and appearing victorious. This is also the case in *Resurrection* (1994), which represents both the death of Christ lying down horizontally in his tomb and the image of the resurrected Christ standing with open arms. This work in clay relief shows the insertion of a self-portrait in the image of Christ and the importance of Christ's victory over death.

In his work *The Divine Tragedy* (1999), Antoine's creativity rose to new heights through the inventive depiction of this scene. This is the only piece which the artist engraved in a wooden panel. The same technique of incising lines into fresh clay are employed here with a pointed cutting tool that cuts into the hard wooden surface. The incised lines literally represent the incisions of the wounds on Christ's body and of the pointed crown of thorns. The incisions are sharper and deeper in this piece, with some coiled pieces perfectly preserved and permanently embedded into the painted surface of the artwork. It is a dramatic scene with Christ holding between his arms and down his body a purple shroud which forms a V-shape, the sign of victory. Purple is not just the artist's preferred colour, but representative of the purple used in the first images of the good shepherd in the mosaic from the north entrance wall of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (c.425) or that of the youthful image of Christ in the apse of San Vitale also found in Ravenna, Italy (547); the purple gown that only the emperor could wear. In the artist's words:

“I love purple because it symbolises waiting...
waiting for the resurrection”

And;

“I am not afraid of death, because there is only Eternal Life”³

Studies for St. Francis of Assisi

The image of St. Francis of Assisi was another recurrent theme in the artist's oeuvre. The saint appears in a number of studies executed in various media and all point to one major work which he executed as a lino print. Between the years 1971 and 1976, Antoine Camilleri focused on this straightforward printing medium. Most of them were simply executed in black and white, images which reveal sharp contrasts as seen in the St. Francis. However, he also created prints using multiple colours. Lino-printing appealed to the artist because of its linear qualities; it involves the carving of lines into linoleum which reveals parallelisms in the method of producing the incised clay works. His printing methods were modest and simple. He had no press and printed his works by hand by simply applying pressure with a spoon and rubbing the back side of the paper in circular motion, thus transferring the ink from the plate onto the paper. This visceral working technique meant that his prints were far from perfect. There are signs of impatience with the slow printing process and he loved to discover accidental effects which made the works more original and unique. Some are numbered, signed and dated and produced in series of fifty, but it is very unlikely that he followed this edition scrupulously. Several other prints were made in subsequent years and remain unnumbered.

In 2002 Lino Borg and myself, were authorised by the artist to professionally print a new series in oil black ink on acid free white archival paper. An edition of ten prints of St. Francis were printed, which were later signed by the artist as artist's proofs.

In this exhibition a series of studies for this important lino-print are shown for the first time. They show the saint originally placed in a standing position and the adoption of the kneeling pose in the final version. This is undoubtedly his masterpiece in this medium.

The preliminary sketches record some distinctive differences in the decision-making process of this work. In the sketches which show the saint

3 Ibid: Interview with artist 1999.



Sketch for St Francis of Assisi, black marker, undated, Private collection



Study for St Nicholas of Tolentino, watercolor, 1969, Private collection

standing, there is a version with birds in the sky revolving round the sun. A similar movement can be observed with the fish in the water. The tree on the far right stayed in line with the theme of the setting sun on the horizon, as did the uplifted face of the saint and his raised arms. On the other hand, the sketches of the saint in an oval seem to be studies for a sculptural rendering which never materialised.

The composition in the final version of this lino-print is a skilful interplay between a set of horizontal lines, mainly done in solid black, which represent the sea and the horizon in the distance. There is an upward movement in the solid truncated body of the saint with uplifted arms in prayer. The saint's body on the right of the print is mirrored on the left-hand side with a beam of light which represents the sea and the setting sun. There are curvilinear lines in the branches of the tree with a few leaves. The elements of the verticals, horizontals and curves are captured in Camilleri's signatory emblem at the top left which shows the image of the moon and sun in a solid black square.

The movement continues in the sky as the uplifting moment is captured in the remnants of cut lino bits that provide texture as well as space for the birds in the sky to roam freely, within reach of the saint's hands.

This is a work which demonstrates mastery in the understanding of negative and positive spaces, line and the effect of incised lines. Notice the shimmering effect on the water, the cross-hatching on St. Francis's robe, giving a sense of the sackcloth effect that the saint put on by virtue of embracing poverty. The plate is etched with great sensitivity and feeling for the subject. Once again the artist identifies himself with the saint, which can be viewed as another self-portrait.

Works and studies for Church Commissions

Antoine Camilleri executed two major official church commissions, the stained-glass windows for the St. Augustine Community Church in Tarxien and the design for the altar and tabernacle area for a church in Paceville.

In this exhibition there are on view some concept drawings for both these commissions which were executed in the early Seventies. The artist dreamt of other possible projects to adorn Malta's churches. However, these never materialised.

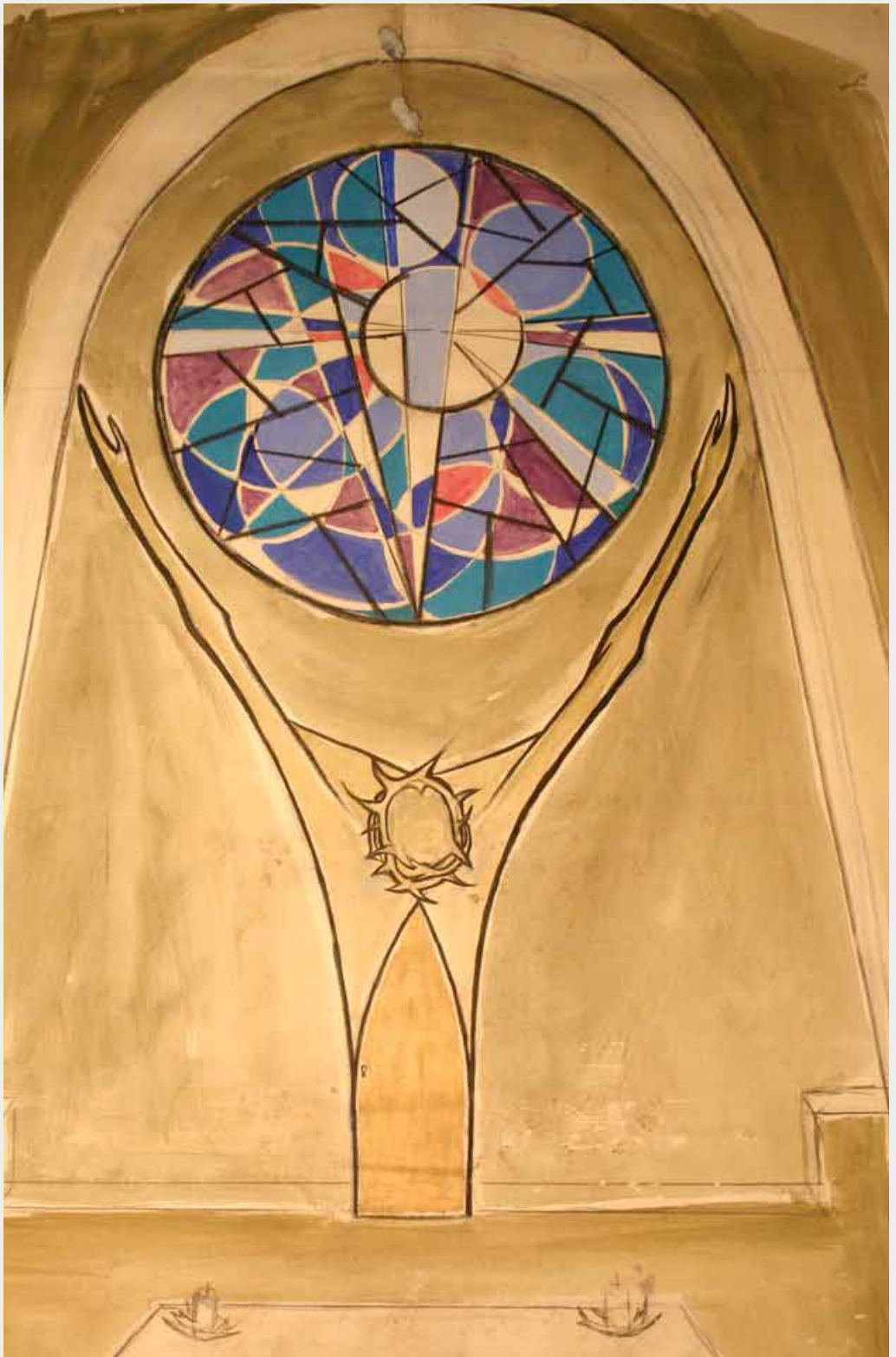
The most important church commission is that for Tarxien, which comprises of two stained-glass windows; one represents *St Nicholas of Tolentino*, and the other a *Crucifixion*. Studies for both these works are included in this exhibition and they are a treat to study. They recount the development of a concept from initial phase up to completion.

It seems that Antoine Camilleri started to address these projects in a rather conservative and representative approach, fearing perhaps that his work stood no chance of being accepted if he did not use this form of visual language. The first stained-glass window representing the saint is a rather elongated image with flowers at the bottom. The sketch exhibited here shows a more detailed image of the saint with a creeper in bloom curling around his body. The background is richly coloured and the saint appears suspended in mid-air. The final image was modified and simplified. The open arms became crossed and the rather subdued face was changed to a frontal expression. The other more colourful stained-glass window is more original and in-line with the artist's innovative, religious concepts.⁴ It is an unusual crucifixion and Camilleri makes use of the round shape of the window to represent Christ embracing all of humanity. The colours for this window are stunning: the artist used to define colours as "children of God".⁵

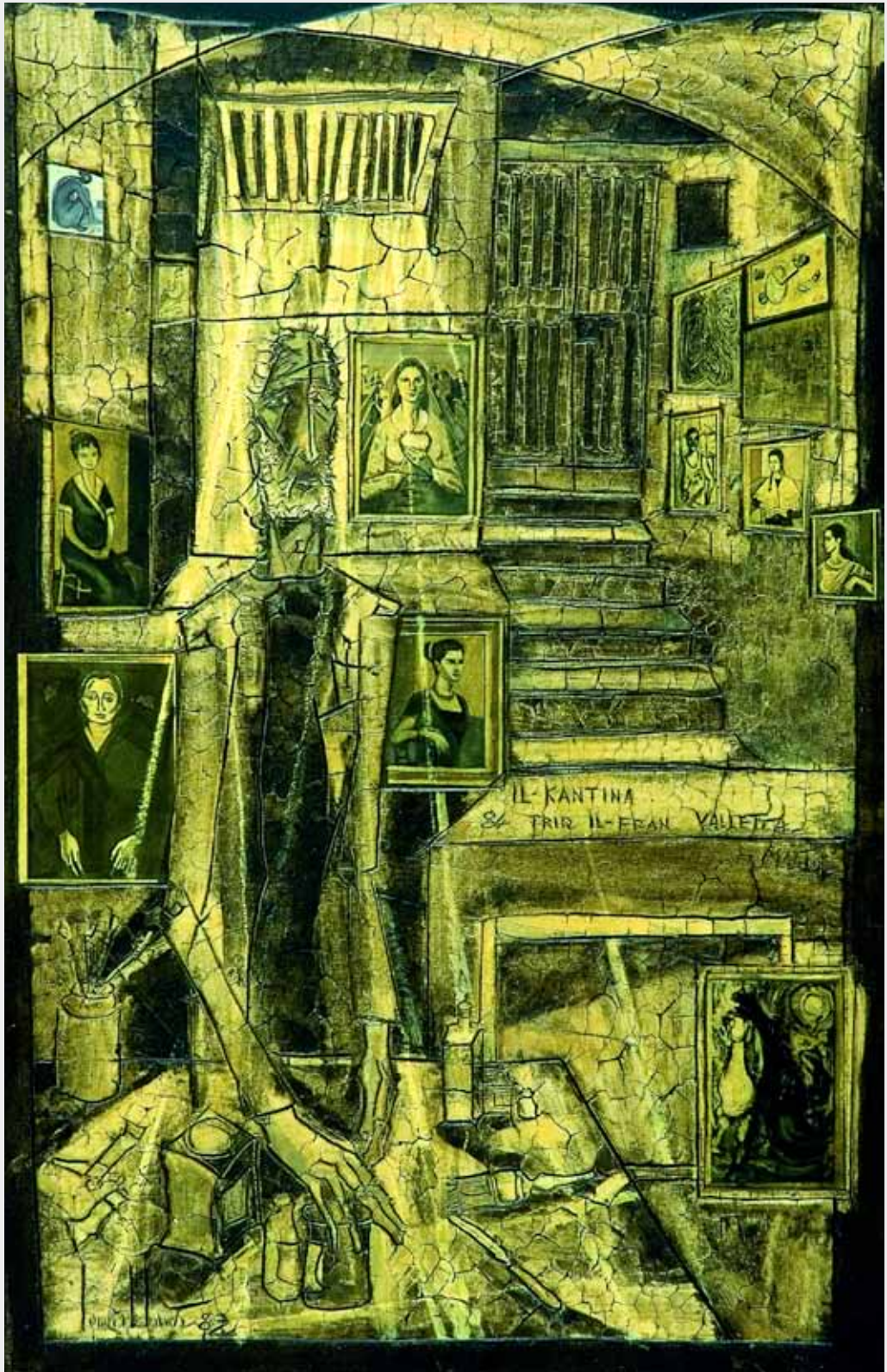
There is a sketch study in the exhibition: *Christ's Victory* (1969), which shows a different composition for the crucifixion. It represents the upper part of Christ's body on the crucifix. His chest is a golden door which would have led to the sacristy. Christ's face is down and only the crown of thorns can be seen. The wooden cross is not there but can be imagined and Christ's uplifted arms are envisioned as open arms embracing the globe. The image of Christ was intended to be painted on the wall and possibly realised as a relief sculpture, and the actual window would have represented the world, symbolising Christ's victory over death. This concept comes close to some of the ideas used in the final version, but remains a distinctive variation on the same theme, which could also have worked effectively. Included in this exhibition is also a *maquette* of the actual stained-glass window, which Camilleri realised on a small scale with coloured glass embedded into a wooden panel.

4 Antoine Camilleri used samples of glass to select the colour scheme for this stained glass window from glass merchants James Hetley & Co Ltd, England.

5 Ibid: Interview with artist 1999.



Christ's Victory, watercolour, 1969, Private collection



Prayer, clay, ink and resin on wood, 1987, Private collection

Several small drawings are also included, which focus on a design for an altar and a tabernacle. At times the differences are minor, but in them the progression of a work in progress can be admired.

Conclusion

Among his many works, which form part of the 'artist in his studio' series, there is one particular key work entitled *Prayer* (1982), where the artist is shown working in his Kantina Studio, which was situated at 84, Old Bakery Street, Valletta. He rented this cellar studio in the year 1978 and worked there until early 1988. During this decade he produced some of his most powerful works, of which *Prayer* remains significant. Camilleri portrays himself at work in front of a working table, which indicates the manner in which he worked, on a flat table rather than on an easel. He is surrounded by many of his major works, some very early pieces like the portrait of his mother, a wedding portrait of his wife Therese, and an image from the famous wild horses' series, among other works.

The wooden gate-like door and the steps that led to his studio are clearly visible and the image acutely describes his creative shrine. But most importantly, he represents himself as high priest in front of the altar (his studio working table), enlightened from above with a ray of light that comes in from the metal grid above his head. This is the creative act itself, this is divine intervention, it represents the artist lost in prayer and thought about his art. This is one of his most important spiritual works. The more such imagery is looked for, the more likely that a rich symbolic visual vocabulary in Antoine Camilleri's works will be identified.

Photography by Joe P. Smith and courtesy of the Camilleri Family

Heaven and Hell

THE EXPLORATION OF FAITH AS VISUALISED BY
JOSEF KALLEYA AND CARMELO MANGION

Nikki Petroni

Abstract

In this essay I will be looking into the artistic search for spirituality as expressed in the works of sculptor Josef Kalleya (1898-1998) and painter Carmelo Mangion (1905-97). The art of these two foremost pioneers of Maltese modern art manifests their struggle with religious faith and with the conventional methods of religious representation delineated by the Roman Catholic hegemonic system. Rather than negating tradition, they confronted it directly, challenging not only that which is visualised but also how it is produced. Kalleya and Mangion's artistic approaches bear similarities in their defiance of a canonic order and induction of the chaotic. However, their respective personal relationships with faith enter into conflict; Kalleya's utopian belief in a spiritual paradise counteracts with the fixity to an earthly materiality as posited in Mangion's paintings. Whatever the conclusion or approach, this essay will argue that it is precisely this questioning of an established conception of existence monopolised by Catholic belief which proclaims the modern turn of Maltese art. The awakening of consciousness, i.e. the knowledge of self, engenders a Gramscian philosophy of praxis as resistance to the hegemonic conditioning of intellectual and creative faculties. Particular works will be examined within the parameters of three categories prevalent in Christian art: Suffering, Martyrdom and Death; as these are explored in depth by both artists as visual manifestations of their respective relationships with existence and mortality.

Introduction

My realisation of the significance of analysing faith, its contents and discontents, in relation to Maltese modern art was motivated by an essay written by Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci on Willie Apap's (1918-70) painting *Descent from the Cross* (1964). The essay accompanied an exhibition held at the Mdina Cathedral Museum which is one of the primary venues of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2015-16. There have been significant moments when the Metropolitan Cathedral Chapter audaciously affronted the insularity and provinciality associated with the Catholic Church in Malta, and the international, multicultural, multifaith and non-faith Mdina Biennale is the most resonant example to date. I still find it rather fascinating, and powerful, that the Chapter, the head of the Maltese diocese, would publish such a penetrating study on Apap's tormented canvas, a work which unmasks the artist's personal struggle with religious belief in his resistance to modernism, a struggle which also reveals "a radical break from the dominance of Maltese traditionalism."¹ This debate is being continued, and even more openly so, with the Mdina Biennale.

This 'break from traditionalism', from the cultural authority of the Catholic Church, marks one of the most significant points of departure in Maltese art history. In Malta, Catholicism, the Roman Catholic system of belief, defines the norms and values of social relations which permit an established equilibrium, a social unity. It constitutes that which Antonio Gramsci terms as 'common sense'², meaning the passive understanding of reality due to the pre-eminence of an established system of normativity. To challenge this dormancy and to develop a progressive and stable thought-action synthesis, what Gramsci calls philosophy of praxis, is the most radical form of subversion. This is because interrogations of the hegemonic structure lead to the development of new intellectual movements which devise conceptions of the world as alternatives to the illusion of unity perpetuated by the dominant ideology. One's realisation of self, which is essentially a political awakening, leads to what Hannah Arendt terms as 'Human plurality'.³ Arendt's theory echoes that of Gramsci in that

1 Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, *Willie Apap: Descent from the Cross*, Midsea, Valletta, 2008, 29

2 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2005, 323

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1998, 175



Carmelo Mangion, *Deposition*, Gouache on paper, undated, Private collection



Carmelo Mangion, *Deposition*, Oil on cardboard, undated, Private collection

plurality is itself created by the disclosure of speech and action. By stressing upon speech, Arendt insists on the form through which thought is reified. She pays attention to the form of language which is used to render thought tangible. In the sphere of art, practice, or action, must be inextricably bound up with thought and the manner in which it is materialised, its formal representation, which are themselves inseparable from each other. “Form”, writes Heinrich Wölfflin, “has the power to awaken vision.”⁴ To stimulate vision, form must emblematised non-hegemonic thought and action, the existence of which signals the growth of artistic and political freedom.

I have remarked on the harmonious consolidation of thought, form and practice in the arts, or praxis as collectively termed, to emphasise upon the radical nature of Kalleya and Mangion’s art, something which must be critically acknowledged. They are both catalysts for the development of Maltese modern art and their works embody a moment of great transition in Maltese history. The conception of reality as embodied by art was during Kalleya and Mangion’s time, and to some extent even in today’s, rooted within Catholicism and its tradition of representation. Artists who questioned this tradition were not only tackling the rendering of appearances but, significantly, the entire understanding of reality and the relationship with one’s own existence. With Kalleya and Mangion, fissures⁵ in the Roman Catholic comprehension of the world as represented in art begin to appear. The binding unity which sustained the continuation of artistic tradition was losing its grip on creativity as well as on social and political values.

T.J. Clark proposes that “the way to freedom in painting”, and all art for that matter, should more often be analysed as taking place “via the incomprehensible”.⁶ To rattle the stability of ‘common sense’ and enunciate non-hegemonic perspectives on belief, and to be liberated from tradition, modern art had to challenge comprehensibility and instigate a non-triviality

4 Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Principles of Art History’, *The Art of Art History: a critical anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, 122,

5 Schembri Bonaci appropriates Gregory Bateson’s concept of Schismogenesis to analyse the appearance of tears in the fabric of a tradition which persists despite the occurrence of radical changes. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, ‘The Live Tradition of Maltese Baroque: Cosmopolitanism and Insularity in the Twentieth Century’, paper delivered at the conference ‘Malta as a Crossroads of Art and Culture in the Baroque Period’, Warburg Institute, London, March 14, 2014

6 T.J. Clark, ‘Frank Auerbach’s London’, *London Review of Books*, 37, 17 (10 September 2015), 8

of illogical seeing as opposed to the triviality of ordered viewing. The cultural signification of traditional religious art was in the twentieth century denoted by Gramscian 'common sense', therefore an art which abided to coherent standards. The sacred images produced by the distinguished artists Giuseppe Cali (1846-1930) and Lazzaro Pisani (1854-1932) were the outcome of a passive mode of production which was suited to, as argued by Walter Benjamin, a likewise passive system of consumption; works which "supply a productive apparatus without changing it."⁷ The conventional representation of saintly figures had in the 20th century become alienated from the spiritual basis which fulfilled the conception of the image and the artist's own religious faith. The Benjaminian aura⁸ of religious art was lost to a power mechanism of production and reproduction, or a remixing of appearances without any fundamental variation. It could be arguably stated that the palpability of the 'crisis of faith' in Maltese art precedes the radical aesthetic questioning of belief in the works of Kalleya and Mangion.

To express his religious paradoxical sentiment, Kalleya could not copy or reproduce conventional religious art. In a 1989 TV interview with former curator of the National Museum of Fine Arts, Dennis Vella (1953-2009), Kalleya defines the artist as a person who suffers great inner torment when formulating how they are to represent the mystery of existence. The struggle is to create that which is conceived in the intellect and felt by the soul, and not that which is readily perceptible in the material world.⁹ Figurative interpretations of religious personages and narratives are concrete images embedded within the Maltese consciousness. Kalleya's religious vision could not be formulated from a system of already existing signs and their cultural signification, signs which are produced as legible forms for the consumption of the unquestioning viewer in order to control and perpetuate a system of order. His works are an exteriorisation of his inner and direct relationship with human existence which defies the unequivocal intelligibility of the sacred art tradition.

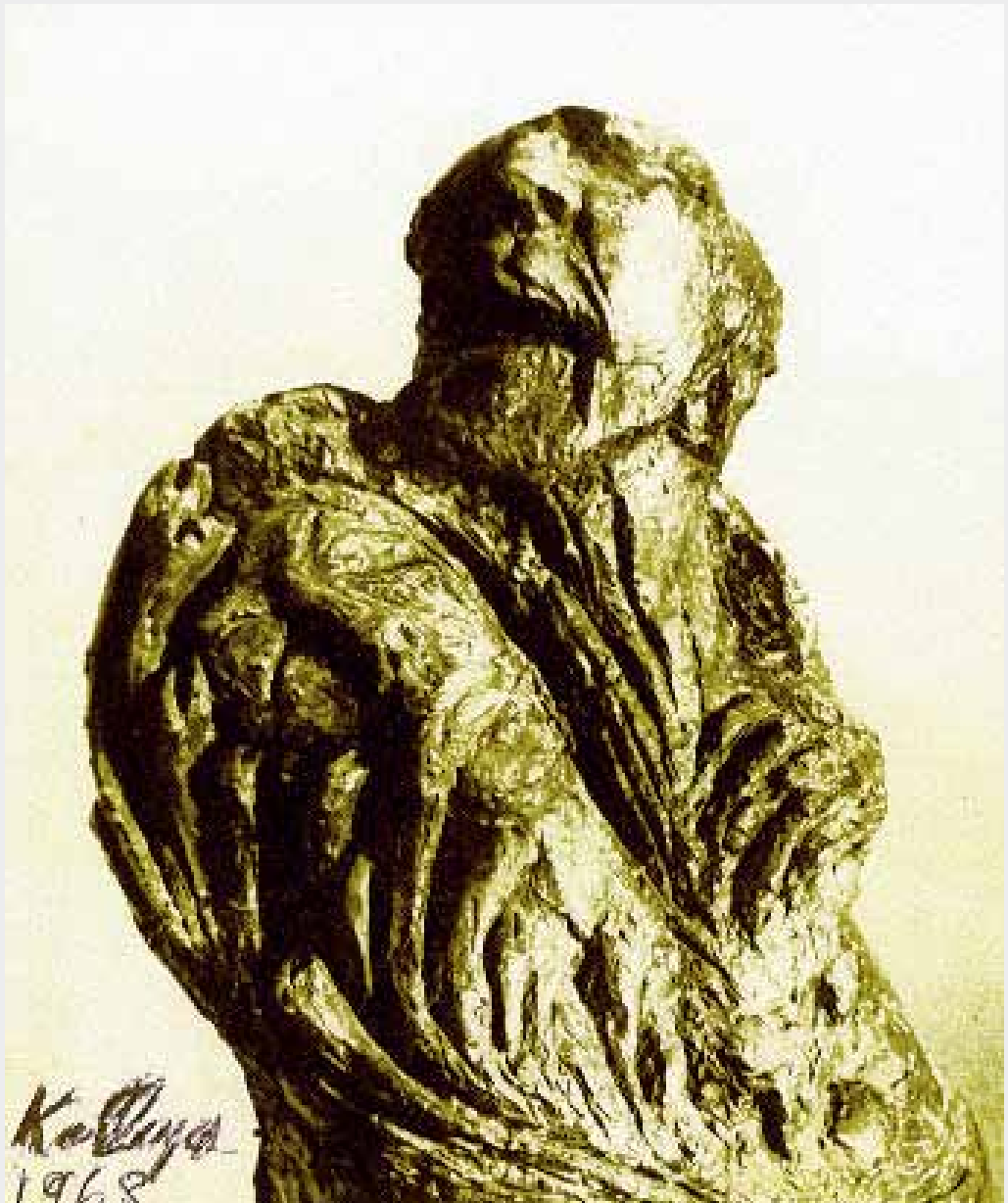
7 Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Francis Fascina and Charles Harrison, The Open University, London, 1982, 215

8 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, 217-251

9 Interview with Dennis Vella on July 11, 1989, Television Malta and Department of Education, 01'57"-03'08" (Courtesy of the Kalleya family)



Carmelo Mangion, *Methodist Church, Floriana*, Gouache on masonite, undated, Private collection



Josef Kalleya, *La Droga*, Gesso duro, 1968, Private collection

A new artistic language inherently defies the norms of aesthetic beauty, which is why the works of Mangion and Kalleya were socially marginalised until late in their careers. Kalleya's quest for immateriality resulted in the production of ugliness.¹⁰ Mangion's art was likewise an attack on the idea of traditional beauty and on the accepted standards of figurative representation. His search for the new was aided by modern French literature and the works of the art masters whom he incessantly studied, especially Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Georges Rouault (1871-1958). Mangion was the first Maltese artist to portray industrialisation and the everyday experience of modernity in Malta. The modern world was not a threat, but rather incited his creative acumen.

In the next two sections I will discuss particular works by Mangion and Kalleya and focus on the non-hegemonic alternatives proposed in their art as proffered within specific works and subject matter. The two themes explored; suffering and martyrdom, and death, were chosen for their effectiveness to express novel worldviews conceived by the two artists.

Suffering and Martyrdom

Representations of suffering, tragedy and the idolisation of martyrs are images which flood the history of Western art. The suffering of the crucified Christ, historical tragedies as iconically depicted in, for example, Théodore Géricault's (1791-1824) *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-19), the numerous martyrdoms of saints captured in the precise moment when faith and pain are reconciled as the ultimate spiritual sacrifice are frequent subjects. The idea of martyrdom and that of Christ's crucifixion are traditionally presented as pious images. In their state of unbearable physical pain when their bodies are deprived of all dignity, these figures provoke in the viewer a desire to achieve this ideal condition of spiritual ecstasy. The dominant presence of the physical in Western art is paradoxically seen as an immaterial spiritual beingness. The act of dying is enunciated as a noble act since faith is bound up with asceticism, even if this implies that one must deny life to one's self. The pictures of martyred saints with their heads turned upwards towards the heavens, which fill our churches,

10 For further notes on Kalleya's aesthetics see Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, 'Josef Kalleya – with gratitude to Elio and Mario Calleja', *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, February 15, 2015

transform the feeling of physical torment into a gratifying experience of sacred reverence. They tell us that spiritual fulfilment requires sacrifice, and that faith must persevere beyond any physical limitations. Images of martyrdom sometimes even border on the erotic, heightening the sentimentalism of these intimate spectacles of heavenly deliverance.

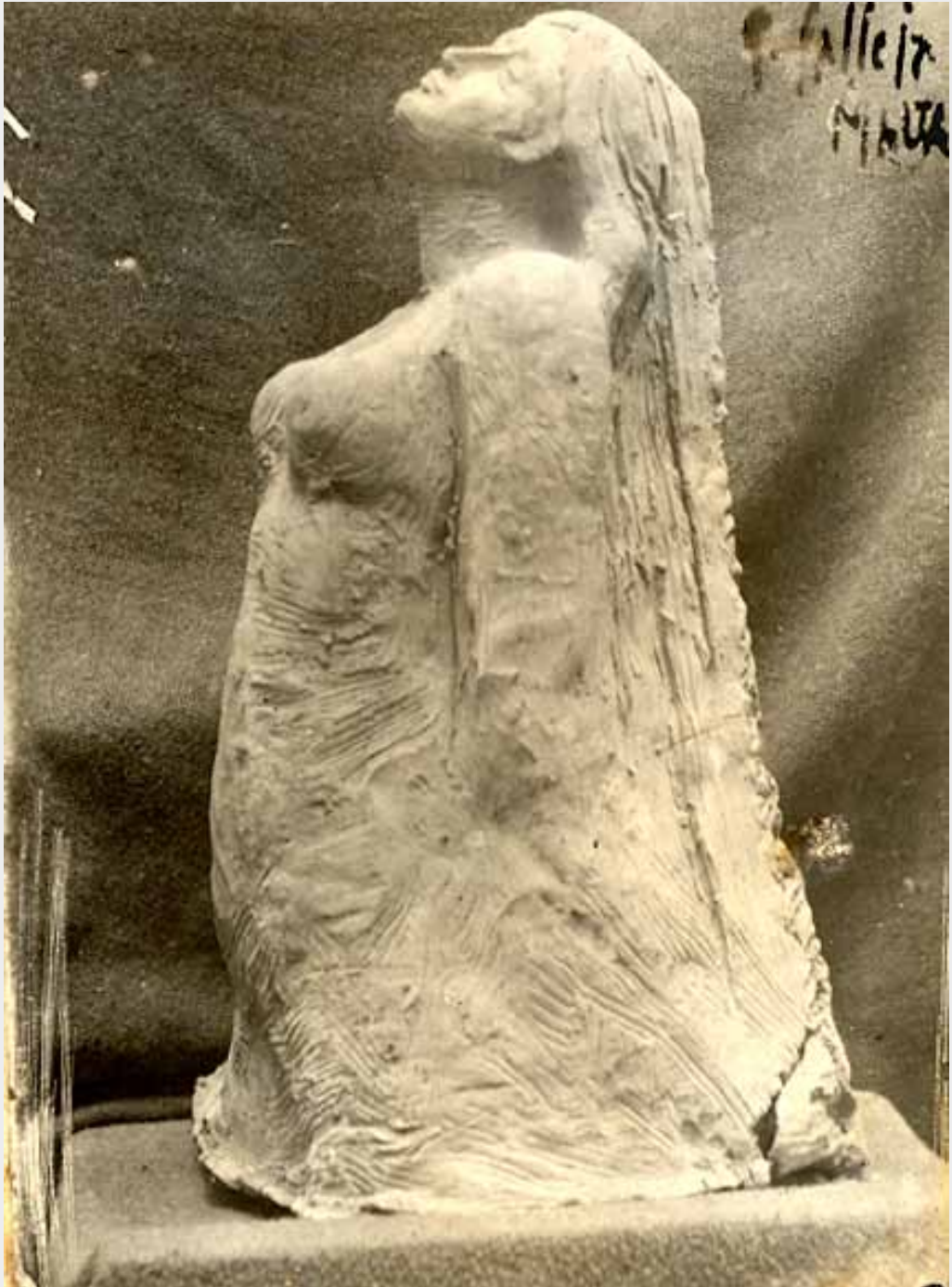
This vivid sentimentalism which is so crucial to the conversion of suffering into redemption is an essential element which is repudiated in Mangion's *Deposition* series. Mangion treats the sacrificial death of Christ as a secondary happening, placed in the background of the composition. Compositional importance is not given to the mangled body of Christ, the body which will soon resurrect and instil hope in the faithful, but instead is shown in the incurable suffering of the mother who had to witness and endure the death of her son. Such an experience is irreversible; it remains embedded in memory with no hope of restoring a pre-traumatic consciousness. Representing, or rather creating the experience of anguish and suffering and making it the subject matter of a Deposition scene, pre-eminent to the burial of the Son of God, abandons the virtue of sacrifice, revealing the ugliness of death and even suggesting the impossibility of a heavenly afterlife, or any manner of afterlife. Mangion transforms the Deposition into an image of universal suffering and sheds its purpose as a narrative for Catholic doctrine.

Read in the context of the Second World War aftermath, it is only rational that one would come to understand genocide as futile. No honour presides in the killing of others. Such an inflection is the counterpart to the shrieking mother in Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) *Guernica* (1937). The anguish of the mother embracing her dead child on the left hand side of the painting, an allusion to the *Pietà* scene in Catholic art as typified by Michelangelo (1475-1564), is felt by the visualisation of her ear-piercing scream. It is that scream, the simple but forceful depiction of a gaping mouth, which provokes our memory to remember the misery of an event which we ourselves did not witness. Those who perished due to the ruthless bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War are not martyrs, but victims. So are Christ and the Virgin victims of human, earthly, cruelty. Suffering, writes Theodor Adorno, "tolerates no forgetting"¹¹, and art must project and preserve

11 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment', *Aesthetics and Politics: The key texts of the classical debate within German Marxism*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, et al., Verso, London, 1980, 188



Josef Kalleya, *Medallion to Dun Mikiel Xerri*, Photomontage, 1960s, Private collection



Josef Kalleya, *Female Figure Representing Malta*, unknown medium, early 1920s, Destroyed

such memories. “Repression is a relief”¹² notes Griselda Pollock, a relief which is dismissed by art’s true embodiment of suffering. Mangion’s *Deposition* series, together with others such as the *Methodist Church* and *Wardija* series, shatter the false pleasantries seen in the smiling peasants and celestial saintly visions represented in the paintings of Edward Caruana Dingli (1876-1950) and the mature Cali respectively, images which camouflage the turmoil of the 20th century and provide relief to tortured memory.¹³

Kalleya too manifests the obstacles of the period as seen in the photograph of his sculpture *The Fallen Soldier* (1934) which portrays a soldier with mouth agape in sorrow. But whereas Picasso’s depictions of the silent scream, the scream which is pervasively present in his paintings; the Madonna in his *Crucifixion* (1930) and *Large Nude in Red Armchair* (1929) to give just two examples, are representations of unremitting despair, as is Edvard Munch’s (1863-1944) *The Scream* (1893), Kalleya seemingly develops the gesture in his art as one of liberation. The liberation of the soul as it ascends up to heaven is materialised by the facial expression of a paradoxically harrowing awe, possibly trance-like state, and this pilgrimage of the soul to heaven was for Kalleya, notwithstanding its difficulty, the ultimate goal of mankind. Clearly, such a belief is tied to the eulogising idea of martyrdom which glorifies the act of dying. The way in which Kalleya presents such an idea is, however, radically different to the traditional image of sentimental virtue. Instead, the artist sculpts an ugly, visceral and distorted vision of one’s struggle with spirituality and the physical in the process of achieving salvation, what he himself refers to as torment, which is seen in works such as *I Santi* (1960s) and *La Droga* (1968).

Kalleya was not only innovative in his introduction of the ugly in scenes of idealised religious piety, but also in his appropriation of an iconographical tradition which is given new meaning through his intervention. For example, the patriotic figure Dun Mikiel Xerri (1737-99) is treated as a heroic martyr in Kalleya’s *bozzetto* for a medallion monument to the priest. Xerri was executed in 1799 for leading an unsuccessful reactionary attack against the French occupiers who threatened the power of the Church. Kalleya planned for the medallion to be installed in St. George’s Square, Valletta, the site of

12 Griselda Pollock, *After-affects/After-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2013, 3

13 Dr. Schembri Bonaci spoke on the obliteration of memory in Caruana Dingli’s paintings in a paper delivered in Maltese on April 16, 2015 called ‘Dun Karm u Caruana Dingli: id-dehra ta’ Marija tal-Bajd bhala kuntrapunt’

Xerri's execution. His death was the result of a political conflict, yet Kalleya's representation echoes that of the crucified Christ flanked by two figures. Even in a political context, Kalleya envisions martyrdom with religious reverence, creating an analogy between the religious and the secular. The Catholic treatment of a political victim is distinctly staged in Jacques-Louis David's (174-1825) painting *The Death of Marat* (1793). Both works allude to Christ as a revolutionary figure rather than as a symbol of the institutional Catholic Church, essentially usurping traditional religious iconography for a secular purpose. Kalleya's paradoxical artistic character is strongly exemplified by this work, as a modern approach is taken to commemorate the reactionary actions of the work's subject.

A close look at two of Kalleya's now lost or destroyed early works propose a redefinition of martyrdom as the repudiation of an archaic ideology, thus the sacrificing of the past, to embrace the new, works which also demonstrate Kalleya's inherent recognition of tradition's contingency. The first shows a young girl rising up as if growing from materiality itself and is catalogued as *Female Figure Representing Malta*. Albeit the force which pulls her down towards earth, the figure aspires to detach herself from that which fetters her to the ground. She symbolises a Malta who seeks freedom. A subsequent work, dated 1934, is very strikingly called *L'Abbandono della Casa Materna* (The Abandonment of the Maternal Home) and again shows a young woman pursuing spiritual and physical liberation. In the latter work, which bears stylistic tendencies suggestive of Egyptian art as pointed out by Schembri Bonaci¹⁴ and as seen in the work of other sculptors such as Eric Gill (1882-1940), the girl 'abandons' her maternal home, meaning the safety of her heritage and tradition. This abandonment is necessary to her intellectual and creative maturation and reveals an empowerment of one's being. The work precisely represents that moment of awakening which causes one to reflect on themselves and their surroundings.

The notion of human sacrifice and the act of martyrdom, the relinquishing of one's sense of the familiar in the pursuit of the modern as challenged by Mangion and Kalleya's art come into direct contact with religious ideological tradition. The consequences of a sacrificial death executed in the name of an ideal and their representation in art illustrates veritable concerns with the

14 Kalleya's use of ancient and prehistoric sources is often mentioned by Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci during our discussions on the artist

prospect of death and, significantly, with death as the road towards modernity. I will expand upon this point in the next section which deals with the uncertainty of imagining mortality and the idea of life after death as configured by these two artists.

Death¹⁵

Art which visualises death itself and the dialectics of mortality and immortality, as well as the dichotomy of physical in contrast to spiritual existence is ubiquitous in the Christian tradition. The presence of death in Christian art serves as a perpetual reminder of one's mortality, as do specific symbols in non-sacred art which signify the fragility of life. Kalleya and Mangion profoundly contemplate death as individuals and reveal an active consciousness of their own mortality which relates to and transcends a Roman Catholic sphere of knowledge. They were drawn towards the occurrence of death. This self-awareness, the reflection of one's own death had a sort of Narcissus-effect, causing them to stare transfixed at the image of unconscious being.

Memento mori, such as the skull, and representations of Christ's Crucifixion are recognisable and legible signs of human temporality due their firm-rootedness in visual and literary traditions. In modern art, the 'nothingness' of death is manifested through new idiomatic formulations which are not immediately recognised as encompassing death. Vincent van Gogh's (1853-90) *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890) painted in the year of his death is an iconic example of a non-symbolic image of immortality, as is Gustave Courbet's (1819-77) *The Trout* (1873). Faith provides a sense of ease and knowingness to the undesirability of death in its positing of aspirations and expectations of life beyond earth. Despite his profound spirituality, van Gogh's vision of nothingness is shrouded in mystery; paths lead to nowhere and suggest an afterlife to be an eternal quest. The concept of death was to

15 The subject of death as expressed in modern and contemporary art is currently being studied by Dr. Schembri Bonaci and a paper will be presented during the 2015 edition of the 'Visual Culture of Death Symposium' organised annually by Prof. Conrad Thake. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Schembri Bonaci for shedding intriguing light on certain understandings of death as represented in art

van Gogh enigmatic, as was his understanding of life.¹⁶ But most importantly, van Gogh takes ownership of the representation of the experience of death. He achieves autonomy from any organised system of belief and proposes a different worldview to that dominated by religious faith. Significantly, this is done primarily through the language of art rather than that of an ideology, meaning that artistic devices are employed to convey a feeling of death. It is an art which does not abide to a 'common sense' order. The artist's exteriorisation of their inner and subjective understanding of death as a universal occurrence in a language independent of tradition is resonant in the works of Kalleya and Mangion.

In Mangion's art, as in that of van Gogh, the modern landscape "ceases to be pictured as a social environment and is transposed on to an existential plane."¹⁷ The landscape is a direct confrontation with reality and its paradoxes. Not only the landscape scenes, but all of Mangion's works are imbued with an existential tension. The *Wardija* series, especially the portrayal of the eternal road in the *Wardija Castle* and *Wardija Hill* paintings, or the perplexing depth of land as shown in the numerous *Cliff*, *Hill* and *Valley* works project a feeling of permanent emptiness within the great expanse of nature. The idea of a valley as a space of death has considerable cultural significance. It is referred to in Psalm 23 of the Bible as an area through which the faithful flock is guided by Jesus Christ the shepherd. In Mangion's paintings the valley is deserted, there is no shepherd to guide the viewer through. Nor is Mangion's valley of death a battleground into which soldiers blindly rode towards their death as in Lord Alfred Tennyson's (1809-92) 1854 poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', based on a particular battle within the Crimean War.

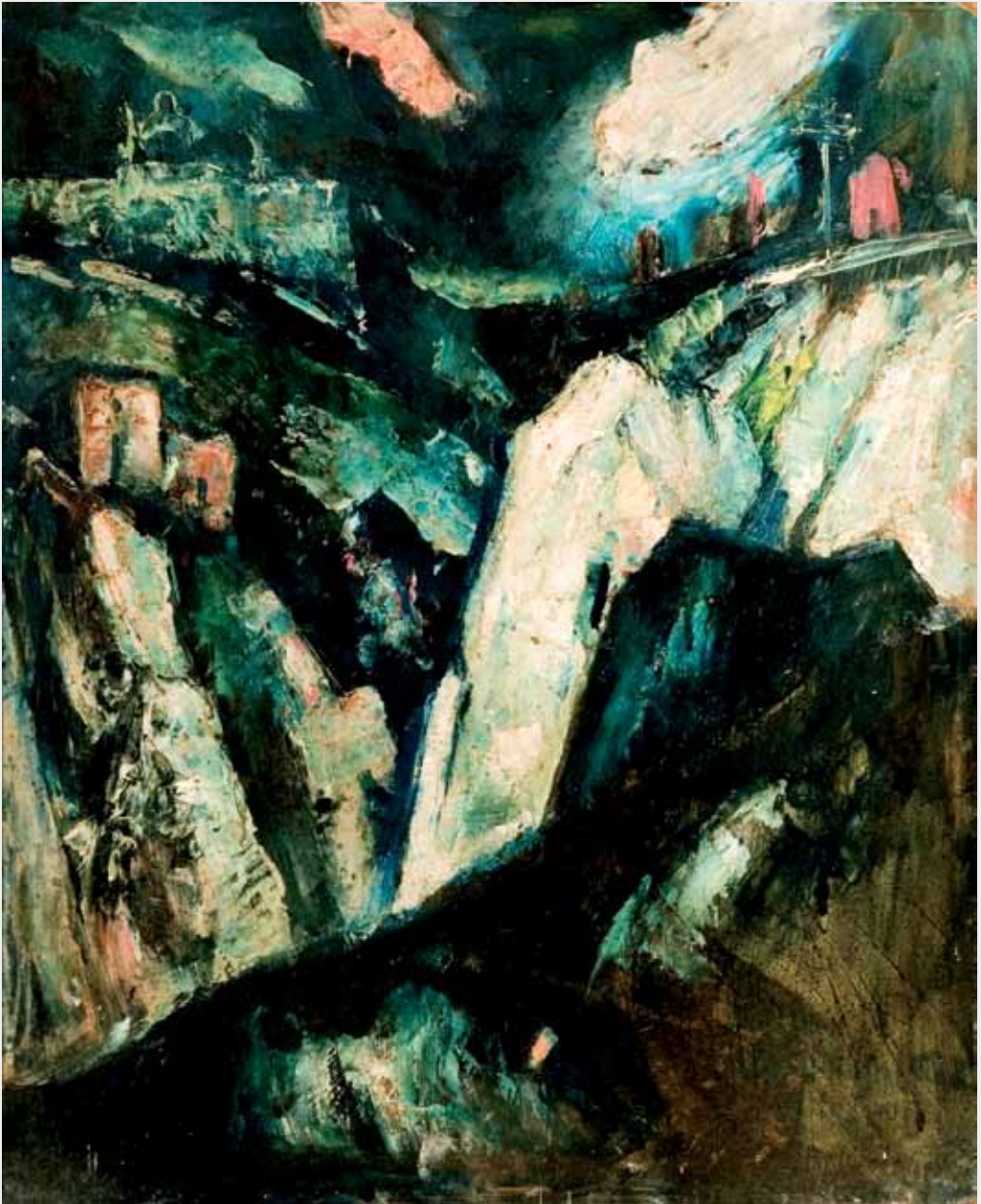
Instead, Mangion's vision of death draws parallels with Charles Baudelaire's (1821-67) poem '*Le Voyage*' (The Voyage) in which the path to death is a mystery, yet one emancipated from tradition;

16 "What a riddle life is"; statement by Vincent van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo, February 8, 1883, The Hague, letter no. 310, cl. 265, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. Accessed on the Museum's official website on August 31, 2015

17 Edward Timms, Introduction, *Unreal City: Urban experience in modern European literature and art*, edited by Edward Timms and David Kelley, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985, 4



Josef Kalleya, *L'Abbandono della Casa Materna*, unknown medium, 1934, Lost



Carmelo Mangion, *The Cliff*, Oil on masonite, undated, Private collection

“To plunge to the bottom of the abyss, whether it be Heaven or Hell,
To the bottom of the Unknown in order to find something *new!*”¹⁸

This signaling of the new in the representation of death in spite of the unknown is Baudelaire’s reference to the manifestation of modernity. He conjures up the vision of a journey which although like death is wrought with uncertainty, is welcomed change which must be embraced. Within the light of Baudelaire’s poem, Mangion’s images of death as an obscure voyage are likewise interpreted as a search, a quest, for the *new*; a new relationship with beauty, even if explored within the virginity of the rural landscape rather than in the modern urban setting.

This pursuit for a new beauty within death is made explicit by Kalleya in an unpublished piece of prose called ‘*Il-Ktieb ta’ Ruhi*’ (The Book of My Soul) wherein death implies the discovery of beauty;

*“Dawn huma l-ahhar jiem.
Il-misteru tal-hażen waslet sighetu u qed jiggarrarf.
L-imħabba tgħaqqad.
Imsaħħa mill-ġdid in-natura għajjiena, fjuri, tgħannieq, estasi.
Il-faqar issir għana.
Jinftehem il-ġmiel.”*¹⁹

*(These are the final days/ The final hour has come for the mystery
of evil, and it’s collapsing/ Love unites/ Strengthened anew nature
is tired, flowers, embraces, ecstasy/ Poverty becomes song/ Beauty is
understood.)*²⁰

Death is envisioned by Kalleya as a beautiful and even honourable passage into a heavenly paradise. Death eradicates evil, or the knowledge of evil. Kalleya seems to await death as an ending to the torment of consciousness provoked by his search for immateriality within a material earth. Death is a resting place as witnessed in the Matissean paradise *Le Bonheur de Vivre*

18 Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil and Paris Spleen: selected poems*, translated by Wallace Fowlie, Dover Publications, New York, 2010, 64

19 Josef Kalleya, *Il-Ktieb ta’ Ruhi*, folio 2 from printed text pertaining to the Josef Kalleya Family Archives

20 I would like to thank Luke Buhagiar for his help with the translation of Kalleya’s text

(1905-06), but also a chaotic space which gives way to ugliness in its reaching for spiritual beauty. The “palliative nature”²¹ of death which Benjamin observes in Baudelaire, combined with its destructive character, or the “death-tranced idyll”²² of his poems, represented by Kalleya in the drawing *Il Grande Ritorno* (The Great Return) (c.1977).

Conclusion

The journey into the unknowingness of death comes to signify the shift into the new. Modernity is just this; a release from the familiar, from a known systematic social order into uncharted territory; a dramatic change which causes one to ponder upon those prior norms which are dissonant to the exigencies of the new age. Social ‘sense’ disinherits its common basis, allowing a plurality of ideologies to flourish even if a particular mode of thought remains prevalent. “From the point of view of the theory of hegemony,” posits Chantal Mouffe, “artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging”²³ This symbolic order, which in Roland Barthes’ philosophy saturates signs with meaning for the construction of mythologies,²⁴ is challenged by the nonsensical, the alien language not readily perceptible, but in being so stimulates perception and provokes a revival of consciousness – the breaking away from automatisms – cultivated by philosophies of praxis.

We are reminded of Apap’s conundrum whether to submit to or confront tradition; whether to subscribe to the assurance of faith or to trudge through the undiscovered road. However, Apap’s battle with faith was, I believe, not the same as fought by Mangion and Kalleya. The reason why the *Descent from the Cross* is so deeply disturbing is because it supposes a dead end, an “eternal ‘suspense’”²⁵, when questioning the consequences of belief and disbelief,

21 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 345

22 Ibid., 355

23 Chantal Mouffe, ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’, *Art and Research*, 1, 2 (Summer 2007), 4, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html>. Accessed on August 18, 2015

24 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1972

25 Schembri Bonaci, *Willie Apap*, 30



Josef Kalleya, *Il Grande Ritorno*, Crayons on panel, c.1977, Mdina Cathedral Museum, Mdina

tradition and modernity. Apap confronts the wall of tradition head on, but cannot climb over it or find its termination. The struggle of the latter two artists, in contrast, was to assert a non-hegemonic ideology, an alternative worldview to that which troubled Apap so intensely. Their language was inconsistent with that seen in conventional imagery. Furthermore, that which makes their art so revolutionary is that these alternatives are presented within representations of religious themes and figures. It is clear that Kalleya and Mangion's mode of thinking is deeply embedded within the Roman Catholic tradition. Modernity is constantly positioned in relation with this tradition in their creation of a radically new language of art. Even though their works are strongly attached to the dominant religion, they are liberated from the hegemonic postulates of Roman Catholicism as made visible in the history of Maltese art. Religious narratives and symbols are given new meanings. Iconography is tampered with or appropriated for purposes beyond those of their canonic function. Faith remains a point of reference but is construed multifariously and presented through a plurality of inferences as to how one may relate to their own physical mortality and anticipation of spiritual transcendentalism, inferences which transcended those dogmatic strictures which maintained the political influence of the Church.

However, the transitional perspectives made visible by their art are distinctive, even opposing. Mangion attempts to rationalise the indecipherability of existence in contrast to the perplexing mystical musings expounded by Kalleya. This newly established cultural plurality contained no harmony of counter-ideological positions, meaning that the intellectual and artistic movements which confronted hegemonic consensus were themselves conflicted. Their worldviews opposed one another's as well as those of the dominant ideology. I must agree with Mouffe's critical stance toward Arendt's definition of plurality, which, according to the latter, engenders a society which accepts the coexistence of differences, differences which are all treated as equal. Mouffe challenges this position by arguing that the democratic consensus of difference overlooks the existence of conflict, which is itself caused by the existence of plurality.²⁶

This essay has endeavoured to identify the existence of modernism in Maltese art as formulated by Kalleya and Mangion in the transfiguration and transcendence of prevalent Christian narratives and symbols. The questioning

26 Mouffe (2007)

of faith, as elicited in Schembri Bonaci's *Descent from the Cross* essay, permits the reflection upon identity, on socio-political struggles as well as the dialectics of tradition and modernity. The alternatives, or philosophies of praxis, proposed against the hegemonic system of belief as represented in art, and likewise the use, or misuse, of its themes and iconography indicate the occurrence of a decisive social upheaval which unlocked a new vision of the world and new claims to spiritual truth, the creation of a modern art.

Images

Photography of Carmelo Mangion's works by Joe P. Smith and courtesy of the Mangion family
Photography of Josef Kalleya's works courtesy of Kalleya family

Christianity and Spirituality from the Margins

DEBATING TWO ARTISTS' CONCERNS
WITH HUMANITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

Irene Biolchini

Nikki Petroni

The Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale will be exhibiting works by two distinguished artists whose works proposed radically new positions on modernity, Christianity and the manifestation of spirituality in art: the French Georges Rouault (1871-1958) and the Italian Dario Fo (b.1926). Artistic Director Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, Irene Biolchini and Nikki Petroni sat together to question the significance of having these artists and their works within the artistic programme of the Mdina Biennale, also examining their importance and links with Maltese art.

NP: Rouault may definitely be considered as one of the pioneering artists of the 20th century. I do feel that he is not given his deserved prominence within the dominant narrative of Western Modernism. His works, although linked to Fauvism and Expressionism, elude a fixed categorisation under both movements. Rouault was a highly individual artist who cultivated a unique aesthetic approach, yet one which encompassed a sense for universal human suffering.

GSB: I do believe that Rouault epitomises the negativity of the 20th century, from a philosophical and artistic point of view, but notably from a pictorial perspective. His range of colour is symptomatic of the 20th century: the century of genocides, humanity's self-mutilation, absurdity. Where Claude Monet (1840-1926) chose beauty as his armament against WWI atrocities, Rouault presents us with darkness, ugliness, decay. His reflection on his time is a true one, one which reveals the schism between Christianity and modernity. The power of his art lies in an inherent paradox of him being a fervent Catholic yet one of the main proponents of modern art, not dissimilar to the contradictions peculiar to the Maltese Josef Kalleya.

IB: One element is particularly interesting from my point of view - the question of not being central to the Western canon - something which I think can have a special pertinence when analysed in Malta, which is undoubtedly outside of the dominant map. But in a very interesting way this peripheral approach gave a special freedom to the artists who experienced it. What is impressive about Rouault's ceramic production is how he was able to adapt his dark palette to working with glazes. His ceramics do not communicate any sensation of preciousness, they are not shiny, but on the contrary, they are characterised by the darkness of colours, by the heavy black curved lines. This can even be found in the raw adoption of clay seen in Kalleya's art.

NP: What I find to be intellectually captivating about Rouault's works is this precise paradox: the ability to surpass religious institutional canons whilst asserting his Catholic faith. He makes us re-think the tradition of religious representation, and in doing so infuses his works with a raw spirituality charged by the experience and force of modernity, as can be felt in the writings of Charles Baudelaire, for example.

GSB: Taking a look at Rouault's *oeuvre*, his *Miserere* series of prints standing at the zenith, one witnesses the juxtaposition of prostitutes and clowns with Christ himself. Like Christ, these personalities were cast aside by society. The artist does not distinguish between subjects; their plight is the plight of all.

IB: Yes, and at the same time he does not create any separation between those people at the margins and the artist himself. In his position there is all the ambivalence of the artist who does not have a social mandate, something which Meyer Shapiro tried to describe when he analysed Cézanne's and Van Gogh's choice of escaping modernity, the field in which they did not have a social mandate anymore. And interestingly enough, as Shapiro noted, this feeling of belonging was achieved again in small religious communities, which sounds like a good definition of the Maltese context within which Kalleya and even Mangion were working.

NP: One of the main reasons why the Maltese Carmelo Mangion and Rouault share an artistic and spiritual connection is because the two artists re-evaluated Christianity, questioned its fundamental postulates and identified in it affinities to modern-day conditions. Mangion, however, was not himself a deeply religious man.

GSB: Mangion even copied Rouault. The crudeness of Rouault's dark Fauvist palette, its density, are clearly encountered in the paintings of Mangion.

NP: The remarkable thing is that for the first time in history the works of these two artists will be displayed in the same exhibition, a milestone step for the interweaving of Maltese modern art history within international parameters.

IB: I agree. The international expansion of this Biennale is one of its most challenging aspects and yet not the only one. I think that one of the main goals of this edition was to challenge the concept of the visual arts. Inviting Fo to participate was a conscious decision to attain this objective, as he is renowned for his theatrical productions.

GSB: Yes, to challenge the traditional as well as contemporary definitions of art. Many forget that Fo is primarily a painter, but his theatre and painting are inextricably linked: his theatre is painting, his paintings are theatrical. All that he produces is heavily focused on the visual, in whatever sphere he is working. However, the main reason for including Fo, was due to his ideological position. Fo's prominent inclusion within a Catholic sphere is quite subversive, his *Mistero Buffo* having been denigrated by the Vatican. I myself had problems

when staging my adaptation of the same production in Malta due to censorship issues. Fo's presence in Mdina affirms that things have changed in Maltese politics, furthermore with the Church.

IB: The theme of the Mdina Biennale is intimately linked with Fo's enduring philosophical-social commitment. The Biennale represents several religions, faiths, spiritual approaches and worldviews, as has already been stated. Having Fo, a dissident artist, entering into the ideological and physical limits of the Church will inevitably provoke viewers to rethink religion and spirituality in the 21st century.

GSB: Fo's works being shown in an exhibition created under the auspices of the Metropolitan Cathedral shows us that spirituality does not solely pertain to the Church, that spirituality is not solely religious. All Fo's works are spiritual, even when he exploits Biblical themes. Yes, he combines it with *commedia dell'arte*, burlesque and other popular forms, but these do not minimise his spirituality.

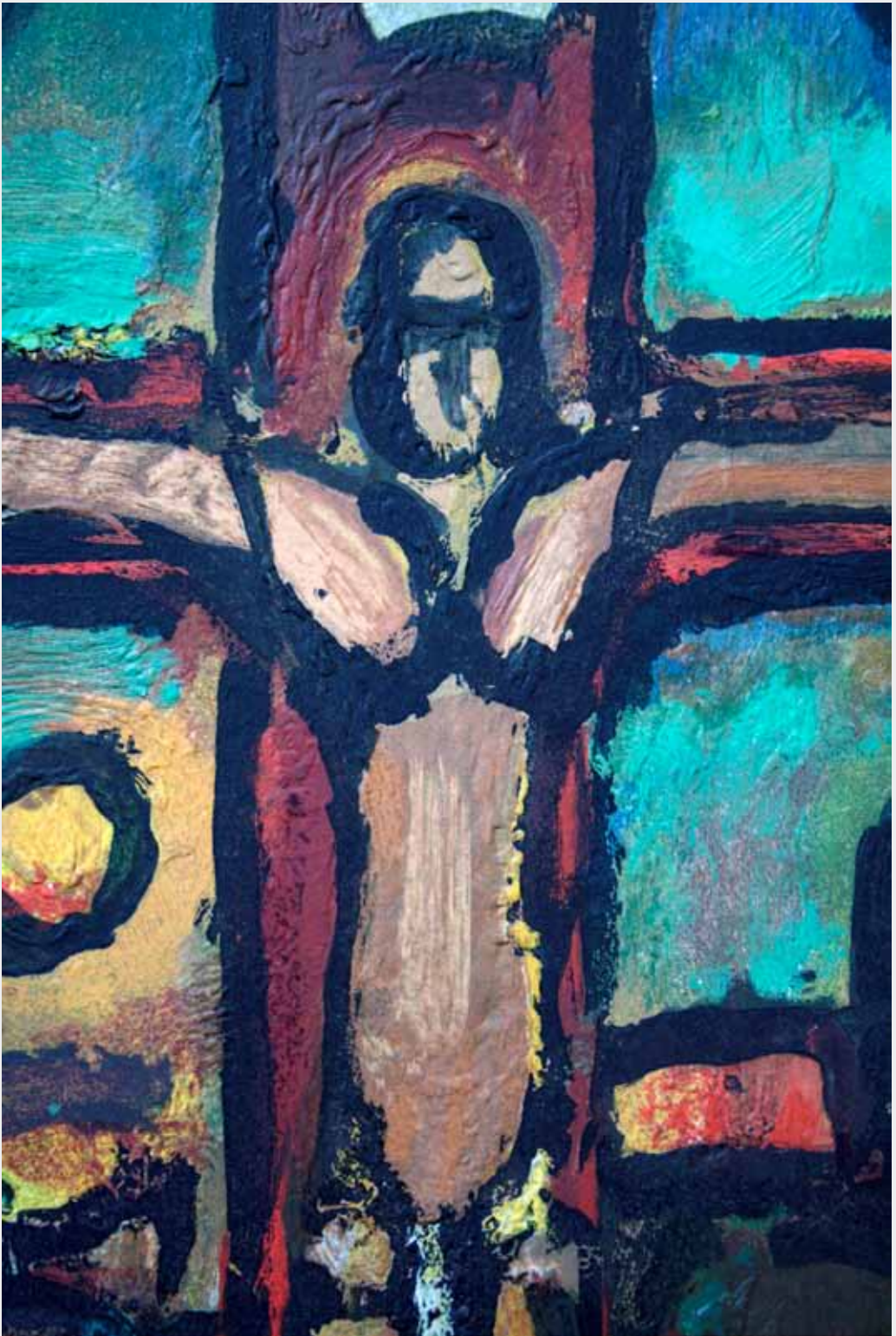
NP: It is evident that the artists we are discussing here today bear strong associations to the Maltese modern art scene. We have already seen how Rouault and Mangion, and even Kalleya cross artistic-philosophical paths.

IB: You have mentioned that Fo's productions were staged locally. How was this exchange between yourself and Fo established?

GSB: All this began when I was director of Teatru Strada Stretta, which introduced new theatrical principles to Maltese soil. To deepen these innovations, I went to Milan to meet Fo and to attend his lessons. We started to collaborate, but our relationship truly blossomed when *Mistero Buffo* was translated into Maltese and performed by local *ghanneja*, which Fo loved despite linguistic barriers. I then staged his productions in Moscow.

IB: Interestingly, this constellation does not end here. Much could be said about the relationship between Rouault and Fo. On the surface, the two are rather different. However, once one analyses their works, a profound analogous sentiment is discovered.

GSB: Exactly. Fo and Rouault represent two extreme points of the same theme. Fo is loud, playful, carnivalesque, satirical, anti-church. Contrastingly, Rouault was devoutly Catholic, dark, visually intense, anguished. Yet there is a common preoccupation and deliberation with poverty, barbarity, injustice, crime, inhumanity and the folly of existence. At the centre of their work are the marginalised.



Georges Rouault, *Christ en Croix*, Oil on paper, c.1914-30, Private collection, (detail)



CATALOGUE

The Silent City is Speaking

THE MDINA CATHEDRAL CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE
AS A SURVEY ON THE DIFFERENT IDEAS OF SPIRITUALITY
(REPLACING CACOPHONY WITH SILENCE AND CONTEMPLATION)

Irene Biolchini

1. 'The rest is silence'

One of the most astonishing phenomena of our global contemporary art scene is the proliferation of Biennales all around the world. A few days after the closure of the 56th Venice Biennale, the catalyst for the contemporary biennale 'condition', the Mdina Biennale is opening its doors, or better said: the city of Mdina is opening its gates to contemporary art. The association between the doors of the exhibition and the gates of the city is not a mere allegory, but reveals the deep meaning of the Mdina Biennale. For the very first time in history, the works of different contemporary artists will be enveloping the city, dealing with its own history, with its churches, squares and museums. Mdina, known as the City of Silence, will be occupied by works of art coming from all around the globe (and by artists hailing from the most diverse backgrounds). As in Ensor's parades, the works will create a colourful procession in the streets, but -as also in the works of the Belgian master- at the centre of the confusion there will always be that uncanny feeling that will oblige us to rethink our relationship with the masses as well as with our most intimate and primordial possession (that which the artists call: soul, our spiritual side, and other various definitions).

In our contemporary moment of global tension, provoked by cross-cultural conflicts, when religious beliefs are being used as justifications for

terrorist attacks and brutality, the connection which ceaselessly links the two elements (the masses and the individual) becomes particularly important. Following the path of some of the most relevant masters of the twentieth century, who also find representation in this Biennale with Georges Rouault's (1871-1958) image of the crucifixion, numerous contemporary artists tried to interpret and provide their own vision of spirituality and religion. By analysing the dichotomy which separates, but also binds, the masses and the individual, especially in our contemporary era of contrasts and migrations, the artists who have taken part in the present Biennale felt the necessity of dealing with "the Other", the third (and yet not less important) term within the theme "Christianity, Spirituality and the Other". If we try to compare the Mdina Biennale with the numerous other large-scale contemporary art events taking place internationally, it is precisely this necessity to create dialogue with 'other' forms of spirituality and with 'other' visions of the world which mainly characterise this edition of the Mdina Biennale. An approach which, rather than investigating "all the world's futures"¹, is trying to challenge "all the world's presents". The elements which constitute our presents and which the participating artists are trying to challenge are radically different, but yet the answers given are extremely coherent in that they suggest a new, meditative way of thinking about the arts (and here the plural 'arts' is used consciously because, as will be seen, the artists in the Biennale do not solely belong to the visual art sphere). Such differences may produce a chaotic effect within the psyche of the spectators who may lose their familiarity with art when confronted by so many different artistic languages, media and choices, but yet they all correspond to a precise vision of spirituality. A spirituality which is the mirror of our individuality and which is as silent as the city of Mdina. The artists being exhibited accepted to analyse this lonely dimension and mainly focused their attention on the existence -or, contrarily, on the negation - of: religious, political and intellectual beliefs in art. Their works are a reflection upon the contemplative solitude which characterises the studio or workshop space and by doing so they have repudiated mockery, noise, the spectacular. Their works reflect a quest towards silence and meditation, or, as Hamlet said after his quest for justice and order; "The rest is silence."²

1 The definition is directly taken from the title of the 2015 Venice Biennale, See: O. Enwezor, *All the world's futures*, Biennale di Venezia. 56 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Marsilio, Venezia, 2015

2 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene II, 4020

2. More than one hundred artists and five different ways to express ‘Christianity, Spirituality and the Other’: a tentative categorisation

The Mdina Biennale is exhibiting the works of more than one hundred artists. These works are characterised by the adoption of different media and also of different techniques and processes: walking through the city one can find sculptures, paintings, ceramics, installations, video. The places in which each work is exhibited determined the nature of the works; the spaces also inspired the subjects, the techniques and the dimensions. Understanding how they can be related is not so easy, both due to the size of the exhibition and due to the manifold results which emerged. Nevertheless, by analysing the works of art it is possible to trace out some common elements that will help us to understand the aesthetic processes which guided the artists. The final result will also indicate the interpretation which each artist gave to the theme of the Biennale, which will help us to know what is being defined and considered as spiritual in our contemporary society. The pages which follow elicit a tentative approach within the creation of particular categories which creates a common relationship between these multiple approaches. By entering into each one we will notice that the idea of spirituality has been examined by means of two main contrasting approaches: the first group of artists has attempted to underline spirituality by opposing it to the matter (both artistic and natural matter); the second one, on the other hand, has linked it with abstract concepts (as formal manifestations of thoughts and symbols). Moreover, by taking a closer look at each group we can isolate some further categories. Under the first idea, the dialectics of matter and spirituality, we can delineate three main categories: ‘materiality’, ‘cosmos’, and ‘body’. Within the second grouping wherein one can recognise the integration between spirituality and abstract concepts, two categories can be identified: ‘thoughts’ and ‘symbols’.

Whereas the distinction between the two groups is extremely evident, the differences between the categories are more flexible: it is clear that there is a continuous connection between ‘cosmos’ and the ‘human body’ (especially due to the fact that the latter is the instrument through which we perceive the first one). What is important to understand is that this specific distinction was made in order to analyse the works which were presented for the Biennale: these categories cannot be enlarged to include the gargantuan spectrum generated in the last thirty years of artistic production. To trace some examples: we cannot

examine the works of Pietro Manzoni (1933-63), Joseph Beuys (1921-86) or Marina Abramovic (b.1946) through the separation of thoughts, symbols and body. But it is also true that when we examine the production of these particular artists we assist in creating a perfect integration between life and art; everything that is individual is universal; everything that is part of the artist's life is part of the arts.³

This opposition between the individual and the universal, which is so harmonious in the works of the artists we have just mentioned, appears to be much more traumatic for the artists which are exhibiting here in Mdina. This approach, which seems to reflect a problematic connection between the individual and the universal, seems interrupted only by artists who originate from China, as does Adam Chang, who is presenting a portrait of Ai Weiwei, the preeminent artist who has been able to initiate a fight for individual rights which also embodies a collective fight for freedom. But, before proceeding to the analysis of the singular artists taking part in the Biennale, we have to concentrate our attention on the distinctive categories which form part of our discourse.

2a. Christianity, Spirituality and Materiality

And the Lord God made man from the dust of the earth, breathing into him the breath of life: and man became a living soul.

(Genesis, 2:7)

According to Genesis, God made man from earth. The artists presented in this section reflected upon matter as the element of Creation. Matter, or materiality, lies at the core of their research, it gives birth to their work as it gave birth to Adam. If we try to go back to the meaning of the word 'Adam', we may see that it comes from 'adamah', which means earth. Moreover in the Bible, Adam refers both to the first man and to humankind. In this category one can find several artists who investigate matter as the creational element, but, more specifically, as the substance which nurtures their own work and the whole meaning of their artistic universe.

In this section we can include at least two artists who work in clay, Victor Agius and Sina Farrugia Micallef. Victor Agius, who works with glazes and

3 See: M. Dantini, 'Piero Manzoni 1959: tre Achromes "prensili" e un asvolta New Dada', in *Predella*, 34, Jan 2015, 319-345; G.Zanchetti, (ed), *Piero Manzoni*, Skira, Milano, 2001; H. U. Obrist, M. Abramovic (eds), *The Conversation Series*, Paperback, London, 2010

traditional ceramics, progressively reduced his language to the basic element of creation: clay and, lately, red earth. The same red earth which formed the body of Adam, one could say; but also the same red earth which one is found around the island of Gozo. The landscape of his motherland is a powerful source of inspiration: such as Ta' Ċenċ Cliff, in which multiple layers of earth modelled by the wind and the sea are visible. In Agius' works one can find this element of stratification. Moreover, the technical process involves wind and air in the drying process. The work which Agius presented for the Mdina Biennale is a reinterpretation of a statue of St. Paul, a monument constructed on top of St. Paul's Islands (Malta). According to the Christian tradition, St. Paul arrived in Malta due to a shipwreck and he converted the Maltese population to Christianity. By portraying St. Paul, therefore, Agius is also representing the beginnings of the longstanding faith on the island. The subject matter, the beginning of faith, is perfectly reflected in the material used: the red earth that gave birth to the whole of humanity. Whilst adopting clay, Sina Farrugia Micallef focused her attention on the idea of enduring creation and recreation. This idea of a continuous, cyclical pattern is clearly expressed by the artist, who defines her work as 'a tactile mandala'.⁴ The shape of the sculpture guides the spectators to complete the circle traced by the ship (which would ideally be re-joined with the head of the boatman). The figure on the ship does not have any specific gendered characteristic: the body is a representation of all humanity, it does not possess any individuality; on the contrary, it is the sum of all individualities (a representation of the spiritual journey of each individual). The same concerns with the universe and the loneliness of human beings is also at the core of Luigi Cipollone's research. The artist aims to represent 'the deep solitude of men, men being the only creatures in the universe who perceive their fragility and the only ones who feel the burden of their shadow'.⁵ The voyage described by Farrugia Micallef is in Cipollone's works an existential journey, a way of investigating loneliness and the soul. In Cipollone's approach one can locate Sartre's ideas of existentialism, in which individual life cannot be separated by the collective destiny.

By analysing the works of the artists whose works fall under this category, we can see how the dichotomy of the individual soul and the collective (which dominates the whole theme of the Biennale) was resolved by forming a perfect

4 See Sina Farrugia Micallef's catalogue entry

5 See Cipollone's catalogue entry

osmosis between the two. It will not be possible, for any artist, to analyse the soul - 'the breath of life' to quote Genesis - without comparing to it the destiny of mankind. The creation of the work of art is part of a bigger system of creation, one which gives meaning to our existence.

2b. Christianity, Spirituality and the Body

*And God made man in his image, in the image of God he made him:
male and female he made them.*

(Genesis, 1:27)

The 'creational realism' which characterises, as per Auerbach's analysis, Judeo-Christian artistic production, is central to the research of the artists present in this section. Vince Briffa appropriated the image of the reliquary, but he did so by subverting the traditional idea of the object itself. If the sacred power of the relics is obtained by their intrinsic definition of being a part of the body of a sacred person, the title of Briffa's work, *No one's reliquary*, reveals a contradiction. Briffa's approach of not indicating a specific body or person goes against the object-driven idea of the relic itself. If the relic comes from an unknown person, therefore, we will not be able to devote our prayers or our thoughts to a specific individual, but, on the contrary, we must direct our attention towards a generic human being. And what is intriguing is the absence of the corpse, the impossibility of attributing a part to the whole. The sacred body is not the body of a saint, but it is neither the body of the artist (a contemporary creator). Briffa is simultaneously negating two traditions: he is refusing the idea of the sacredness of the body of the saint, but he is also contesting the representation of the contemporary artist's body as something that produces life. A trend which can be traced in Miquel Barceló's (b.1957) representation of Christ (which was done by the Catalan artist as a self-portrait), but also in Maurizio Cattelan's (b.1960) early work *Reliquia d'amore* (a box in which he placed his pubic hairs), or even in Abramovic's *The artist is present* (a performance lasting three months during which the spectator met directly with the artist, influencing the life of the spectator; the artist made her body the instrument of communicating values and hopes). In Briffa's work there are no saints, there are no demiurges and there are no shamans. No one can transmit health and hope. The spectator can't find anything in the object:

the only thing that he can see is a part of a body. The relic is representing no one's body and therefore everyone's at the same time. Humankind is our goal, the fragmentation of the soul of the individual, of each individual, is the only representation which we are called to testify. And the individual, and, more particularly, his body is also the debated in Salvatore Cali's research. Cali's performance (digitally documented) was based on his act of standing still at the centre of a landscape scene, holding the handkerchief his mother gave him before her death. His act of standing is a form of resistance, it sounds like a declaration on the importance of being an artist in our world, of finding the meaning of the whole in the individual spiritual research. The handkerchief completes this artistic statement in which art and life are merged into the artist's spirituality. The handkerchief represents the spiritual connection with his mother: his gesture of holding it reveals his roots and his newfound life in Malta. At the same time, the object, being exposed to the wind, is manipulated according to the breeze. This is a volatile object, but its shapes are also giving form to air. In this way the artist, with his presence and his gesture, is allowing the spectator to see something invisible: the passage of air. He is the instrument through which the forces of nature are passing in order to reach us. In this performance Cali, like a shaman, is bringing the metaphysical world to us, he is directing the invisible towards our visible world.

The evanescence and the spirituality of Cali's work finds its counterpart in Monika Grycko's work. The white ceramic organs, obtained in series thanks to a mould, are reproductions of human organs, but their aseptic colour creates a contrast with the objects that they want to imitate, producing in the spectator a sense of displacement. This other-worldly feeling is amplified by the structure of the installation. Floating above the spectator, like an Alexander Calder (1898-1976) mobile, the organs are mixed with daily objects, negating any form of relation with the real world. The distance from our physical world is not just symbolic since the objects, because of suspended from the ceiling, do not touch the ground. Any reference to matter, or to the real organ, is therefore negated by the intervention of the artist: the spectator is lost in front of the work, contemplating the visibility of human body parts suspended, disconnected from our reality, but at the same time alien to every form of established symbolism. They are mute forms, they do not speak to us and they do not create a parallel world which we can recognise. As in Briffa's work, in which relics were not associated to a specific body, even these multiple reproductions

of organs are not connected to a specific individual, but their weight hangs over us, a contemporary *memento mori*. The only form of spirituality which we can maintain in our society (the same society which is irrupting in the works through the adoption of daily objects) is the reflection upon our transience; the body is the last horizon which we can perceive.

2c. *Christianity, Spirituality and Cosmos*

And God said, See, I have given you every plant producing seed, on the face of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit producing seed: they will be for your food
(Genesis, 1:29)

The fight between Cosmos and Chaos is, according to Mircea Eliade,⁶ at the basis of every form of archaic religion. This category includes artists coming from different backgrounds: the Catholic religion, as in the case of Myriam O; Indian mythology, in the work of D. Priyanka; and a laic reflection upon the spiritual side of life, as seen in the work of Giovanni Ruggiero.

Myriam O created a work of art in which the subject matter reflects a spiritual belief. The creation of the world, according to the Christian religion, is born from darkness and brings light to the world. Likewise, her painting (representing the Creation) is composed of a progressive change in colour: from the blue-violet at the top of the painting there is a progressive lightening of the palette, until the arrival of 'light', symbolised by the use of bright colours. The process of Creation, represented by the artist, is also a metaphor for artistic creation, of the moment in which inspiration brightens the artist's mind. That particular moment of inspiration can be reached, according to the artist, only through a moment of silent self-reflective contemplation. Myriam O compares the process of spiritual reflection with the act of praying. Through religion she can reach the deepest level of her soul, finding in that darkness the light which gives life to the work of art. Her praxis perfectly reflects her subject matter and it is echoed even in the technique adopted.

The Chilean Myriam O, who comes from a Christian religious background, references her religion in order to represent the Cosmos. Interestingly enough, the Indian D. Priyanka tries to depict the same subject matter, even if coming

6 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1954

from an opposed cultural horizon. By presenting her work, Priyanka affirms that according to ‘Indian mythology God is present in every form of nature’;⁷ in her statement we can find references to Genesis, according to which every seed was created by God. The seed, the smallest part of the universe, is what attracts Priyanka’s imagination and is central to her subject matter. The artist focuses her attention on the smallest natural objects, trying to grasp the multitudes of organic variation by amplifying them through the act of painting. At the same time her works, generally produced on a large scale, do not act as a microscope: what interests the artist is not how nature looks like, but how can we perceive it. A form of seeing which itself senses the experience and the sensibility of man, a way of living which also characterises the work of Giovanni Ruggiero. Ruggiero presents his reflection from a laic perspective, but nevertheless in his approach we can witness an echo of Priyanka’s words, especially when the Italian artist declares: ‘the stone and the spike are living in us: we are the depositories of a trace of infinity’.⁸ The Infinite is the word that the artist adopts to speak about God (without attaching a religious connotation) and his subject matter is reflected in the composition of the work of art. The work, a huge canvas, appears to be an abstract painting, but if one focuses attention on the lines it becomes evident that they are meeting at the centre of the canvas, gradually constructing a symbol of the infinite. Even if Ruggiero’s approach does not respond to a particular religious belief, his sensibility reflects the same need for spiritual belonging expressed by the Indian artist. By examining the works of the three artists, one can see that the seed contains all the mystery of the Cosmos both in Ruggiero’s vision and in Priyanka’s one, but even in the Genesis narrative which inspired Olivares. The reflection upon the physical world seems to lead to the same conclusions all the artists present in this section: inspiration is something which transcends the physicality/ physical form of the artist.

7 See Priyanka’s catalogue entry

8 See Ruggiero’s catalogue entry

2d. Christianity, Spirituality and the Symbol

And out of the earth the Lord made every tree to come, delighting the eye and good for food; and in the middle of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

(Genesis, 2:9)

The artists present in this category have interpreted the symbol as an instrument through which to represent our spiritual and material world. In Roman Opalinski's work we can see the power of representation through the selection of one main subject. By working with the concept of the icon, according to which the image is a direct representation of divinity, the artist builds his own work. The angel represented in the painting is the human guide. The symbols, like the lily and the peacock, are speaking to us. They follow the traditional idea of the symbol and they are inserted in the work in order to represent and also reinterpret this concept.

Opalinski adopts traditional symbols, yet the path adopted by Adam Chang is diametrically different: the artist choose a laic symbol, such as Ai Weiwei, a contemporary living artist, in order to symbolise the values of freedom of speech and creation. Ai Weiwei is portrayed on a canvas of large dimensions, his face becomes the symbol of fighting against political constrictions and limitations to human freedom. His research is elevated by Chang as the ultimate spiritual horizon: only through freedom can we abandon the material world and find or attain spirituality. Chang's interpretation is not related to any religion, but in a laic way, he tries to give a face to the forces which are actively struggling in contemporary China. Appropriating Ai Weiwei's face, therefore, is an attempt to elevate a contemporary artist to a symbol: in the pantheon of contemporary artists, he selected the artist whom he perceived to be influential and close to his sensibility. The portrait, rather than a tribute, is a political statement. It reflects a new form of awareness: spirituality can't be just be a process of searching within a metaphysical reality, but has to be concretised by our daily life and our contemporary world.

Our contemporaneity, and, moreover, the centrality of dialogue between religions and political beliefs is also fundamental to Caravan's project in which numerous artists, coming from different backgrounds, are participating in the painting of the same object, a sculpture of a Maltese donkey. The donkeys,

positioned around the city of Mdina, become the tangible symbol of this dialogue. The use of the same subject matter painted by different artists means that each sculpture was given an individual interpretation. The fact that all the works coexist, as a series, in the same city (Mdina), underlines the homogeneity of the project and stresses the idea behind it. In an era in which we persist in encouraging dialogue between religions and cultures, Caravan decided to build up a project in which different realities are made to interact in order to collaboratively build up a common object, the donkey. The works of art, therefore, reflect the idea of a dialogue between religions: the donkey is the object in which the symbol becomes real and tangible.

If Caravan's project works with real and tangible symbols of peace, the approach adopted by Guy Ferrer is different. He presents a series of sculptures, all placed in a circle. In his work, the spectator cannot identify what those figures are doing exactly: the title of the work, *Les Vigilants* (The Vigilants) suggests a state of alert, but we cannot really understand why those figures are seated in circle and what are they looking for. In reality, as the artist suggests, they are not waiting for something to happen, but they are vigilant, or to better say, they are there to prevent the eventuality of something which may happen. That's the reason why, as declared by the artist, they 'are praying for us'; but again the scope of their prayers and their methodology does not correspond to any specific religion. The vigilants, in Ferrer's interpretation, are therefore figures which originate from ancient forms of belief (something older than the organised religions we know and understand today) and they can protect us. They give us a peaceful feeling, but they do not symbolise anything specific.

2e. Christianity, Spirituality and Thoughts

For God sees that on the day when you take of its fruit, your eyes will be open, and you will be as gods, having knowledge of good and evil.
(Genesis 3:5)

The majority of the artists inserted in this category hail from a Christian cultural background. According to the Bible, the devil appears to Adam and Eve in the form of a snake and he tempts them by promising them knowledge and freedom of judgment. Numerous artists decided to challenge this idea

and concentrated their research upon the impulse for freedom of thoughts and knowledge.

Denis Pondruel investigates these elements in his work, the photography of an architecture which is reminiscent of a head, more precisely, that of St. John after Salomé's dance; the theme was inspired by Caravaggio's (1571-1610) *Beheading of St. John* which hangs in Valletta. Salomé's obligation to dance and John's sacrifice, due to his religious beliefs, are the motives which drive the work of art. If evil offered to human beings the freedom of choice, in Pondruel's work this freedom is debated as being a form of sacrifice: by choosing faith, St. John is sacrificed. His freedom of choice, reflected in his decision of following religion, will not condemn his soul, but leads to his death. The idea of sacrifice and of the freedom of belief is also vividly present in Loredana Longo's research. In her project, *The Line*, the artist presents a video in which the main protagonists are all women who have escaped religious persecution and arrived in Italy as political refugees. Subverting the idea of Eve as the first woman to condemn humankind, the women who participated in Longo's project are all witnesses of faith. Refusing to renounce their Christian beliefs, they were condemned to death in their home countries and therefore they had to escape in order to defend their freedom, both as human beings and Christian followers. Their decision of defending their freedom of belief is, even in this case, a profession of faith. A profession of faith that did not allow them the freedom to choose how and where to live, but rather, on the contrary, resulted in their exile. In her project, Longo reflects upon the impositions and regulations determined by each religion and tries to underline the value of human beings (portrayed alone with a light in their hands). Freedom (symbolised by the light) reveals their faces; the shadows and lights of their portraits remind us of Caravaggio's dramatic use of light, his *chiaroscuro*. It is the light which acts as and creates a real sensation of empathy, since the portraits are all devoid of dramatic expressions. The faces of these women and their silence, underlined by the video that works upon the juxtaposition of still images, demand us to observe them, but without imposing any possible interpretation.

Vincent Côme's work, a stratification of levels of paint, adopts an approach that is very similar to Longo's project (which is based upon this contrast of black and white, and which deals with the theme of freedom of thought in a very subtle way). In Côme's work, in fact, the different strata of paint refer to the stratification of our cities, in which each society decides to build upon

the progress of the previous one. This urban process mirrors the different dominant systems of power: once one society gains power it will impose its own idea of the world, its own system of thoughts, upon the previous ones. Therefore, what we do consider as good and evil, the ability of judgement that we obtained by accepting the forbidden fruit, is something which is not eternal, but that is going to change according to the system of power which concerns us. In this sense, Côme's reflection upon knowledge and freedom is a laic voice, a counterpart to the eternal vision proposed by the Bible. According to Côme's vision of the work, nothing is eternal and, most importantly, the distinction between good and evil was not granted to us by God, but by the structures of power which affect our life and our ability of judgment.

All the categories that have been examined, exemplified by a few artists and their works, are all expressions and interpretations of the theme for the 2015 edition of the Mdina Biennale. They reflect, in some way or other, the different approaches taken by the variety of artists and media involved in the exhibition. The artists' approaches, and their enthusiastic quest for spirituality, seem to be the practical counterpart to the theoretical debate which developed in the round table discussion which opens the catalogue wherein three intellectuals attempted to examine the problem of spirituality. Parallels may be drawn between the concerns of the Mdina Biennale participants and those artists whose works were analysed in the other essays on Maltese and international milestone artists. In this section the reader can observe that same debate but from the perspective of the contemporary artist, of the dealing with matter, and how the artists participating in the Mdina Biennale tried to render spirituality as tangible form.



Aktar San Pawlijiet, 2015, Gozitan Terra Rossa, 700x700cm, detail

Victor Agius

Aktar San Pawlijiet consists of an ensemble of sculptures cast using a variety of local soils. This installation aims to create dialogue with the splendid golden retable of St. Paul at the Mdina Cathedral Museum which illustrates various episodes from the life of St. Paul. The saint is invaluable to Maltese history as he is thought to have brought ashore Christianity, rooting and shaping the Maltese historical, religious and cultural identity. My work depicts various representations of St. Paul through crude materiality, a manner which I believe is the purest form to inhibit the spiritual. The formless mud and soil was rendered with borrowed forms of different statues of the saint which I found and cast after conducting research. These sculptures are still enslaved in their semantic form while struggling to return to their primal status. Another project, *27:41*, is a site-specific work installed at the chapel of the Pentecost at St. Paul's Cathedral, Mdina. *27:41* refers to the moment in the Acts of the Apostles when the ship which St. Paul was travelling on struck a sandbar near Malta. The works depict moments during and after an event which occurred on St Paul's islands and the surrounding seabed. This documented 'pilgrimage' strives to trace tactile memories cast on these islands which in this work are treated as a giant relic. In front of the altarpiece of the Pentecost, the objects, materials and sculptures attempt to question and reflect the spirit of this event from the Acts of the Apostles.

Victor Agius (b.1982) graduated from the University of Malta's fine art unit in 2004. He furthered his studies in 2009 at the International School of Painting, Drawing and Sculpture in Perugia (Italy), and at Central Saint Martins College (UK) in 2011. His works have been shown at the National Museum of Fine Arts and St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity (Valletta), at the UNESCO World Heritage site Ġgantija Temples in Gozo and in galleries and museums in Venice, Florence, Rome (Italy), London (UK), Bornholm (Denmark) and Zagreb (Croatia), amongst others. Through performance, installation, sculpture and painting he reflects upon the subject of human existence in general and the limits of his own existence in particular.



Ashenge Tamrin, 2014, Photography, 51x33cm

Nicola Arkell

My photographs are taken in the Omo Valley in Ethiopia. I have been travelling to Ethiopia since 1989 and I am still fascinated by the remaining indigenous tribes. The Ancient African Tribes that live in the Lower Omo Valley and around Lake Turkana are believed to be the most unusual tribal people in the world. They have become famous for their heritage and diversity. The tribe has practiced some of the same traditions that their ancestors did centuries ago living in the same remote area. Most tribes now carry rifle's (AK47s) to hunt or protect themselves. The Lower Omo Valley is a spectacularly beautiful area with diverse ecosystems including grasslands, volcanic outcrops, and one of the few remaining 'pristine' riverine forests in semi-arid Africa which supports a wide variety of wildlife. Ultimately, we are all Africans. Studies of mitochondrial DNA have proven that all human beings are descended from a small population (less than a hundred individuals) that emerged from Africa about 60,000 years ago. The earliest written religious texts as well as the first documented monotheistic religion also developed in Africa. During the European dark ages, many ancient manuscripts were preserved in African libraries in places such as Ethiopia and Timbuctoo. The few tribes that are still living pastorally are slowly decreasing in numbers. Before they vanish, I want to photograph and celebrate their way of living. The photographs that I have chosen attempt to show their strong sense of spirituality and unique presence of each and every individual.

Nicola Arkell read for a degree at Central Saint Martins, London from 1983 to 1987. She completed a PGC at Chelsea College of Art in 2003 and an MA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in 2009. She has also worked as a visiting lecturer at UAL, University of Gloucester and West Kent College.



The Beauty of the Given Moment #3, 2014, Photography, cotton paper, 63x94cm

Alex Attard

As wind travels across the sky, over the forests and the seas, over rooftops and urban landscapes, change invariably marks its path. Occasionally, a wind comes along that demands attention, even in the comfort of our secure homes. This photographic series is the consequence of a gust of wind and a satellite dish struggling to hold on to its wavering signal. The force of the wind is such that it interferes with the transmission, resulting in a faltering and pixelated video signal during the airing of a concert conducted by the late Italian maestro Claudio Abbado on television. The ensuing interference provokes initial feelings of annoyance and frustration in the viewer. However, upon realisation of what was transpiring over the rooftops, this exasperating chaos gradually transforms itself into a moment of enlightenment. This body of work, photographed directly off the television screen, makes visible the performance of the wind, the satellite and the maestro and seeks to look beyond and into this un-orchestrated scenario. It aspires to transcend the emotional and the obvious, and to record the easily overlooked beauty of the given moment.

Alex Attard (b.1955) was born in Valletta to a family of photographers. Attard is a fine art photographer who works mainly on personal projects and particularly, but not exclusively, on architecture-related series. His body of work, *The Overlooked Performance*, which chronicled the unconscious behaviour and ephemeral art beneath the face of Renzo Piano's new parliament building for Valletta, is arguably one of the best-acknowledged local contemporary photographic expressions. His innate sense of creativity and the very personal interpretation of his subjects have won him critical acclaim and awards.



No one's Reliquary, 1997, Mixed media reliefs,
human hair mounted in wooden cases, 32x27cm (each)

Vince Briffa

No one's Reliquary is a work that forms part of a larger body of work entitled *Relics*. The sixteen-piece collection deifies the common man through their form and through the use of fragmented poetry, symbolic of contemporary relics. The work pays homage to the unknown and anonymous human being whose encased lock of hair refuses to give us any other information than its form, texture and colour. The lock of hair can never be linked to a specific head and is destined to remain rootless, to symbolise for eternity the fragmentation of the individual. The work alludes to *temps perdu* through the inalienable details of the futility of endlessly written, erased, rewritten and re-erased lines of poetry. *No one's Reliquary* is a collection of empty relics whose memory can never be revived.

Vince Briffa (b.1958) is a practicing multi-media artist and researcher. Currently, he is the Head of Department of Digital Arts at the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences of the University of Malta and is an associate of the Electronic and Digital Art Unit of the University of Central Lancashire, whilst also involved in research projects with faculty members from Contemporary Art Practice, University of Leeds. He is also the external examiner for the Bradford-WWI Film School, based in the United Kingdom. During the past three decades, Vince has represented Malta internationally and has had his work exhibited in major museums and art galleries.



Airshapes/Goodbye Mother, 2014-15, Photography, 125x190cm, detail

Salvatore Calì

Good Bye Mother/Air Shapes is developed from my research around themes which investigate invisible borders, identity and territory. This series finds its origins in my project *Guazza*, a 'digital performance' and video piece. Interested in the relationship between landscape and human presence, *Guazza*, was a response to the lyrical, iconic presence of an Italian flag billowing in the breeze on a lakeshore. Beyond the geopolitical significance as an expression of a specific people, of a given cultural identity, with its possible conflictual connotations, I sought a different opportunity. As the water in the lake and everything around me moved, I stayed motionless, in a still journey towards my own identity as well as an affirmation of my determination to be part of the world, of that moment in time. I then left for Malta to fulfil a personal and artistic quest, and I kept an object of particular significance to me; the handkerchief that my mother gave to me before her death. I realised that the flag moved with the wind just as the handkerchief did. They gave shape to air, air that by definition does not have form and which cannot be touched or seen. The viewer is similarly invited to unknown destinations of thought and understanding. Giving shape to air, making it possible to manifest the invisible: this is my territory, this is the fundamental effort of my work.

Salvatore Calì (b.1966) is an Italian artist whose primary interest lies in what he calls 'digital performance'. Film and photography are for him means to convey performances which occur in a specific time and space. Man's relationship with nature, the relationship between art and the world, are his focus. Profoundly inspired by Marko Pogacnik and Marina Abramovich's approach to performance, Calì's view of art entails that every action, every art gesture directly influences nature. He currently works in Malta as one of the 2015 Artergiro Artist Residency recipients. He has exhibited across the world.



Church - Romagnano al monte (Campania), 2014, Hand coloured giclée print, passpartout, wood frame, 20x30cm



Church - Saltrio (Lombardia), 2014, Hand coloured giclée print, passpartout, wood frame, 20x30cm

Silvia Camporesi

The corpus of works presented at the Mdina Biennale is part of a larger project which I worked on for over a year. The images will be published in a photographic book and their main subject is abandoned places: empty villages, old hospitals, former mental institutions and sacred places. The theme of the Mdina Biennale inspired me to select works which all have sacred subjects: churches, sanctuaries, bell towers and sacred places. These places are located all around Italy and are today totally abandoned. The images are first printed in black and white and later hand coloured, adopting a technique which harkens back to the beginning of photography. I would like to suggest a poetic and emotive path, something that does not want to be complete or objective: I imagine it as a photographic journey across the country. It is an idea of Italy which is already lost, or which we are losing: my aim is to transport the spectator to a lost time in which he can experience the void, the same void that men built by ignoring the original meaning of the shot places. The portrayed places and objects are not characterised by those who inhabited them, their nature and function are now changed. They are forms open to time, to its infinite possibilities. We can experience these places by perceiving what Marcel Proust suggested with his quest of the lost time; the echo of the past as a continuous presence.

Silvia Camporesi (b.1973) graduated in Philosophy and is currently living and working in Forlì, Italy. Her work has been featured in several solo and group exhibitions throughout Italy, Europe and North America: 'Dance dance dance' at MAR, Ravenna in 2007; 'La Terza Venezia' at the Photographica Fine Art Gallery of Lugano in 2011; 'À perte de vue', Chambre Blanche, Quebec (CAN) in 2011 and 2012, Saint James Cavalier, Valletta (Malta) in 2013; 'Souvenir Universo' at the Z2O Gary in Rome. In 2007 Camporesi won the prestigious Premio Celeste for photography, and also won the Francesco Fabbri Prize for photography in 2013.



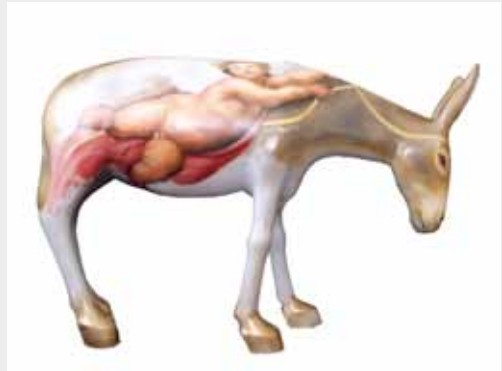
Hend Adnan, *Four Beautiful Women*, 2013, Acrylic and oil colours, accessories in copper, rope and leather, 100x40x186cm



Ibrahim El Dessouky, *The Night Donkeys*, 2013, Acrylic, 100x40x186cm

Caravan

CARAVAN, an international peacebuilding arts NGO, has organised and curated the Mediterranean Peace Donkey project. This is an exhibition of 21 life-sized fiberglass Maltese donkeys painted by noted Maltese and Egyptian artists, all symbolising the need for peace and compassion between the Middle East and West, and more specifically, throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Each of the donkeys represents the 21 Mediterranean nations. The Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition uses the symbol of the renowned and rare Maltese donkey, a historical 'East-West' symbol, to focus global attention on four critical needs; Interreligious harmony, East-West relations, Donkey welfare in conflict zones of the Middle East and Humanitarian assistance for refugees in the Mediterranean. The donkey represents 'peace and compassion' in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and in the cultures of the Middle East and West. The Maltese donkey is an historic East-West symbol, as four Maltese donkeys were sent to George Washington in 1786, prior to him becoming the President of the United States of America. As a 'beast of burden', the donkey is a humanitarian symbol, thereby raising awareness about the difficult conditions facing working donkeys in the Middle East region. Being a means of journeying, the donkey also symbolises the thousands of migrants and refugees passing through the Mediterranean region looking for a better life. The form for the life-size fiberglass donkeys was sculpted by the premier Egyptian artist Dr. Reda Abdel Rahman, which were then fabricated in Malta. The 21 artists selected include women and men, from established contemporary artists to emerging ones from both Malta and Egypt. Using a variety artistic mediums, the artists are highlighting the critical importance of building harmony between the Middle East and West by creatively communicating a message about 'peace and compassion' toward the 'other'. Seven of the painted donkeys by Egyptian artists were previously exhibited in Cairo and London in 2013. The form for this donkey is that of an Egyptian donkey. The remaining 14 donkeys are painted by 2 Egyptian artists and 12 Maltese artists who worked with the form of the Maltese donkey.



Farid Fadel, *The Renaissance Donkey*, 2013, Acrylic, 100x40x186cm



Khaled Hafez, *The Donkey Project: Red Lines*, 2013, Acrylic, 100x40x186cm

Hend Adnan (b.1970) lives and works in Cairo. She received a B.A. from the Painting Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo. She has shown her work in many national and international exhibitions, festivals and meetings and her work is represented in both Egyptian and international collections. Adnan treasures the ability to work freely in oil colours and with live models, respecting shadows in all their forms, working on psychological moods and feelings into realistic representations and colours that bring together all the characteristics of oil colours with an emphasis on texture.

Ibrahim El Dessouky (b.1969) lives and works in Cairo. After studying painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Zamalek (Helwan University), El Dessouky received his doctorate in 2003 on the dynamics in painting. He is currently an associate professor. He has participated in an extensive number of national and international exhibitions and has shown his works throughout Europe, the Arab world and Asia. Acquisitions of his art can be found at the Egyptian Museum of Modern Art, Al-Ahram press organisation, Bibliotheca Alexandrina and Arab Museum of Contemporary Art, Qatar.

Khaled Hafez (b.1963) was born in Cairo, Egypt where he currently lives and works. He studied medicine and followed evening classes in fine arts during the eighties. After attaining a medical degree in 1987 and M.Sc. as a medical specialist in 1992, he gave up his medical practice in the early nineties for a career in the arts. He later obtained an MFA in new media and digital arts from Transart Institute (New York, USA) and Danube University Krems (Austria). Hafez's practice spans the mediums of painting, video, photography, installation and interdisciplinary approaches.

Miriam Hathout (b.1980) is an Egyptian painter who lives in Cairo. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in 2002 with a focus on oil painting. She has held numerous solo exhibitions in Egypt and Switzerland, and group exhibitions in Switzerland, France, England, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Austria and Saudi Arabia. She loves painting the Egyptian culture, using vibrant, bright solid colours on subjects like the Egyptian countryside. She especially loves to focus on Egyptian donkeys and on the daily hectic life of the common Egyptian, who has to deal with the chaos of crowds and traffic.

Mohammed Talaat (b.1976) holds a degree in Art Education from Helwan University, a Diploma in Criticism from the High Institute of Art Criticism, and masters from the Faculty of Art Education. He founded Misr Art Gallery, was a programmer for the General Administration of Arts Centres of the Sector of Fine Arts (Egyptian Ministry of Culture) and is the former director of the Palace of Fine Arts (Ministry of Culture). Talaat has participated in numerous national and international solo shows. His art can be found in private and state collections in Egypt and abroad.



Claire Marie Pearman, *In Peace and with Compassion*, 2013, Acrylic and paper, 100x40x186cm



Karim Abd El Malak, *What do I reflect?*, 2015, Acrylic and metal, 100x40x186cm



Mohammed Talaat, *Conversion to Theocracy*, 2013, Acrylic, 100x40x186cm



Farid Fadel (b.1958) was born in Assuit, Upper Egypt, into a family noted for both its musicians and its doctors. He has since excelled at medicine, art and music. He has held 34 solo exhibitions and has given prominent recitals and concerts. His exhibition 'On Both Sides' toured US cities; Ohio, Connecticut and Washington D.C. Over the years he has taken part in numerous group and solo exhibitions around the world. His interest in art theory culminated in the establishment of his 'AIN' theory (Aesthetic Integrated Naturalism), which explains his particular views on a naturalistic approach to fine art in a post-modern context.

Claire Marie Pearman (b.1967) was educated in the UK and graduated from the American University in Cairo in 1990 with a degree in Psychology. Until recently, she lived and worked in Cairo, specialising in paper and metal sculptures and installations. Pearman's work often incorporates symbolic elements and is inspired by nature. Her work has been exhibited both in the UK and Egypt. She was selected as Resident Artist in the distinguished Artist-in-Residence programme of St. Johns Church and Interfaith Centre, Cairo. Pearman's work has been exhibited in St. Paul's Cathedral, London

Karim Abd El Malak (b.1980) graduated in graphic design from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Minia University. He is an illustrator for local Egyptian magazines, Sabah El Kheir & Rosalyoussef, as well as being the Art & Managing Director for Red Box Advertising Agency. He is a practicing sculptor. The artist has held several exhibitions, including showings at the Cairo Gallery, Cairo; Ahmad Shawky Museum, Cairo; Mahmoud Said Museum, Alexandria; the Black & White Exhibition, Cairo; Gallery Grant, Cairo.

Reda Abdel Rahman (b.1966) was born in Ismalia, Egypt and has studied at the University of Minya at the College of Fine Arts. There he was surrounded by outstanding Pharonic monuments and Coptic monasteries which left a lasting impression on Rahman, one of Egypt's leading contemporary artists. It has resulted in his artistic expression focusing on the relationship between what he regards as his ancient Egyptian heritage and the demands of contemporary life. In his work one can see the combination of Pharonic and decorative motifs. He draws a direct relationship to the hieroglyphs that the ancients left behind.

The following artists are also participating in the Mediterranean Peace Donkey project:

Abi Macleod Clark
 Agatha Grima
 Anna Galea
 Christopher Saliba
 Daniela Guevska
 Damian Ebejer
 Emma Morgan

Federico Chini
 James Micallef Grimaud
 James Vella Clark
 Kenneth Zammit Tabona
 Rachel Galea
 Valerio Schembri
 Children of The Happy School, Gozo



China 10, 2001-02, Photography, 65x80cm



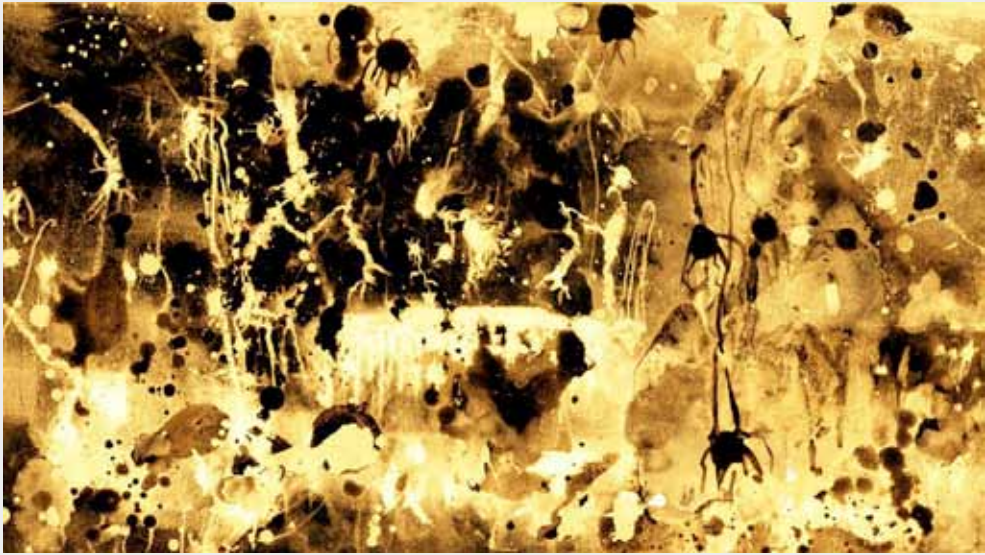
China 11, 2001-02, Photography, 65x80cm

Alexandra Carle

Henri Cartier-Bresson had once said; “Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes.” It is with this same desire that Alexandra Carle left for China. She wanted to document life, capture on film the everyday, traditions and customs which were slowly being devoured by modernity. Black and white photography was deliberately chosen by Carle to transcribe a quotidian act in the process of disappearing, a present happening already belonging to the past. Humanity takes a central position in her work: the camera allowed her to establish contact with people directly, to bypass cultural or linguistic frontiers. By glancing out of the window, one senses and experiences the solitude of a man at work. By pushing a door, one enters into the busy kitchen of a restaurant. These photographs transport us; allow us to travel with the inhabitants, on board a train, a bus, a bicycle. Means of transport are recurrent motifs in her photographs, as they remind us that the world moves, transforms, and that we move along with it. Carle mainly photographed life in local neighbourhoods, where faces are marked by the passing of years, where business is concluded down an alley. But it is equally there that the modern world has not yet taken over traditions. Thanks to these photographs, the window will always remain open on Carle’s work and life.

Text by Graziella Serra-Carle

Alexandra Carle (1974- 2002) received a masters degree in the plastic arts and in history of art. In 2002, she earned her diploma from the National High School of Photography of Arles. In 2001, Carle left for her first trip to China, being greatly attracted to this country which was quickly changing socially, economically and industrially. Her work aimed to capture this ongoing change. She then returned in 2002 and began a photographic project based on Sardinia. This was the beginning of a long-term search within the country which grew familiar to the photographer. The images produced reveal an intimacy with the subject matter.



A Quixotic Transfiguration in Wonderland 3, 2015, Digital collage on canvas, 145x253cm



A Quixotic Transfiguration in Wonderland 6, 2015, Digital collage on canvas, 144x253cm



A Quixotic Transfiguration in Wonderland 2, 2015, Digital collage on canvas, 150x253cm

Anthony Catania

‘The failed mind sees the heart’s failings.’ This adage, observed by Kyoami, the moral fool in Kurosawa’s *Ran*, correlates to Don Quixote’s attributes which verge on what Harold Bloom calls the “visionary madness.” As Miguel de Unamuno claims, the idiosyncrasies of the Manchegan knight were not instigated by idealism for he did not fight for ideas, but by spiritualism fought for the spirit. This quixotic hierophany is not only synonymous with the piety of Eliade’s “homo religiosus” and the messianic aura of the Christ figure, but also with the quenching of a spiritual thirst in our failed chaotic age. *A Quixotic Transfiguration in Wonderland* conflates the myth of Cervantes’s hero with Lewis Carroll’s mad tea party, alluding to the numinous ‘Last Supper’ from the canonical gospels. Akin to Alice’s uninvited tea ceremony, where the girl’s coming of age reached its furthest descent into her illogical dreamland, this project’s last dinner party attempts to postulate a lunatic (trans) figuration of a *mysterium tremendum*. The (de)mystification that was vested in this project finds its kindred spirit in Alice’s child-life creed – “So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality - the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds - the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells.”

Anthony Catania’s (b.1969) depictions of myths and fables attempt to produce subversive portraits of classical legendary beings in bizarrely anachronistic settings. Always on the threshold of grotesquely figurative painting, his works offer distorted windows to alternative worlds. He studied art practices and theories under Mro Pawlu Grech and Dr. Saviour Catania. His personal exhibitions; ‘Selve Oscure’, ‘The Cave of Centaurs’, ‘The Piper’s Requiem’, ‘Spectre-Bark’ and ‘Last Light’, were held at various prominent Maltese museums and galleries. In 2014, Catania completed a master’s degree in Fine Art (Digital Art) at the University of Malta.



Égalité/Equality, 2015, Plastic, 3D print, chroming, 120x4x15cm; 120x20x35cm; 120x24x40cm



Perspectives of Freedom, 2014, Metallic paper, digital photography, Diasec, 120x120cm (each)

Gor Chahal

The works are based on the iconography of the *Descent of Christ into Hell*. The typologies of perspectives in art are related to the nature of representation. Direct and linear perspective tends to reflect the physical, bodily space. Parallel to this are the emotional, intellectual, and the intelligible world. Spiritual space reflects the reverse perspective.

Gor Chahal (b.1961) is one of the most noteworthy Russian contemporary artists, whose creative method synthesises the scholarly approach with ritualistic elements. Chahal can be considered a universal master', with a diploma in applied mathematics from the Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute, whilst also a contributor to numerous creative experiments. Chahal's creations seem to lie within the context of 'Actual Art', in substance they are at the other end of the spectrum. His themes often concern faith with a deep awareness that true art cannot exist without contact with the tradition of the sacred, being Christianity in Chahal's case.



Portrait of Ai Weiwei, 2015, Oil on linen, 160x140cm (each)

Adam Chang

Traditional Chinese aesthetics, which emphasises the harmony between human beings and the natural world, is a core intension within my artwork, which has been fully incarnated in my oil paintings. The project entitled *Portrait of Ai Weiwei* is a continuation of the *Mao and Terracotta Army* series, through the form of a portrait. It tells the story of Ai Weiwei whilst displaying his artistic concepts and values. The art piece also discusses China's contemporary political system and yearning for democracy and freedom. I hope these works from the Far East can bring harmony, forgiveness, and generosity in order to reach a state of a perfect world.

Adam Chang (b.1960) is a Shanghai-born artist who lives and works in Sydney, Australia. After years of research and discussion centred on Western art, Chang intends to combine the whimsy of Chinese freehand brushwork and ink, with the expressivity of European painting techniques, in so, creating his own style. Chang's oeuvre is stylised with his use of large format canvases, monochromatic palettes, and the employment of wide brushwork. The final effect is achieved through the manipulation of sharp brush strokes so as to exhort holistic detail. Chang's works include *Mao with Terracotta Army*, *Portrait of Ai WeiWei*, *Ink Flavour*, and *Melt*, all of which have received international acclaim.



Passion, 2011, Digital print, Variable dimensions

Valera & Natasha Cherkashin

Our work, taken from the series titled *Passion*, will be part of an installation in the Church of St. Peter in Chains. People have prayed in this church since the 15th century, sharing with the God their joy, sorrows and despair. Our aim is to create a special art device which will help people to communicate with God, to ask him questions and hopefully to receive some answers. As scientists say, the information about everything that has happened in the world is preserved in the universe, in certain places or objects. We hope that some people will be able to hear the whispers of past centuries. Our work is deeply rooted in social archetypes; universal symbols of human existence. We are interested in the presence and development of these eternal archetypes of human civilisation in the present, in real life. Lately, our attention is drawn to apocalyptic problems; the fate of humanity burdened by the knowledge of tragedies and disasters. Terrestrial civilisation in the third millennium is truly experiencing a fantastic fracture; we can feel its powerful and tragic roar. They cannot rationally explain the underlying tectonic shifts which they perceive. They transform their intuitive comprehension into forms of art.

Valera (b.1948) and Natasha Cherkashin (b.1958) currently live and work in New York City and Moscow. They have been exploring the cultures of the USSR, Russia, The United States, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Japan, China, France, Italy and other countries for over three decades, and as a result have presented more than 130 individual exhibitions and more than 100 live art performances. The Cherkashin's work has been the subject of 40 television programmes, including CNN, Deutsche Welle, and Russian TV, as well as the subject of over 250 publications.



Caduta Libera, 2008, Tempera on masonite, 120x90cm



Ritorno al Centro, 2009, Mixed media on digital print, 100x70cm

Luigi Cipollone

The works that I decided to present were all determined by the necessity of defining the interrelation between men and the universe. This relation reveals the deep solitude of men, being that men are the only creatures in the universe who perceive their fragility and the only ones who feel the burden of their shadow. The question I posed was; why are the most fragile creatures also the ones whom have to sustain that burden? In *Pietà della Maddalena* my aim was to represent the deep sadness of the scene through compositional devices. *Calvario* represents (in the most synthetic way possible) the deepness of black and of the infinite. In *Caduta Libera* men try to free themselves from chains and, after that, they fly... or maybe they follow in an all too human dimension (of colour and dream). Whilst *Il Crocifisso senza Croce* is representing the man who lives in us all: he is not serious enough to sustain a cross and way too human to free himself from it. *Regeneration* is describing a rebirth from ashes: suddenly, when everything seems to be finished, one starts to rise again. In this work we see the outlines, dug as negatives at the base that grow out of the work. Finally, *Ritorno al Centro*, conceived as a digital work of art, is presented as a challenge: that of a dialogue.

Luigi Cipollone (b.1937) is an Italian painter and sculptor who lives and works in Rome. Living in Rome offered him the opportunity to see the works of the greatest Italian artists. Early in his career, he became an apprentice to the sculptor Lorenzo Ferri. In 1954 he started studying art in Rome. He came into contact with some of the biggest names in the art world, including Renato Guttuso, who became one of his tutors. Once he graduated in 1959, Luigi started teaching art. He entered the University of Architecture and discovered scenography, photography and design.



Body blood, 2015, Paint, 354x293cm

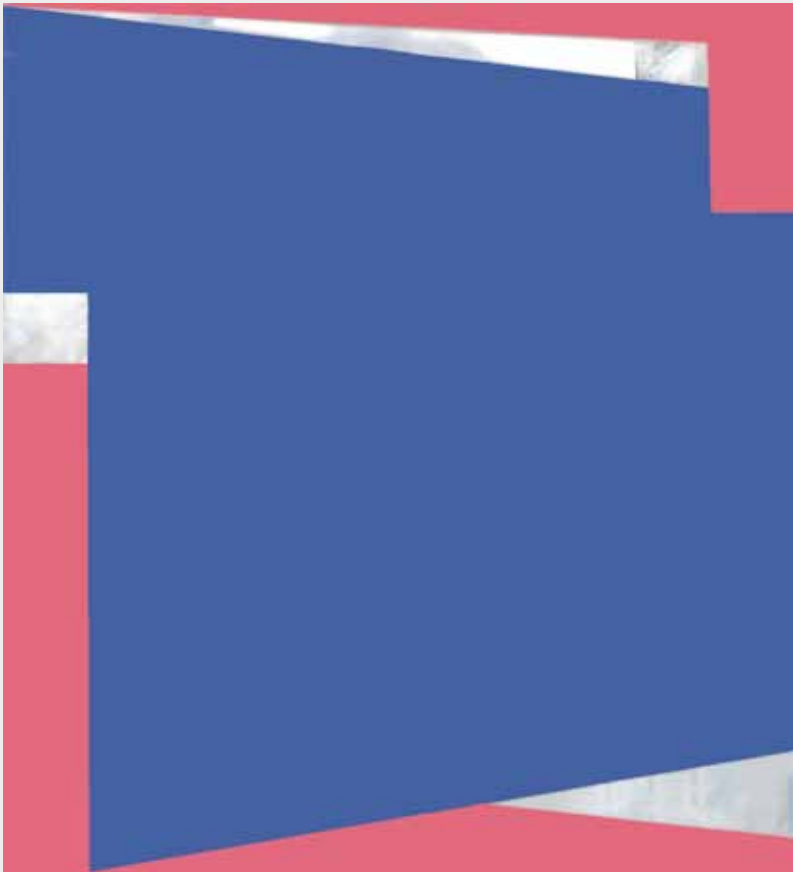


Bodiless, 2015, Paint, 356x293cm

Vincent Côme

My work is an abstract rendition based on the architectural past of various civilisations, and the buildings which are constructed atop previous structures. It is about revival by destroying, by recovering, by hiding to build on the same spaces. As in an archaeological excavation, one layer hides the other. The ultimate stratum, the top layer, which acts as the 'conquistador', a carrier of power and holder of dominant ideas, recovers the previous ones. But did previous layers not behave as the ones which hide them now? A 'revival' which aimed to be the revival of previous societies. Colours are people: past people, forgotten people, diverse people. We rebuild where the others built. We make sacred a scene formerly occupied.

Vincent Côme's (b.1963) work is an abstract look at stacks of archaeological remains, the evidence that different civilizations that have succeeded each other on the same soil. His work speaks of a renewal in understanding; the very foundation of renewal claims to be the renaissance of foundations of the past. The colours are people, people from the past, people who have disappeared, people who became integrated with the last ones, the ones who dominated. We rebuild where others have built, we sanctify those same spots that had been destined at other times to be sanctified



SUPPLAN 2015-4, 2015, Wood, plastic mirror, acrylic, 132x122x8cm

Bernard Cousinier

My work simultaneously applies two conflicting principles. Firstly, I want to keep the physical presence of the picture (its vertical mirror plane) parallel to the body. Secondly, I want to go beyond the frontal quality of the picture and give colour a multidimensional quality. The element I rely on is called a 'Passeplan', which is a rectangle with indented lateral edges. All the shapes I create derive from these principles, from flat drawings to three-dimensional works that take into account the surrounding architecture. Here in Malta, in the building of the Local Council of Mdina, I plan to build pieces derived from a series entitled *Supplans*; wood, mirrored plastic, acrylic. These pieces are all built on rectangular supporting structures. On such supporting structures I paste a Passeplan made of mirrored plastic, and this new figure is in turn almost entirely covered up by another Passeplan made of wood, coloured in matte acrylic paint. These pieces, by cultivating an ambiguous relationship between flat surface and volume, sum up the basic points of my artistic approach as I would like to free the viewer's gaze from the usual frontal confrontation with traditional painting.

Bernard Cousinier (b.1942) was born in Castres, Tarn, France and currently works in Saint-Maur, Val de Marne, France. Cousinier completed his studies at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris in 1972. From 1970-1972, frustrated by having to conform to the boundaries of rectangular frames, he painted a series of irregularly shaped canvases and discovered the work of Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko. Continuing to question the limits of the canvas, in 1990 he built what he calls a 'Passeplan; a rectangle with asymmetrical lateral edges. This shape is used as a basic unit, allowing him to go beyond a frontal approach of pictorial space.

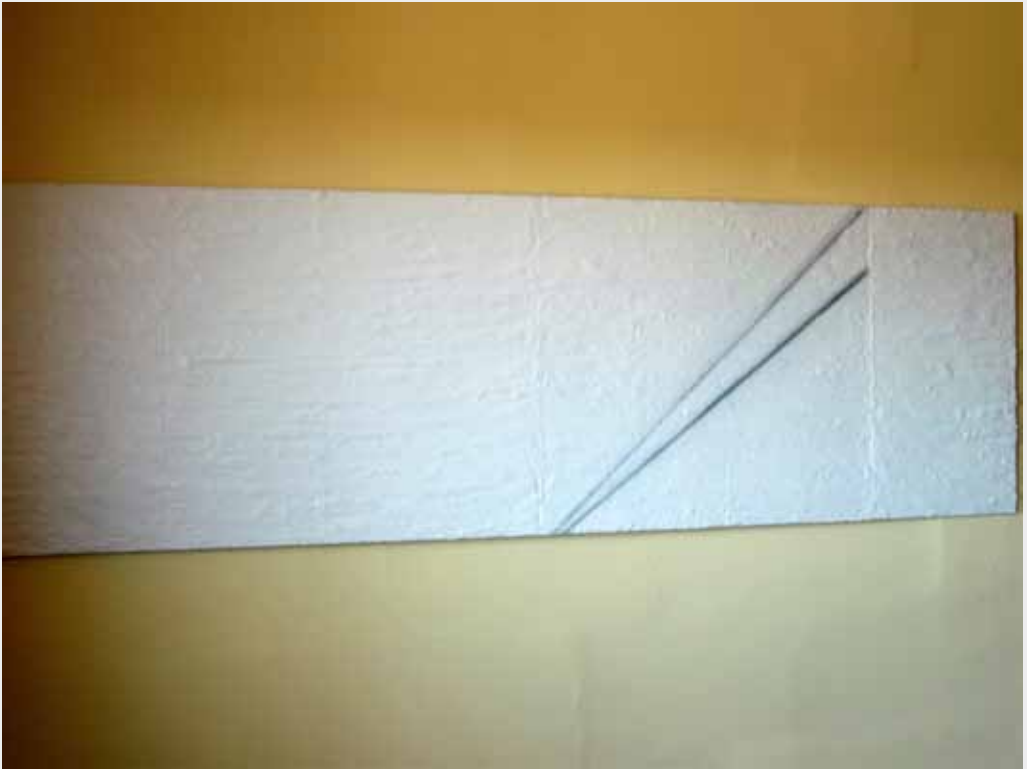


Sic Transit Gloria Mundi!, 2015, Wooden objects, Variable dimensions

Ilaria Cuccagna

My project titled *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi!* is focused on the fragility and precariousness of the natural and the urban contemporary landscape. Creating environmental portraits of a hybrid nature, my project is closely related to experiential and spiritual factors. 'Atmospheres, landscapes, situations.' During repeated strolls into the city of Mdina, I have taken pictures and picked up natural and artificial fragments from the site. 'Environment, so protected inside the wall, is suspended.' Every work is a fragile miniature imaginary landscape composed by natural and artificial fragments.

Ilaria Cuccagna (b.1981) was born in Cesena, Italy and now lives and works in Como. Cuccagna attended the sculpture course at the Academy of Fine Arts of Urbino, Italy and Saint Charles Fine Art Department in Valencia, Spain. She mainly works in sculpture, installation and site-specific work. The use of organic materials and references to nature are permanent features in Cuccagna's projects, an element born from her interest in matter and its transformations. In 2011 she was invited to participate in the FDV Art Residency Programme, Fabbrica del Vapore, in Milan. She has participated in several exhibitions.



Resurrection, 2015, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200x60cm

Alex Dalli

Spirituality makes humans complete. It is the peak of humanity and of humankind. To live and understand each other is to be spiritual. I believe in Resurrection and Afterlife: which is the restoration of body and spirit. Life on earth is the time for mankind to prepare to meet God.

Alex Dalli (b.1958) was born in Birkirkara, Malta. Dalli's first tutor was the artist George Fenech. He continued his studies at the School of Art, Valletta under the guidance of Esprit Barthelet and Harry Alden, studying history of art under Fr. Marius Zerafa. Simplicity is one of the main characteristics in his work, a simplicity and symbolism which reflect his own character. Dalli has had a number of solo exhibitions at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta. He also took part in an exhibition, together with another three Maltese artists at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam.



Cathedral, 2011,
Mixed media on wood,
40.5x32cm



Cathedral, 2011,
Mixed media on wood,
48x32cm



Cathedral, 2011,
Mixed media on wood,
48x32cm

Anna Maria De Corato

My research is based upon spirituality and transcendence. People have built Cathedrals in order to elevate themselves toward God. The taller the structure, the closer to God they feel they have arrived.

Anna Maria De Corato (b.1943) became a piano teacher and painter in 1970. Her works vary in subject from pieces entitled *Cathedrals*, *Fighters to Doors*, *Compositions*. While her work is abstract she has always been interested in producing figurative representations in her paintings. The subject matter of her paintings is inspired by the real world, but also by fantasy and improvisation. The final goal for the artist is to communicate a pleasant feeling to the spectator. In order to reach this effect, the artist develops her research by searching for materials at flea markets and vintage shops between Madrid, Paris and Venice.



Epiphanies, 2015, Tracing paper, metal, LED lights,
Variable dimensions

Sylvie de Meurville

I am interested in the relationship between the body and the landscape, passionate feelings and nature's movements. The earth's crust is for me a fragile skin which can shift and mutate like drapery. I like exploring a new place and discovering that which resonates within me. I use a diverse set of materials - from wood, metal, concrete to resin, light and video - to express the resemblance between the particular material and the endless mobility of the spirit.

Sylvie de Meurville (b.1956) lives and works in Paris and Friville (Picardy). She attended the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art in Paris. Throughout her career she has participated in a number of collective exhibitions in France. She also recently held a personal exhibition at the Galerie Univer in Paris. Since 1998, De Meurville has been the artistic director of FEW, an annual contemporary art exhibition held in Alsace, France.



Hiroshima, 2013-14, Photo manipulation, 120x80cm



Trinity, 2013-14, Photo manipulation, 120x80cm

Therese Debono

Clouds are a source of debate for beauty and the sublime. One is imbued with a sense of pleasure when one views clouds either in real time or through images. The sublime effect of clouds is present in their ever-changing qualities. For centuries, clouds have played important roles in cultural, religious and artistic realms, often being associated with divinity. In Christian scripture a cloud pillar led the Israelites out of Egypt and to the Promised Land, whereas for Mesopotamians, Egyptians and Greeks, clouds represented creation, fertility, divine power, and protection. The perception of how one viewed clouds changed when nuclear and thermonuclear experiments started being conducted. So, whereas clouds were at first seen to be divine, with the introduction of nuclear weapons, cloud images also became synonymous with destruction. Man-made clouds of destruction resulted from experiments that started in the 20th century. Gone were the images of soft white clouds passing above us gracefully and in came the mushroom-style imagery of so-called clouds, which brought a totally different perspective. The photos of clouds are in black and white to get the viewer to interpret the cloud as a solitary object without the blue of the sky. The photo manipulations are reminiscent of Rorschach's Inkblot test. The primary cloud image is mirrored to create a new image that is no longer a cloud, but can be interpreted as the other side of the cloud. The interplay between divinity and destruction is shown in these images between what is a cloud and what is derived from manipulating cloud images.

Therese Debono (b.1977) began her apprenticeship as a draughtsman in 1996 and went on to qualify and work as a full-time draughtsman in the year 2000. She has worked with various local firms, specialising in architecture, restoration and structural works. In 2007, she took up photography and has since become an associate with the Malta Institute of Professional Photography. She completed a Masters of Fine Arts in Digital Arts in 2015, with particular emphasis on photography. Her preferred photographic genres are urban and architectural photography, as well as cloudscape.

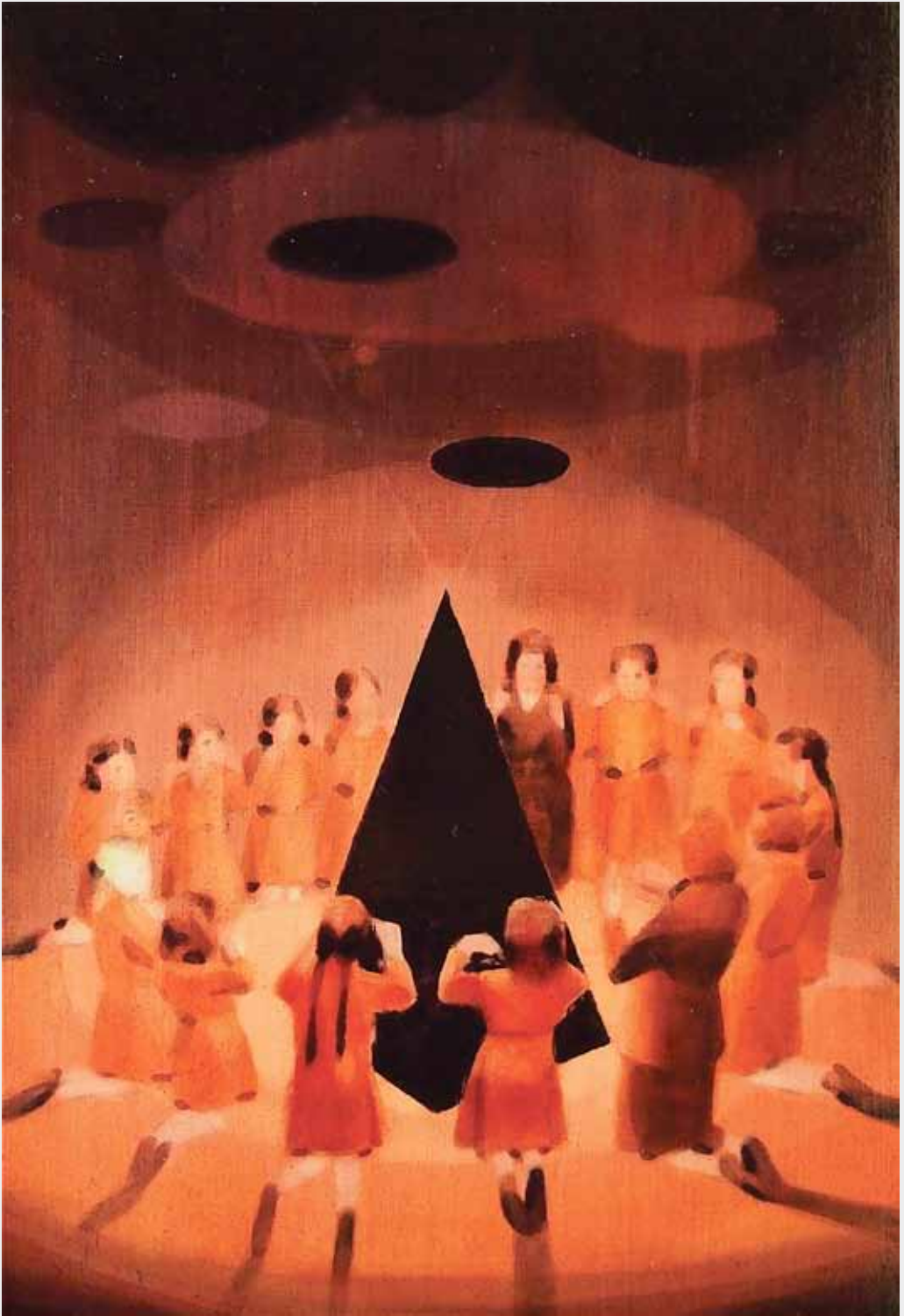


The Cycle, 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 100x70cm (each)

Wiktorija Deero

The work which I have created for the Mdina Biennale is a series of three paintings, which are to be considered as separate pieces, yet which together constitute one work. My work explores a sense of 'The Other' through the depiction of the landscape. The three paintings reflect the symbolical continuum of the Beginning, the Middle and the End. They explore the idea of presenting the world as a space consisting of separate things, yet a simultaneous reflection of the 'swirl', of energy. The swirl is a reflection of a myriad of separate and unique energies, thus the phrase 'things of the world'. This reverse polarity between the world and its reflection is the paradox and the main source of my work. All things are one, yet each thing is separate, individual and unique. These dreamy landscapes involve the viewer in the play between what seems familiar and what seems unknown, unexpected. The spaces they present seem to 'float' somewhere between the sky and the forest, lakes or gardens, all of these merging and interweaving in their 'swirly' dance, only to settle and confuse the viewer's eye.

Wiktorija Deero is an artist based in London who works primarily in painting. She graduated from Wimbledon College of Art, London in 2008, and her works have been continuously exhibited in UK and in the rest of Europe since 2007. Her paintings are full of colour, possessing a surreal feeling, and are often inhabited by figures and spaces that combine a deep commitment to the history of painting, with a unique, personal view of the contemporary world. Built in layers of vibrant acrylic and oil washes, these technically well- conducted works depict compositions that conceal rather than reveal their subject in the materiality of paint.



Coven, 2013, Fluorescent pigment, ink and oil on panel, 50x34cm

Adam Dix

My work explores associations between communication, technology and our desire to communicate. My exploration into society's response and subsequent personification of these devices of modern communication describe how we relate to and comprehend technology on a humanistic level, whilst referring to other constructed 'belief systems' that foster a similar dual sense of connectivity and community. I used muted colours, hazy imagery and subjects to anchor the work in a time of historical optimism. Referring to the imagined futures of our predecessors, the deployment of colour links the subject of contemporary technology to its 1950s origins. These are exaggerated by appropriating the ritualistic and ceremonial traits and imagery often found within science fiction, religion and national identity. Through combining these genres, I acknowledge the focused response of the subject's relationship to the 'Icon of infotainment', conveying a sense of compliance or worship. For the Mdina Biennale, British curators ARTNAKED are working with me to curate a unique installation comprising of a 'prayer cushion' entitled *Follow (kneeler)*, facing the painting *Coven*. Situated in a set-back, altar-like annex of the Mdina Cathedral Museum, this ritualistic component will be complemented by a selection of parallel works on paper, exhibited on a printed photographic backdrop – this in itself a visual replica of a wall in the my studio, featuring images from my anthropological research. The inspiration comes from the conception of imagined alternative societies.

Adam Dix (b.1967) is a London-based painter of high international standing. Most recently he exhibited his work at the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens. Previous notable exhibitions also include those at Haunch of Venison, Eleven Gallery, Charlie Smith Gallery, APT Gallery, the Mall Galleries and The Future Can Wait, in addition to shows in Paris, Germany, Dubai and the United States. In 2009, Dix was awarded the Jealous Art Prize Residency and has been shortlisted for many high profile awards, including the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award, East London Painting prize (finalist), Jerwood Drawing prize and the Catlin Art Prize (finalist).



Out of Nothing, 2015, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 80x80cm

Damian Ebejer

“Out of nowhere,
 Emerges nothing:
 Out of nothing, emerges all.
 Deep in the recesses of our minds
 Lurk the spirits that once were
 Ours, before we were made flesh.
 It is the mind that carries on
 Through the centuries;
 Spirits carry ancient thoughts from flesh to flesh,
 Body to body...
 Eyes that see and grasp at light.
 Through the darkness
 Only the mind will perceive
 What the flesh can never touch.”

With this painting I wanted to explore and convey the visual impact of mystery by using paint. I also wanted to evoke a curiosity; a need to find something other than what is painted on the canvas. I believe we are guided by what we do not understand. I deliberately chose brush strokes that I thought were well suited to portray movement. But in which direction? Any direction and no direction, all at the same time. Why? Because we go through all kinds of directions to find what we really feel comfortable with, some use religion... I purposely chose to leave sections of the canvas showing through. I had pre-washed the canvas with a very pale neutral bistre; I wanted a raw part of the whole. We tend to hide what is raw... The darker colours and tones reflect and bounce off each other. There is a slither of the Cross maybe, off centre, but the main focus is on the lower middle red triangular patch. Reference to womanhood; the mother earth? A suffering for her son's end? Mysterious questions... Out of Nowhere.

Damian Ebejer (b.1961) is a self-taught artist, born in Somerset, England but living and working in Malta. His first solo exhibition was held at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta in 1994. He displayed his first ever collection of abstract works during his *A Tale of Consequent Parallels* exhibition in 2007. It is in this genre that he has continued to develop his techniques and discover new ways to explore his inspirations and innermost feelings. Since 2007, Ebejer has held eleven solo exhibitions and has taken part in several collective exhibitions; the latest being held at the Belgravia Gallery, London in December 2014.



Arch in the Fire, 2014,
Portuguese pink marble,
75x25x15cm



Water and Fire, 2015,
Portuguese pink marble,
150x35x15cm



Spirals in Time, 2015,
Onyx,
100x30x30cm

Elena Faleschini

Air, Water, Fire are all fundamental elements in our lives.
I observe and study them and I see the similar ways in which they all move.
I identify with them and I try to materialise in marble what I feel.
They all have sinuous, soft, but even tempestuous movements:
The cloud or the drape; inflated, twisted and extended.
The fire rises and creates flames.
Engulfing and chastising the air.
Water flows rapidly; it generates vortexes, rivulets and waterfalls.
All is energy, movement towards the future: the meaning of life.

Elena Faleschini (b.1944) has lived and worked in Friuli since 1970. A graduate of the Istituto d'Arte di Udine and a Master Goldsmith, she explores various techniques within the field of sculpture. She has exhibited in many personal and collective exhibitions and symposia. She has also taken part and won numerous prizes in competitions in Italy and abroad. Her works are found in museums and private collections.



Journey, 2014, Ceramics, 40x40cm

Sina Farrugia Micallef

The City of Refuge, Homage to Melchisedek, is about one's inner journey. My work represents a tactile mandala made of ceramic components which is organic in shape and may shift form but always revolves around a still central point. "When Christ was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said: the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo, here, or Lo there, for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." St. Luke "Men are continually seeking retreats for themselves in the country or by the sea or among the hills. And thou, thyself, art wont to yearn after the like. Yet all this is the surest folly, for it is open to thee every hour, to retire into thyself. And where can man find a calmer, more restful haven than in his own soul? Most of all, he whose inner state is so ordered that he has only to penetrate thither to find himself in the midst of a great peace- the peace that to my mind is synonymous with orderliness. Therefore betake thee freely to this city of refuge, there to be made new." Marcus Aurelius

Sina Farrugia Micallef was born in Malta. She graduated with distinction from Mater Admirabilis College of Education in 1971. She studied art at the Malta School of Art and ceramics at Targa Gap School for Crafts. She taught art and ceramics for over 20 years. In 2004, she became Education Officer for Art within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education. She presently lectures within the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. In 1984, the artist opened her own ceramics studio. Farrugia Micallef has taken part in collective and personal exhibitions in Malta and around the world.



Untitled, Carrara marble and travertine, 30x10x37cm



Untitled, Globigerina and travertine, 43x16x62cm



Untitled, Carrara marble and bronze, 11x59cm



Untitled, Globigerina and limestone, 12x10x18cm

Antoine Farrugia

My work focuses exclusively on form – the constant search for it in all the mundane things that surround us. The journey in discovering these forms started from a technical background in anatomy which merged into the surreal, and finally resulted in the impetus to give birth to pure forms. The process leading toward each form that I create is a long one, both technically and conceptually. I see hidden forms encapsulated in blocks of stone, abandoned pieces of wood and other materials, and my mission as an artist is to free these forms. The medium of my sculptures is not important to me. The medium is a mere vessel which brings form to life. The only constant in my works is the search for pure form. My work always aims to portray elegance, curvaceous sensuality and to create an inner turmoil of feelings ranging from calmness to the craving and urgency to touch these perfect forms which are brought to life.

Antoine Farrugia (b.1969) was born and lives in Mqabba, Malta. The artist's primary driving force lies within the limestone medium; its various geological characteristics and pliability providing the momentum to give life to organic, undulating forms. An energy which transcends the material itself, resulting in a personal endeavour to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. Such strength reverberates in other materials, whether marble or steel, its power resulting in dynamic and monumental sculptures.



The Consecration of the Oyster, 2015, Oil, resin and gold on wood, 23x29cm

Madeleine Fenwick

Light has long been understood to hold a divine quality in painting, from the soft emanations of Christian iconography to the depictions of the sublime by such artists as Caspar David Friedrich, John Martin and J.M.W Turner. The full spectrum of light is beyond our visual comprehension, and as for myself, these invisible elements are a fascination. It was indeed that search for brighter light that led to my relocation in Malta. My paintings are an investigation into my personal response and emotions towards light – an exploration of how it affects the human mind and eye, in a way that can be described as divine communion. For the Mdina Biennale, I am working with curators from ARTNAKED to present an elegant selection of small paintings, a collection which embodies the constant transference of energy of light in my work – depicting that moment the light catches and ignites the creative thought and engages the divine, while simultaneously metaphorically recalling another shift, from the primordial to the technological era of the now. *The Consecration of the Oyster* is a paradigm of these ideals. Inspired by the altarpiece at St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, its rays of light, emanating from a symbolic icon, render an interpretation of the divine. The oyster, as an image of simple sustenance transformed into an icon of rare delicacy for the wealthy, lends in its metamorphosis an inherent contradiction, reflective of the nature of belief and how it has changed throughout history.

Painter Madeleine Fenwick (b.1988) completed a B.A. in Fine Arts at City & Guilds of London Art School in 2012. Since then, her work has been exhibited throughout London, with key highlights including the exhibitions 'Freed from Desire' at Gallery 233, in 2014, and 'Surface Revive' at Rook and Raven Gallery, in 2013. Fenwick moved to Malta in 2014 and has since developed an emerging practice in experimental painting. Focusing upon the experimental use of oil paints with mixed media to create an intuitive style with an emphasis on combining the metaphysical and mystical perception of light with a scientific perception of the universe.



Les Vigilants, 2007, Mixed media, fabric and wood installation, 450x100cm

Guy Ferrer

Joined together in a sacred ceremonious circle, *Les Vigilants* patiently pray for us and ask the heavens to grant clemency. They may form part of any religion, they could be from every ancient civilisation, but most importantly, they have come for peace.

Guy Ferrer (b.1955) is a sculptor and a painter with a successful international career. In 2015, Ferrer's works were presented in Malta, Johannesburg, Shijiazhuang, Paris and London. Ferrer draws inspiration from his travels; the human matter which animates his work and inspires his spirit. Impassioned by the spiritualities of the world, he powerfully offers us his sensitive and poetic vision of Man, who is limited by time and faced with a paradoxical destiny: Man is, according to Ferrer, both made of light and mud, and the path of Man's life is fundamental.



Word, 2015, Mixed media on canvas, 65x90cm (each)

Claudio Fiorentini

My work is made up of six canvases using an array of different materials including; printed paper, glue, plaster, sand, water-based paint and oil colours, amongst others. The concept is 'the meaning of word', exploding from a red background that does not invade other colours. Around the explosion is a collage of various temples, fading into the fog and confusion of reality. Silence is the only word we can read, albeit still faded. Each temple is the summarisation of a set of interpretations of words, but the truth springs out of something we cannot explain and we cannot reproduce, because it is inside each and every one of us. When truth explodes, no words can explain it, so word only means word, and confusion disappears. With this work, I intend to point out that words can only be partially interpreted: there is a mystery that remains unveiled because truth offers no explanation and goes far beyond our understanding.

Claudio Fiorentini (b.1959) is a novelist, poet and visual artist. He lived in Mexico, France and Morocco for several years, and has travelled to more than 40 countries. He has published six novels, three poetry books, and a collection of short stories. Fiorentini has participated in national and international exhibitions. He is also member of several literary juries and is an active promoter of the arts. Together with the philosopher Franco Campegiani, he produced the cultural manifesto '*Il Bandolo*' (The Unravelling End), which brought together over 100 artists from Italy and beyond.



Aqua, 2015, Oil on canvas, 150x100cm

Rachel Galea

My work is an expressive painting consisting of three large canvases. In this work water and aquatic flora lend themselves to being stated in an expressive manner. The scenes have exquisite light and atmosphere and the spectrum of colours and textures are expressed with bold splashes of colour. I aim to capture the energy in the scene without being tied to a literal realism. The paint is applied using an impasto technique which also gives a tactile quality to the surface of the canvas and which allows the spectator to react to the painting in a sensual manner.

Rachel Galea (b.1973) was born in Malta. In 1984 her family moved to Gozo. Throughout her life she expressed an interest in art and eventually studied privately to develop her style. She has exhibited in numerous exhibitions and has a considerable number of artworks in private collections. Galea applies loose, broad brushstrokes and overlapping layers of paint to transform the flat surface of the canvas into a three dimensional interpretation of her subjects, through the use of vibrant palette and brushwork which become the link between matter and spirit.



When all is lost, 2014-15, Oil on canvas, 120x100cm

Marlene Gouder

My research and work of these last two years inquires into the exploration and application of philosophical concepts to figurative works. My focus is on whether one has ever asked the questions why or how and consequently wondered endlessly, only to find oneself asking more questions. Passages in our history as mankind have contributed greatly to discoveries that I have endeavoured to explore and understand. However, the need for acknowledging my existential being and the question about the role of the other has made me question continuously. The questions of self, the enquiry of time, the absurdity of death, the existence of God, the reason of life, have all at one point bothered most of us, and the answers, or lack of, have travelled through realms of thought. To these questions, philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Steiner and Heidegger have provided many answers. Yet the best answers that we find are not written in books or theories, but lie in our thoughts. As thinkers we have the cognition to transcend. For the Mdina Biennale I have chosen to interpret the condition of man in a state of loss; loss of self, faith, love, health, hence the stance and use of the nude, and the hand of courage which tells us that with or without faith, humans are all the same.

Marlene Gouder (b.1980) is a mainly self-taught artist. She attended periodical classes at the School of Art in Valletta and eventually took up art direction under local artist Anton Calleja. She later carried out in depth studies of the nude with artists Lino Borg and Patrick Dalli, and continued studies on the human figure and portraiture with various art groups. In 2012 she attended a course on Incision at the Malta School of Arts.



Il-Mixja, 2004, Mixed media on canvas, 61x122cm, detail

Agatha Grima

Il-Mixja, which translates as ‘The Passage’, discusses the human procession of life, the passage from conception to death and beyond. *Il-Mixja* is a triptych, each canvas revealing a quasi-blank surface except for the low-relief abstract forms in the lower areas, which contrast to my usually more vibrant work. The work is the result of the serendipitous application of the material, with the resulting forms remaining at the mercy of the material itself, to its working properties and the way it has reacted to drying and curing. The upper space of the painting does not act as the work’s background, but as a detached support. A discourse is created between subject, space and relevance. The work poses a number of questions; what is human life? Is it so huge as to exist beyond comprehension and explanation? Or is it just a tiny speck of dust, irrelevant to the overall scheme of the universe? When does life begin and where does it end? And what makes man, apart from his attributes, his titles, his race, his values and his religion?

Agatha Grima (b.1965) studied art and painting at the School of Art in Valletta, Malta. She graduated with First Class Honours in the Conservation of Painting. Her participation at the IIC Congress in Bilbao, Spain and her soulful experiencing of the Guggenheim Museum spurred a spontaneous reaction towards art in a modern context. Her work is influenced by a number of artists including Alfred Chircop, Pawl Carbonaro, Mark Rothko and Gerard Richter. “And only here, in my studio, do I stand as just myself, with no expectations and no pretenses, knowing that my work can take me to stupendous places.”



Future Memory, 2015, Mixed media on handmade paper, 100x140cm

Anna Grima

One of Jung's favourite quotes on synchronicity is from the fifth chapter of Lewis Carroll's 'Through the Looking Glass', where the Queen tells Alice; "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards." *Future Memory* depicts opposing polarities which attract and explode in fields of yellow and blue intended to represent the earth's magnetic field. Two rectangular constructs delineate two interlocking Fibonacci spirals creating endless synchronicities, calculating *memory* to work backwards, but also forwards, with each number the sum of the two preceding numbers (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21...) in a sequence that is a 'self-developing' series with an encoded destiny. In rectangles where the ratio of the larger side to the smaller one is of Divine Proportion, the points where this series of 'whirling squares' divides the sides will generate a logarithmic spiral that coils inward/outward. Kepler's five platonic solids (nature's universal codes of creation) provide a central axis of orientation, reflecting on the word *geo-metry* derived from the Greek words Geos, meaning earth, and Metron, to measure. Measuring of the earth or Earthly measurements was an art traditionally restricted to priesthood, offering the means to understand how and why such matters were considered sacred. Such mathematical and geometric constants follow Kandinsky's and Malevich's ideas, two artists who stressed on purity of shape, particularly the square.

Anna Grima (b.1958) is an interdisciplinary Maltese artist who has exhibited her works nationally and internationally. She studied Art at the Malta School of Arts and the Accademia di Belle Arti Pietro Vannucci, Perugia, and recently graduated in Masters of Fine Arts and Digital Media from the University of Malta. Intuitive visual narratives encode a philosophical, metaphysical discourse into pictures of an imagined world, translated into form and intense depth of colour. Grima is currently a Visiting Assistant Lecturer at the University of Malta in the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences in the Department of Digital Arts.



CULTFIGURE, 2015 – ongoing, Ceramic, plastic and assorted objects, Variable dimensions

Monika Grycko

Organism is a sculptural installation which consists of a number of modelled forms of human organs connected to one another. The organs, made of grès and using a mould, are clearly artificial due to their white colour and their juxtaposition with daily objects. The installation, partially based on an organic structure, gives life to a hybrid construction which seems, at a first glance, to be a human organism. Plastic transparent wires connect the organs to one another and anchor the structure to the ceiling. The concept of the installation is based on the idea of fusing daily objects to elements of the female and male body; all these objects, which do not possess any logical interconnection, symbolise the complexity of spiritual devotion. The organism is a floating decoration which is not linked to reality, and is free from all religious references. The spirituality of the installation is represented by its lightness and transparency, by the total lack of connection with the real world.

Monika Grycko currently lives and works in Faenza, Italy. She graduated from the Department of Sculpture at Warsaw University and the Academy of Fine Arts in 1998, under the supervision of Prof. Grzegorz Kowaski. She has had a number of solo exhibitions, such as; 'Fatal Attraction', Centre of Contemporary Art, Warsaw (1999); 'Movimento extremo', Rebecca Container Gallery, Genova (2005); 'Transplantman', Kunstraum B Gallery, Kiel, Germany (2006); 'Biancaneve', Musikcafe, Art Stays 2011 – 9th Festival of Contemporary Art, Ptuj, Slovenia (2011); 'Hybrids-duo show', Galerie Helenbeck, Nice (2011). She was awarded the International Arte Laguna Prize 2009, Venice.



Wisdom (Bird). ('For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow', Ecclesiast 1:18, ASV), 2007-15, Charcoal, pencil, acrylic on canvas, treatment, 197x285cm



Heart (Winter). ('Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life', Prov.4:23 ESV), 2007-15, Charcoal, pencil, acrylic on canvas, treatment, 205x310cm

Daniela Guevska

According to early Christian theologians the ship was a symbol of the Church. The work *A big Maltese Luzzu*, a large mural composed of three panels, was inspired by the bright colours of the Maltese *luzzu* and the 'All Seeing Eye' or the 'Eye of Horas'. The three panels symbolise the three main Christian Churches: Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical, even if they do not contain specific symbols from each denomination. The decorative interpretation of the forms aims to reflect upon the contemporary Christian message of the Church in post-modern times. *Whisper* reflects the desire of man to soar like a bird in his dreams. The bird is bleeding, wounded by the pain of life. The author of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, encourages a young man to seek wisdom and avoid foolishness, but also warns him that the more he increases his knowledge, the more he increases his pain since he will become aware of the limitations of human nature. The work *Heart* was inspired by the appearance of the Bulgarian landscape in the winter season and by Maltese cliffs, which are characterised by multi-layers of fields. Winter is a dead season, but it has a 'living heart'; it gives birth to a new beginning, new hope, and new life. It is a metaphor of the human heart which was considered in ancient literature as the main source of life. In this interpretation, the heart is not merely a powerful organ which circulates blood around the body, but it is also the main coordinator of balance between the mind, the eyes, speech and will.

Daniela Guevska is a visual artist and art educator who lives and works in Malta. She studied Applied and Fine Arts, along with Pedagogy, Theology and Church leadership in Sofia, Bulgaria. She received a scholarship for the Summer Tutorial in Wheaton College, Illinois, USA, where she developed her entrepreneurial skills and worked on new ways to apply the visual arts for purposes of corporate and community outreach. She has been focusing on classical methods of drawing to reflect upon post-modern reality. She uses alternative techniques, combining the Applied Arts, Fine Arts, abstraction, collage and decorative panels.



The Other, 2015, Oil on canvas, 22x27cm (each)

Anne Guillotel

Each of my series provides an occasion for pictorial experimentation, and often also the pleasure of bringing together one or several artistic talents. In fact, my works are always, apart from the subject itself, an homage to painters, to art, to the history of art. For 'Christianity, Spirituality and the Other', the theme of the Mdina Biennale, I have focused on the notion of the 'Other', that which from a Christian and Spiritual point of view includes itself and all others, without creating distinctions between faiths, beliefs or non-beliefs the world, therefore all of humanity, is symbolised here through a series of 14 paintings which represent all peoples and their diversities. From the perspective of the history of painting, the motif makes reference to *Flag*, a painting by the American Jasper Johns produced 60 years ago – even if the meaning here is different- it also addresses the essential question of painting itself as; “a flat surface covered in colours in an orderly assembly”, according to the well-known formula of Maurice Denis. The series *The Other* was created to be displayed in the Mdina Cathedral Museum Refectory.

Anne Guillotel (b.1963) was born in Rennes, France and works in Paris. She has held several solo exhibitions including; 'To be continued' at Aponia/Centre d'art Contemporain, Villiers sur Marne, France, 2012 ; 'Auszüge und Zitate' at the Galerie Charlotte Norberg, Paris, France, 2011. She has also taken part in a number collective exhibitions including; 'Ordonnances', le 6B, Saint-Denis, France, 2014 ; 'Drawing Now', Paris, 2012 ; 'Groupe BLUME', Galerie G., Paris, 2012. She is represented by the Charlotte Norberg Gallery, Paris.



Power from Within, 2015, Ceramics and steel, 110x60cm

Paul Haber

This sculpture portrays the contrast between the fragility of the human mind and the extreme power it has when harnessed. It conveys that which the mind can achieve and its ability to transcend limits. The ceramic sphere, though apparently strong, is made of a material which is intrinsically very fragile. The firm strength of the steel is broken by the force coming from within, a force which knows no boundaries. Thus, freedom is achieved.....

Paul Haber (b.1940) studied art and ceramics at the Malta School of Art, Liceo Artistico di Roma, Istituto Artistico Piero Vanucci, Perugia, Camberwell College of Art, London, Hornsey College of Art, London, and graduated with a bachelor's degree from Central Saint Martins, London. Haber has taught art and ceramics in Malta. He is the founder of Alka Ceramics. His works have been exhibited in Malta, Europe, and the US, including a solo exhibition at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Haber has received numerous awards in Malta and overseas.



Untitled I, 2015, Mixed media on board, 30x30cm

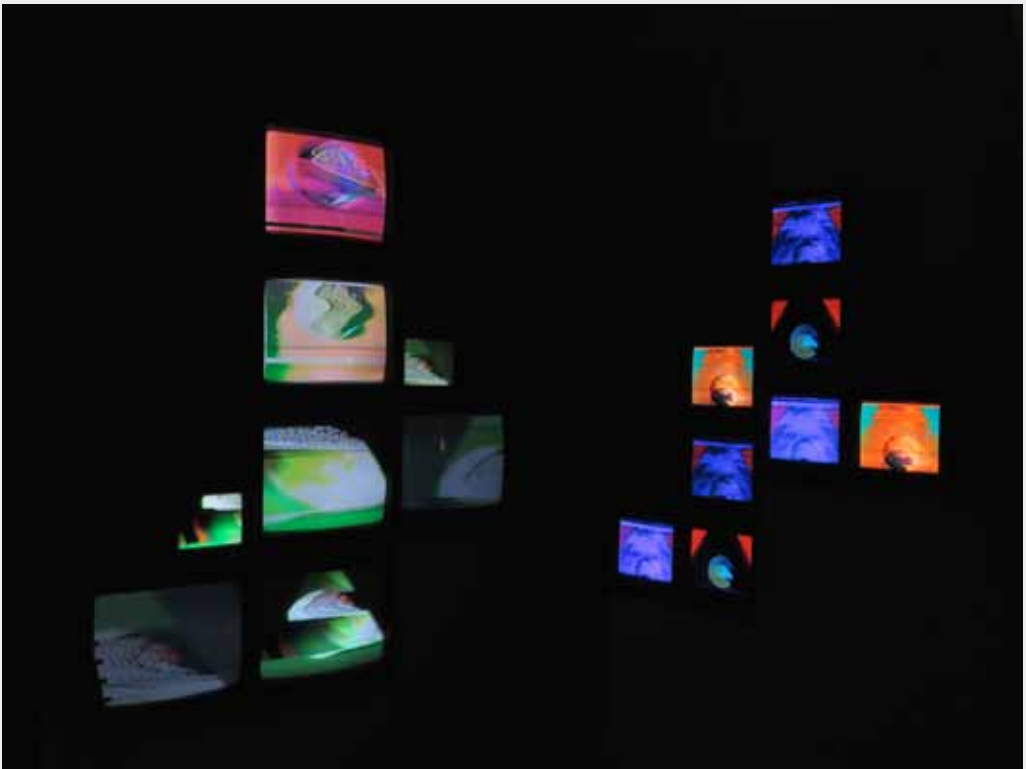


Untitled II, 2015, Mixed media on board, 30x30cm

Andrew Hancock

My works belong to both the static medium and the conceptual realm. Paintings, documentation, time-based performance and installations sit within the context of wider conceptual themes. Under investigation, I explore a diversity of subjects in my own idiom. My practice is constantly evolving, heavily steeped in the mythologies of artistic practice and the struggle with the specificities of key art materials. I created a unique series of work in Malta in 2015. Often integrating the very fabric of the island in painting; its raw materials, limestone dust, chalk and found objects. Along with this spirit, I incorporate the inextricable bodily existence of the land. Focusing on abstract painting, I am conceptually realigning artistic and iconographic histories. Part of my focus for these works has been on Maltese communities and the dichotomy that exists between outward expressions of faith and private religiosity. Symbolic and bold but with a profound material and theoretical subtlety, my paintings require the viewer's meditation in order to psychologically respond to the religious landscape across the Maltese island. Malta to me has been a lifelong family home and spiritual retreat. Being privileged in the making of these new artworks for the Mdina Biennale, I am symbolically acting out ritual observances that stem from profound Catholic traditions in addition to certain art historical and theological ideas and practices. I am painting as part of a real pilgrimage and in my own manner making art as a religious obedience.

Andrew Hancock (b.1982) is a London-based artist, writer and curator. He graduated in History of Art at Manchester University in 2006. Some of his exhibitions and collections include: Barbican Centre, Cultural Olympiad 2012, Royal College of Art, House of Saint Barnabas, Chinese Visual Festival, Wilton's Music Hall (London), Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (Norwich), K35 (Moscow), StandArte (Madrid). His installation *Oracle I* was created for the National Centre of Contemporary Art (NCCA) as part of the 6th Moscow Biennale, 2015. His work is permanently exhibited in the National Collection of China (CSPACD), Beijing. As an elected member of the Chelsea Arts Club and Society of Staffordshire Artists, he has worked in organisations including White Cube, Christies, Saatchi Gallery, Royal Academy of Arts and Frieze.



151113, 2015, Video system, Variable dimensions

James Alec Hardy

I am adverse and sceptical of new technologies being used to entrap minds with the use of specialised propaganda. I attempt to reuse the old technology by subverting it towards a positive direction that offers truth and narrative as subjective. The video sequences are produced by physical manipulation of machines, which is the performative action that accepts noise, error, redundancy and amplification of phenomenon. Using feedback, the complex systems of machines are stimulated to produce the content for the monitors. Sound is generated from the video signal and vice versa, which interact together to produce meditative video sculptures suggesting a tribal, and totemic influence. The installations are physical representations of the schematic diagrams showing feedback loops. The monitors are programmed with the recorded video post-performance to be presented as a 'static' monument to the event. The monument becomes then a video sculpture composed of video loops, which are void of sequential narrative and have no beginning or end. Having worked with analogue equipment for 20 years, I have an affinity with the physical element and see the video as being an object rather than a virtual electronic portrayal of image and sound. Being immediate and sensitive, video is able to powerfully display suggestions of my ideas in the age where our video-literacy is highly proficient. I attempt to pursue the most simplified and direct approach of display by using the primal symbolic forms of circles, lines, triangles and squares. I interrupt and modify them in order to create elaborate 'landscapes' and 'textures' promoting reverie. With truth being understood as subjective, the video sculptures I create do not limit freedom of thought, but stimulate choice. I aim to avoid manipulating the viewer by presenting 'video as truth', my work allows the video to function ultimately as the meditative stage for the mind, which unravels its own truth.

The essence of James Alec Hardy's (b.1979) practice is concerned with the impact of technologies on our life experiences. Following his degree at Camberwell College of Arts in London in 2002, he focused on refining complex systems, by the use of performance, sculpture, installation and print. Hardy makes use of obsolete devices from a former analogue age; from sculptural totems of video monitors, to a three month long residency in the fields with I-Cabin, Hardy's practice has the ability to manifest itself in multiple challenging forms. He has also exhibited at the Tate Modern.



African Dancers, c.1970, Bronze, 92x87.5cm

André Hogommat

André Hogommat inherited Marcel Gimond's powerful expression, which he then interpreted in his sculptural works injecting his own artistic identity. His sculptures reflect the human condition through the expression of movement. The forms stand in space and take hold of their environment, creating a forceful presence. The body as a whole is nourished by internal pulses which reflect the dynamic mastery of forms. His focus is to capture the form's authenticity in its expressive vibrance, and not necessarily to seek a realist or classical interpretation. The forms are worked with plaster and manipulated with gestures which shift inwards, forwards, upwards and outwards. By utilising the immortal quality of bronze, he sought to transform the eternal material and to sustain matter without betraying his vision.

Text by Philippe Hogommat

André Hogommat (1925 - 2015) was born in Nante and worked in Paris. After attending the School of Fine Arts in Nantes, he enrolled at the School of Fine Arts in Paris, where he studied under in Marcel Gimond. Hogommat was awarded the Susse Prize in 1960. He has created original representational works that have been exhibited in both personal and collective exhibitions. His solo shows were held in Paris in 1979, 1984, 1993, 2001 and 2007. Group exhibitions include those at Mount Marsan Museum in 1975, Bourdelle Museum in 1982, Palais de Tokyo in 1962 and the Rodin Museum in 1962. He also pursued teaching at the School of Fine Arts in Nîmes for 25 years.



Dreams of a Child, 2015, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 30x30cm

Gulja Holland

My portrait series entitled *Dreams of a Child* is based on a single internet-sourced image of a child victimised in Gaza. The works are not intended to incriminate neither Hamas nor the Jews, a more general reading of the work is encouraged. Religions arise from people's quest for spirituality and inner peace; therefore it is a false essence of spirituality which justifies any violence as an honouring of love and peace. By alternating between an experiential and conceptual use of colour and form, a clear reading of the work is confusing. The portrayals are not concerned with similitude as each variation alludes to how we process and render events through a subjective perspective. The subject's floating form recalls the sacred portrayals of cherubs whilst abstract marks on a physical body imply that it is no longer part of this world. The indexical marks allude to the medium of painting, which can in itself give meaning and life to the moment of death, signifying that it can have a spiritual purpose. Symbolically, a child is devoid of social conditioning, unlike an adult. It represents purity of thought, of heart and of intent and hence conveys religiously motivated violence in its most devastating form. A bold and expressive palette makes poignant the vibrant energy and life-potential of the child who faces death. Yet, somewhat ironically, it is the child that will never be able to realise its dreams, therefore the child can be seen to be undergoing a spiritual experience.

Gulja Holland (b.1990) creates both paintings and mixed media artwork. Her style remains varied and experimental, drawing from different creative fields such as fashion and graphic design. The human form provides the cornerstone in her work. Her portraiture seeks to move away from formal representative constraints through the application of tentative and expressive strokes. Holland's imagery is inspired almost exclusively from photography. Her saturated palette seeks to address the hyper reality of our times as presented by social media. She is currently living in Malta following her graduation from Leeds College of Art with a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

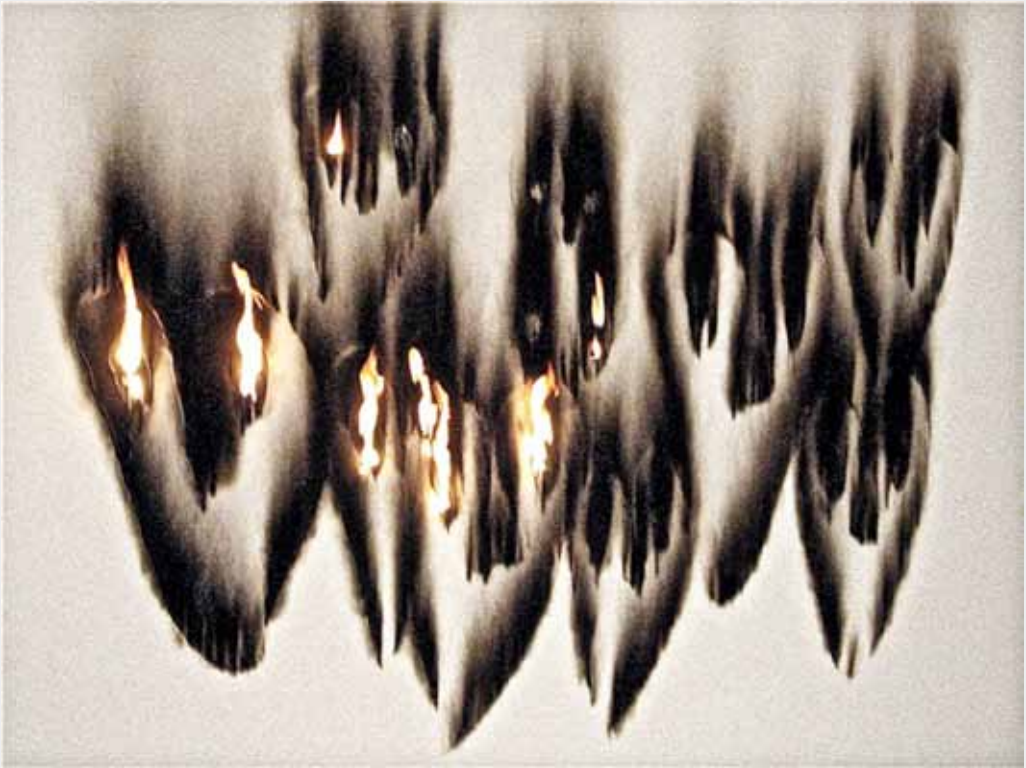


Untitled, 2010, Silver-gelatin print, 30x40cm

Sergei Isakov

My project for the Mdina Biennale includes several photographs from my series *Siberia: The White Roads* and *Polar Night*. The chosen collection is a stark demonstration of the changes in the life of generations of families who settled in Siberia on the wave of economic and social change – yet it remains, also, a crystalline reflection of my personal inner search for something profound: I am looking for something, I guess, I am trying to find photographs that would delicately transmit the human emotional experience. Born in the north of the USSR, I hold a close personal affinity with my subjects, however I have never set myself the target of observation or documentation – rather, the aim of finding a place of inner purity. Working on a Leica M4 and personally developing silver gelatin prints, I find the physical process of printing a meditative and deeply devotional experience, one that is as vital to me as the shooting of the subject. The final works lend themselves to a state of quiet contemplation and transcendence, the emotive tension apparent across the photograph's surface. This careful selection of work, curated by ARTNAKED, is a unique highlight from a period of ten years of my photographic career. Each piece is a study in the juxtaposition of silence and tension, each uniquely encapsulating a deep story of spiritual life, evoking the experience that envelopes the Siberian people in its white landscape.

Sergei Isakov (b.1974) is a fine art photographer born in Serov, USSR, now residing in Paris. He graduated in Russian Literature from Nizhniy Tagil State University. In 1996 he started documentary photography, working for a number of different outlets across Europe. Active in one of the most politically charged periods in modern Russian history, Isakov covered several of the country's most high profile events: war in Chechnya; terrorist attacks in Moscow; and political crises in Ukraine, Belarus and Central Asia. In 2005 Isakov won Best Young Photojournalist of Russia, yet simultaneously developed the fine art style for which he is now well known. He has held a number of exhibitions.



APCIS 07, 2007, Ephemeral canvas, Video, Variable dimensions

Christian Jaccard

Surprised by the vicissitudes of a light sleep, the pyronaut suddenly crosses the strata of a strange dream. The clarity of his troubled vision is as alive and fleeting as the hasty progress of the ascending flames generating their torrid spasms. The pyronaut armed with thermal gel multiplies and decreases the founding gestures of the brilliant and sublime energies. The fugacity of spectres liberates carbon shadows whose juxtapositions and overlaps bring forth a cohort of glances at the masked, the unusual and the sometimes animalesque physiologies. The incandescent theatre and its performane duplicate their convulsions, and then slowly vanish. Scenes of light and shadow, metaphors of the fiery Bush, nothing else occurs other than the creation of an ephemeral painting which fertilises the migratory pulverances of capricious expressions.

TRACES OF LIFE

Fire, a source of life and light, and the trace (or tracing), a principle of creation which devises relations between kingdoms of the living, are the two 'tools' constituting my artistic practice which is concerned with the representation of time. A practice begun in the 1970s with the combustion of objects on canvas, leather and anonymous paintings, the ignition has associated the act of painting with the ancestral practice of slashing and burning, also called the culture of burning. The ephemeral painting displays its 'film', symbolising the displacement of an ephemeral and nomadic activity in the course of which the thermal gel creates its traces of life.

Christian Jaccard (b.1939) is of Swiss origin and was born in Fontenay-sous-Bois. He completed his education at the Fine Art School in Bourges in 1960. Jaccard's focus on industrial waste and traces led to the genesis of his first lithographic work. From 1964 to 1975 he was a chromist engraver in a letterpress-printing house where he explored the impregnation processes related to the manufacture of specialised tools. Specialising in combustion processes, he developed the *Brûlis* and the *Supranodal Concept*, described as being the proliferation of gnarled textures. His work has been shown in several public and private institutions such as, Saint-Etienne, Dunkerque, Marseille, La Chaux de Fonds in Switzerland, and the National Museum of Art in Osaka, Japan.



Ten Commandments, 2015, Mixed media, 147x48.5cm (each)

Maria Kaleta

Living in a multicultural society, having been brought up in a religious, Catholic environment, and thinking about my own identity all bring to mind an important question about the relevance of *The Decalogue* in today's world. Questions like: Are the Ten Commandments still helpful in understanding the issues we face today? Do they continue to show the way towards personal development, happiness and better relationships within our communities? Are they still The Truth in this new, modern, digitised and partly virtual world? As an artist I do not wish to provide any straightforward answers. *The Decalogue* series is my attempt at putting these questions in front of the viewer and inspiring them to confront their thoughts and feelings; to seek the answers within themselves.

Maria Kaleta's work reveals a fascination with colour and form, coupled with the search for understanding through art. She relies on both traditional and modern media, focusing in particular on oil painting, drawing and digital art techniques. Kaleta's work includes painting, drawing, pastels, traditional printmaking, computer graphics and installation. She is also involved in desktop publishing. Her work has been exhibited all over Europe as well as in Russia and Latin America, and has received several awards. Kaleta holds a Masters Degree in Fine Art from The Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, Poland, and has since also studied Exposition and Display at The Poznań National College of Arts. She currently lives in London.



36.082,14.183 35.087,14.577 - I, 2015, Photography, aluminium, 30x60cm



36.082,14.183 35.087,14.577 - II, 2015, Photography, aluminium, 30x85cm



36.082,14.183 35.087,14.577 - III, 2015, Photography, aluminium, 30x85cm

Katelia

The serial titled *Liaison* 36.082,14.183 35.087,14.577 began in April 2015 in Malta as part of my artistic work which questions and reconstructs the landscape. 'Liaison' is a correspondence between two photos taken in different places. 'Liaison' is comparable to a path, a route in the landscape. 'Liaison' also denotes those binding ties between us and the environment. And finally, 'Liaison', is the intimate connection I have with Malta. Beyond the astonishing beauty of the Maltese landscape, its sea and shores generate two metaphysical echo waves. In the past, Malta, as the homeland of my father's family, was witness to numerous exiles and returns, similar to violent waves which pound against the rocks, which I now consider to be soothing and regenerative waves. Today, the sea still bears migrant boats and ships, and too often it becomes their tomb. The sea, cradle of biodiversity, has been ignored, slaughtered, decimated by Men. On the eve of COP21 climate conference, how can Malta regain a decent and magnificent sea bed?

Katelia (b.1975) was born in Brittany, France but is deeply attached to her Maltese origins and today works and lives in Paris. Katelia became aware of the scarcity of water and understood the importance of sea territory. As a child she was scared to walk on seaweed but became amazed with the beauty of the seabed and has been scuba diving since 1994. She graduated from the Beaux-Arts de Rennes with a project entitled *The Lack of Reference in the Water*. The need for water is manifested in all stages of her photographic production, from shooting to image processing.

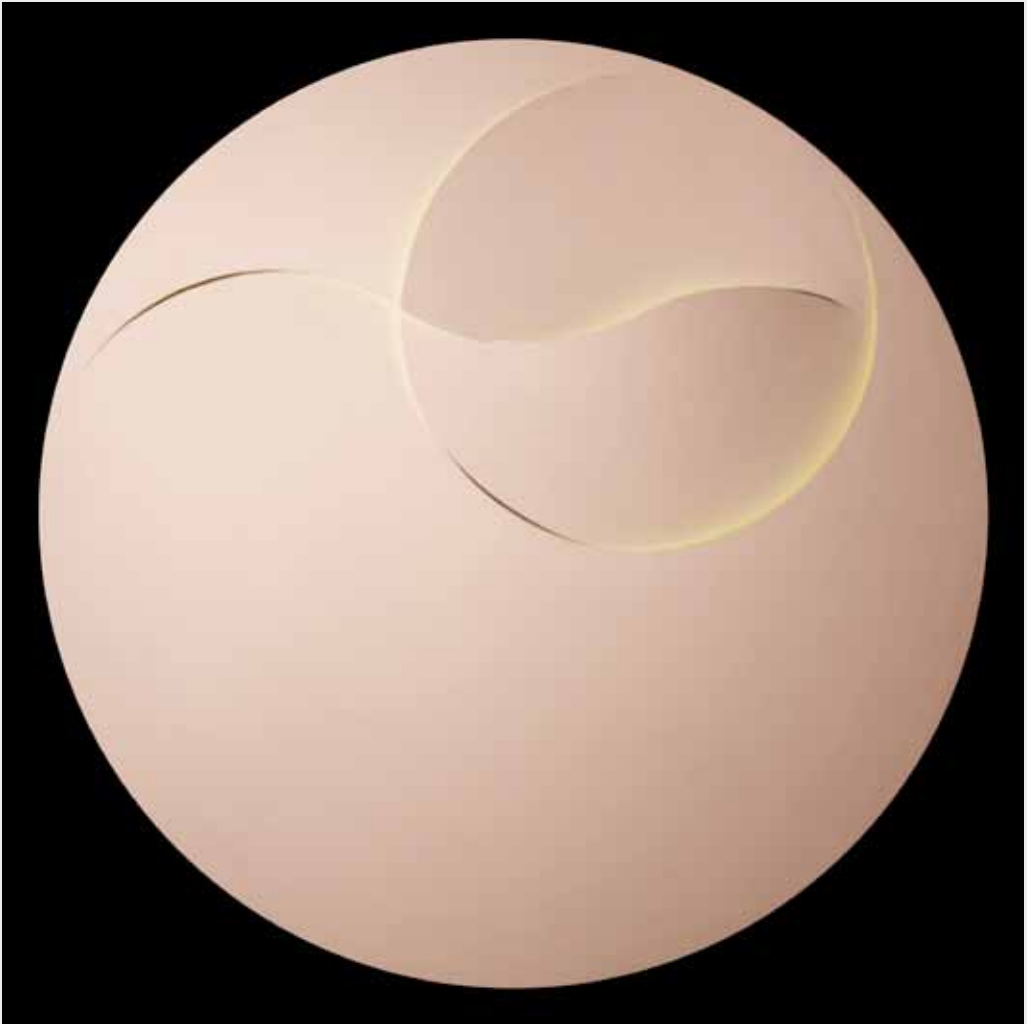


Dream Of Flight, 2015, Etched and patinated copper and bronze, 25x25cm

Marie Louise Kold

I created a unique set of techniques that imbue metals with an emotional charge that turns them into art. The art I create is a dynamic mixture of imagination, passion and colours mutated by light. My techniques have their roots in the tradition of copper printing, but use the metal itself in the making of the art. Working in this way, copper, bronze and brass are etched using various methods. The cuprous metals are then brought to life by patination with chemicals and the art that results not only changes depending on angle and light, but also through touch and time. The colours that emerge are, among others, deep vibrant reds, muted greens, blues, ochres and ambers. My project involves a number of a number of works that are tied together through their shared theme, taken from the short story 'The Diver' by Danish author Karen Blixen. In it, a young theological student builds wings for himself in passionate hope of getting closer to God. Fragments of words, traces of wings, structures and patterns filled with intense longing for flight give these works a unique architecture that creates an aesthetic that both attracts and stimulates, the intensity of the colours tied to the nature of the metal (mutated by light) conveying the depth of Blixen's theme.

Marie Louise Kold (b.1974) is a Danish metal artist living and working in Malmö, Sweden and Msida, Malta. She studied architecture at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen, art at Lund's Art School and metallurgy at Lund University and The Scandinavian Casting School. Marie Louise Kold has worked with metal since the mid-1990's, and has exhibited extensively internationally. Among her many solo exhibitions are those held at St James Cavalier in Valletta, Malta; Jäger & Jansson Galleri in Lund, Sweden; Studio 28 in Montmartre, Paris, France; Illums Bolighus on Strøget, Copenhagen; and Nordic Council of Ministers' Gallery, also in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Circles in eight - white, 2015, Acrylic on wood, 70x70x7cm

Balázs Kontur

My method is about building up relationships, tension, harmony and disharmony from nothing, from the basic forms which can be described with the simplest calculated way; to create simple life with elementary instruments. To create existence from elements which on their own have only one direction, one quality. Through this it is possible to see a simple relation of forms and a simple relation of colours, which in connection, like a living thing, clearly represent a rich quality. It is through that which we can find in nature, the cosmos and ourselves. This simple relation of clear forms allows several possibilities for the imagination. Therefore, we can make a connection between the order of nature and our own diversity, to reflect on the human personality and its raw purity.

Balázs Kontur (b.1982) was born in Budapest, Hungary. He works as an architect. Kontur learned to draw and make compositions with photography and moving images at a young age. He attended the Szerencs Free School of Art in Hungary. There he met János Fajó, the director of the school, who became his painting master. After leaving the school, he worked with other artists in a group which followed the principles of the Art of Clear Form, which he adopted from Fajó. He also gained experience in the field of contemporary dance. Kontur lives and works in Tuscany.



Awareness to Understand What Cannot be Seen Cannot be Known, 2015, Oil on raw of cotton, 60x70cm

Michal Kozlowski

My practice involves assemblages of objects, images and words focused on challenging the audience in terms of how to read and understand the various juxtapositions of paintings, materials, images and text as forms in a given space. In recent years, I have primarily concentrated on developing my interests within the limits of graphics, text, painting, and the idea of archive. If we assume that the initial impulse to transform 'the source' into another medium or form is originated in the awareness of a generation loss, we arrive at the idea of an archive; something that calls for a performative re-enactment. The process of transformation from the 'original' source material into a painting, drawing or print is not a duplication, as my practice includes knowledge about something that has been omitted or added during the process. I view this part of the process as an act of transgression, contamination, deformation, an act of supplementation in which the previous 'source material' is postponed. Each step within the process embodies a loss of source and has to be replaced by what will emerge from the origin. In this sense, repetition (or reproduction) can be seen as a principle of insubordination. The use of various, often antagonistic, aesthetics and techniques seen in my work such as print, painting, permutations and cut-ups is an attempt to create an interdisciplinary non-hierarchical practice in the lineage of countercultural traditions such as Dada, the Situationists or the Beats.

Michal Kozlowski (b.1986) was born in Warsaw, Poland. Kozlowski currently lives and works in London. His work was initially built on the personal collection of images consisting of photographs, cut-outs, maps and postcards. He studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London. He later received his MA, at The Royal Danish Academy of the Fine Arts, Copenhagen and also studied at the European Academy of Arts, Warsaw. Kozlowski has exhibited internationally in England, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Poland, and received The Patrick and Kelly Lynch Scholarship (2011). He also collaborated with independent book publishers Galeria Czulosc, Warsaw, TTC Books, Copenhagen, who design his own press, mail art and artist books.



Croix de Malta, 2015, Ink on paper mounted on canvas, 50x50cm (each)

Gildas le Reste

The paintings suggest confused spaces, fleeting or natural, the subject appearing, disappearing. Liquification of painting, the bursting of points, of marks, preserving the whites which design the space and retain the confusion, or which suggest the glare. The painting is like a stratum which multiplies itself to become a blur, to cloud our perception; “a light which will not be emitted from the inside but which places us in relation to the impossible thickness which separates them, the interior and the exterior” (François Bon). For the Mдина Biennale, I have produced a series of small paintings which represent an invasive nature uniquely composed of flowers found in Malta (and which bear reference to the cross). Malta at the crossroads of history and its possible meanings; Malta between the sign and the symbol.

Gildas le Reste (b.1958) was born in Quimper, France. He now lives and works in Paris and Châtellerault. He is the Director of the School of Plastic Arts at Châtellerault (Vienne, France). Le Reste is a fervent supporter of engravings and a publisher whose numerous editions reflect his passion for the arts. For more than twenty years, le Reste has pursued painting, moving beyond fashions, beyond the sight of time. The artist approaches a work by basing it on his relationship with time. He investigates the theme of the landscape by means of a slow process which intervenes into the notions of projection, superimposition and accumulation.



Paper Man, 2015, Paper and Chinese ink, 200x150cm

Joo-Youn Lee

Far from the commercial super heroes of comics and movies, 'Paper Man' lives in the lightness and destructibility of a sheet of paper. When 'Paper Man' allies himself and finds emotional unity with his fellow man, his strength grows with the fertility of common interests. Underlying the iconic and thematic expression is a notion that democracy rises out of principles of equality. In my views of the human condition, overcoming the essential alienation of the individual remains the immense challenge.

Joo-young Lee is an engraver and print maker who grew up Seoul, South Korea. At age 6, she began to win competitive awards for her drawings and paintings. After earning a master's degree in Fine Arts, she went on to exhibit internationally in Europe and the United States, enjoying success at Miami's Art Basel and at galleries in France and Germany. She has participated in 12 solo exhibitions.



White elements, 2015, Paint, sculptural medium, Variable dimensions

Kacha Legrand

During a journey to the city of Mdina, I was able to visit the Cathedral, the Museum and the courtyard of the Cathedral Archives in Ange's Palace. My gaze lingered over some of the architectural elements which constitute these various places and which translate their historic and patrimonial depth. In the courtyard of these archives, a place marked by its simplicity, I encountered small niches and chambers which were surprisingly absent of statuary. The sobriety and the humility which emanated from them caused me to question this place, because they contradict the baroque spirit of the cathedral. My proposal for the Mdina Biennale places two photos in relation to each other. The first one was taken in the courtyard of the Cathedral Archives, a testimony to the heritage of Mdina. The second reveals a series of sculptures inspired by the place. These small volumes form part of my research process which is based on the passage of the evident shape, and which questions the notions of presence and absence, but also the inter-relation of forms; their coexistences and their capacity to reflect light. These separate white elements act here as extractions and constitute the architectural Archives of place.

Kacha Legrand (b.1960) was born in in Auchel, France. In 2004 her work was acquired for the collection Frac Haute Normandie and shown in a monographic exhibition called '*Matières et Mémoires*' (Matter and Memories). She has exhibited in several solo and collective exhibitions amongst which include: 'Arte Video Night', Gaité Lyrique, Paris (2011), '7+1 Architecture, Volume, Space', Gallery Jordan Seydoux, Berlin (2013), 'Hypersurfaces', Gallery Duchamp, Yvetot (2014), 'Agglomeration(s)', Gallery Carre Noir, Amiens (2015), '(im)material', Gallery Jean Fournier, Paris (2015), 'Entrelacs / entre la', La Borne, POTCB, Phitiviers (2015), 'Herbaria', Manufacture des tabacs, Galerie Rejane, Louin (2015).



THE LINE, 2015, Photography, video, Variable dimensions

Loredana Longo

THE LINE is a project based on an imaginary line running between Africa and Sicily; it is the journey which a lot of migrants embark on in order to escape the turmoil in their motherland. Seven girls, most coming from Nigeria, spoke to me about their trip, their experience and their journey to Sicily. They described the dramatic moments, the violence, but even those instances of hope. I tried to transform these narrations into fixed images, in which the neon lights and the girls become the real protagonists. The neon light illuminates and draws the space, designating different aspects of their journey: an island, a weapon, a bridge, an object which can both offend and defend. The girls assume dignified poses, they create living sculptures (which encapsulate the strength of life) and avoid any rhetoric or theatricality. This video was realised inside a theatre, in Ragusa, a city very well known for being an outpost of North African migrants. A volunteer working with the Fondazione San Giovanni, a centre of assistance which works mainly with political refugees and asylum seekers, helped me in the process of realising this work.

Loredana Longo (b.1967) lives in Milan. She graduated with a degree in painting. She has been the recipient of several awards and has participated in a number of residencies and biennales in Italy, Athens, Morocco, amongst other countries. In 2009 she participated in the Residency Programme of the Marrakech Biennale, Morocco. Her main solo shows include: 'My Own War', GAM, Palermo (2014), 'Place/ No Place', Bad New Business Gallery, Milano (2013), and 'Demolition#1 squatter', Assab one, Milano (2011). Longo's main collective exhibitions include: 'Nel mezzo del mezzo', Museo Riso, Palermo, 'Post Fata Resurgo', MIC, Faenza, 'Un été sicilien', Chateau de Nyon, 'Sesso and Design', Triennale Design Museum, Milano, Violence.



Familia Lignum, 2013, Recycled hair, Variable dimensions

Jennifer Mallia

Spirituality, birth, death and afterlife are my sources of inspiration. Through my art, I aim to communicate my personal thoughts and feelings with my audience. Experimentations with recycled hair have developed into in-depth self-discovery and self appreciation. Playing around with shadows connects the spiritual and the living together. The material, the hair, is very important to me as it contains coded information of my relatives and myself.

Jennifer Mallia (b.1990) obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art from Fraunhofer - Gesellschaft University, Germany, through the MCAST Institute of Art and Design in Malta. She also studied in Ruhr, Germany. She completed a master's degree in Digital Arts at the University of Malta. Her first solo exhibition 'Zwiege' was held in 2012 in Recklinghausen, Germany. Mallia also participated in international art competitions such as 'See Me' (2012) in the USA and also exhibited her works in Times Square, New York City. She has participated in collective exhibitions in Malta and Italy.



Creative Passion, 2015, Oil on linen, 90cm diameter (each)

Myriam O

I feel deeply touched by the theme of the Mdina Biennale, a subject of personal analysis ever-present in my life. Even though I myself cannot affirm whether God exists or whether He is the Creator of the universe, I do believe that creativity is intrinsically connected to the spirit. When I paint, the process of blending together what I see, how I feel and what I want is mostly a spiritual experience; a constant prayer in solitude, lovingly and joyfully done. I present a series of four oil paintings inspired by the allegory of the creation of the world envisioned as energy and fire, from 'nothing' to the beginning of a colourful 'something'. My work begins with darkness, but a linear gesture suggests a future in which subsequently gas and matter float, as above, so below. Then, dense swirls give way to a period of intense activity. Finally, there is a promise of a colourful world where light is a reality, not only an idea. With the choice of a circular format, I mean to emphasise the spontaneous affinity between man and any circular shape; a circle is formed of an infinite curved line. The round works would organically blend with the background of the ruins in the Cathedral Museum Subterranean Vaults.

Myriam O (b.1966) is an artist, singer and painter born in Chile. Her fondest childhood memories are those of attending the opera and turning the pages of art books. She enjoyed a career as a passionate interpreter of jazz standards and Latin songs. She believes in the power of colour. She is sentimental - emotions push her to create. Nowadays, beauty and perfection are overrated. She feels that painting is a journey through the longings of the heart and the windmills of the mind, just as life itself. Oil remains her preferred medium; it is romantic, melancholic and infinite.

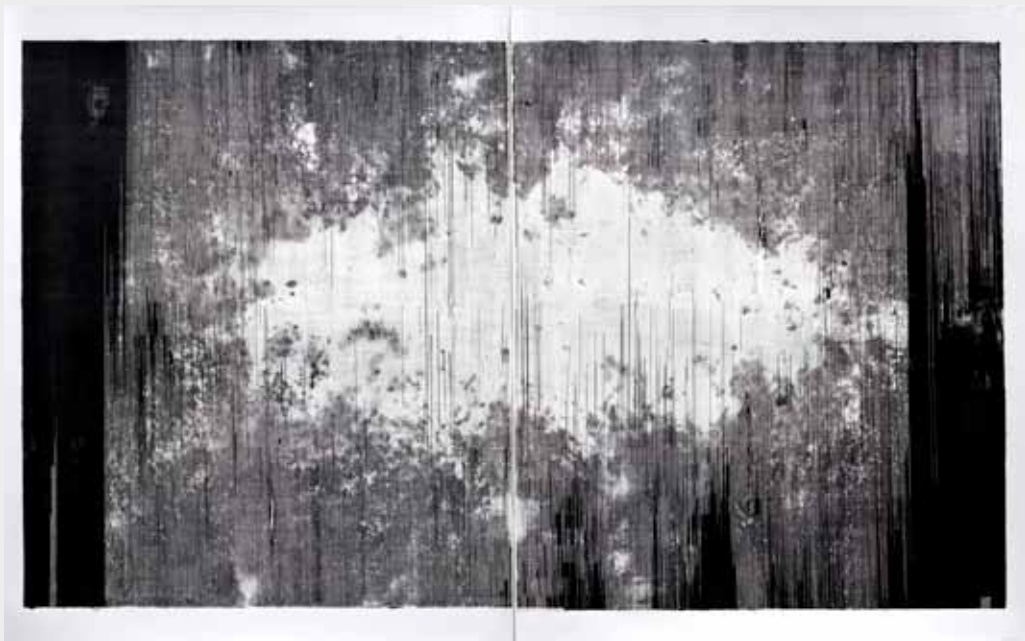


Lady with a Peacock, 2014, Oil on MDF panel, 100x65cm

Roman Opalinski

Inside every individual there is the eternal struggle between the spiritual and the material. I tried to depict this struggle in my work *The Lady with the Peacock* by using the language of symbols. The spiritual element is symbolised by the figure of an angel. The lily in his arms is the symbol of the good that exists. The peacock is the symbol of wealth and splendour, whilst also symbolising bad taste. These two sides reflect the element of choice which every individual faces.

Roman Opalinski (b.1962) is Ukrainian artist. In 1985 he completed his studies at Lviv Civil Engineering Technical School and in 1992 he graduated from Lviv State Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts. He is involved in many projects and takes part in Ukrainian and international exhibitions such as; Lviv Autumn Art Salon 'High Castle' (1997), 'Art as the Ambassador of freedom and democracy' (Kyiv, Ukraine), 'The Bridge instead of the walls' (France), and International Art Workshops in Myślenice (2001-2014). His works are also presented in solo exhibitions in Germany, Holland, France and Slovakia.

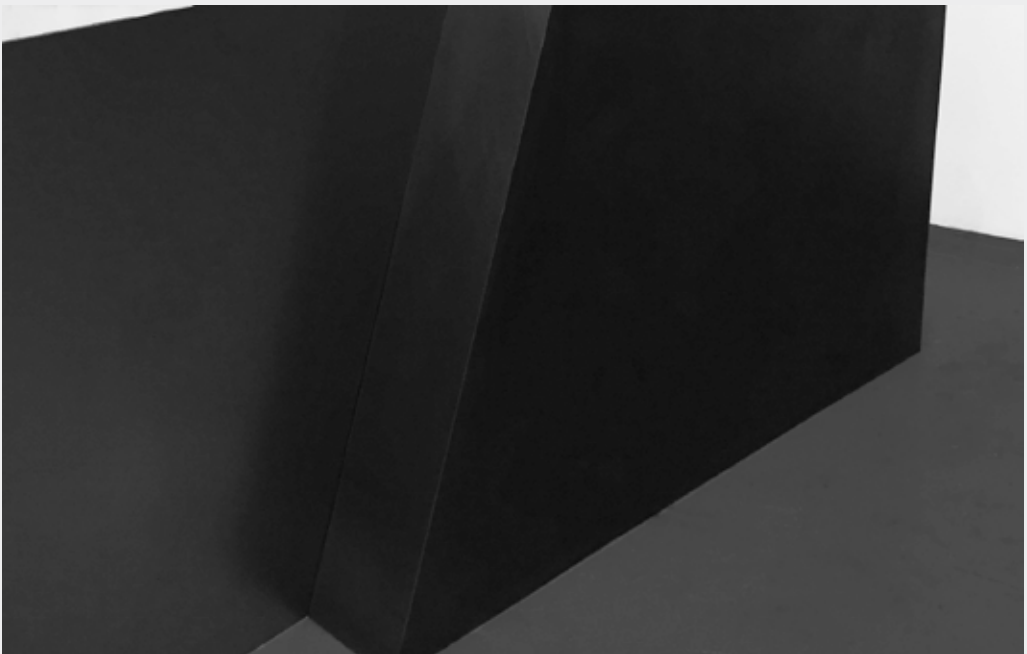


Penelope Today, 2015, Ink on incised paper, 146x245cm

Patrice Pantin

My project consists of a large work, executed on paper and created in dialogue with a painting by Pietro Dandini (1646-1712), *Daughters of Jethro*. What I am showing is an impression of sand on paper, done with a blowtorch and with a technique often used in my creative process. During my most recent visit to Malta, I collected sediments from the beach, sand and all sorts of things which were strewn on the coastal floor. To my great surprise, I found a bit of everything there. Of course, grains of all sizes, but also fisherman's flotsams, bits of wood and coloured plastic, shells. One may find an assortment of micro objects on the shore – objects which are not necessarily maritime in origin. The beach is a place between two others, it is a border between town and ocean. I wish to speak of this, of this hybrid and white layer from which we direct our eyes fixedly onto the clouds and the horizon. My hanging picture is “an imprint of sand on paper, the sediments of Malta”, it is an imagined layer visualised by seeing and experiencing idyllic beaches.

Patrice Pantin (b.1963) lives and works in France. He has been developing works using cloth for around 20 years. Pantin's work from the 90s features some black material elements directly transixed on walls. He questions the foundations of painting by dissecting paper; he calls it the *Corpus Delicti*. The cloth is for him the original base of any pictorial approach. He skins, cuts, spreads, dismantles. In recent works, he first begins by using papers which are not creased, which are not curled up in a ball, negating the illusion of rustled or folded materials.



This is here, this is now. But soon we shall go, 2015, Black mild steel and mild steel, 200x200x20cm

Ana Catarina Pereira

I approached the theme of the Mdina Biennale from the perspective of emptiness, as I work with a minimalist language, and also in reference to Mdina's reputation as 'the silent city'. To discuss the idea of 'empty space' in art is, above all, to reflect on the continuous process between presence and absence; "moments of being", quoting Virginia Woolf. In other words, it is to work with the space that mediates between being and nothingness. The starting point was to work with steel plates since; "even though an extremely real material, they lack somehow in a solid sense of presence - it does not exist for itself alone, does not have its own reason for being or meaning. It is a half-way thing, on the way to something else" (Lee Ufan). This very idea of transformation is also present with the *Other* material chosen: acrylic. Moreover, both materials have high resistance, almost to the point of non-destruction. However, with plastic the commitment to permanence has been exchanged for flexibility, change and expandability. In its literal sense, the void takes the form of a cut, a physical act of separation which is also related to the drawing of a line. In terms of the demarcation of space present in all Minimalist sculptures, my interest lies in edges which cut into space, defining it without occupying it.

Ana Catarina Pereira (b.1972) completed her masters of Fine Art at Chelsea College of Arts in 2012. She was awarded the Clifford Chance/UAL Sculpture Prize (2013), which included a solo exhibition at the law firm's headquarters. In 2014 her work was included in the Aesthetica Art Prize Anthology, and Pereira was awarded the Royal British Society of Sculptors bursary. In 2015 one of her pieces was shortlisted for the Signature Art Prize. Her work has been shown in both Portugal and London.



The Severed Head of Salome, 2014-15, Photography, 300x230cm

Denis Pondruel

As a geometrical abstraction resembling concrete pillboxes, I tried to describe the process of a thought in its most organic and fragile state. This thought originates and meanders, sometimes erratically, inside the brain which is imagined as a succession of corridors, stairs and chambers. Glowing words and sentence fragments act as stimuli for a mental dance that could materialise and develop in these protected architectures.

Denis Pondruel (b.1949) lives and works in Paris and in Friville. His sculptural works are cubic volumes presented with 'doors' and 'windows', yet they are not classical constructions. Such concrete blocks invite the viewer to stand on the border between the visible and the invisible. This is the paradox with which the artist is concerned, objectified by these small concrete cubes: everything and its opposite. Pondruel indefatigably investigates the relationship between thoughts and materials. He has a beautiful way of conveying our permeability to the world and the way it builds us.



Nowherescape XIV, 2012, Oil and ink on canvas, 70x50cm



Nowherescape XV, 2012, Oil and ink on canvas, 50x40cm



Nowherescape, 2015, Oil and ink on canvas, 140x100cm



Nowherescape IV, 2012, Oil and ink on canvas, 70x50cm

Helga Portanier

The paintings presented here are a selection from a series of works entitled *Nowherescape, Variations*, produced 2012-2015. Few pictorial elements occupy and make up the space of these paintings: the foliage motif, a very limited palette, veils of tonal ranges, and the interplay of pigment and empty space. The interplay of these elements come together to play and reconfigure themselves anew in each painting. These works capture nonexistent landscapes, having no real, concrete source in 'real' life, no real place. They are 'mindscapes', landscapes of 'nowhere'. The sound, 'Nowherescape' alludes to the word 'no-escape'. Nowherescape: the experience of having no recognisable elements in one's outer environment on which to hang on to, capturing a departure from any familiar reference point, a familiar identity... The gaps within the pigment reveal glimpses of canvas, glimpses of light in otherwise dark sombre vast spaces. Looking for some form of refuge. These gaps, these pauses refer to the gaps in the trajectory of one's thought process, gaps in one's illusory sense of continuity and cohesiveness, the essential groundlessness of one's own being. The little gaps within the pigment remind us that we can peel each layer, layer by layer, and go back to the groundlessness of the painting itself, pointing us to the vacuity of the painting itself. Each painting, is to be experienced as a full, rich domain, dense in tonal ranges, and elusive in poetic 'truth', but it is also vacuous, a mere play of appearances on a white screen.

Helga Portanier (b.1980) is a Maltese artist based in Belgium. She studied Chinese and Japanese art (SOAS, University of London). Portanier has exhibited her works in Malta and abroad. She has held two solo exhibitions at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta in 2005 and 2008. In Brussels, 'Nowherescape', a solo exhibition, was launched at Cabinet Libre Choix, 2012. In October 2015 she participated in the Young Artists Milano Biennale. Portanier has been selected to take part in a collective exhibition at the Uccle Centre Arts, Belgium. Alongside her painting practice, Portanier teaches art in Brussels.

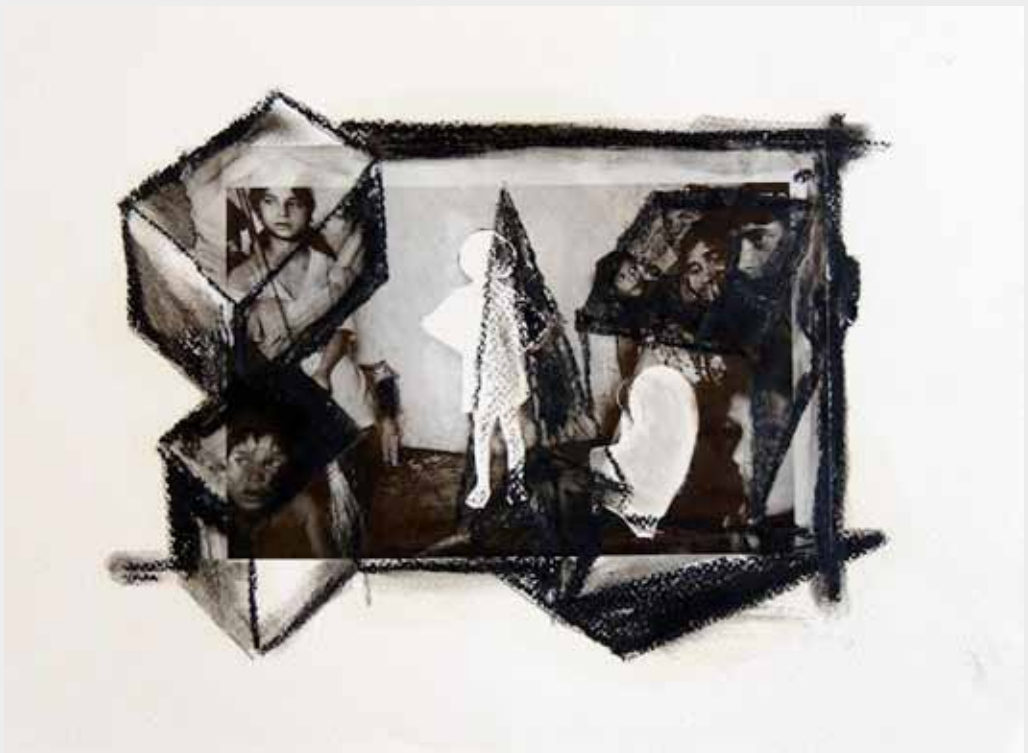


Roots of my faith, 2015, Graphite, ink, acrylic on canvas, 384x184cm

D. Priyanka

According to Indian mythology, God is present in every form of nature and nature is the purest form of creation. Thus, one can see the presence of God in it. From the beginning of the universe, in the cosmic formation, in the deepest depth of the ocean, one can feel the presence of God. As an artist, I observe these elements of nature and wonder how powerful these forms are. The smallest growth under the stone on the road side can be the most amazing form of art. No artist can claim to surpass the beauty it possesses. We can only imitate life and get inspired by it. The painting which is presented here is the result of observations of a found organic object which is only an inch in size. After completing hundreds of drawings, I discovered how monumental this form can be. This tiny object has so much power in it that can be transformed into a work of art. To complete this art piece, I simply observed what God created and transplanted it onto the canvas. For me, this is the ultimate form of devotion to God. Painting is another form of surrendering myself to the almighty. Painting is the path of salvation and by realising that we are part of nature, one of the many forms which is produced by the Creator. We are His creation.

D.Priyanka (b.1978) is an Indian artist who received recognition for her work in installation and oil painting. She has been regularly invited for exhibitions, residencies and art fairs. In 2015, she was awarded a Best Emerging Artist award. Today she lives and works in New Delhi, India. According to Priyanka; “one can feel the whole universe inside the smallest organic object lying quietly on the roadside. If observed carefully, you will feel the power of the Creator and no artist is able to reproduce the beauty of God’s creation.”

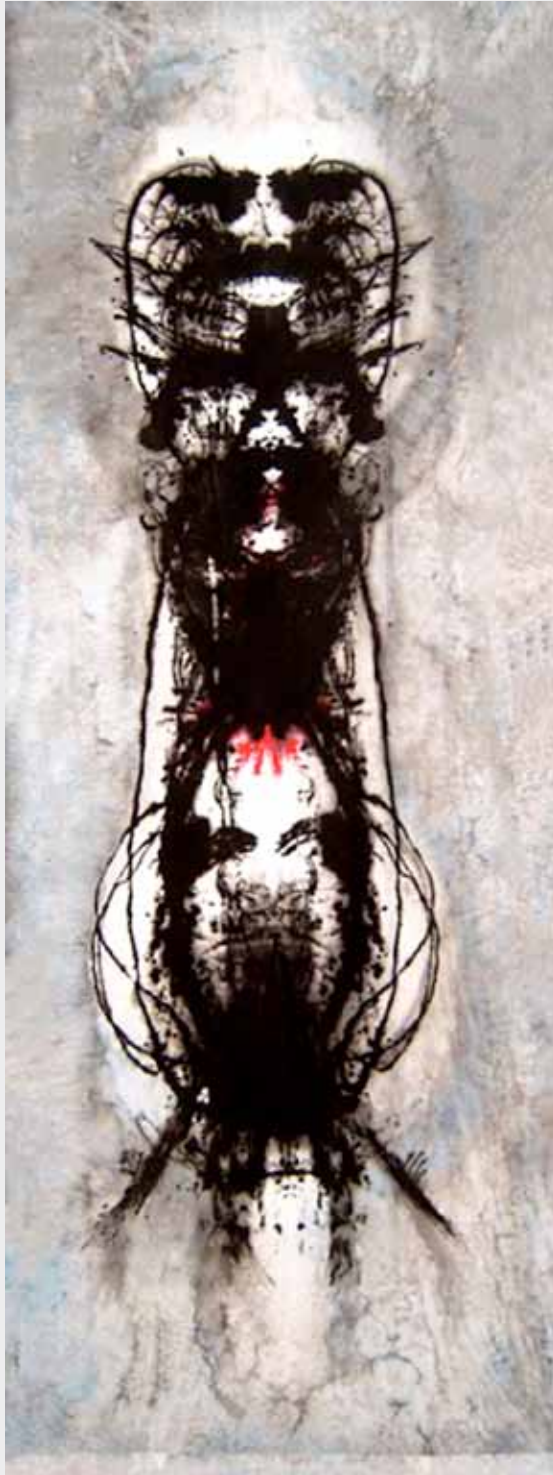


Everlasting Peace, 2015, Collage, Variable dimensions

Sandra Rizza

The individual should be stimulated by the feeling of community, and by the existence of peace between religions. Unfortunately, today fanaticism, violence and intolerance are dominating the global political scene. *Everlasting Peace* is a series of drawings and collages, realised for the Mdina Biennale, which desires to insert a message of peace and communion with the peripheries of the Church. I want to leave a strong message of peace which embraces all human beings, races and religions.

Sandra Rizza (b.1963) was born in Syracuse, Italy, where she lives and works. She grew up in an artistic environment since her mother used to paint. At age 14 she began her studies at the Art Institute of Syracuse under the tutelage of Alfredo Romano. Rizza also attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Catania in 1983, studying at the school of scenography. However, her rebellious character stopped her from completing her studies. Since 2008 she has been making frequent visits to Rome to further her artistic experimentation. In Rome, Rizza encountered the photographers Claudio Abate and Stefano Esposito with whom she collaborates.



Astral forces operate on human mind, 2015,
Acrylic on canvas, 750x240cm

Giovanni Ruggiero

My work is a gesture, a trace of colour, something was, but is not anymore. My work is a continuous development, it is always changing. There is a secret world which flows into human existence: it is an infinite circular line which cuts across Time and Space and then reaches the Origin, the Divine flow that gave birth to life. It is the same line that we leave across the air and in the earth when we trespass through; this line is composed of millions of cells that constitute our Cosmic memory, the existence of our divine DNA. The line crosses the space in which everything reconnects with itself, to its primordial creative power. We think that we are made of cells and matter, but during our own existence we generate an energy, a light that is in sync with the universe. That is the reason why we are immortal, despite our limited belief and knowledge. The breath of the sea, the atomic nucleus of a star, the wind and the clouds are all alive within us: we are the depositories of the trace of infinity. By the word infinite I mean the whole, the whole of existence that goes back to its unity: the unity of the whole as a generative principle of the cosmic existence of space and time.

Giovanni Ruggiero (b.1973) was born in Fontanarosa, Avellino, Italy. He has mastered various sculptural techniques associated with a continuous analysis of the soul. He lives and works in Faenza, Italy, where he is currently lecturing at the Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche. He exhibited in several solo exhibitions: 'Mind the gap', Oltredimora Gallery, Bologna (2011); '*Libera lama del pensiero*', Università degli Studi di Siena (2009); '*Introrilevi*', Overfoto Gallery, Naples (2007); '*Cambiamenti*', Modena (2006); and Intro, Faenza (2004). He also participated in several residencies such as: *Keramiksposium* Gmunden, Austria (2015) and a residency for the Campigna Prize, Italy (2006).



In-To the Sacred, 2012, Wood, mixed media, 60x80cm



In-To the Sacred, 2012, Wood, mixed media, 130x90cm



Interferences. Confused, 2008-09, Wood, mixed media, 130x90cm

Andreea Rus

The sense of exile and loss, the loneliness of the individual in contemporary society, accompanied by an attraction towards a *sense of sanctity*, lead to an aspiration for something higher than that which reality offers us. The feeling of isolation may direct us to reject reality as 'good in itself or wanted as such', allowing us to perceive the inadequacy between what is and what should be. This feeling may lead us toward religion. Alienation from the world makes us aware of the potential for better involvement in the world. Salvation from such overwhelming states can be found in that meaningful shift *into something*, which for us Romanians would mean the orientation *into* the divine. This is characteristic of our folklore, according to which the divine was part of all experiences and vicissitudes of man. The typically Romanian *into* implies the sense of becoming which would bring us into a permanent beingness. The path we must follow becomes visible. The *becoming into purpose* generates meaning for the life of the individual, a chance for salvation, a way to freedom...

Andreea Rus (b.1967) completed her doctorate studies in visual arts in 2010, graduating from the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She also completed an MA in visual art at the same institution. Rus has held a total of fifteen solo exhibitions and has participated in a large number of collective exhibitions in Romania, Moldova, Poland and Italy, amongst others. She is the recipient of several awards, including the 2014 Painting Prize awarded by the 5th International Painting Biennale held in Venice. Rus is a member of the Visual Artists Union of Romania (UAP).



Sa mesa 'e suighere' or *The bread-making table*, 2015, Wood and photography, Variable dimensions

Benvenuto Saba

It is a tradition, a language spoken by the hands, passed down through the ceremonial vitality of bread. It transpires in the daily ritual, its uniqueness a cardinal element of an island, and it tells of faces, of childhood flavours, the beginning of a tale overlapped by others whose syntax is long lost, yet whose primordial semantics live on. Bread laid out on the bareness of cypress wood, on its veins revealed by its gouges, not clamoring for attention because its presence is already a spiritual union, already a prelude to a return to Ithaca. Sculpture, bread, tradition turn into an expressive medium in Benvenuto Saba's hands, transcending the physical concept of an island, conquering a 'Mediterranean' space, where the course becomes the pretext to lionise a time in which personal memories may commingle with the emotional dynamics of every single seafarer who on each platter will cast the crumbs of his life's experiences.

Text by Elisa Favilli

Benvenuto Saba (b.1956) was born in Siamanna, Italy, but then moved to the Tuscan region of Versilia, where he still lives. He graduated in 1976 from the Art Institute "Stagio Stagi" of Pietrasanta (Lucca), and from the Academy of Fine Arts in Carrara in 1983 with a diploma in sculpture and photography. He works both as a design photographer and as a sculptor. Saba has collaborated with prominent designers like Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari and Angelo Mangiarotti, and has been working with leading Italian designers and producers of modern furniture. Saba's works are on display in major Italian and foreign collections.



*The Annunciation, Death and the Resurrection: a conversation with Favray, 2015,
Oil on stretched canvas, 160x100cm (each)*

Mark Sagona

This site-specific painting installation is made up of two abstract works conceived for the Late Baroque architectural setting of the chapel in the Mdina Cathedral Museum, flanking the *Annunciation of the Virgin* (1748), a painting by the French artist Antoine Favray (1706-1798). The measurements of the contemporary canvases are intended to reflect Favray's dimensions so that a triptych is created with the *Annunciation* as its central panel. This project aims to create a rapport between the traditional and the contemporary. The idea stems from my strong conviction that abstraction is a true manifestation of spirituality and the artist's spirit; thus its existence in a sacred space, and its juxtaposition with a work which although sacred in theme, is not necessarily spiritual. The intention of the project is to create a conversation between two seemingly different worlds which are then linked and interrelated through the thematic choice. This relationship is embodied in the language of light and colour which is consonant with my abstract language. It yearns for a tension between the academic and the contemporary, the figurative and the abstract, the fixed and the suspended, the ethereal and the tangible. The works emerge from meditation on the centrality of the *Annunciation* to the Christian faith: it announces the birth of Christ but also his death on the cross, and ultimately his resurrection. Hence, this tripartite dialogue transforms itself into a cycle, a cycle emanating from the past but independent of it.

Mark Sagona (b.1976) was born in Gozo. He is an artist and art scholar. Sagona studied at the Malta Government School of Art in Valletta and at the University of Malta. He completed his Ph.D studies at the University of Malta in 2014, where he is now visiting lecturer in the Department of History of Art. His works have been exhibited in Malta, Rome, Brussels and Paris. Sagona's works are found in numerous public and private collections in Malta and other European countries, Australia and the U.S.A. Sagona has conducted pioneering research on the decorative arts in Malta and has published in local and international publications.



Rules of Engagement, 2015, Ceramics, 71x33x45cm



Comrades-in-Arms, 2015, Ceramics, 60x50x15cm



Group Photo, 2015, Ceramics, wood, 96x63x16cm

Mario Sammut

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: In an active community, arguments and confrontations occur all the time. Conflicting ideas develop between opposing factions, which are sometimes brought together through meditation. These frequent clashes are essential to the building of synergy for a healthy society to develop further through the propagation of different and opposing ideas.

COMRADES-IN-ARMS: This sculpture represents a community which helps and assists each member and which gives importance to each individual, the lack of which leaves a gap in the integral foundations of a community.

GROUP PHOTO: The impact of social media on today's happenings has radically changed the character of social gatherings and historical events. If the Last Supper, being such an important event in Christianity, had to occur during the present time, a group photo of the Apostles lined-up together with Jesus Christ would have been appropriate. It would have been posted on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and gone viral. This image would have been available for the global public on all social media platforms to like and share.

Mario Sammut (b.1955) studied art under Antoine Camilleri, Esprit Barthelet and Gabriel Caruana. He has taken part in various collective ceramics exhibitions in Malta and has also exhibited his works in Cyprus, Frankfurt, Sicily and Denmark. He has been co-organising the Malta-Cyprus Ceramics Exhibitions since 2005. In 2013, his ceramics were selected to be exhibited at APS Bank. In 2010, his ceramic works were chosen for the European Ceramics Exhibition in Denmark and Sammut was elected as National Commissioner for ECC2014. As part of the Public Art for Gozo initiative, his bronze sculpture *Embracing Dancers* was installed at Xewkija, Gozo.



Neighbours III, 1992, Watercolour, 68x83cm

Michael Sandle

Exhibited for the Mdina Biennale is a series of nine etchings and original prints which confront the experiences of war and peace and the idea of identification with or of the other. The theme of war and peace is a recurrent theme one, as exemplified by *A Twentieth Century Memorial*, which was acquired by the Tate, London, and the Siege Bell Memorial, Malta. These grotesque Goya-esque images create a profound visual experience wherein the viewer witnesses the collapse of humanity by means of the numerous juxtapositions of form. Several objects are combined without losing the comprehensibility of each individual object. The notion of identity is posited as being autonomous from national definitions. The non-identification of nationality is seen in the depiction of the cadaver, the ruin of human life which is devoid of any nationalistic characteristics, characteristics which tend to provoke and justify wars. This collection of works highlights the futility of defending one identity against another, or the other.

Michael Sandle RA (b.1936) is a British sculptor. He studied at Douglas School of Art and Technology, Isle of Man and at the Slade School of Fine Art, London in the 1950s. He has worked in Canada, Germany, Rome and the UK. Sandle's works largely consist of monumental sculptures which critically address the negativities of war and capitalism. One of Sandle's milestone projects is the Siege Bell Memorial in Valletta, Malta. His works are found in the collections of major world museums including; Tate Britain, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Metropolitan Museum, New York and the Australian National Gallery, Canberra.



So That Nothing Is Lost, 2015, Ceramics, Variable dimensions

Valerio Schembri

“So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.”
(Jn 6:12-13)

Through a miraculous event Jesus fed five thousand “men” with five loaves and two fish, but when all were satisfied, He commanded the disciples to gather up the fragments. While leftovers are irrelevant to some people, they might be of great value to others and Jesus viewed them as important. This work will investigate the importance of fragments. Should we take fragments lightly? Can fragments add up to something greater? In a religious sense, aren't the leftovers of the miracle fragments of Divine Grace? Do we appreciate only our major achievements in life as blessings? Are we forgetting about the small ones? Are we too lazy to gather up these fragments of blessing? Do we underestimate the grace of God in our lives? The work is an installation consisting of twelve ceramic bowls, burnished with a magnesium oxide, pit fired and waxed. Within the bowls and also on the floor, ceramic (bread) fragments will be set up. Some of the fragments are glazed in a white colour (the Eucharist) and some in third firing gold plate (to highlight the importance of the fragment).

Valerio Schembri (b.1969) studied architecture at the University of Malta and obtained a master's degree in Baroque Studies from the same University in 2002. He presently he runs his own architectural atelier and his ceramics studio in Naxxar. As a ceramist Schembri has participated in various local collective exhibitions including several editions of the prestigious Malta –Cyprus Collective Exhibition held in Malta and Larnaca, Cyprus. Schembri describes his expression through clay as a medium as follows: “Ceramics for me is not solely a personal exploration and celebration of an artistic process but an attempt for fruitful interaction with a broader horizon.”



The Madonna in The Blue, 2015, Chalk pastel and pigment fixed on a pool table, wood, blue baize cloth with electric lights, 74x138x7cm

Richard Shields

For the Mdina Biennale is exhibited the acclaimed *From the Cradle to the Grave with Empty Pockets*, from the project ‘The Journey of the Artist and the Price of the Ticket’. The installation comprises of two green baize pool tables – one depicting Madonna and Child (after Raphael), the second Christ on the Cross (after William Holman Hunt). The work is a paradigm of the artist’s conceptual exploration of historical relationships between art, finance and the Church, finding in the faded ‘D’ the outline of a halo, and in the green baize an inextricable link to the banking patronage of the art world since the Renaissance. Additionally, I have created a new work, in direct response to my first visit to Malta with curators from ARTNAKED in early 2015. Taking inspiration from the Madonna’s presence throughout the Island, as both a symbol of reflection and communal celebration, I developed a fitting continuation to the series. Returning to historic painting techniques, the work simultaneously converses with the intrinsic tone of spirituality experienced in the Maltese Islands. Inspired initially by a statue near the ‘Chapel of Rđum tal-Madonna’ in the North of Malta, the development of the theme was furthered through introduction to adorned, illuminated churches during *fešta* celebrations and altars to the Madonna erected throughout Malta – juxtapositions to that calm reflection felt on the northern cliffs. This was an important statement for the making of this new work, *The Madonna in the Blue*.

Richard Shields (b.1980) is an artist, curator and writer based in Manchester, UK. Alongside his art practice, Shields contributes to arts journals including ‘a-n’ Magazine and lectures on his activities within universities and galleries throughout the UK and internationally. He co-founded the artist-led initiative ‘Contents May Vary’ in 2004. The site-specific features heavily in Shields’ work, where he uses everyday issues and the objects they provide as source material. Using traditional skills from drawing, painting and sculpture fused with found objects and relational aesthetics, Shields’ work assesses contemporary culture and values whilst offering a contextualised view in the same instance.



Where Shadows Fall - Ghosts of Urban Decay, 2014, Photography printed on archival fine art paper, 84x118cm

Joe P. Smith

States of abandonment and disrepair appeal to my emotions. I am drawn in by the obsolete dereliction. Decaying artifacts take me back to the past. They provide a rich visual stimulus which contrasts to the ultramodern and technological environment that is slowly enveloping us. I was immediately taken in by this derelict old town house on Strait Street, Valletta. A wonderful flight of stairs, arches, flaking paint, suitcases and their contents strewn across the floor. Framed holy pictures and antique vases, holy effigies and plastic figurines lined the mantelpieces. In my series of photographs I included my own shadow as a portable flash-head cast it across the flaking walls, the debris, the rotting doors and the fading curtains. In some instances I also utilised the light from bare bulbs hanging from the ceilings. Not unlike the phantasmagorical projections of the magic lantern used in 17th century theatre. In the process of losing myself in the space I abandoned all exterior thoughts as I sought to interact with the seductive elements of presence and absence through this reflective engagement with time. Like Derrida's theory of hauntology, I was seeking to bleed the past into the present by making myself a 'ghost' in this landscape, liberating myself from ulterior fears in the process. I wanted to connect with the defunct architecture, the ominous silence, the artifacts and the spiritual remains which were speaking back to me. This is an environment I feel comfortable in.

Joe P. Smith (b.1959) has a background in painting and also in graphic media. He has been a photographer since 1979 and is a Fellow of the Malta Institute of Professional Photographers and various UK professional photographic organisations. His preference is for monochrome photography, especially that depicting the performing arts. He has gained a acclaim for photographing musicians at the annual Malta Jazz Festival. Smith has exhibited extensively locally as well as overseas and has been the recipient of numerous national and international awards. He is often called to sit on the judging panels of photographic competitions and to deliver masterclasses.



A Quest for Truth, 2015, Oil on canvas, 220x160cm

Anthony Spagnol

I started with my own spiritual experience: a Christian experience. I felt that this spiritual journey could not be explored in a vacuum where I felt secure, comfortable, with my own faith. Such experience is more authentic when lived with the 'other' - those of different beliefs. My aim was to express my quest for the Truth. My work is inspired by Paleo-Christian and Byzantine imagery, which I consider the most sincere artistic expressions of Christian faith, distilled from other earthly philosophical concerns. Along my spiritual (but ceaseless) journey, I encountered the gnawing elements of conflict and doubt. I felt inundated with questions, overwhelmed by uncertainties and afraid of simplistic answers that do not suffice for the ardent seeker. Who holds the ultimate truth? Are there elements of truth in all religions? Who can speak with conviction and authority about God, who remains the 'other'? Why have religions, especially the people of 'The Book', the believers in the One - who is Almighty, Akbar, Holy - experienced so many conflicts, wars, crusades, so much bloodshed among themselves? This is a heartfelt plea; a prayer and a deep longing for true and mature dialogue, where past and present conflicts, doubts, hatred and violence can be nursed as a first step towards healing. Steering towards the many nuances of white that enables one to find rest, solace, knowledge, and perhaps the wisdom that transcends logic, I yearn for answers, parched for solutions but, more importantly, cherish hope. Am I naïve?

Anthony Spagnol (b.1960) studied at the Malta School of Art from 1974 to 1980. He later completed a Diploma in Painting between 1989 and 1991. Spagnol held four personal exhibitions at the National Museum of Fine Arts in 1993, 1995, 1997 and 2009. He also participated in numerous collective exhibitions. 'The Way', his most recent solo exhibition was held in 2014 at the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Valletta. He started his career as a figurative artist but later shifted towards abstraction. He believes abstraction is a highly spiritual language that allows him to narrate stories.



Corpse of Reality, 2015, Oil on panel, 120x90cm

Darren Tanti

“... the corps(e) of the Reality – if there is any – has not been recovered, is nowhere to be found. And this because the Real is not just dead (as God is), it has purely and simply disappeared. In our virtual world, the question of the Real, of the referent, of the subject and its object, can no longer even be posed.”
(J. Baudrillard, 2000)

The two artworks presented for the Mdina Biennale contemplate the words uttered by Baudrillard and seek to interpret such a statement in today's context. It seems that reality has indeed disappeared; we live life through the web with the aid of 'prosthetic' gadgets at an ever growing speed. Everything seems ephemeral and superfluous until our flesh is corrupted and our longevity compromised. It is then when we fear that 'God is dead'. When flesh turns against itself and threatens its host body (the only Reality we can testify to), and when one witnesses imminent collapse, something profound occurs; the world is silenced and poetry surfaces – mere mortals contemplate the Divine. There are those who believe that God is nothing more than a simulacrum, but it is amazing that when faced with dire situations, man begins to contemplate the Divine even though it may be nothing more than an illusion. Saints used to offer immaculate organs on silver plates to God. Perhaps nowadays it is through corrupt flesh that man seeks the Divine.

Darren Tanti (b.1987) is an artist renowned for his technically accomplished and thematically loaded paintings. He focuses on hyper-reality and the integration of the digital world into innovative painting techniques. In 2013 he was awarded a Masters of Fine Art in Digital Arts with distinction from the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, University of Malta. Presently, Tanti lectures at MCAST's Institute of Creative Arts and at the Department of Digital Arts, University of Malta. He has participated in numerous events, and in 2014 Architecture Project, a leading architecture firm, supported his participation in the Venice Architecture Biennale.

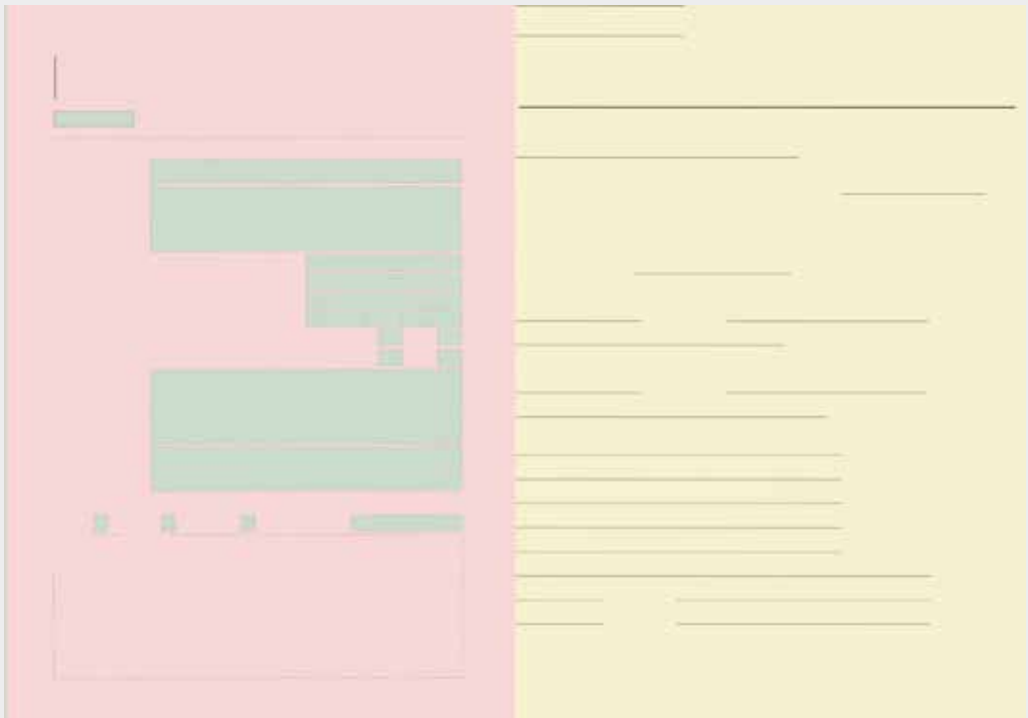


DIVINITY, 2015, Oil on canvas, 250x140cm

James Vella Clark

The exhibited project is a triptych entitled *DIVINITY*. It is composed of a blue panel, a central red panel and a green panel, replicating the format of the traditional sacred triptych in Byzantine art which formulated colours as a code. These three large abstract works in quasi-solid colour represent love, humanity and earth. As an artist, I see a deeply ingrained connection between large abstract works which command an overpowering presence over the person standing in front of the work, to the extent that a large work arouses more than a simple response but a spiritual awakening. This spiritual element in art is the main theme of the work that I am presenting. Art transcends everything because it is a divine act – the act of creation. Consequently, when art is created, emotions are aroused which drive us to achieve more. Ultimately, this proves our divine nature. Spirituality is also a personal rapport between the self and the higher entity with which the individual relates, however that entity is represented and conjured by the individual. My work *DIVINITY* is representative of three main qualities that make man a divine being – his power to love, his humanity, which although riddled with failures, contains a spark of the divine, and earth, man's source which has been created by a divine force. The suspended display of this work enhances the transcendental nature of art as a divine act.

James Vella Clark (b.1975) is one of Malta's leading painters. His abstract landscapes, heavily inspired by Malta's unique character, light and Mediterranean colours, seek to convey mood and meaning beyond the simple depiction of particular scenes. His abstract works are highly charged with Mediterranean boldness, spontaneity and passion which reflect the artist's personal character, whilst constantly attempting to establish a spiritual connection between the artist and his work. His works are representative of his human emotion and personal life. Vella Clark has exhibited in Florence, Barcelona, Kampen, Brussels, Berlin, Melbourne, New York, Paris, London and St Tropez.

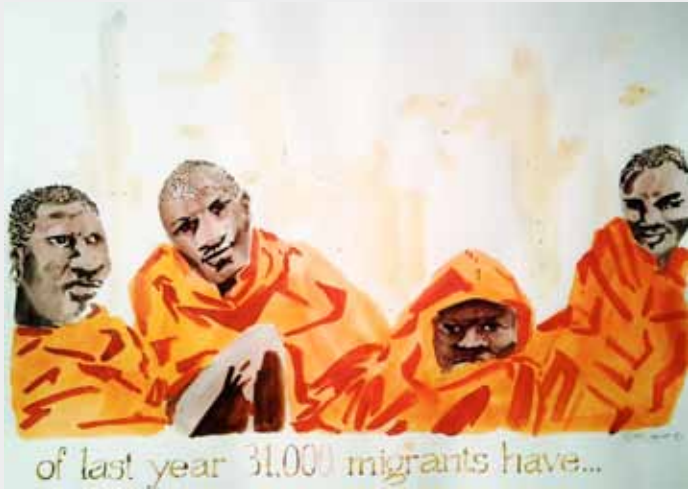


Church and State, 2015 – ongoing, (form 77) Notice of the Disuse of a Certified Place of Meeting for Religious Worship, (form 1) Application for Registration as a Voter, Variable dimensions

John Vella

Mute, coloured, geometric compositions, derived from contemporary religious and civic bureaucratic processes, are placed in contact with a suite of artefacts. Marked by 'the business' of church and state, this reanimated archive now oscillates awkwardly through the historic, pragmatic and poetic; between a decorative, functionality and a latent, obtuse spirituality...

John Vella (b.1969) has exhibited across international contexts that include: the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Hobart, Australia; the Stockholm Independent Art Fair, Sweden; Glasgow International Arts Festival, Glasgow, UK; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; The Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award, Melbourne, Australia; the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Australia and Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, Australia. Vella has been awarded five major public art commissions and received various competitive grants. He has guest lectured at Australian and European tertiary institutions and is currently the Head of Discipline (Art) at the Tasmanian College of the Arts, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.



12 apostle stories, 2014, Mixed media on canvas, 71x51cm

Michael von Cube

Wars instigated by the major world powers in the Middle East and also in many African countries have displaced millions of people from their homes. These refugees want to do nothing but escape death. They want peace and freedom and a living for themselves and their families, which they hope to find in European countries. The drawings, the production of which began in early 2014 specifically for the Mdina Biennale, show the fate of migrants and the often tragic outcome of their efforts. Using a reportage-style approach, an attempt was made to provide insight into the situation of these poor people. The often dismal living conditions, the problems with integration and social exclusion, but also the manner in which help is granted, have become a general principle of dealing with such people as shown in the series of 12 drawings. The large population of refugees which is ever-increasing, an end to which is not foreseeable at the present moment, trivialises the issue, as the 12 works convey. However, in a country where the shipwrecked St. Paul is a national religious symbol, the patron saint, those who experience a similar journey should matter.

Michael von Cube (b.1952) lives and works in Munich, Lower-Bavaria and Malta. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, under the tutorship of Prof. Mac Zimmermann. Von Cube's works have been exhibited in various cities in Germany, Venice and Malta, amongst others. He was awarded the *Cité internationale des arts* scholarship in Paris, the scholarship of the city of Munich and a working grant from the Art Foundation, Federal Republic of Germany.



Wall mural California, 2013, Red vinyl, Variable dimensions

Lena von Lapschina

As an experienced multimedia artist, I am well-versed in creating powerful, authoritative, yet sympathetic site-specific installations, both indoors and outdoors, formed uniquely for the place and the time in which they exist. Entering into a conversation with history, present and future in a single instant, my 'wall murals' are precise moments – open dialogues which may carry social, political or spiritual messages, but which ask just as many questions as they may venture to resolve. Specifically for the occasion of the Mdina Biennale, I have worked directly with the curators of ARTNAKED to conceive new work in the medieval walled city; work which will exist only for the duration of the Biennale. Working in temporary materials, a form will be composed in red vinyl across the chosen surfaces hidden deep within the warren of city streets and buildings. The final piece may be a drawing, a statement or a whisper; the manner of which to be determined upon my arrival in Mdina, and the response to my surroundings. Mdina, the 'Silent City', will become both the subject and the canvas, the inspiration and the foil for my work, juxtaposing Mdina's mountainous texts and imagery, the artwork standing as a reflected account of the spirit in the place itself. Communicating with the audience and binding the Biennale to the place that is its host, my work will be an interactive link on the Mdina Biennale trail through the city.

Multimedia artist Lena von Lapschina was educated at the Stroganov Moscow State University of Arts and Industry in Moscow, she now lives and works in Austria. Winner of the Austrian State Grant for Video and Media Art (2011), Lapschina has exhibited widely throughout the world, including solo shows in Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Romania, Lithuania, Italy, Croatia, Iceland, and as far as Vietnam and the Americas. In 2015, her solo show 'Yes/No' took place in Brooklyn, New York City. Lapschina has been invited regularly by major institutions to undertake residencies in Tehran (2014), St. Christoph (2012), Woodside (2011), Heerlen (2009), Saigon (2008), Strobl (2006) and Reykjavík (2006).

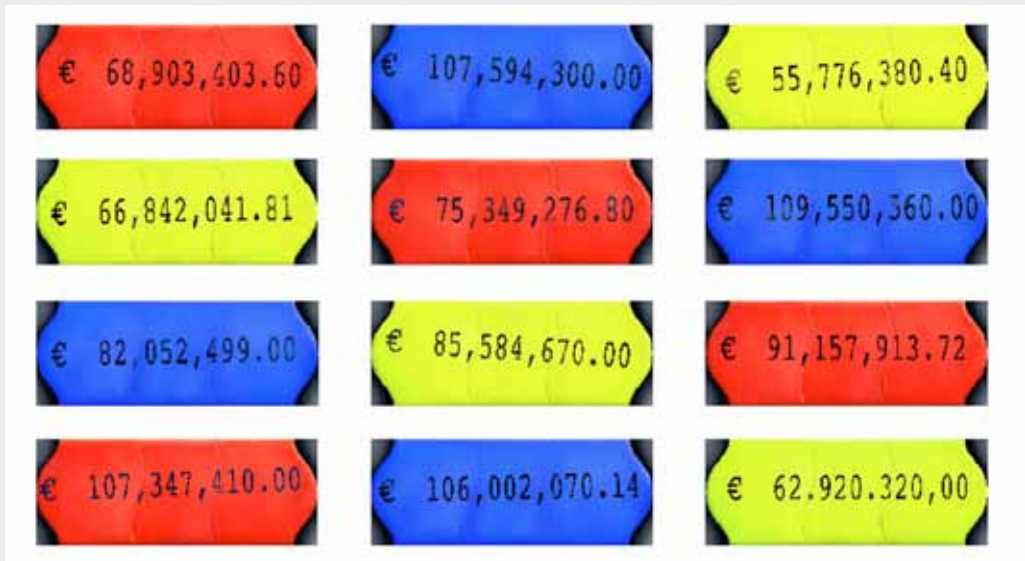


Exogenesis Trilogy, Floating in Space, 2015, Mixed media, Variable dimensions

Angelina Voskopoulou

The inspiration for this project came from the theory that the 'seeds' of life already exist throughout the Universe. Life on Earth may have originated through these 'seeds', hence the origins of life are not religious but spiritual, conceptually speaking. The idea of *Exogenesis* also concerns Chaos, meaning the science of entropy in a nonlinear and unpredictable fashion. *Exogenesis* makes us expect the unexpected. From Chaos, Eros is born, thus creating unity once again. My inspiration for this arose from Plato's 'Symposium', which refers to the creation of mankind. *Exogenesis* depicts energy; illuminated energy which moves freely inside the electrical field of the universe. It interconnects everything by holding and shaping the physical, spiritual and intellectual world, giving it life and movement. *Exogenesis* is all about the instantaneous moment.

Angelina Voskopoulou (b.1981) was born in Athens, Greece, where she currently works and resides. She graduated with distinction from the University of the Arts, London with a degree in Fine Arts and Technology, and also holds a master's degree in Digital Arts. Voskopoulou teaches at the Athens Cultural Centre of Art and New Media, whilst also practicing her own art. Her work has been shown in many art festivals and exhibitions worldwide in Greece, Italy, Canada, Sweden, London, USA, Spain, Peru, Argentina, Bulgaria, and Morocco. Most recently Voskopoulou's work was selected for the Short Film Corner of the Cannes Film Festival 2015.



Transcendence Line of Beauty, 2011-14, Pigment on canvas, 80x30cm

Siegmar Warnecke

The installation, *Transcendence*, evaluates the question about the reality of pictures in the context of the metabolism of the art market. Over the centuries the relationship between pictures and the audience has always shifted and changed. What is a picture today? The conceptual starting point of *Transcendence* was the question: Is it possible to encode the contemporary perception of art in a visual representation? How do we talk about pictures? Information theory tells us that a code is an algorithm, which uniquely represents symbols/ icons. It is a rule of representation between one image set (*Urbildmenge*) and another image set (*Bildmenge*). Where is the information in a picture? Art history presents a set of base elements in the discussion of art. These are colour, design, and aesthetics. These three elements are encoded in *Transcendence* based on the theories of Franciscus Aguilonius (*Opticorum Libri Sex Philosophis Iuxta Ac Mathematicis Utiles*, 1613) and William Hogarth (*Analysis of Beauty*, 1753). Is a picture just dirt on a canvas? The obvious signifier of attraction for artwork is the attributed money value. Each canvas represents the price tag of some of the most expensive pictures of today. Every masterpiece can and will be transcended by numbers. The audience has to resolve the last question: Is *Transcendence* just a representation of price tags or are they actually price tags? This would make the ensemble the most expensive artwork in the world.

Siegmar Warnecke works and lives in Munich. After studying art history and philosophy at J.W.G Universität and painting at the Städelschule, he attended directing classes at the HFF Munich. His works were exhibited in Frankfurt, Kokkola, Torino, Limburg, Wien and Munich. Warnecke has been a member of the Münchner Secession since 2010. The emphasis of his work is the examination of spaces and the genesis of narrative structures in the presence of humans. With ephemeral interventions he builds stress fields – to collide concepts, words, pictures or experiences. Art has no importance as creation but as an interception of reality itself.



Utunumsint, 2015, Photography,
Variable dimensions

Workshop on the Mount

The five columns represent the art group Workshop on the Mount, a group of Orthodox and Catholic artists of different nationalities from Moscow. The columns hang together, forming a square, a unity. One side of the square represents one image made by each of the five artists which depicts that which has most deeply affected each member over the past seven years of creating together. They investigate themes like desire, transcendence, death, social connectedness and rest. This side reveals the diversity among us, including style and subject matter. On the other side of the square is one circular image, made from the artists' individual images. This shows the energy, beauty and synergy of the group. There is a separation between the columns. On the one hand, this signifies the tenuous connection between the individuals; but on the other hand, it represents the Spirit, the sixth member of our group, who is free and moving among us. The block also symbolises community and the Church. The columns stand as do people gathered as a community, a worshipping body, each very different from the other in their struggles, spiritualities and histories; yet united by the Spirit which moves in, through and around each member. The community is the creative work of the Spirit's impulse and inspiration, gathering diverse people into one body.

Janez Sever SJ, Galina Moskaleva, Vladimir Shakhlevich, Vadim Moskalev and Svetlana Gaivan formed the Workshop on the Mount in November 2008 in Moscow, Russia. Through photo, video and installation exhibits, master classes, lectures and publications, the Workshop follows and teaches a creative process which seeks to relate artistic experience with lived spiritual experience in order to inspire a renewed vision of human identity through contemporary art. Each project involves a group study of the images and narrative of Sacred Scriptures, which pertain to the subject being investigated. The goal of each project is to create a platform for personal and communal witness to the spiritual depth and meaning of reality.



EVENTS

Opening Concert of the Mdina Biennale

Composer: Euchar Gravina

Conductor: Christopher Muscat

Soloist: Miriam Cauchi

Choir: Bel Canto Choir

The annual concert organised by APS Bank is this year part of the Mdina Biennale. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Christopher Muscat, will join forces with soprano Miriam Cauchi and the Bel Canto Choir in the world premiere and recording of Euchar Gravina's *Stabat Mater*, which had received the Special Jury Prize in the APS Bank Composition Competition held in 2012.

Euchar Gravina began his music studies in piano and theory at a young age, and then in organ with Rev. Albert Borg, former Maestro di Cappella of St. John's Co-Cathedral, later studying with Mro. Wayne Marshall. Gravina is currently reading for a degree in Music at the University of Malta, furthering his studies in composition.

Christopher Muscat holds a degree in music studies from the University of Malta as well as a Master of Music degree (with distinction) from the University of Surrey, where he studied with Sebastian Forbes (composition and choral conducting), Steve Goss (composition) and Nicholas Conran (orchestral conducting). Muscat teaches music at the University of Malta and sacred music at the Archbishop's Seminary, and is regularly invited to judge international vocal, instrumental and composition competitions.

Miriam Cauchi is a firmly established Maltese soprano, making a name for herself both in her native country and overseas. Graduating with full honours from the Sofia State Music Academy under the tuition of Prof. Blagovesta Dobreva in 1997, she furthered her studies in Milan with Juliette Bisazza Zanni and attended master classes with Magda Olivero in Barcelona. She is the recipient of the Gheorghii Slatev Cherkin Competition and the Bulgarian XIV National Competition Svetoslav Obretenov.

On A Caravan

Organist: Calvert Johnson

The organ recital will explore Arab and European cultures in two parts. The first part will include Spanish Renaissance music that demonstrates lingering influences of Arab musical culture (composers such as Antonio de Cabezón, Sebastián Aguilera de Heredia, Francisco Correa de Arauxo, Pablo Bruna, and José Jiménez). The second part will feature contemporary music by Arab composers (Lebanese Naji Hakim's *Aalaiki'ssalaam* and *Rubaiyat*) or those influenced by Arab music (John Baboukis, an American composer on the faculty of the American University of Cairo; Frenchman Jehan Alain, who uses North African melodies and rhythms; and Alan Hovhanness, an Armenian-American whose father was from Turkey). The ending will consist of some American works which feature the theme of conflict and resolution (African-American composer Sharon J. Willis on the Civil Rights movement, ending with a triumphant *Black and White Together: We Shall Overcome*).

Calvert Johnson is the Charles A. Dana Professor Emeritus of Music and College Organist, Agnes Scott College, and Organist, First Presbyterian, Marietta, Georgia. Johnson earned his doctorate and master's in organ performance at Northwestern University, where he studied with Karel Paukert, and his bachelor's at Kalamazoo College, where he studied with Danford Byrens (organ, harpsichord) and Mary Beth Birch (piano). Through the Fulbright-Hays programme, he studied at Toulouse Conservatoire (Premier Prix) with Xavier Darasse. Johnson has performed and lectured at many colleges and chapters of the American Guild of Organists (AGO).

Piano Recital

Mezzo-soprano: Anna Chan

Pianist: Carmen Tsang

Anna Chan and Carmen Tsang will perform an exciting repertoire which will include arias by Handel & Mozart, lieder by Brahms & Schubert, melodies by Duparc & Faure and English songs by Gibbs and Elgar.

Anna Pui-shan Chan is currently studying for a postgraduate diploma in performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance. She graduated from the Hong Kong Baptist University, majoring in vocal studies. She pursued further study in ethnomusicology and graduated with a masters degree in Philosophy in Music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Anna obtained the scholarship offered by Hong Kong Jockey Club via the Opera Hong Kong Chorus for 2011-2012.

Carmen Tsang graduated from the Hong Kong Baptist University. After her graduation, she pursued a professional music career as a piano accompanist in Hong Kong's core music-related fields, namely, ballet, singing and instrumental performances. She had won numerous awards in the Hong Kong Music Festival Piano competition. She was awarded the International BC Scholarship to pursue postgraduate studies at the Birmingham Conservatoire in 2015.

Aħna Li Bqajna

Composer: Mariella Cassar-Cordina

The concept revolves around the search for answers provoked by the departure of loved ones and the strength that one has to find within themselves to move on. One can find resilience and peace in different ways. The work is a reflective re-enactment of the thought-provoking American TV series *The Leftovers* (2014), which revolves around the disappearance of 2% of the world's population. The TV show focuses on a fictional town in New York and the lives of the members of its community. My re-enactment forms a conceptual framework which relates to daily struggles as portrayed in this TV series, and provides personal reflection on the psychological trauma which one experiences with the sudden departure of a loved one. The 'leftovers' are all connected by the same tragic event, and all deal with unanswered questions. They all have to find their own ways to survive and the right equilibrium to counteract the imbalance of the world. They are faced with unsatisfying explanations, deep emptiness, constant change, speed, uncertainty and the struggle for basic human needs. The project entails a live performance (voice) with pre-recorded sound and a video component. The modification of tempo (sound and vision), motion and duration, together with the multi-layered musical interventions shape the basis of the post-production process. The recordings of these interventions alongside a live performance and fused within the manipulated sound of the original music of the film form an artwork which functions as a network of interconnected elements.

Mariella Cassar-Cordina is a composer and an educator. She holds an M. Phil (Music) from the University of Malta and a PhD in Music Composition from Falmouth University, UK. Her works have been performed in Malta, UK, Italy, Austria and Czech Republic. She is also the Education Officer for Music in Malta, Lecturer at the School of Performing Arts and Faculty of Education, University of Malta, the founder of the Malta Association of Music Educators (MAME) and co-founder of *Ars Vitae Ensemble*. She is currently residing in New York, working as project director for *Orchestra of Our Time* (US), under the direction of Joel Thome.

Evgenija

Double bass: Gjorgji Cincievski

Guitar: Darko Bageski

Gjorgji Cincievski and Darko Bageski have worked together on many music projects involving many different genres of music. The *Evgenija* project has been their most emotionally-charged and enjoyable project, as well as the one with greatest meaning to their joined effort in music making. *Evgenija* was born as result of the wish and constant striving of both performers to dig deeply into the roots of Macedonian folk music and explore its rich heritage, paying close attention to the basics of traditional composition rules and forms. Its unique nature of instrumentation, the double bass being mainly played in the high solo register together with the virtuoso classical guitar approach, makes this formation one of a kind. Cincievski and Bageski have been praised for their harmonious means of expression as well as their performative energy.

Gjorgji Cincievski was born in Skopje, Macedonia where he began his double bass studies. He graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, UK. He has performed with some of the world's leading orchestras, giving concerts and master classes throughout Europe, Japan, Cuba and China. Since 2010 he has been the principal double bass player of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, whilst continuing his active role worldwide as a soloist, teacher and chamber musician. In 2014 he received an endorsement from the world-leading string company Pirastro.

Darko Bageski studied in Skopje and Zagreb. He graduated at the Higher School of Music 'Franz Liszt' in Weimar, Germany and he continued his postgraduate studies at the National Conservatory of Music in Thessaloniki, Greece. He has performed in Germany, Greece, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Sweden and the USA. He acts as a soloist with many chamber orchestras as well as with the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra. He is president and founder of the Association of Classical Guitarists of Macedonia and art director of 'Tremolo Guitar Fest' in Skopje. Currently, he is very active as soloist worldwide and he works as a guitar professor at the Faculty of Music Arts in Skopje.

Goldberg Variations

Composer: Johann Sebastian Bach

Transcription and Double bass: Gjorgji Cincievski

Violin: Marketa Janouskova

Viola: Nadia Debono

Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988) was first published in 1741. This work, originally written for harpsichord, is considered to be one of the most virtuosic and ambitious examples of the variation form in the Baroque period. The *Variations* are named after Johann Gottlieb Goldberg who may have been the first performer. Although never proven to be true, the story behind the *Goldberg Variations* is probably as famous as the music itself. The idea came to Gjorgji Cincievski, who wrote this transcription for violin, viola and double bass, from the fact that the main element of these variations is based on a single ground bass theme. The main difference of this transcription from the original harpsichord piece is the last four additional bars, at the end of the "Aria da Capo". Derived from the final bars of the piece, the idea of such a different conclusion is that it evokes the transcribers desire to try and prolong the ending, even briefly, of such a monumental work. This does not in any way dispute the original Bach ending but, on the contrary, it is consciously written to reflect the enormous respect towards this great master.

Marketa Janouskova ranks among the most promising young Czech violinists. She is a noted soloist and a chamber musician. She is a founding member of Palenicek Piano Trio, a violinist of the chamber ensemble *La Réverie* and a soloist of the self-crossover project FolkloreClassic, inspired by czech traditional music roots and accompanied by a czech traditional band. She was also invited to be a part of the *Goldberg Variations* project supported by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. Janouskova has given performances all around Europe and has made several recordings for Czech Radio and Czech Television.

Nadia Debono has been appointed Principal Viola with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, after 12 years as its co-leader. She also continues to be an active soloist, performing a range of works from the Baroque to the Contemporary repertoire. She is a member of the New Century Baroque Orchestra (NCB), an acclaimed international period instrument baroque orchestra. Debono is also a keen chamber musician. She has toured France, Italy, England, Tunisia and Scotland. She co-founded the Anon String Quartet and has collaborated with other chamber groups over the years.

Jazz Night

Vocals: Myriam O

Guitar: Marc Galea

Just as music has colour, colours have sound. However, individuals perceive them differently. We converge in common grounds since sounds and colours give some kind of emotional joy to all of us. Artists love what we do and do what we love most, and share this with the world. This is when art becomes a universal language, so we invite everybody to enjoy what so easily brings us together: music. The performance will consist of *bossa nova* jazz standards.

Miriam O is an artist, singer and painter born in Chile. She enjoyed a career as a passionate interpreter of jazz standards and Latin songs. She believes in the power of colour. She is sentimental, emotions push her to create. Nowadays, beauty and perfection are overrated. She feels that painting is a journey through the longings of the heart and the windmills of the mind, just as life itself. Oil remains her preferred medium; it is romantic, melancholic and infinite.

Marc Galea is a session guitarist, RGT Registered Tutor, and principal at the Euro Institute of Music in Hamrun. In 2008 and 2009 he was awarded the internationally-acclaimed RGT Guitar Tutor of the Year finalist award. In 2001 he held a teaching post at the Malta Society of Arts in Valletta. He attended a Berklee University summer jazz course in Perugia, Italy in 2005, where he studied with Jim Kelly and Mark White. He has also given master classes on Jazz Improvisation and History of Jazz at the Euro Institute of Music.

Notes of Faith

Composers: Albert Pace, Cristina Vilallonga, Karl Fiorini, Doron Kima

Notes of Faith was a project initiated by CARAVAN. The aim was to conceive a musical performance which could tie Middle Eastern and Western traditions together. Rev Paul-Gordon Chandler, President and Founder of CARAVAN, worked with Brian Schembri, Principal Conductor of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, to create *Notes of Faith*, which works around Doron Kima's composition *Seeds of Hope*. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra agreed to perform the world premiere of *Seeds of Hope*. The concert will include the works of four composers, who all offer the audience the opportunity to contemplate fundamental eternal questions of existence, faith, harmony and peace through the ethereal acoustic experience of outstanding musicianship.

Albert Pace: *In Amore illo ardeas*

This work is based on the chant *O Aeterne Deus* by St. Hildegard of Bingen. The title is taken from the second verse of the chant, and means "to burn with that (divine) love". The piece begins serenely with the chant, but as it goes along a sense of struggle develops, analogous to the struggle of faith which occurs even in the most saintly people. Each section in the first part raises the tension and the level of dissonance further, and is approximately a golden section of the previous one. The second part ruminates on the previous material. Pace was awarded an M. Mus degree in Composition with distinction by the University of Edinburgh and a D. Mus in Composition by the University of Malta. He is currently Visiting Lecturer in Composition at the University of Malta.

Cristina Vilallonga: *Aspiratio*

The composer takes respiration - aspiration - inspiration as a starting point of man's first day. The work is based on a cycle, a form which is present in all scales, since the birth of time. Men arrived on earth to deal with mystery and the divine. The cycles occur, from exaltation to doubt, going through the descent, the struggle, into lightness, and the ascension to a new start. Man goes through cycles in the attempt to reconcile material and eternal time. Vilallonga was awarded a Fullbright grant to study music and graduated in 1991 from Berklee College of Music (Boston) in Composition and Film Scoring. She has composed several orchestral and chamber music pieces.

Karl Fiorini: *Rêves Obscurs*

The work symbolises the opening verses of Dante's *Commedia* "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita", once Dante emerges from the selva oscura. This one movement work is divided into small alternating sections which gradually grow to form larger ones. Rather than having each section finishing its dialogue they are interrupted, but continue evolving when they recapitulate. This sudden change from one ambience to another represents the turbulent state of man's duality. Fiorini studied composition under Charles Camilleri at the University of Malta. His compositions have been performed in major European cities, in the US, Japan and Latin America. Fiorini is artistic director of the International Spring Orchestra Festival, an annual event which takes place in Malta.

Doron Kima: *Seeds of Hope*

Seeds of Hope is an East-West composition by noted Jewish composer Doron Kima for oud (Middle Eastern lute), nay (Middle Eastern flute), and Western symphony orchestra. It is a fusion of two different musical traditions, Western classical and Arabic music, into a single cohesive work. Kima holds a doctorate in music composition from Florida State University. He taught at Florida State University, the Open University of Israel and is currently a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley.

Organ Concert

Organist: Adriano Morea

The Malta International Organ Festival is collaborating with the Mdina Biennale to present a solo organ concert by Adriano Morea which will be performed on the historic pipe organ of the Mdina Metropolitan Cathedral, which was built in 1774 by the famous Neapolitan organ builder Domenico Antonio Rossi. From Frescobaldi to Biscione, this concert will grant the opportunity to get closer to the older and forgotten works from the Italian repertoire, together with the music of contemporary composers who pay homage to their predecessors.

Adriano Morea studied organ at the Conservatory of Bari with Margherita Quarta, graduating from the Lecce Conservatory as a private student in 2015 under the guidance of Orazio Maglio. He performs regularly in Italy, Austria and Germany, focusing on Italian organ music from the past until the present. He now lives and works in Vienna, Austria.

Versus (Of God and Man)

Composer: Reuben Pace

Choir: Collegium Musicale

Choir Conductor: Endrik Üksvärav

‘Has God created man or has man created God in his quest for the truth? How do different people view their relationship with God?’ These are the two main philosophical questions which this music work is based upon. The music is set for a chamber choir of 16 singers from Estonia, the Collegium Musicale, and 5 solo singers; a young soprano, a soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor and baritone. The text for the music consists of short poems and prayers written by school children from all over Malta and Gozo during their religion and personal development lessons. These short works were then fused into larger poems by students from the School of Drama and by freelance poets. The project is the original concept of the main coordinator of this event, Reuben Pace, a contemporary Maltese composer who also composed all the original music.

Reuben Pace read for a degree in music at the University of Malta, followed by a masters and doctorate at the University of Bangor, Wales. His works have been performed regularly in Malta as well as abroad by several performers. His repertoire includes over a hundred works ranging from works for solo instruments to an opera.

Endrik Üksvärav was as a singer and conductor in several ensembles. He formed the Collegium Musicale which immediately became established as one of the best choirs in Estonia. He is also a prolific tenor. Collegium Musicale was formed in 2010. The choir has won numerous awards nationally and internationally. It has also premiered several contemporary pieces by Roxanna Panufnik, Veljo Tormis, and Erkki-Sven Tüür.

March 16th, 1244: As Above, So Below

Composer and Pianist: Tom Armitage

Tom Armitage's piano piece *March 16th, 1244* is a work which explores the atrocities committed against the Cathar heresy in Medieval Occitania, and which resultantly destroyed the rich cultural and spiritual heritage in the region.

After studying at Birmingham Conservatoire and the University of Malta, British composer and pianist Tom Armitage has been heavily involved on the new music scene throughout Europe. He has given over a hundred world premieres of new works and has written for some of the most exciting musicians and ensembles around the globe. He is currently working on productions for Teatru Manoel Youth Opera with Valletta International Baroque Ensemble and Teatru Manoel Opera with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. His first opera will also be performed as part of the UK City of Culture 2017 festivities in Hull, England.

Ebullient Reverberations

Composer: Jess Rymer

Coreographer: Naomi Hunter

This performance piece will involve the projection of film, live dance and pre-recorded electronic music. The concept of the piece originated from the site of Greeks Gate, Mdina where there is a marble tablet which accompanies the sculpture of St. Paul above the archway. This bears an inscription which states that Mons. Paolo de Bussan granted a forty-day indulgence to whoever recited a Salve Regina in front of the archways. The piece will represent both the good and evil sides of indulgences and the concept will convey a message not only relevant to the history of Mdina, but also to the acute, world issues of modern society via a questioning of the falsifying and exploitation of religion for personal goals and the pleading for the preservation of integrity in such matters

Jess Rymer and Naomi Hunter are a duo based on the collaboration of a composer and a choreographer, with a unique aim and method. Over the past two years, Rymer and Hunter have created a diverse range of works including site-specific pieces. Their collaboration creates equality between the two art forms in order to produce work that is neither sound nor movement-driven but a confluence of ideas. Their work has been performed in the Open Space dance festival in Bath and many events throughout the south west of England.

L-Art Imwiegħda

Designer: Ritienne Zammit

L-Art Imwiegħda is a resort 2015/016 collection and art installation which focuses on the realities of the current migrant situation; what is the reason behind their departure? What is causing all this movement? Is it worth the risk? These questions and others have been the primary driving forces of this upcoming project for the Mdina Biennale.

Ritienne Zammit is a Maltese designer, known in the Maltese fashion industry for her experimentation with materials. The collections created by this brand are always based on the idea of investigating various concepts, while creating contradictions within the main sources of inspirations. Unusual textures, retrospective trends and new impressions/expressions in the design field are some of the main sources of motivation for the brand's identity. The character of the clothing made by this brand is a strong, rebellious and powerful one, with a dominant message for society. Zammit was awarded the 'New Designer Award' at the Malta Fashion Awards 2013.

Stirred Words: A Poetry Evening

Coordinator: Karina Fiorini

Stirred Words is a poetry evening which is being coordinated by Karina Fiorini for the Mdina Biennale 2015. The project aims to immerse the public into the world of poetry through a captivating talk which will be delivered by an expert in the field, and also through various poetry readings. The event will be showcasing poetry by both upcoming and established poets. It will create an auditory and stimulating evening by means of poetry expressed in both the Maltese and English languages. Key participants include; Claudia Gauci, Priscilla Cassar and Karina Fiorini, as well as former and current University of Malta students who will also be reciting their poetry. The event is partly organised in collaboration with the Department of English Students Association, University of Malta.

After gaining academic insight into the environmental world at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, Karina Fiorini is now reading for a degree in English with Philosophy. Last year, between April and October 2014, she co-organised poetry readings in Malta entitled *Bleeding Fine Lines*. In January 2014, three poems were exhibited as part of a collective exhibition by the Malta Women in Business. A year earlier, her poem 'Ruts' achieved third place in an international Canadian competition, while Bare Hands Poetry, an online journal published 'Warded Off' in 2012. In 2015 Fiorini began to organise the Luxembourg Poetry Group.

IV Annual Symposium on the Visual Culture of Death

MODERNITY AND THE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION
OF DEATH AND BEYOND

Convenor: Prof. Conrad Thake

Speakers: Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, Irene Biolchini

This year's IV annual conference explores themes relating to the visual representation of death in modern times within the context of a consumerist-driven culture which celebrates the quest for everlasting beauty and health, material well-being and infinite earthly pleasures. The troublesome thematic of the artistic representation of death was approached head-on in various past civilisations from the almost neurotic and obsessive fascination with death and the after-life in ancient Egyptian times to the medieval, and later Western Renaissance and Baroque epochs concerned with the complex relationship between humanity and the vanquishing of death through religious faith and dogma. This year's symposium will focus on the visual representation of death and beyond within modern and contemporary society as manifested in art forms, be it in a figurative or abstract manner, in painting, installation, sculpture and architecture. Western modern society has tended to sanitise the passage of time from our earthly existence to the realm beyond. The confrontation with the ephemeral nature of our existence on earth ultimately and inevitably leading to death is one that is characterised by considerable anxiety, stress and emotional discomfort.

“In His Own Image”

Speaker: Irene Biolchini

As written in Genesis, God made Adam “in his own image”. In 2003, Miquel Barceló presented his ceramic mural for the Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca. The body of Christ is represented at the centre of the work as a self-portrait of the artist, created to resemble the artist’s own image. Barceló, one of the most acclaimed contemporary artists, often reflects on the role of the spiritual in art and he is extremely interested in the concept of self-representation. During the course of this public talk, Irene Biolchini will present the ceramic production of the artist and also his most recent works. In her analysis of the representation of the body of Christ, Biolchini will also discuss the concept of mimesis in Miquel Barceló’s art in an attempt to compare it with other the work of other leading contemporary artists.

Peripheral Alternatives to Rodin in Modern European Sculpture

WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON JOSEF KALLEYA'S ART
AND THE VISUAL DIALOGUES OF AN ISLAND SCENE

Organiser: Department of History of Art, University of Malta.

Coordinator: Nikki Petroni

Speakers:

Dr. Sophie Biass-Fabiani (Musée Rodin, Paris)

Dr. Jon Wood (Henry Moore Foundation, Leeds)

Dr. Julia Kelly (Loughborough University)

Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci (University of Malta)

Prof. Joseph Paul Cassar (University of Maryland University College)

Mr. Ulrich Meinherz (Kesselhaus Josephsohn, St. Gallen)

Ms. Barbara Vujanović (Atelijer Meštrović, Zagreb)

This conference aims to bring together international scholars and researchers to discuss and debate not only the role sculpture was playing in the formulation of a new artistic language, but also to analyse the various idiomatic alternatives to Rodin which coexisted during the first decades of the 20th century and beyond. The French sculptor Auguste Rodin is widely considered as the forbearer of modern sculpture whose pervasive influence proclaimed him as the authority of sculptural art. However, Rodin's own developments were challenged by his successors and marginalised contemporaries who further pursued the aesthetic revolution catalysed by the French master sculptor. The conferences' objectives include the task to see how this new language related to various daring exponents of sculpture, such as the Italian Medardo Rosso, the more recent Swiss sculptor Hans Josephsohn, the Maltese contemporaries Antonio Sciortino and Josef Kalleya and the abstract monumentality of Henry Moore. The conference aims to create a trans-cultural scholarly relationship between the mentioned European sculptors and other relevant artists. It endeavours to question and debate the artistic hegemonic relationship between Rodin and these sculptural exponents. The conference is to further analyse the works of those pioneering sculptors who directed art towards original modes of representation within their respective socio-political situation and the international context. The significance of hosting a conference which debates divergent growths within the development of modern sculpture in Malta is to study the intellectual and aesthetic links between artists working within the leading artistic cosmopolitan centres and those situated at the periphery of the cultural avant-garde.

Francesco Zahra's Apotheosis

THE GLORIA OF ST. PAUL AT THE AULA CAPITULARE

Speaker: Prof. Keith Sciberras

The lecture discusses one of the major artistic productions of Late Baroque Malta, namely Francesco Zahra's paintings representing the Glory of St. Paul for the Aula Capitulare at Mdina. Prof. Sciberras will discuss this work within the context of Zahra's oeuvre and will place it within the framework of other works of art being commissioned from major painters, sculptors and silversmiths of the period by the Cathedral Chapter. In many ways, the ceiling of the Chapter Hall can be seen as the most remarkable of the Late Baroque decorative schemes produced by a Maltese artist. The lecture will analyse its complicated iconography and will also discuss elements of style, technique and methods of patronage.

Exhibition Talk

JOSEF KALLEYA, CARMELO MANGION
AND ANTOINE CAMILLERI

Speaker: Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

Josef Kalleya, Carmelo Mangion and Antoine Camilleri are three of the most important figures in Maltese 20th century art. Each of the artists developed their own individual artistic idioms, idioms which challenged the ideals of traditional art. Kalleya was a profoundly philosophical-theological artist who manipulated matter in order to attain the impossibility of immateriality. His sculptures portray a visible struggle with the creation of form as a spiritual act. Mangion's intense chromatic schemes, harsh black outlines and aggressive painterly execution opened up a new direction for Maltese painting. The artist greatly empathised with the subject matter of his paintings and also with the works of international modern masters. Camilleri saw artistic potential in any object or material, from natural substances to mass-produced things. Creativity was for Camilleri both a quotidian and a spiritual process. Artworks by all three modern masters will be exhibited as part of the Mdina Biennale 2015. Artistic Director, Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, will give insights on the artists, their works and their socio-political context. This is a great opportunity for the public to engage with the art of Kalleya, Mangion and Camilleri. The talk is part of the Department of History of Art, University of Malta's conference 'Peripheral Alternatives to Rodin in Modern European Sculpture'.