

**APS MDINA  
CATHEDRAL  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART BIENNALE  
2017**

**The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities**

APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2017

13 November 2017 – 7 January 2018

**Artistic Director:**

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

**Catalogue Edited by:**

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, Nikki Petroni

**Copy-editors:** Tonya Lehtinen, Robert Louis Fenech

© for the texts: the authors and the artists

© for the images: the artists. Peter Bartolo Parnis, Kevin Casha,  
Emma Micallef, Ramon Portelli

ISBN 978-99957-75-12-4



**APS MDINA  
CATHEDRAL  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART BIENNALE  
2017**

**THE MEDITERRANEAN:  
A SEA OF CONFLICTING SPIRITUALITIES**

**EDITED BY**

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

Nikki Petroni

# MDINA CATHEDRAL CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE 2017

**Under the Patronage of:**

Archbishop Charles J. Scicluna  
Mdina Metropolitan Chapter  
Mdina Cathedral Museum Commission  
Mons. Aloysius Deguara  
Fr. Rev. Dun Edgar Vella

**Artistic Director:**

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

**Curator:**

Nikki Petroni

**Assistant Curators:**

Alexandra Camilleri  
Melanie Erixon

**Social Media Manager:**

Audrey Rose Mizzi

**Marketing Assistant:**

Luca Miceli Demajo

**Public Relations and Communication****Coordinators:**

Alexandra Camilleri  
Melanie Erixon  
Audrey Rose Mizzi  
Nikki Petroni

**International Public Relations:**

Melanie Erixon

**Public Relations Assistants:**

Emma Borg  
Giulia Xuereb

**Website Content Manager:**

Nikki Petroni

**Curatorial Intern:**

Adrianna Broclawska

**Editorial Assistant:**

Naomi Bajada Young

**Administrative Assistant:**

Mithra Stevens

**Technical Coordinators:**

Noel Attard  
Clint Calleja

**Technical Assistants:**

Ray Axiaq  
Sephora Baldacchino  
Joe Bartolo  
Joe Gauci

**Project Assistants:**

Naomi Bajada Young  
Emma Borg  
Adrianna Broclawska  
Maria Cassar  
Claire Farrugia  
Aimee Galea  
Emel Hasanoglu  
Luca Miceli Demajo  
Magdalene Mizzi  
Sarah Portelli  
Mithra Stevens  
Lara Vella

**Lighting:**

Transient Light and Sound Ltd.

**Branding and Design:**

smple

**The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale would like to thank:**

Archbishop Charles J. Scicluna, Mons. Aloysius Deguara, Rev. Dun. Edgar Vella, Frederick Mifsud Bonnici, Emanuel P. Delia, Marcel Cassar, Keith Sciberras, members, students and former students of the Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, Mariella Cutajar, Gianluca Falzon, Patrick Aquilina, Jeremy Vassallo, Luca Bugelli, Katrina Xuereb, Ray Saliba, Mikael Mohamed, Jean-Roch Bouiller, H.E. Béatrice le Fraper du Hellen, Jean-Baptiste Prevost, Laurent Croset, David Bezzina, Naomi Gatt, Paul Sant Cassia, Jelle Bouwhuis, Fortunata Calabro, Tijen Tunali, Maria Cassar, Elizabeth Isabelle Borg, Kristina Cassar Dowling, Caroline Tonna, Sonia Bezzina.

**Special thanks to all the artists, authors, and contributors.**

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

Sharonne Fenech, Henri Portelli, and Simone Micallef; Charles and Monica Swain; Neville Sciberras; Luke and Angela Agius Barthelet; the Giuseppe Galea Family.

**The projects of the APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale were supported by:**

MuCEM  
Embassy of France in Malta

*For Robert Stokow's project:*  
German-Maltese Circle  
Goethe Institut

*For Lena Lapschina's project:*  
Bundeskanzleramt Österreich

*For the Frank Portelli and Esprit Barthelet exhibition:*

The Alfred Mizzi Foundation  
Fenech & Fenech Advocates  
Fenlex Corporate  
Fenech & Fenech Marine

**The APS Mdina Biennale would like to thank the Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta for its collaboration**



**L-Università  
ta' Malta**

Department of Art & Art History



# CONTENTS

Forewords.....	09
Preface.....	19
Contemporary Mediterranean Dialogues: Essays on Art, Politics and Spirituality.....	21
It must be this time... Somewhere else .....	23
<i>Fortunata Calabro</i>	
Modern Calls - Mental Walls: Willem Sandberg in Amsterdam and Israel .....	35
<i>Jelle Bouwhuis</i>	
Art Biennials as Contested Spaces: Conflicting Ideologies and Creative Criticism Surrounding the Istanbul Biennial .....	53
<i>Tijen Tunali</i>	
Shared Religious Cultures in the Mediterranean .....	61
<i>Paul Sant-Cassia</i>	
Cubism Beyond Paris: Mediterranean Interpretations.....	77
<i>An exhibition of paintings by Frank Portelli and Esprit Barthelet</i>	
Exhibition Catalogue .....	95
Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations .....	211





In art one can find the truth of the moment, which reveals the thoughts, and sentiments of mankind, begotten from the heart, created by the mind, and birthed by hands so as to elevate the idea. In this manner, art becomes the fruit of mankind's labours, while still being a product of specific situations, of social and geographical terms. Art is an intimate experience that is exposed to the scrutiny of all, despite still retaining the original experience of its conception.

God as creator is God as artist, because all of existence is the moment of truth in which God loved all. God is still an artist because He still loves, and He will still love and create. Due to mankind being created in His image, the greatness of art comes from this connection. Humans, like God, can love, can create and so their products are as well. The spiritual exigency of mankind elevates humanity towards God, gravitates them towards God, and makes them similar to Him.

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, as a human was the culmination of God's word and love, and became God's greatest achievement. The dependency on Christ helps elevate the human experience to evangelical terms, propagating itself as the highest peak to which humans can aspire to, while still being subjected to scrutiny.

It is in this way that art places us in our own reality, faiths and destinies. Art is a servant to God's ministry of love that surpasses time - the same love which is all encompassing and accepting. God, who creates ways to fulfil us, gives us strength even at our weakest points.

May every thing that humankind observes and creates in the expression of human experience becomes one with God, the merciful and thoughtful artist of Creation.

**Charles Jude Scicluna**  
**ARCHBISHOP OF MALTA**



The conservation of works of art in the museums is the source of the continuous formation of the people in historic, religious and civic education. Fortunately, our Museum has been fulfilling this job since its first beginnings, in a more efficient way during these last fifty years. It has been the “depository housing the results of cultural achievements attained by man’s will-power extending itself in all directions that emerge from human intelligence.” One of the means in attaining its success these last years is the organisation of the Mdina Biennale series, progressing every time in understanding the people’s desire to have a wider range of views on a definite characteristic of our cultural ideas.

In 1994, the event underlined the idea of museums as the result of the achievements of human intelligence developed during their intrinsic previous events. In 2002 and 2005, the Biennale defined sacred or spiritual art as the summit of religious art and emphasised its connection with the ‘noble ministry’ of artists.

In this edition of the APS Mdina Biennale, it will be declared that all art is to be spiritual in the sense that creative depiction, actions, and events reflect the individual’s relation with reality and with his or her existence. Artists will create site-specific works that investigate the theme and the permanent collection of the Mdina Cathedral Museum.

I welcome you all and invite you to visit the APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale and admire the big task undertaken by the organisers led by Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci. I thank you for your big effort. You are helping to perform the mission of the Museum in our country to all classes. I thank the artists for their participation.

**Mons. Aloysius Deguara**

**PRESIDENT | THE MDINA CATHEDRAL MUSEUM COMMISSION**



For the past few years, APS Bank has supported the Mdina Biennale in building this impressive showcase of the city's artistic vision, forward thinking attitude, and diversity. Thanks to the international and creative impact of this initiative by the Mdina Cathedral Chapter and that of the artistic director, Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, APS Bank has been proud to be associated with this event.

'The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities' is the chosen theme for this edition. This theme reflects the various cultures and religions, and explores the multiple manifestations of Mediterranean identity as visualised by past and contemporary art. The exhibition displays the works of a number of renowned Maltese and international artists who will challenge and interpret this theme through their works of art.

APS Bank wishes success to the organisers and participating artists of this edition of the Mdina Biennale.

**Mr Frederick Mifsud Bonnici**

CHAIRMAN | APS BANK



It is a pleasure and an honour to once again introduce the APS Mdina Biennale in 2017, following the successful 2015 edition of the project. Through the admirable efforts and riveting enthusiasm of my esteemed colleague, Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, the newly-renamed Department of Art and Art History at the University of Malta is intimately involved in the creation of an international forum for contemporary art.

The entire organisational team of the APS Mdina Biennale; the artistic director, curators, managers and assistants are members, tutors, students, and ex-students of the department who are dedicated to establishing a potent space for art and critical thought in one of Malta's foremost museums. History is being treated as a living source of knowledge, as something to be revisited, reinterpreted and challenged from our contemporary perspective.

This time around, the History of Art students will be collaborating with the Fine Arts students who are following the most recent programme offered by the department; the Fine Arts stream coordinated by Dr. Schembri Bonaci himself. The initiative to diversify and expand the department's remit has established new levels of educational interaction that are being implemented at the APS Mdina Biennale. History, theory and practice have come together holistically, with each person honing their talents and areas of specialisation throughout the process of realising this momentous exhibition.

'The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities' is a theme that resonates with contemporary artists and art historians alike. Malta's entire art history attests to the continuous exchange between Mediterranean cultures; the wealth of written, spoken and visual languages posits the country as a vestibule of *Mediterranieta*'. The APS Mdina Biennale looks back at this complex past and reinvents the dialogue through international contemporary art.

**Prof. Keith Sciberras**

HEAD | DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ART HISTORY | UNIVERSITY OF MALTA





I am very happy that, after the unprecedented success of the 2015-16 Mdina Biennale, I was kindly asked by the Mdina Metropolitan Chapter and the Mdina Cathedral Museum Commission to take on the challenge of directing the APS Mdina Biennale in 2017.

The philosophy behind the APS Mdina Biennale under my artistic direction includes the idea that a biennale must be a hub of ideas, challenges, exchange, collectivity, and innovation that has to evolve with the active participation of all involved as well as the audience. We are trying our very best to confront the mercantile-consumerist-commercial agenda that has engulfed the role of biennales all over the world.

Another important and integral part of this very same philosophy is that in times of 'post-truth', meaning the insincere, of 'the ugly', of the 'futility' of aesthetics, in times when art has become fashion and money, consumed in a global context of aggressive wars, human and environmental displacement, famine, and poverty, the Mdina Biennale lays emphasis on the vital concept of spirituality in whatever form.

Two years ago, contemporary approaches to faith and non-faith, spirituality and its absence were debated with the theme 'Christianity, Spirituality and the Other'. In 2017, all artists have had to tackle a very relevant and loaded topic; 'The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities.'

The Mediterranean region encompasses various cultures and religions. From the interaction between East and West has emerged a history of conflicts and struggles that are represented by the powerful visual cultures of each diverse community. The contemporary political scenario emphasises the need for the arts to respond to an era of crisis and destruction. Being at the centre of the Mediterranean, Malta is a significant place for such an artistic dialogue to be exposed and challenged. Furthermore, the city of Mdina was home to multiple faiths and artistic cultures.

Artists from Malta, Italy, Lebanon, Israel, France, Germany, UK, USA, Russia, Jordan, Poland, Austria, Serbia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, and Australia will meet, exhibit, discuss and will actively contribute to the Mdina Biennale's evolution into a regular space for free creativity and idea-exchange in the midst of a sea of contemporary turmoil. The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale tasks to give life to the contemporary within a space that retains a strong and vivid past.

**Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci**

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | APS MDINA CATHEDRAL CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE**

# PREFACE

The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale is a project that merges the weight of a dynamic past with present-day experiences through the visual arts. All participating Maltese and international artists have been asked to create work linked to the space and collection of the Mdina Cathedral Museum and to the theme 'The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities'. Months of collaboration engendered compelling discussions on history, culture and politics that have resulted in the diverse projects exhibited throughout the museum. Each artwork takes a critical look at those subjects which resonate with our daily lives; history, religion, ecology, myth, urban culture, migration, spirituality, geography, the archive, identity, and the media.

This year, the APS Mdina Biennale has collaborated with MuCEM - the Museum of Mediterranean and European Civilisations in Marseille - to present two contemporary video works from the French national collection. These take a look at Mediterranean cultures and traditions from the perspective of two artists from the region. Contemporary art is complemented by the paintings of two twentieth-century Maltese artists; Esprit Barthet and Frank Portelli. This section of the exhibition focuses on the Mediterranean adaptation of Cubism's philosophy and aesthetics through the works of the aforementioned Maltese modern artists, a topic that will be discussed within its global context during the 2017 annual modern art conference organised by the Modern and Contemporary Art Research Programme of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Malta. Another link with twentieth-century art history was made during the month of October when the 1930s nude figure drawings by Maltese artist and decorator Giuseppe Galea were exhibited at the museum as a prelude to the APS Mdina Biennale.

In keeping with the ethos of inciting creative and intellectual dialogue, the catalogue is not solely intended as a representation of the visual element of the APS Mdina Biennale, but is also a space for textual investigations of the exhibition theme. Scholars and curators have produced essays related to their research and practice, adding a further dimension to the artistic focus of the project.

The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2017 came together with the indispensable help of APS Bank, who once again supported the vision of artistic director Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci and the efforts of the entire curatorial and organisational team. As a project that builds upon tradition and provokes the development of contemporary aesthetics and intellectual thought, the APS Mdina Biennale is an initiative that offers a profound and enduring view on the present state of art and its possible futures.

**Nikki Petroni**

**CURATOR | APS MDINA CATHEDRAL CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE**

**CONTEMPORARY  
MEDITERRANEAN  
DIALOGUES**

**ESSAYS ON ART, POLITICS  
AND SPIRITUALITY**



# IT MUST BE THIS TIME... SOMEWHERE ELSE

Fortunata Calabro

*...I recognize the divine origin of all nations and therefore their value in being as they are, respect their laws, and feel my existence solely as a bridge of good fellowship between them. This is why, on my own ship I fly my own flag, why I have my own passport and so place myself without other protection under the goodwill of the world.*

GEORGE DIBBERN<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the world has been marked by numerous traumatic events that resulted in mass migration. World Wars I & II are the most notable wars; however, there have been armed conflicts before and since then in all regions of the world. At present, wars occurring throughout the world are the primary source instigating mass migration.

Recently, the world was affected by the largest recorded mass migration in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The crisis saw people forced to leave their countries due to continuous states of extreme conflict, resulting in them abandoning houses, families, and communities, often ending in a loss of many lives. Their identities, both as individuals and as nations, have been upended, and how the rest of the world perceives them has shifted from their being migrants to *refugees*.

---

1 George Dibbern, *Quest* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941).

Migration has largely been portrayed in a negative light, not only through the rhetoric used by the media, but also by many governments, who cite migration as a contributing factor to the financial crisis, and as a burden for the EU.

Just as for many years the Berlin Wall had symbolised division, the Mediterranean Sea now seems to play a similar role as a barrier of division. A new border has been formed which the refugee cannot straddle but is still forced to navigate. An apparent ‘invisible’ frontier that contrasts leisure, wealth, and glamour for the lucky versus the harsh reality of becoming a refugee for others. The picturesque background of the Mediterranean bears witness to the trauma and displacement of the people who continue to move through it.

Juan delGado, a socially-engaged artist based in London, has worked extensively on this subject since long before it become a focus of the media. He travelled to Greece, Macedonia, and Calais to record the journeys taken by different refugees. In his work delGado presents powerful fragments of experiences and fleeting moments that tell the human story of people caught in the unfolding sweep of history.

delGado aims to understand the force of art to engage and express political sentiments. At the heart of his work is a firm revolutionary belief in the possibility of societies reforming and improving. Behind its obvious involvement with current issues and concerns, delGado’s art is always oriented toward shaping an ameliorated future.

In the contemporary political scenario, delGado emphasises the need for the arts to respond to an era of crisis and destruction to recompose itself and rebuild what has been destroyed or put under pressure. The arts can contribute to and help reinforce civil and political resilience. Resilience also points towards an element of civil, aesthetic, and political ‘elasticity’. The arts are a site where activist strategies and techniques can be developed and performed by drawing the imagination into new modes of resistance and persistence.

But who is the responsible agent of this situation, if there is a single agent? Which power is to blame? Religions? Capitalism? Corrupt governments? Defunct colonialism? Abuse of power? People’s indifference? Lack of empathy? The West? The East? Or perhaps each of these elements together?





**Juan delGado**

*Evening Impasse, 2014*

Medium: C41 Photographic Print | Dimensions: 70x50 cm

Location: Mediterranean Sea

Is it perhaps Western culture reaching an end and losing its specificity as it proceeded on its road to westernising the world? The decline of western culture is established the day the West interprets itself as a culture of man's domination over things.<sup>2</sup>

*Somewhere else* was a special project dedicated to the refugee issue and exhibited in London in 2016. The project is a journey. As a storyteller, the artist scrutinises, assesses, critiques, and recounts an intimate experience of travelling through an unfamiliar landscape through which the real life experience of thousands of refugees reverberates.

Art plays an important role in raising awareness in society. Many movements in art history have tried to change society in one way or another: Dada artists advocated for silliness and nonsensical behaviour in daily life as the only response to the horrors of the First World War. Fluxus sought to promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, living art, and anti-art through its network of international artists. And groups like the Situationist International played a major role in the revolutionary events of May '68 in Paris by exposing the divisions between artists, consumers, and the means of production. And of course, art can take the form of protest, addressing political and social issues through direct action. But can art make a difference?

Through their work, artists can be the voice of the unheard, drawing attention to issues that concern all of us as human beings.

I have interviewed the artist Juan delGado, who has a long career in working with social and political issues, especially regarding what concerns the Mediterranean conflicts.

### **What can you tell us about these projects and the initiative in which they are framed?**

In 1989 I was living in Valencia, Spain and had my first experience of meeting with an 'illegal' — as they were called then — immigrant. Frank had arrived a week before and was trying to find out how to establish [himself] in a city where he knew nobody, could not speak the language, and which had no resources for newcomers. In our accidental encounter, he explained that he left his country Nigeria due to the increased fear of being murdered. The

---

2 Umberto Galimberti, *Il Tramonto dell'Occidente* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2005).

young man told me he was an agricultural engineer and his father's family had been farming in the region of Ogale for decades. Then the Anglo-Dutch oil company Shell implanted a factory in the region and the water and land became polluted. Frank's father complained about this and he was killed. I listened carefully to Frank's story of how he was forced to leave, and thereafter his sister and mother, first to Senegal, and then for Spain. He crossed the desert into Morocco, and with others, mainly young men, met a mushrooming network of smugglers who crossed them through the Strait into Spain. Frank had never seen the sea and his mixed feelings when he was confronted with it was something that I wanted to represent in the work that I produced later, *Fléchés sans corps (Arrows Without Bodies)*, 2003.

### **Why does your art focus on human crises? What is the aim of your work?**

In 2011, I travelled to Nablus after being invited by the organisation Artschools Palestine. There, in collaboration with the Media Department of An-Najah University, I developed a project in which we examined how free the Palestinians are to move around what is called the West Bank, and particularly the city they lived in. On many occasions, we were filming in the old city, or some other neighbourhoods which were classified areas A, B, C, for they were under control of the Israeli Defense Forces. The Old Medina neighbourhood where most of the old outlets and shops were located had to close due to an endless curfew that restrained their trading hours; so the place became an empty area after 8.30pm. We filmed the city exactly as it was. The final piece was an on-site installation in a former soap factory in Nablus and later at the Ethnographic Museum in Birzeit. The local residents came to see the work, which had a big impact on a community that has been under siege for years. I understood that art could be a powerful tool for transformation; an empty space being activated through this exhibition encourages reflection and gives perspective on the way we live.



**Juan delGado**  
***Orestiadas, 2016***

Medium: C41 Photographic Print | Dimensions: 70x50 cm  
Location: Orestiadas, Greece

## **What are the good and bad things you experienced in doing this sort of work?**

The ideas explored are also linked to the experience of living the context in which they are generated. As an artist I immerse myself in the situation the work will address later.

## **What did you learn from the people you met?**

Having this opportunity to engage with local artists and community groups gave me an understanding of how art practitioners developed their practice in this part of the world very differently from those in London. I also had the chance to learn more about the recent history of the region, their thinking, cultural identity, and expectations: how the Palestinian economy has been badly affected, as with the example of the soap factories in Nablus, through a policy of overcharging taxes for goods that are imported and that have to go through Israeli customs to the extent that some companies had to close: how this ‘invisible’ occupation and control of the economy and trade informs the current situation that has impacted the lives of individuals and communities across the West Bank.

On the other hand, I met several Syrian artists who are displaced in Turkey; Fine Art students who had to flee due to a regime that forced them to be in the army, or be imprisoned if they refused. These young people found themselves in another country, with limited access to education, work, and their art. I was struck by their resilience and determination to continue and develop their careers. This had a tremendous effect on my own practice when I decided to produce *Altered Landscapes*.

## **Your works focus on the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. How can art help this tragedy?**

Like many artists, since the beginning of the civil unrest in Syria, I was rapt by the increasing levels that this tragedy was reaching; like many, I felt compelled to find a voice in responding to the current crisis through reflecting on how

a reality which surpasses any possibility of narration, such as the colossal dimensions of this tragedy and its many aspects, can be represented. This is also the reflection I am currently doing through my art practice; I understand there is a responsibility of engaging the audience with this reflection, in such a way that doesn't turn the work or the subject of the work into a commodity.

## **Do you think you have the right to account for other people's tragic stories?**

In my practice, I am responding to ideas that preoccupy me as a human being. The British writer Virginia Woolf highlighted how men make war. Men (many men) like war. As a man I also acknowledge that in my art practice, which is interconnected with the world and the experience of living in the world. The humanitarian crisis, the exile, death, and tragedy many hundreds of thousands are facing, such as with the case of Syria since 2011, has an enormous impact on my practice and yet, talking about others' suffering — how I miss Susan Sontag these days — implies an understanding of our position in the world.

## **Can art improve/change the world?**

Again, following Woolf's reflection, can we recoil from the allure of war or conflicts? How do we feel (together) when looking at images of war, disaster, the on-going humanitarian crisis? Woolf says we respond with the same words: 'horror and disgust; war is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost', and as Sontag states, 'who believes today that war can be abolished? No one, not even pacifists. We hope only (so far in vain) to stop genocide and to bring to justice those who commit gross violations of the laws of war.' And what is the role of art in this? Can a filmic narrative, a televisual documentary, a striking photograph of dead bodies have any impact on an audience watching the tragedy unfolding before their eyes, the narrative of those victims claiming for their suffering to be just acknowledged? In 1945, the British painter Francis Bacon shocked the educated panel of an art salon in Paris with his triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* — he himself recalled that 'I was in a bad mood of drinking, and I did it



**Juan delGado**

***River Vardar*, 2016**

Medium: C41 Photographic Print

Location: Macedonia

under tremendous hangovers and drink; I sometimes hardly knew what I was doing.' By looking at this work John Russell described being shocked by images 'so unrelievedly awful that the mind shut snap at the sight of them.' The work has been on display in one of the galleries at the Tate Britain, and has retained its genuinely startling impact according to the Irish writer Colm Tóibín.

### **What inspires you? What are you looking for?**

There is no inspiration, nor am I looking for specific themes. I am just responding to the situation that we are living in, and as an artist I use my creativity to construct a narrative, either visual or auditory, experiential, with the intention of shaking the viewers out of their comfort zone, with the hope that they question their human condition.

### **If any, who are the heroes of your art?**

I am interested in the unfolding stories of those individuals and collectives who have been through a massive challenge in their lives. People I meet, who might come from a humble background, and yet their presence encapsulates the definition of what defines us as human.

### **What are your future challenges?**

My interest in examining how a society or an individual responds to the experience of mobility limitation, whether that is financial, physical, emotional, or political, led me to start a new project called *Qisetna*, an online platform I initiated in 2013 with a small team of Syrian refugees. Together we have been collecting stories and recording the individual accounts of people fleeing their homes, in transit, crossing borders or resettling across Europe. This project is now growing to promote art produced by writers, visual artists, and singers who live displaced in Europe and beyond, who could narrate their experiences and also share stories that the war has taken away.



## What role is contemporary art meant to play in all this?

Contemporary art has many goals, trends, and is part of a global economic market. Great works become commodities, objects on display for the entertainment of upper classes in thousands of events across the planet, where sometimes the subject of it is excluded and invisible. I think we have an opportunity to shake the perception of culture as a commodity and claim spaces in order to inquire into the current situation, beyond art itself. We live in a time of urgency, and so art must build a foundation out of which to question the human condition and our relation to the world.

## Who is Juan delGado?

A nomadic enquirer.

**Fortunata Calabro** was born in Italy. She is an art historian, independent curator and art producer. Calabro has conducted research at The Wallace Collection in London and at the Queens Museum in New York. She was Associate Curator of La Bienal del Fin del Mundo (Argentina and Chile) and Exhibition Manager at La Bienal de Las Fronteras (Mexico).

Fortunata works as a production manager for international art fairs such as Pinta (The Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art Show, London/New York), Art Marbella (Spain), and CROSSROADS (London). Calabro frequently participates in conferences and has published several papers in online and print publications.

**Juan delGado** was born in Spain and in 1994 moved to London, where he lives and works. Since his graduation in Media Arts at University of Westminster in 2001, delGado has produced a wide range of works in photography, moving image, and installation. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at: Tampere Film Festival, Finland; Mardin Biennial, Turkey; Clandestino Festival, Sweden; ARTBO, Colombia; Adelaide Film Festival, Australia; Calgary Film Festival, Canada; End of the World Biennial, Argentina; Birzeit Ethnography Museum, Palestine; National Gallery, Scotland. delGado has been awarded grants and commissions by the Colombian Ministry of Culture, Arts Council England, Wellcome Trust, British Academy and the Spanish Ministry of Culture, amongst other prestigious institutions.



# MODERN CALLS - MENTAL WALLS

WILLEM SANDBERG IN AMSTERDAM AND ISRAEL

Jelle Bouwhuis

## Introduction

It is an understatement to say that, in the modern art museum complex, traditionally little or no attention has been given to the Global South. Only in the last few decades, with the rise of the 'economic tigers' and the biennial exhibition format, has this ignorance been firmly put on the agenda. Yet, with the financial crisis and its aftermath, to which we can add war and turmoil in West Asia, the traditional economic power regions of North-West Europe and the U.S. have found a perfect excuse to once again pit the North against the South, Us against the Other, the West vs. the Rest. In this worldview, the Global South seems to have moved further up North than ever, even crossing – along with thousands of boat refugees -- the Mediterranean, entering Spain, Italy and especially Greece, which are now regarded as the financial deficit states of the European Union. The failed states.

We human beings feel very much trapped by this financial hijacking of our lives. Modern art, its genealogy and its institutional embedment in the form of the Modern Art Museum is thoroughly intertwined with the 'post-colonial constellation'.<sup>1</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, while continuing on the work of post-

---

1 The term was coined in Okwui Enwezor, 'The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition', *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 57-82.

colonial thinkers such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, has coined the phrase ‘colonial matrix of power’. This matrix has pervaded Enlightenment philosophy and the formation of public institutions, the exclusivist tendency which he proposes to ‘de-link’ by giving voice to those silenced (historical) thinkers on the dark side of the matrix.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay I want to focus on the colonial positionality of the modern art complex through the life and work of the Dutch museum director Willem Sandberg (1897-1984). I focus on specific moments in which he, personally or through his institutional work, invoked the Global South. I contend that such invocation almost by definition was to promote modernism, that is, a specific branch of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries regarded to have almost seamlessly developed into the contemporary art. It is this contemporaneity that was advocated by the modern art museum, through the contradistinction with a primitive, exotic world associated with a distant past, before modern times. The Mediterranean can be taken as the geographical axis on which this rhetorical balancing was performed.

## Willem Sandberg and decolonisation

So far, the scholarly work on Sandberg is fragmentary and often hagiographical in nature.<sup>3</sup> His life and work have never been related to colonialism even though his directorship of the Stedelijk Museum (1945-1962) is framed by the end of the German occupation over the Netherlands and the almost simultaneous declaration of independence of the Republic of Indonesia (the

---

2 Writings by Mignolo abound on the internet, for example ‘Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality’, in *Globalization and De-Colonial Thinking*, special issue of *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21-2/3 (March 2007): 1-75.

3 Sandberg’s international reputation notwithstanding, a studious, critical biography is still missing. Ad Petersen & Pieter Brattinga, *Sandberg – A Documentary* (Amsterdam: Kosmos, 1975) is an anthology of biographical and bibliographical notes published in Dutch and English on the occasion of Sandberg being awarded the Erasmus Prize together with E.H. Gombrich. Ank Leeuw Marcar, *Willem Sandberg – portrait of an artist* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2004) is a collection of interviews with Sandberg held in 1970/71. Caroline Roodenburg-Schadd, *Expressie En Ordening. Het verzamelbeleid van Willem Sandberg voor het Stedelijk Museum, 1945-1962* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2004) is a thorough research of Sandberg’s activities at the Stedelijk Museum. Max Arian, *Zoeken en scheuren – de jonge Sandberg* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Kessel Publishing, 2010) is a survey of Sandberg’s life up until 1945.



*International Exhibition of Experimental Art*, known as *First Cobra Exhibition*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, November 1949, showing Karel Appel's *Man and Animals* made for the occasion.  
Photo: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Dutch Indies) in the beginning, and the transfer of Dutch New Guinea to that Republic (now the Papua province of Indonesia) at the end of it. Even more so, after his retirement from the Stedelijk he became active at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in a position that can be compared to that of artistic director, in a period that covers the 6 Day War in 1967. He continued his institutional activities for the museum until after the October War of 1973. Before his directorship, he famously had also experienced first hand the other side of the colonial matrix during the Second World War, when he became active in the Dutch resistance movement, was declared outlawed by the occupation force and needed to abscond for more than a year. His image as a progressive museum director greatly benefitted from that biographical fact, and he would often refer to it extensively in later life.<sup>4</sup>

Sandberg's incessant and successful efforts to revamp the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from a multipurpose assembly of art and cultural historical exhibits into an internationally acclaimed museum of modern art and design has gained him a seminal status. Originally trained as an artist and a self-taught graphic designer, he became a founding father of the modern art institution and in many respects the Western European counterpart of Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Sandberg was much less an academic but all the more a socially engaged person who saw modern and contemporary art - the institutionalisation and consecutive terminological interchangeability of the two is certainly one of his legacies - as a tool to redress imaginations of class and cultural differences stained by Nazism and war into the universalising denominator of 'the modern' realised through the museum.<sup>5</sup> His close involvement with the conception and architectural competition of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in the early 1970s can be seen as a cumulative result of this art emancipatory attitude, in which modernism transgressed from marginality before the war into a successful public affair in the decades after.

---

4 At the occasion of an honorary lecture at the Israel Museum (c. 1975), invited to talk about his work as a graphic designer and museum director, Sandberg almost exclusively addressed this wartime experience. Recording kept in Stedelijk Museum archives, CD643.

5 On the interchangeability of 'modern' and 'contemporary' art and the genealogy of the latter term, see also Terry Smith, 'The State of Art History: Contemporary Art', *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 366-383.

When Sandberg became the director of the Stedelijk Museum (literally: Municipal Museum; it was a department of Amsterdam's municipality) he was set on a trajectory of international modern art, including applied and graphic art, industrial design and photography, and initially also architecture. Probably taking cues from Alfred Barr in New York (whom he had visited before the war) and the Bauhaus, he steered the museum on a course in which it would get rid of most of its displays and collections that did not fit the modern art category. This included, for instance, a pharmacy and a clock collection. Until 1952 the Stedelijk also hosted the collection of the Asian Art Society, which invested in historical fine art from China, India and the Dutch Indies.

The canonical event that underscored Sandberg's policy was the exhibition and first manifestation of the international CoBrA group at the Stedelijk Museum in November 1949. It became retrospectively known as an event in which a young generation of artists and writers demanded space for free expression in reaction to the Dutch political atmosphere at the time, which was basically seen as a continuation of pre-war preoccupations generally regarded as dull and suffocating. CoBrA artists exalted anti-academic expression such as African art, children's drawings and outsider works. Constant, the major Dutch spokesman of the group, evoked the liberating atmosphere that coincided with the monetary expansion of the Marshall Plan, and the definite end of the colonial administration in Indonesia just weeks after the exhibition.<sup>6</sup> But with the Asian Art collection housed in the same museum, the Stedelijk was simultaneously also a carrier of that colonial burden. One of the first poems of Lucebert, an early yet brief affiliate of CoBrA, waywardly evokes the Dutch colonial nostalgia by disrupting it with expressions of war

---

6 The Dutch generally persist to date Indonesia's independence 27 December 1949.



Exhibition *Modern Art - New and Old*, New Wing, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Summer 1955, showing Jacques Lipchitz *Figure* and *Study of 'Figure'* with a Bakota mask (West-Central Africa).  
Photo: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



and violence, generally interpreted as an anti-colonial protest.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition was a scandalous success and eventually CoBrA protagonists such as Karel Appel would reach the highest rank in the pantheon of canonical Dutch art.

## Modern Art – New and Old

The CoBrA exhibition was surely an artistic challenge to governmental business-as-usual administration and its aligned colonial order that was now severely on the wane. Retrospectively, it was just one event in a development in the institutional appropriation of modern art and modernism; a development that at the same time implied the polishing and negation of its inherent political edges. This becomes clear from a later hallmark ideological exhibition *Modern Art – New and Old* in 1955. More clearly than any previous exhibition, this one revealed the didactic and mass-orientated scheme of Sandberg's modern-art-isation of the Stedelijk. This exhibition pitted modern North-West European art by, among others, Duchamp-Villon, Klee, Lipchitz, Mondrian and Picasso, against masks and attire from certain regions in Africa, as well as shields and bark paintings from the Melanesian region and Dutch New Guinea, and archeological objects from the (Greek) Mediterranean. It also conjoined modern art with large black and white photographs evidencing urban modernity such as skyscrapers and train wheels. Situated in the then recently opened New Wing of the museum, with its large glass facade revealing the

---

7 Lucebert, pseudonym of Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk, *Minnebrief aan onze gemartelde bruid Indonesia* (love letter to our tortured bride Indonesia), dated 19 December 1948, which coincides with the second military expedition of the Dutch against the Indonesian republics. Published in 1949 in CoBrA magazine, it seems to have been Lucebert's debut. See also Gerard Termorshuizen, 'De roep om merdeka. Inleiding', *Indische Letteren* 11, (1996): 51-55, [www.dbnl.org/tekst/\\_ind004199601\\_01/\\_ind004199601\\_01\\_0008.php](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_ind004199601_01/_ind004199601_01_0008.php) (accessed 23 August 2017). The 'Manifesto' by Constant Nieuwenhuys, published in 1948, is more generally regarded as foundational of the Dutch leg of CoBrA. It exalts the liberating, individualist gesture, the painting as 'an animal, a night, a scream,' rallying against post-war bourgeois society, however without any specific reference to colonialism. Constant, 'Manifesto', *Reflex: orgaan van de experimentele groep in Holland*, no. 1 (September/October 1948), [www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/manifesto.html](http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/manifesto.html) (accessed 23 August 2017). The main reference work on CoBrA is Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra. Geschiedenis voorspel en betekenis van een beweging in de kunst van na de tweede wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1974) and subsequent editions in which she equates the moment of CoBrA with the breakthrough of modern art in the Netherlands. CoBrA is an acronym of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, where the group's protagonists were active.

displays to public view on the streets, the message it conveyed was the ubiquity and inevitability of modernism. It expressed the idea that abstraction and free expression was regarded as a universal artistic language concerning peoples around the world – a timeless language as well. To underpin the importance of this didactic scheme, the displays could be entered without having to pass the museum's main entrance, and without paying the regular admission fee.

Taking place in the summer of 1955 the exhibition overlapped with a major European art event, the first *Documenta* in Kassel. Both shows seem to have their didactics in common. The *Documenta* exhibition hall opened with a monumental photographic wall picturing the same kind of art objects that the Stedelijk had on actual loan from Dutch ethnography and archaeology museums. Walter Grasskamp takes the *Documenta* photo-wall as a starting point for an argument about the exhibition as a correction to the infamous Nazi-instigated, extremely popular 1937 *Entartete Kunst* (*Degenerate Art*) show in Munich, in which similar photographic conjunctions were used with the aim to ridicule abstract and expressionist art. Eighteen years later the first *Documenta* thus functioned as a corrective, a decisive reevaluation of the previously downplayed modernism, which of course happened in the Cold War context and with the Iron Curtain in close proximity of Kassel. Yet Grasskamp also analyses that this *Documenta* omitted the politically radical artists, as well as many of the Jewish artists, i.e. the main targets of *Entartete Kunst*. By highlighting modernism as a predominantly formal development, the *Documenta* pictured modernism basically as a politically neutral, mass-proof bourgeois affair.<sup>8</sup> We can firmly state that this is exactly where the Stedelijk had arrived six years after the CoBrA event with its politically charged pathos.

---

8 According to Grasskamp, 'such a strategy of legitimation fits with an image of a reduction of modernism', Walter Grasskamp, 'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed', in *MuseumCulture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, eds. D.J. Sherman and I. Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994), 163-196; 171. The Museum of Modern Art in New York probably offered the example to the Stedelijk with early exhibitions such as *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) and *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art* (1948-49). See also Nana Leigh, 'Creating Ancestors and Affinities. A Rhetorical Analysis of African Art in the Story of Modern Art', *Stedelijk Studies*, no. 1, thematic issue *Collecting Geographies: Global Programming and Museums of Modern Art* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2014), online at [stedelijkstudies.com](http://stedelijkstudies.com).

## Bringing the modern museum to Israel

In 1953 Sandberg was invited to the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem to the opening of a Dutch art exhibition. Eager for international modernism, he would soon after organise an Israeli artist group exhibition and a monographic survey of Joseph Zaritsky, the art-patriarch of the new nation's international modernist image. A solo show of Zaritsky's contemporary Mordecai Ardon, whom Sandberg had already met in 1922 as the Bauhaus student named Max Bronstein, followed in 1960.<sup>9</sup>

Ardon, an advisor to the ministry of education and culture of Israel, was instrumental in drawing Sandberg into the Israel Museum. This museum was conceived as the successor of the former Bezalel Museum and was to include new collections such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was obviously intended as the national hallmark for culture.<sup>10</sup> To secure a smooth transition to this enormous expansion of institutional scope and scale, it was deemed necessary to hire an international museum professional. Sandberg, with his sound international reputation as a tireless promoter of modernism, had become available after his retirement from the Stedelijk. Employing him at the Israel Museum would thus also grant this institution the luster of his epitomic persona of the international modern.

If Sandberg had any hesitations to his being employed by an Israeli institution, there is no evidence of such whatsoever. The only barrier for him seems to have been the nature of the appointment as 'advisor'.<sup>11</sup> In 1966 he managed to obtain a firmer rank in the hierarchy, as 'Chairman of the executive committee' (which seems to have also been a tailor-made position).

---

9 In the Summer of 1922 Sandberg had met Itten and his Bauhaus students in Herrliberg, Switzerland, a centre for the Mazdanan movement, to which he adhered. Leeuw Marcar (2004), 56.

10 For a brief history of the museum, see James S. Snyder, 'The Israel Museum: One hundred years of Beauty and Sancity', coll.cat. *The Israel Museum Jerusalem* (New York/ Jerusalem: Abrams/Israel Museum, 2005), 7-21. Snyder is currently 'Director Emeritus and International President for the Museum's Worldwide Activities' (Wikipedia).

11 Being merely an advisor was obviously too vague a position, yet he accepted. The correspondence between the two started in 27 December 1963, Amsterdam City Archive, SMAA00015000028-54. The Israel Museum was presided by Teddy Kollek from 1965 until 2006; this close ally of David Ben-Gurion was also the mayor of Jerusalem from 1965 to 1993. The Israel Museum holds a photo reportage of Sandberg and Kollek guiding Ben-Gurion through the museum on its inauguration day on 11 May 1965. See also Lapidot, M. & A. Miron, *1965 Today* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2015), 327.



Exhibition *Modern Art - New and Old*, New Wing, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Summer 1955, showing Jacques Lipchitz *Figure* and Paul Klee *Ludus Martis* (1938, far left) among Oceanic and Papuan bark paintings and shields.  
Photo: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

His permanent presence was required anyway. In the Spring of 1964 he and his wife Lida Augustin moved to Jerusalem, while the museum building was still under construction.

Accepting any position in Israel enabled him to maintain his international networking with intensity. Such is revealed by his reports of extensive international trips to Europe, and later also to the United States, kept in the archives of both the Israel and Stedelijk Museum. Furthermore, it provided an outlet for his graphic design practice: during the whole period of his directorship at the Stedelijk he had also been its in-house graphic designer. Graphic design enabled him to provide a persuasive inevitable image of universal unity. The Israel Museum was also eager to learn from his expertise with corporate graphic museum design. Indeed, the most lasting mark that Sandberg has left from his work in Israel is the museum logo still in use today. It consists of four clearly discernible pictograms symbolising the different departments of the museum, caught in the unifying totality of the quadrangle (its original frayed edges were later on straightened).

### **Modernist complicity**

Sandberg used to write aphoristic texts. In later life he sometimes self-published these texts, in which he reflects on contemporary life. In one such longer text, published in 1968, he dwells at length about the age of leisure that came with the modern welfare state. Society paces forwardly, he states, and the surplus leisure time will be dedicated to unconstrained creativity, signaled by the hippie movement and heralded by the modern art masters. With some Marcusian bravura he predicts that leisure will eventually force equality among all people. A postscript indicates that most of these insights were born in 1966 when he was living in Jerusalem. He evokes the times of the crucifixion and 'the suffering of races in silent revolt', and continues with describing the 'eternal landscape', where 'everyday brown herds of dribbling sheep come grazing a lively note', clarifying that 'this scene acts as a background to my considerations about today.'<sup>12</sup> The Global South in which he was actually strolling around functioned once more as a rhetorical step-up to a modernity elsewhere, like it was in the CoBrA exhibiton and *Modern Art - New and Old*.

---

12 Text dated December 1966, NU2 (Hilversum, 1968); see Petersen (1975), 131-148.

In another text dated 1967, probably written two months after the 6 Day War when Israel had captured Jerusalem's old centre, he further elaborates his metaphor of an eternal medieval city that counterbalances modernity. This time Sandberg invokes Northern European renaissance painters 'who embraced the city, [although] the city did not embrace the renaissance.' Women still 'wear baskets on their heads.' The streets are not fit for traffic. At best, Jerusalem is a tourist curiosity. From this Christian and orientalist backdrop, he responds to the question of what needs to be done with the Old City's demolished Jewish quarter. Referring again to the age of leisure, he promotes Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation*, and subsequently advises to erase what's left of the Jewish Quarter to replace it with megalomaniac architecture that appropriately reflects the times that are a-changing.<sup>13</sup>

Being a contemporary in his understanding did not imply being sensitive to cultural history and political tensions. At the Stedelijk under his reign, 'doing' contemporary art had become a progressive educational tool for getting over certain historical sensitivities and antagonisms. That was the lesson he brought to the Israel Museum and its success is proved by the fact that his disciples there, notably the renowned life-long curator Yona Fischer (b.1932), would soon outdo him in contemporaneity.<sup>14</sup> But in the process, curating became the term for merely getting acquainted with new art and artists, which is a step away from reflecting and emulating the violence of suppressive nationalism. Putting the internationally sanctioned and a-political contemporary art world at the centre of attention, one easily overlooks the exclusive, nationalist bias that ignores the importance not only of *what* is chosen as being of interest,

---

13 W. Sandberg, 'une cité d'une harmonieuse unité', *Ariel - Revues des Arts, des Lettres et des Sciences en Israel*, nr. 19 (Israel: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1969), 80-88 (English edition nr. 23, 1969). The issue is dedicated to Jerusalem. Sandberg's contribution in the magazine is ambiguously dated 8.4.67. Sandberg's opinion reverberated at the international Jerusalem Committee organised in Summer 1969 by Kollek to discuss the urban planning issues after the unification (annexation) of the city. See Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground. Archeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 178.

14 From my conversation with Yona Fischer in Tel Aviv, 24 March 2016. Around the time of Sandberg's appointment at the Israel Museum, Fischer became a year-long trainee at the Stedelijk Museum under supervision of Ad Petersen (b.1931), another disciple. It must be noted that Sandberg, suspected of Communist sympathies, was denied entry in the U.S.A. for most of the 1950s and 60s and thus lacked experience of contemporary art networks there.

# ZARITSKY

# RUSLI

**stedelijk museum a'dam**

**tot 12 oktober**

Willem Sandberg, exhibition poster for *Zaritsky / Rusli*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, December 1955. The solo show by Rusli (Indonesian, 1916-2005) is also a proof of Sandberg's genuine interest in modern art worldwide. Photo: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



Teddy Kollek, David Ben-Gurion, Willem Sandberg, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 11 May 1965  
Photo: The estate of Rolf (Michael) Kneller, courtesy of Israel Museum.



but especially *who* is choosing.<sup>15</sup> Naturally, Sandberg's relative neutrality and international status made him the ideal signpost and vehicle for Zionism - and complicit with it.

### **The art museum and neo-liberalism**

The shift of attention from modern art's absorption of political antagonism to the mere issue of what is new, called contemporary art, runs parallel with the broader project called neo-liberalism.<sup>16</sup> New art institutions are mushrooming on an almost global scale and there is hardly any existing museum that is not prioritising major extension plans – supplying a convenient outlet for both surplus leisure time and the surplus capital of global finance. The European South is suffering from the extraordinary inequalities created by global finance. But elsewhere it creates opportunities. The recently opened, privately financed Palestinian Museum in Bir-Zeit just outside Ramallah should be seen in this slightly ambiguous perspective. This museum definitely serves the idea of Palestinian cultural self-destination by creating the necessary space for that, without interference from Israel.<sup>17</sup> But the neoliberal way of defining art and culture through quasi-public institutions also creates the 'undoing' of political antagonism and the covering-up of moral deficits.<sup>18</sup>

What about Sandberg? Given his central focus on the modern art museum as an inclusive institution in both the Netherlands and Paris, which he in a way also continued in Jerusalem by being very supportive of the establishment

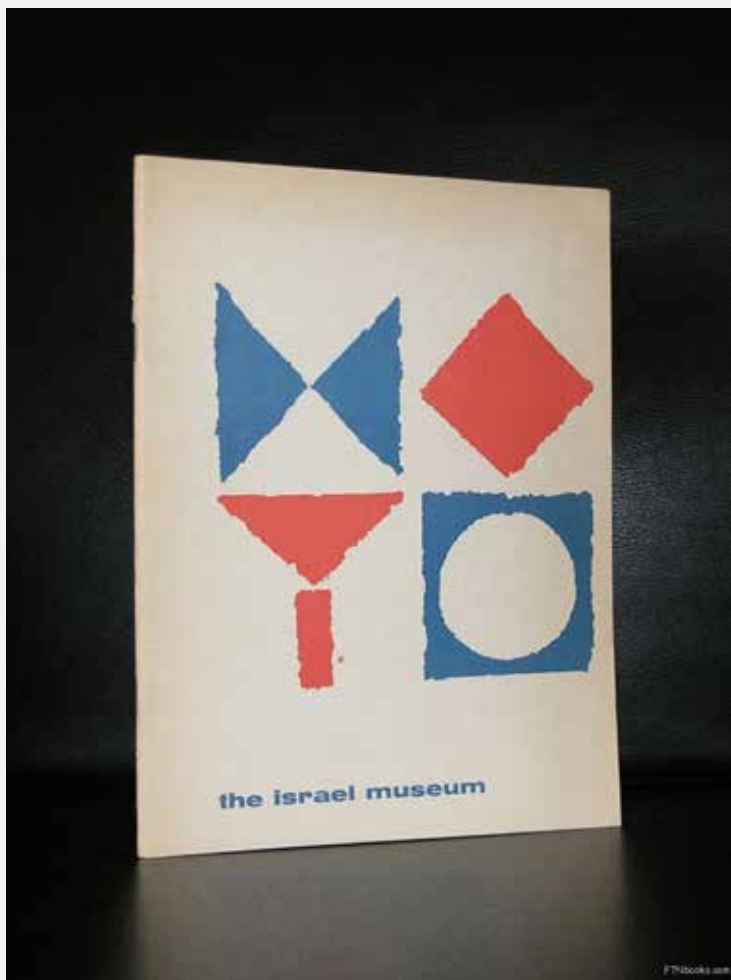
---

15 About the restricted visibility of and lack of perspectives from minority cultures in Israeli cultural policy, notably Arab ones, see Arielle Azoulay, 'With Open Doors: Museums and Historical Narratives in Israel's Public space', Sherman/Rogoff (1994), 85-111. See also Yonatan Mendel & Alexa Rose Steinberg, 'The Museological Side of the Conflict: Israeli Exhibition of Terror and the Palestinian Museum of Prisoners', *Museum & Society* 9, no. 3 (2011): 190-213.

16 Liberal theorist Duncan Bell avoids the term 'neo-liberalism' and instead convincingly argues that already since the 1950s we inevitably are all 'conscripts of liberalism.' Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

17 The splendid Rockefeller Museum for Palestinian Archaeology in East Jerusalem was also captured during the 6 Days War, and, since then, controversially administered by the Israel Museum.

18 For oblique angles on the lack of a 'moral horizon' in the contemporary art world, see Tirdad Zolghadr, *Traction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).



Willem Sandberg, design for the inaugural catalogue of the Israel Museum including his logo design, 1965

of a prominent educational department (the Youth Wing), the exclusivity complex of Israeli institutions must have become obvious to him. But only after the October War in 1973, the year in which he had been instrumental for channeling an endowment from the Californian venture capitalist Max Palevsky (1924-2010) into a design pavilion, did he show a sign of enhanced awareness of the conflict. He took the initiative for a reconciling publication that would feature the voice of both Jews and Arabs. The project failed hopelessly, not only because he could not come up with any contemporary Arab name for a possible contribution, but also because the Dutch among whom he was promoting his idea proved to be too pro-Israel and therefore unwilling to support it.

Sandberg's transfer from the Netherlands to Israel enables us to see the modern art project through a magnifying glass that reveals how the colonial background and the exteriorising of the Global South within the very foundations of the modern art institution slips into the cultural politics of exclusivity. The major challenge of the modern art museum in the coming decades is not to realise yet another expansion wing, but to get a grasp of its own questionable role in the art history it produces, to venture into the flipside of its colonial matrix and break through its mental walls.

### Bibliography

- Abu El-Haj, Nadia. *Facts on the Ground. Archeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Arian, Max. *Zoeken en scheuren – de jonge Sandberg*. Amsterdam: Johannes van Kessel Publishing, 2010.
- Bell, Duncan. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Lapidot, M. & A. Miron. *1965 Today*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2015.
- Leeuw Marcar, Ank. *Willem Sandberg – portrait of an artist*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2004.
- Roodenburg-Schadd, Carolin. *Expressie En Ordening. Het verzamelbeleid van Willem Sandberg voor het Stedelijk Museum, 1945-1962*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2004.
- Petersen, Ad and Pieter Brattinga. *Sandberg – A Documentary*. Amsterdam: Kosmos, 1975.
- Sherman, Daniel J., and Irit Rogoff, eds. *MuseumCulture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Stokvis, Willemijn. *Cobra. Geschiedenis, voorspel en betekenis van een beweging in de kunst van na de tweede wereldoorlog*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1974.
- Zolghadr, Tirdad. *Traction*. Berlin/New York: Sternberg Press, 2016.

**Jelle Bouwhuis** is an art historian and PhD researcher. He headed the art space Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA) from 2006 until 2016. He initiated the long-term, curatorial research programmes 'Project 1975' (2010-2012) and the subsequent publication 'Project 1975 – Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Unconscious' (blackdog publishers, London 2014). Recent (co-)curated exhibitions include 'Spaces of Exception', at the Moscow Biennial, 2013; 'How Far How Near – The World at the Stedelijk' in Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014. Bouwhuis frequently publishes and lectures on art and art theory. His current PhD research is entitled 'Going Global: The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Perspective of Globalization', supervised by Prof. Katja Kwastek and Prof. Wayne Modest at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

# ART BIENNIALS AS CONTESTED SPACES

## CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES AND CREATIVE CRITICISM SURROUNDING THE ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

Tijen Tunali

For the past thirty years, the Turkish contemporary art scene has expanded both inward and outward with aid from the European Union, sponsorship from private corporations, and the attention of the international art world since the foundation of the Istanbul Biennial in 1987. Whilst the Istanbul Biennial internationalises Turkish contemporary art, the opposition against the increasing monopoly of this major art event continues to grow in the local art scene. The protests, activist performances, and open condemnations received unprecedented attention in the mainstream media and pushed discussions on the Biennial beyond niche art circles into the public sphere.

The critics of the Istanbul Biennial, which include two opposing segments of the Turkish Left, the Kemalist nationalists and the anarchists, are quite hostile to the biennial phenomenon in general. The Kemalist nationalists see the Istanbul Biennial as the imprint of imperial cultural colonialism because of its role as the vessel of exchange between the international art world and the Turkish contemporary art scene. The main artistic camp supporting this ideology, occupying positions in fifty-six art academies in Turkey, disregards experimental or postmodern art, whilst claiming to be the artistic and political platform engendering modernist and nationalist discourses. On the other hand, the anarchist activists base their arguments on art's relationship with the corporations that circulate global capital through financial markets, real estate

investment, and global tourism. While the anarchists link the newly-recognised power of independent curators with the globalisation of art under neoliberal hegemony, according to the Kemalists the foreign curator is treated as the 'other' and is not to be trusted by the local art world.<sup>1</sup> While corporate sponsorship and cultural imperialism are the two main criticisms aimed against the Istanbul Biennial, when studied closely, the reasons for the opposition are rooted in more complicated issues than simply the structural and ideological tribulations of the biennial institution.

Mainstream leftists in Turkey have had close ties to modern progressivism, yet modernism and postmodern/contemporary art in Turkey have developed as critical stances in relation to modernism's authoritative ideals.<sup>2</sup> From its foundation in 1923 until the 1990s, the Kemalist ideology (that takes its name from the founder of Turkey as a sovereign state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) catalysed the processes of cultural modernisation that was closely linked to Westernisation. The Kemalist reforms were forged to invent a new 'citizen' and this operative principle was not only legally enforced overnight but entrenched itself in vast areas of society, from the universities to the artistic and cultural sphere for decades to come. Top-down modernisation led by this nationalist secular elite had also begotten administrative middle-class gate-keepers of the Kemalist ideology as part of the state apparatus. However, the transition into neoliberalism and the privatisation of state-assets would significantly weaken this hegemonic class in the 1990s. In 2002, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power with a populist programme and his promise to empower those marginalised by the Kemalist elite, establishing a neoliberal-Islamist government. Since then, the ideological grip and filtered values from the West to mould a Turkish Westernised cultural sphere, as well as the Kemalists' power over culture, continued to be weakened.<sup>3</sup> Kemalists exploited the anti-imperialist sentiment of Kemalism with the hope of restoring their power,

- 
- 1 Beral Madra, 'Poetry is Here, Justice Will Come,' accessed October 12, 2009, [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th\\_istanbul\\_biennial](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th_istanbul_biennial).
  - 2 Sürreya Evren, 'Neither with nor Without You,' in *İnsan Neyle Yaşar?: Metinler : 11. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 12 Eylül-8 Kasım = What Keeps Mankind Alive? The Texts: 11th International Istanbul Biennial, September 12-November 8*, eds, Ilkay B. Ayvaz and Nazım Dikbaş (Istanbul: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2009), 374.
  - 3 In Turkey, when popular segments of society experienced the postmodernisation of culture in the 1990s, especially due to immigration from rural Turkey to economic centres, it created a new system of values. Those values included a new lifestyle, music, architecture, and fashion that eventually constituted a new postmodern Turkish identity that had become decolonised and free of Western influences. Hasan B. Kahraman, *Postmodernite ile Modernite Arasında Türkiye: 1980 Sonrası Zihinsel, Toplumsal, Siyasal Dönüşüm* (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2007).

and have dismissed the Istanbul Biennial as an instrument of the 'neoliberal imperial project.'<sup>4</sup>

Hanru's commentary in the 2007 Biennial's catalogue on Turkey's modernisation as a forced top-down project of the elite infuriated the Kemalists.<sup>5</sup> The Kemalist media interpreted it as a direct attack on the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his modernist reforms.<sup>6</sup> Soon after that, 131 academics – led by the dean of the Fine Arts Faculty at Marmara University – issued a declaration condemning Hanru for accusing the founder of the Turkish Republic of being a 'non-Humanist.'<sup>7</sup> In Turkey, it is not only a political but also a social taboo to criticise Atatürk because the majority of society embraces him as 'the Father of the Turks.' The media, which largely favours the Islamist government, quickly took the opportunity to manipulate the nationalist sentiments of the public in order to consolidate power.

Several mainstream media outlets continued to verbally lynch Hanru for a number of months. The widespread and polemical reactions to Hanru's biennial set the foundations for the justification of control over critical artistic and discursive practices to conceal layers of conservatism and nationalism – the central feature of contemporary Turkish society. Hence, in a country such as Turkey, where coverage of art and art festivals rarely exceeds the length of a brief paragraph, the attention that this edition of the Istanbul Biennial received was unprecedented and generated a much-needed public discussion about the foundation principles of Turkey and freedom of speech in the arts. Hanru's criticism not only brought intellectuals, artists, organisers, the curator, the state and the media face to face in such discussions, but it also provoked a series of creative and amusing protests. For example, a punk-rock music group hung a dozen dirty pairs of underwear on the wire fence of the biggest venue with a big note saying, 'They should clean up their own dirty underwear first.'<sup>8</sup>

Through the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> editions, some anarchist groups protested against the Istanbul Biennial with the same zeal as the nationalists. Some even invited

4 Adnan Turani and Zafer E. Bilgin, 'Söyleşi: İnsan Önüne Her Konulanları Yemek Zorunda Değildir,' *Sanatçının Atölyesi* 1 (2008): 210.

5 Hou Hanru, 'Not only Possible but also Necessary, Optimism in the Age of Global War,' in *10. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 8 Eylül - 4 Kasım 2007=10th International Istanbul Biennial, September 8-November 4, 2007*, eds. Hou Hanru and Ilkay B. Ayvaz (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, 2007), 15-19.

6 'Hou Hanru'yu Kınıyoruz,' *Milliyet*, November 12, 2007, 1.

7 'Biennial Finds Itself in Age of Expression War,' *Turkish Daily News*, September 27, 2007, 1.

8 'İstanbul Festivali Kürotörüne Kirli Çamaşırılı Protesto,' *Sabah*, October 23, 2007, 26.

people to damage the artworks and offered tips on how to do it on their blogs and websites. In 2009, the curators from Zagreb; Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović, who formed the curatorial collective What, How and for Whom (WHW) used the theme *Den wowon lebt der mann?* (What Keeps Man Alive?), a song from Bertolt Brecht's 1928 *Three Penny Opera*. Similarly to Brecht's projection of the dialectical tensions between art and industry in his theatre, WHW staged the conflict between dissident contemporary art and its corrupt counterpart, which paved the way for the protests of radical leftists – an attempt that would have been appreciated by Brecht. The young anarchists focused on the apparent contradictions between this edition's overtly Marxist rhetoric and the fact that one of Turkey's biggest corporations, one that produces warships and tanks for eight countries, including Israel, and whose founder, Vehbi Koç, is publicly known for his support of the 1980 coup, was the major sponsor of the Istanbul Biennial. Nationalist-Kemalists were silent about this, whilst the anarchist-activists prepared for several days of creative protests.

During the opening week of the Biennial, the anarchist group that called themselves 'cultural commissaries' circulated subverted images of the Biennial posters in the busy streets of Istanbul and over the Internet. They also organised gatherings for the upcoming anti-global resistance days across popular spots in town. Anti-IMF and anti-globalisation meetings merged with anti-biennial meetings. Additionally, in some popular bars and locales of İstiklâl Caddesi, some creative performances were held. For example, the anarchist-artist collective *İç Mihrak* (Internal Enemy) presented a three-minute performance called *Beğenal* (changing the word 'bienal' to 'beğenal', which translates 'to choose and buy'), whose theme was on corporatism in the arts and 'Koç's invasion' of the Istanbul Biennial. An anonymous group circulated short videos of animated images on social media networks mocking the ironic relationship of the Brechtian biennial under the sponsorship of Turkey's biggest corporation, known for its support for the 1980 coup d'état and the prosecution of many intellectuals and artists throughout the 1980s.

When an executive representative of Koç Holding was making a speech about the importance of the Biennial for the economy of Istanbul, protest noises from outside were heard. The activist crowd, led by the group *Resistanbul*, some wearing clown costumes, staged their intervention by shouting slogans, whistling, and playing drums and trumpets outside the venue to protest the hypocrisy of the event. Some artist groups, which are a part of the anarchist





Protest against the 9th Istanbul Biennial in front of the main venue by a folk-rock group known as 'Grup Günizi.' Photograph was taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 10, 2007.



Protest against the 11th Istanbul Biennial. The photograph was taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 12, 2009.



A poster mocking the 11th Istanbul Biennial. The photograph was taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 5, 2009.



A boy holding a sign showing the caption, which mocks 12th Istanbul Biennial: 'Mom, are police human?' Source: [www.internetajans.com](http://www.internetajans.com), accessed July 12, 2013.

organisation *Resistanbul* and ‘the culture commissaries,’ were also present at the exclusive opening gala of the 11<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial. At the entrance, the protestors disseminated a leaflet with the title *Direnal!* (mocking the word ‘biennial’ and literally meaning in Turkish to resist and take) and read a manifesto to the public that talked about the basic consequences of the decisions forced by the IMF and the World Bank. The manifesto ended with an activist call to the streets: “Let’s prepare works and visuals (posters, stickers, stencils, etc.) for the streets of the resistance days. Let’s produce together, not within the white cube, but in the streets and squares during the resistance week! Creativity belongs to each of us and can’t be sponsored!”

Their call was interpreted as ‘naïve’ and ‘biased’ by some Turkish contemporary artists who participated in previous Istanbul Biennials and as ‘premature’ and ‘inadequate’ by others. Ahmet Ögüt, one of the artists displaying works in the Turkish Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale, said: “Such a choice between street and the white cube is not necessary”.<sup>9</sup> Burak Delier, who came to be known for his strategic criticism of neoliberalism at the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennials, said: “It is true that this group reacted fiercely upon only hearing the contextual title of the Biennial. One cannot judge an exhibition without seeing it”.<sup>10</sup>

The anarchists called for people to participate on the streets, and 97 independent artists and 18 art collectives – none of whom participated in the Istanbul Biennial for various reasons – gathered to stage an artistic performance to protest the corporatism and elitism of the artworld. To produce this exhibition, 265 participants worked collectively for two years on an interdisciplinary project called *The Alternative Work Platform*. This giant alternative exhibition titled *Hayalet* (which can be interpreted simultaneously as ‘imagine’ and ‘ghost’ in Turkish) opened in 2009 on the day the Istanbul Biennial opened to the general public. It was organised without the hierarchical institutional structure conventionally required for large-scale art events: no advisory board, directors, curators, or sponsors. The project aimed to create an artistic movement that would bring together diverse tendencies and multiple generations of artists raising their voices against the existing hierarchical mechanism and corporate hegemony in the art world.<sup>11</sup> Although the event was announced in the local newspapers and on the Internet as ‘the alternative biennial’ and the artworks openly ridiculed the

9 Author’s interview with Ahmet Ögüt, Istanbul-Turkey, November 19, 2009.

10 Author’s interview with Burak Delier, Istanbul-Turkey, December 9, 2009.

11 ‘Hayalet Aramızda.’ *Birgün*, September 14, 2009, 8.

Istanbul Biennial, the organisers insisted that the way they prepared this artistic platform was intended to transcend the biennial model and not to contest it.<sup>12</sup>

The 13<sup>th</sup> edition held in 2013 was titled *Mom, am I barbarian?* and curated by Fulya Erdemci. During the heat of the Gezi uprising – the biggest civil protest in the history of the Turkish Republic – a photograph appeared on social media (and later as a poster on the streets) showing a child coming out of a cloud of pepper gas with police following him and holding a paper that reads ‘mom, are police human?’. The photograph that circulated on the Internet was real and taken during the uprising, but on it was superimposed the word ‘Isyanbul’, an alteration of the word Istanbul merged with isyan (revolt), that proclaimed the act as a staged protest against the Istanbul Biennial. The 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial organised in 2015, titled *Saltwater: A Theory of Thought Forms*, was curated by the American curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and coincided with the November 1<sup>st</sup> general elections amidst escalating political violence and terrorism. In this edition, in an atmosphere of fear and the growing political polarisation under a ruling party adopting an increasingly authoritarian style of governance, the antagonism towards the Istanbul Biennial discontinued.

The Istanbul Biennial has been important not only for the corporate world to attract international investments but also for Turkish contemporary art to be exposed to a globalised market. Through the channels that the Istanbul Biennial has built, international ideas, concepts, and funding have flourished in Turkey.<sup>13</sup> Many artists who had been deemed too radical for the local art market: Ahmet Ceylan, Mehmet Dere, Burak Delier, Genco Gülan, Halil Altındere, Ahmet Ögüt, Şener Özmen, Inci Furni and Esra Ersen to name a few, have become visible locally and internationally. The Biennial vitalised the local art scene to such an extent that it also allowed the growth of alternative cultural activities and anti-establishment art spaces in the 1990s, which had become invisible in the 1980s under the military junta’s cultural directives.<sup>14</sup> Not-for-profit art spaces, collaborative project groups, and off-space art exhibitions appeared as a reaction to the privatisation of art institutions and the hegemony of the Eurocentric artworld. Turkish contemporary art has burgeoned in the discursive and economic space that the Istanbul Biennial has created.

---

12 Erkan Doğanay, ‘Casper Bienal’e Karşı,’ *Taraf*, October 8, 2009, 12-14.

13 Azra Tüzünoğlu, ed., *Dersimiz Güncel Sanat* (Istanbul: Outlet, İhraç Fazlası Sanat, 2009).

14 Beral Madra and Ayşe O. Gültekin, *İki Yılda Bir Sanat: Bienal Yazıları* (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2003), 44.

## Bibliography

- Amirsadeghi, Hossein ed. *Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2010.
- 'Biennial Finds Itself in Age of Expression War.' *Turkish Daily News*, September 27, 2007.
- Dervişoğlu, Gökçe. 'Corporate Support on Art: A Vicious or Virtuous Cycle.' In *Istanbul Biennial's Published Texts*. Istanbul: Ofset Basım, 2009.
- Doğanay, Erkan. 'Casper Bienale Karşı.' *Taraf*, October 8, 2009.
- Erdemci, Fulya. 'Curator's Text.' In *Mom, Am I Barbarian? 13th Istanbul Biennial Guide*. Istanbul: IKSİV, 2013.
- Evren, Sureyya. 'Neither with nor Without You.' In *Insan Neyle Yaşar? Metinler: 11. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 12 Eylül-8 Kasım=What Keeps Mankind Alive? The Texts: 11th International Istanbul Biennial, September 12-November 8*, edited by İlkay B. Ayvaz and Nazım Dikbaş, 470-381. Istanbul: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2009.
- Hanru, Hou. 'Not only Possible but also Necessary, Optimism in the Age of Global War.' In *10. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 8 Eylül-4 Kasım 2007=10th International Istanbul Biennial, September 8-November 4, 2007*, edited by Hou Hanru and İlkay B. Ayvaz. Beyoğlu, İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, 2007.
- 'Hayalet Aramızda.' *Birgün*, September 14, 2009.
- 'Hou Hanru'yu Kınıyoruz.' *Milliyet*, November 12, 2007.
- 'İstanbul Festivali Kürotörüne Kirli Çamaşırılı Protesto.' *Sabah*, October 23, 2007.
- Kahraman, Hasan B. 'The End of 'New' As We Know It.' *Third Text* 22 (2008): 21-34.
- Keyder, Çağlar. *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.
- Madra, Beral. 'Hot Spot of Global Art: İstanbul's Contemporary Art Scene and its Sociopolitical and Cultural Conditions and Practices.' *Third Text* 22 (2008): 105-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *İki Yılda Bir Sanat: Bienal Yazıları*. İstanbul: Norgunk, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'Poetry is Here, Justice Will Come.' Accessed October 12, 2009. [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th\\_istanbul\\_biennial](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th_istanbul_biennial).
- Tüzünoğlu, Azra ed. *Dersimiz Güncel Sanat*. İstanbul: Outlet, İhraç Fazlası Sanat, 2009.

**Tijen Tunali** is Postdoctoral Research Associate at Université François-Rabelais, Tours, France. She received her PhD in Art History and Criticism, with the title 'Festivals of Art, Carnivals of Representation: On Contemporary Art and Neoliberalism', from the University of New Mexico in 2015. Her writings have appeared in books published by Verso, Palgrave MacMillan, and Liverpool University Press. Tunali has received numerous awards, grants, and has presented papers at several international conferences. Recently published papers include 'Contemporary Art and the Post-1989 Art World' (*Dandelion Journal*, 2017), and 'Aesthetics of (An) Other Politics: The Art of the Zapatista Movement' (*Journal of Global South Studies*, Fall 2017). She has also curated exhibitions in Buenos Aires, New Mexico, İstanbul, and Nicaragua.

# SHARED RELIGIOUS CULTURES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Paul Sant-Cassia

## 1. Introduction

The Mediterranean has often been characterised as a region of conflicts of religions. There is a sense in which this is self-evidently true if one views it from a geo-political optic. Braudel highlights the line drawn from Djerba through Malta up to Lepanto as one dividing the Western Christian Mediterranean from the Eastern Muslim one, although our historian is very clear that the sea and its surrounding lands breathe in the same rhythms and are governed by the same immutable natural forces. In this contribution I explore different facets of common elements in Mediterranean religions, from the 'Evil Eye' belief and material culture, to syncretism in the eastern Mediterranean. I begin however by outlining how the introduction of writing and of money had a profound effect on intellectual scrutiny of conceptions and representations of divinity, introducing more abstract conceptions as well as a more fixed and universalised message. Yet because of their common origins and mutual influences the three Abrahamic religions tend to elaborate differences between them in terms of variations of a limited set of 'natural symbols' whose importance is pre-Monotheistic: water, blood, wine, meat, fish, and bread. That is one element of unity.

The second element I explore is the paradox that whilst the Mediterranean might be a region of historically *conflicting faiths* and even *diacritical ritual*

*markers*, it is also one that presents its inhabitants with *common predicaments* that can result in *similar practices*, and even in some cases in *shared ritual spaces*. I suggest that Mediterranean peoples and cultures exhibit common responses in how to deal with chance and aleatoric misfortune in an uncertain natural environment. The solution was ‘informal religion’: apotropaic practices that religious specialists, both Christian and Muslim, often disapproved of but had to accommodate themselves to. One of these is the notion of the ‘Evil Eye’, found throughout the region including in the classical world, right up to contemporary times. This is a vast topic, and I shall only address two aspects: first, that rather than seeing the phenomenon as a dyadic one (i.e. between the protected subject and the potential source of envy, i.e. the ‘envier’), it should be seen in *triadic* terms (i.e. between these two parties and *divinity*, the source of grace). There is something fundamental in the act of looking at the beneficiary of grace that represents a potential challenge to divinity, and the material culture associated with the Evil Eye represents a ‘reminder’ of this in the social world.

Finally, I explore the historical challenges faced by Mediterranean peoples on adapting to changing political and religious borders that often encompassed them: both in the west with the Spanish *Reconquista* that incorporated Muslims and Jews who faced either conversion or exile, and in the eastern Mediterranean with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire right up to the Balkans, in mainly Christian lands. The challenge was therefore how to navigate one’s social and therefore religious identity in potentially hostile environments. The solutions included religious conversion of the original inhabitants in response to settlement of new populations, and the emergence of so-called ‘crypto-religions’: converted Jews in Spain and elsewhere (e.g. in Salonica) secretly practising the law of Moses rather than of Christ, and crypto-Christians in Turkey, Crete, Trebizond, Cyprus, the Middle East and the Balkans camouflaging their faith from their Muslim neighbours and the authorities. The resulting mix of religions resulted in a grassroots syncretism with respect to ritual practices, devotion and shared places of worship, such as saint tombs, shrines, etc.: between Christians and Muslims in the Balkans and the Middle East, and Muslims and Jews in North Africa. There was thus a constant grassroots movement by Christians, Muslims and Jews to various shrines, as well as circulation of ‘magical’ protective charms, etc. The age of nationalism has largely swept these groups away, but in spite of virulent nationalisms and ethnic cleansing, there is still sharing of local shrines and places of worship, a heritage of the past so important nowadays for bringing

people together. Religions thus divide but they can also unite, and we have examples of both. It is up to each and every generation to decide which facet of this heritage to emphasise.

## 2. The implications of writing and coinage on Mediterranean Religion

The ancient world had its own networks of religiosity that transcended political divides and were based on reputation. The Oracle at Delphi was consulted by the Greek and non-Greek ancient world including the Lydian king Croesus who famously misinterpreted its ambiguous message. And there is a growing body of scholarship that attempts to explore the similarities, parallelisms and perhaps linkages between ancient Greek and Indian philosophy prior to 326 BC when Alexander crossed the Ganges, from which period onwards the mutual interpenetration of East and West become more traceable following as it did shifting and porous political and military frontiers and trade routes. Karl Jaspers coined the notion of the 'Axial Age' for the period between the 8th-3rd centuries BC, characterised by the simultaneous emergence of new more speculative transcendental modes of thought and new ethical modes of conduct guiding relations between man and the cosmos, that spanned from China (Confucianism and Daoism), India (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism), the Middle East (Jewish Prophetism), and Greece (unitary causation philosophy). Emile Benveniste extended this idea by tracing the common roots of the concepts of gifts and hospitality, sacrifice and contracts, kinship and the ancient economy in the Indo-European languages. The political contexts shared certain similarities: the collapse of empires, new modes of social and political organisation based on intense urban living and the emergence of often peripatetic religious specialists formulating unitary, structured, learnable modes of ethical conduct linking relations between men, their spiritual lives and transcendental salvation. These included Greek philosophers and healing specialists who, exposed to the effects of writing on thought, causation, examination and proof, were beginning to offer novel solutions based upon empirical observation.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and G.E.R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore and Ideology: Studies in the Life Sciences in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

The period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC is marked by two important developments that were crucial to these new modes of thought and social organisation, and there is a sense in which they were instrumental in shaping this new Axial Age: the introduction of writing and of money. Writing, the technology of the intellect, profoundly influenced religious thought, expression, and dissemination, among others. Money, the technology of exchange, transformed modes of accumulation of wealth and power.

The introduction of minted money by the state was not a Greek ‘breakthrough’ and appears to have occurred in roughly the same period in China where cowrie shells were progressively replaced by bronze replicas, bronze castings of spade money (during the Zhou dynasty), and ultimately by copper coins - this was a critical feature of Chinese unification. Globally, the fact that coinage emerged soon after writing at the same time in both the eastern Mediterranean (the alphabetic writing, the syllabic Linear B, around 1600 BCE, replaced by vowel-introducing Classical Greek) and China (the ‘Oracle Bone’ Script between 1500-1000 BCE,) is surely significant. Hart notes ‘alphabetic writing and this new form of money were profoundly subversive of old ways. Until then, wealth and power were concrete and visible, being attached to the people who had them. They took the form of cattle, vineyards, buildings, armed men and beautiful women. Now riches could be concealed as gold coins, allowing for a double detachment from persons - impersonal exchange at a distance and unaccountable (because hidden and private) economic power.’<sup>2</sup> The Greek phonetic alphabet, an advance on the Phoenician and other syllabic scripts, detached reading from comprehension - dependent as syllabic scripts are for comprehension upon a prior knowledge of the language<sup>3</sup> - and democratised writing as the graphic unambiguous representation of all speech, and all languages. In this way, the phonetic alphabet ‘Hellenised’ all writing and reading enabling more ‘disembedded’ (i.e. socially detached) learning processes, in the same way that the circulation of coin money serially detached goods from their persons. Some scholars such as Seaford have suggested that the introduction of coinage is linked to the emergence of (i) the abstract as more important than the concrete (i.e. the emergence of ‘philosophy’), (ii) the individual (as in Greek

2 Keith Hart, *Money in an Unequal World* (New York and London: Textere, 2000), 53.

3 Clarisse Herrens Schmidt, ‘Writing between Visible and Invisible Worlds in Iran, Israel, and Greece,’ in *Ancestor of the West: Writing, Reasoning, and Religion in Mesopotamia, Elam, and Greece*, ed. Jean Bottéro, Clarisse Herrens Schmidt, and Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 101.



tragedy), and (iii) of the idea of unlimited individual accumulation.<sup>4</sup> This may be deriving too many multifarious effects from a single posited conceptual and practical breakthrough, important though it indubitably was, and writing was probably an even more significant precipitating factor.

Nevertheless, the introduction of writing and coinage, together with that of iron that displaced the more expensive bronze, democratised warfare (the so-called 'hoplite revolution' linked to the emergence of the citizen army in the Greek city states) undoubtedly worked to unify the Mediterranean in the circulation of goods, ideas, schools and trade. And writing had a profound effect on religion in the Mediterranean: it both encouraged questioning about traditional forms of polytheistic belief - elite Greeks were already questioning the validity and significance of their gods and their statues - but it also boosted prophetism, both in Judaism and in later varieties (Christianity and Islam). If writing could be used to establish fixed bureaucratic procedures, record contracts, as well as encourage intellectual speculation, so too was it used as the privileged means of communication from God to men (issuing Commandments, recording the life of Christ in Greek, and dictated in Arabic to the Prophet in Islam), as well as the arguments between men on the nature of Divinity, such as between Classical philosophers and the new monotheists, and to spread the religious message through letters (literally '*epistoli*' in Greek). The harnessing of prophetism and writing had profound effects in the Mediterranean: it transformed a Jewish heresy into a World Religion (Christianity) through the circulation of religious proselytisers, epistles, hagiographies, etc, and the religious message in both Judaism and its initial sect, Christianity, undoubtedly influenced Islam, that acknowledges both as its prophetic progenitors, and was initially viewed by early Christians as a Christian heresy.

---

4 Richard Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind. Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

### 3. Underlying common elements

There is a sense in which it is precisely because the Abrahamic religions shared so much through the text that they also made strenuous efforts to distinguish themselves from each other. Some important elements predate the prophetic religions and provided them with deeply embedded symbolic foci around which they elaborated ritually or even topographically. These include the emphasis on water as holy and initiatory (either to the religious community as with Christian Baptism, or Islamic ablutions prior to prayer) and the identification of holy springs as sites of blessings and cures from the ancient world (*nymphaea*), from Lourdes to the well of Zamzam in Mecca. Mountain tops were other sites for communication with divinity in the ancient world, continued to this day in the monastic communities of Mount Athos. Because of their common origins each religion has attempted to distinguish itself from its contiguous and monotheistic siblings through (i) ritual and prohibitory foods, (ii) bodily transformations on, and of, believers, and (iii) attitudes towards representation. For the first, Bromberger has identified the complementary differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in what could be called the alimentary- ritual triangle of alcohol, pork and blood.<sup>5</sup> Pork rigidly prohibited for Jews was encouraged by the early Church fathers to bind converted Jews to the new messianic sect and impede their return to their natal communities.<sup>6</sup> And wine, by most (though not all) Koranic interpretations prohibited to Muslims, becomes a transubstantiating agent into the sacrificial blood of Christ, whereas for Muslims it is the impious food of evil *djinn*. Similarly, with water: Catholics sprinkle the heads of infants in Baptism whereas the Orthodox submerge the child, and the Muslims perform ablutions prior to prayer. The same signifying set of oppositions applies to the body, facial and head hair of believers: Jews and Muslims are circumcised, Christians are not. Christians (particularly priests) shaved following the previous Roman tradition to distinguish themselves from the 'barbarians' (including Jews), Muslims sported beards; Catholic priests had a scalp tonsure, Orthodox priests not only grew beards but kept their hair in a bun. Finally, a major differentiation lay in attitudes towards representation: Christianity, apart from an early brief hiatus, was resolutely iconophilic until

5 Christian Bromberger, 'Towards an Anthropology of the Mediterranean,' *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (June 2006): 91–107.

6 Christine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast. Jews, Christians and the Pig* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

the Reformation, and remained so in Catholicism and Orthodoxy although the latter view statues (an ancient Greco-Roman tradition) as disturbingly pagan. By contrast, Judaism and Islam have been resolutely iconophobic, giving exclusive emphasis to the sacred texts.<sup>7</sup>

Such markers could assume a critical importance in situations of obligatory conversion, as occurred in *Reconquista* Spain where Church and secular authorities attempted to identify 'false' Jewish converts by reference to whether they refused pork or rested on the Sabbath. Likewise, aware of Muslim devotion to Mary, Church authorities distributed pictures of Our Lady to anchor Muslim converts, an experiment that generated the latter's repugnance and rejection.

Yet there is a sense in which popular beliefs remained partly outside these formal distinctions throughout the Mediterranean and constituted a shared complex of beliefs, propitiatory practices, rituals and even sacred spaces. One recognisable pan-Mediterranean complex is that of the Evil Eye, which is an attempt to tame chance and provide an explanation for misfortune by reference to the innate propensities of others believed to have the power to cause harm unintentionally. When this innate power is viewed as intentionally willed and therefore even more dangerous, protection is sought in and through potent material items. In extreme cases there is recourse to ritual specialists who may or may not comply, but often view such beliefs as at best 'superstitious' or at worst heretical. And we call it a complex because it cannot be treated as a mere set of erroneous beliefs about causation, i.e. pre-logical magical thought, for it is a cultural and indeed traditional combination of actions, beliefs and emotions surrounding the vulnerability of those resources essential to an individual's and their immediate group's well-being (flocks, crops, the newly-born and children, always particularly vulnerable). The Evil Eye complex constitutes a cultural interpretative framework and tradition to explain or preempt aleatoric misfortune with its own rituals and material culture. The latter consists of charms, talismans, protective objects, stories and admonitions, and are at one and the same time an identification and protection of the critical resource against harm intentional or otherwise, a personal recognition and public acknowledgement of vulnerability, and thus a confirmatory statement of membership in a moral community that acknowledges the socially pervasive belief that fortune is vulnerable and could be easily erased. Often these folk

---

7 Jack Goody, 'Bitter Icons and Ethnic Cleansing,' *History and Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2002): 1-12.

items are combined and worn with more formal material symbols of official religion, such as a gold charm of the pointed index and little finger with a cross worn on a chain round the neck, or attached to a baby's nappy in Christian societies, or some Koranic text rolled in a small pouch on the body in Muslim societies. They cannot therefore be separated from religious beliefs; they are often imbricated in them, and their adoption although often combined with primary religious symbols (that could also include those of another faith) are treated with scepticism by religious specialists, viewing them as either 'superstition' or 'un-Islamic' at best, or heretical at worst, depending on the flexibility of the interlocutor.

Various explanations have been offered to explain the Evil Eye: that it is due to envy, intentional or not, that it is a manifestation of Foster's notion of the 'Limited Good', etc. These explanations undoubtedly have a certain persuasiveness. But these are partial for they fail to take into account two aspects that I can only allude to briefly here: (a) the underlying complexity of the symbolism of the eye and looking, and (b) the structural factors rooted in the environment that can contribute towards an explanation of the pervasiveness of this practice. The two are of different orders: the first concentrates on the specific symbolism of the eye and the act of looking as an interpersonal and, by implication, cosmic challenge in myth and religion. The second focuses on the structural factors inherent in the environment that contribute to its quasi-necessity as an adoptive strategy. For the first we can note the mythic significance and potency of the eye that appears throughout Mediterranean cultures running from Greek thought to the Bible and the Koran: from Gorgon's image, to Oedipus' gouging out of his eyes on learning the awful truth, to the impossibility and danger to humans to look directly onto the face of the gods. Looking directly onto the face of the gods is a challenge that humans cannot assay, for that is akin to the challenge posed by men among themselves, a presumption of equality, a challenge. One approaches the gods with averted gaze. Seeing and being seen is a challenge of reciprocity, and no reciprocity of equality is possible with the gods. One is always at their mercy or their *charis*, and looking into their eyes is thus a claim to equality, and - when directed at divine beings - a fateful challenge for humans. The gods choose whom to manifest themselves to: in anger or in blessing. In anger, as when 'Athena held up her aegis, the bane of mortals, on high from the roof, and the minds of the suitors were panic-stricken, and they fled through the living rooms like a

herd of cows' or when the icon of the *Panaghia* or the *Aghios* strikes down the impious unbeliever. Alternatively, in inscrutable blessing when the gods extend their grace, their *charis* and protection to those whom they favour, a grace that should not be questioned by others: Athena to Odysseus, or the children at Fatima who see 'the Lady more brilliant than the Sun.' Significantly, in many Mediterranean examples it is the marginal to whom the gods extend their grace: to ragged Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, or to young children in Christianity who see apparitions, such as of our Lady. The adults often see nothing, and claims are treated with popular, and particularly clerical, suspicion.

Let us pursue the connection with the Evil Eye further for it links grace with a challenge to *charis*. Vernant reminds us that Gorgon's mask depicted on Agamemnon's shield represents 'pure fright - Terror - as a dimension of the supernatural'<sup>8</sup> resulting in petrification that Freud interpreted as the fear of castration, which is none other than the loss of reproductive humanity. Athena's aegis, depicted on her shield, similarly represents the Gorgon, extending protection but also terror. And *is not the Evil Eye charm often set in stone not analogous to an aegis, an appropriated warning of the potential petrification of the starrer?* i.e. the one who dares to stare at the recipient of divine fortune and *charis*, and therefore challenge it, risks divine retribution through the stare of the Gorgon? i.e. a warning that 'in the eye of Gorgon is revealed the truth about your own face'<sup>9</sup>, the unbearable truth to humans about their own dark natures? Or is not Oedipus' gouging out of his own eyes after having dared to glare back and challenge his father Laius, or to ocularly ravish his own mother as his wife (and thus transgressing his obligation to shield his eyes as the proper sign of filial piety), the perfect *anti-dosis* (reciprocal exchange following a challenge) performed on (and with) himself? For Oedipus starts as the opposite and ends as the analogue of Teiresias, the blind seer who had warned him of his unconscious transgressions. I can only allude to the complexity of the symbolism here, for it is surely evident that much more is involved than the mere popular association of the Evil Eye with envy, for this provides the key but not the answer. The cosmological and symbolic dimensions of looking, associated as it is with asserted equality and thus with implicitly questioning, and by extension hubristically challenging the gods' distribution of their *charis* to humans, are too rich to discard once we become aware of them.

8 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, edited by Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 117.

9 *Ibid.*, 138.

*Not to question charis...* If the Evil Eye complex is the social elaboration of this principle mediated through the interpersonal appropriation of charms that *project* and *transfer* the anxiety that envy could provoke in a challenge to *charis*, this is because it is the underlying basis of authority that in its divine origin is inscrutable. Scrutiny, and thus questioning, could therefore lead to a reversal of fortune. Authority governs relations between God and men, and between parents and their children. From Job's transgressive challenge in questioning his sufferings despite his virtuous conduct where the 'lesson' is unquestioning submission to God: "I am that I am", to the compassionate father in the Christian parable of the prodigal son and others, the same set of relations, expectations and sentiments are operative between parents and children, in the transmission of scarce resources and their receipt. Humility and *pietas* are both expected stances and modes of conduct between men and the Gods, and children towards their parents, the latter relationship inevitably bound up with challenges to authority. Here we may take inspiration from Meyer Fortes who explored religion not in terms of society or cosmology but rather in how people manage their lives, an approach largely absent in anthropological accounts of religion in the Mediterranean: modes of living, not modes of thought or of social organisation, or even tropes of differentiation.<sup>10</sup> The latter are certainly essential to explain *difference* but if we wish to explore common underlying similarities we have to explore what Igor Kopytoff called 'pragmatic religion': how individuals manage their lives in and through those basic institutions such as family and kin that endow them with identity and realise their 'mutuality of being', in Sahlins'<sup>11</sup> comely phrase.

Rather than seeing the Evil Eye complex as a folk superstition and relying on surface explanations, we should therefore try to embed it in more fundamental belief structures and social relationships. The messianic religions accommodated themselves to it but somewhat ambiguously, a clear indication that some belief structures both predate and operate at a deeper level. I have suggested that rather than seeing it as a dyadic relationship between the protected vulnerable subject and social envy, we should approach it as a social re-enforcement of a cosmological system linked to the non-scrutinisable distribution of divine *charis* or grace. That in turn is embedded in the fundamental institution of parenthood, and the *pietas* expected towards parents.

10 Meyer Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion. With an essay by Robin Horton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

11 Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is-And Is Not* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012).

#### 4. Syncretism and Grassroots Religiosity

The second purpose of this contribution is to explore how Mediterranean peoples adapted to changing political and religious borders that often encompassed them, such as in (i) *Reconquista* Spain and (ii) in many European areas controlled by the Ottoman Empire.

*Reconquista* Spain was preceded, and influenced by, a lengthy Arabo-Berber Muslim occupation that resulted in Christian to Muslim conversion. The challenges were thus immense involving massive social, cultural, religious, and linguistic engineering. It was not just the Jews and Muslims who had to become Christian, but also Christians themselves: to be properly instructed in their religion, and regulated in their marriage practices.<sup>12</sup> Inevitably, many of these diacritica concentrated on cultural aspects that essentialised religious belief and belonging: food and drink (such as consumption of pork and wine), bodily ablutions, postures, the Sabbath/Sunday distinction, etc. Jews that remained had to convert but some still secretly practised their faith, and women were particularly important in the transmission of the law of Moses to their daughters.<sup>13</sup> But the faith was not necessarily transmitted vertically along lines of descent; it was often learnt later at marriage and was therefore transmitted both vertically and laterally.<sup>14</sup>

---

12 Charles L. Tieszen, *Christian Identity amid Islam in Medieval Spain: Studies on the Children of Abraham Vol. III* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

13 Renee Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Maya Shatzmiller, 'Marriage, Family, and the Faith: Women's Conversion To Islam,' *Journal of Family History* 21, no. 3 (1996): 235-266.

14 Enric Porqueres i Gené, *Lourde alliance. Mariage et identité chez les descendants de juifs convertis à Majorque (1435-1750)* (Paris: Editions Kime, 1995).

In the Balkans, Crete and Cyprus, areas under Ottoman occupation, a different form of crypto-religion emerged. There was no forced conversion as in Spain, but Christians and Jews (particularly the Dönme in Salonica<sup>15</sup>) converted for economic motives, and to preempt discrimination and oppression. Here it was often men who converted to Islam and then took wives from their ex-coreligionists, often close kin. The upshot was a mixture of religious practices: boys brought up as Muslims and daughters as ostensibly Muslim but practising a syncretic form of Christianity and Islam.

Evidence for the matrilinear transmission of religious practices comes from the Ottoman Balkans. There, Hasluck noted that Muslim participation in Christian rituals was encouraged by mixed marriages<sup>16</sup>, echoed by Doja who argues that the preservation of crypto-Christianity could be attributed to women.<sup>17</sup> This phenomenon was found also in Crete, Cyprus, Bosnia and elsewhere. Indeed, Doja writes: 'In the seventeenth century, when the Catholic population began to diminish rapidly because of mass conversions to Islam, crypto-Christianity correspondingly expanded among the Albanians. Missionary reports frequently describe cases of whole Catholic communities engaging in men-only conversion. This reflects the fact that the main motive for conversion was not at all religious but simply to escape the additional taxes on Christians, levied by the Ottoman administration only on the male members of the family. Often the motivation for conversion was not only financial, economic and social but even sheer survival. In some cases the new converts are reported to have taken Christian rather than Muslim women as their wives, on the grounds that they did not want Christianity to vanish from their homes.'

Such mixed-marriage patterns could well have contributed to the syncretic forms of religion that were found until recently in the Balkans, and in Cyprus where they were known as the '*linovamvakoï*' (linen-cottons) until the mid-19th century.<sup>18</sup> Similar trans-classificatory terms ('*laramane*', dappled), were

---

15 Marc David Baer, *The Dönme. Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

16 Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity And Islam Under The Sultans Vol I, II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 136.

17 Albert Doja, 'Instrumental Borders of Gender and Religious Conversion in the Balkans,' *Religion, State & Society* 36, no. 1 (March 2008): 60.

18 Irene Dietzel & Vasilios N. Makrides, 'Ethno-Religious Coexistence and Plurality in Cyprus under British Rule (1878–1960),' *Social Compass* 56, no. 1 (2009): 69-83.



employed for Albanian crypto-Catholics. Durham's observations on border Albanians who attended both Church and Mosque, had both private Christian and public Muslim names, observed both Christian fasts and Ramadan, and obtained last rites but were buried in Muslim graveyards, is well known.<sup>19</sup> Nor was this admixture merely a vertical transmission of religious cultures, but incorporated other religionists in dense overlapping ties of neighbourliness and alliance. In Herzegovina Muslims acted as godparents or marriage witnesses, and Christians as circumcision sponsors.<sup>20</sup> The Cypriot *linovamvakoï* followed Muslim marriage rites on Fridays open to all with a master of ceremonies and a Sunday Christian wedding for a small group of intimates with a *koumbaros*.<sup>21</sup> This is not to exclude more prosaic forms of cultural diffusion and borrowing especially of religious practices, including shared places of worship, a phenomenon that received exhaustive attention by Hasluck<sup>22</sup> and more recently<sup>23</sup> suggesting strong resilience.

Finally we should highlight the parallelism between Christian priest and Muslim *khoja* whom Hasluck labelled 'medicine-men' with relatively intermingled clientele.<sup>24</sup> Diversification in production that Horden and Purcell characterise as an essential feature of Mediterranean micro-ecologies<sup>25</sup> was paralleled by a diversification in religious intermediaries through a utilitarian version of Pascal's Wager.<sup>26</sup> Busbecq in the 16th century noted the secret baptisms by Turks of their children: 'they were persuaded that the ceremony contained some good in itself and they were sure that it had not

---

19 M. Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905).

20 Alexander Lopasic, 'Islamization of the Balkans with special reference to Bosnia,' *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no 2 (1994): 175.

21 R.L.N. Mitchell, 'A Muslim-Christian Sect in Cyprus,' *The Nineteenth Century*, no. 63 (May 1908): 751-762.

22 Hasluck, *Christianity And Islam Under The Sultans*.

23 Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean. Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

24 Hasluck, *Christianity And Islam Under The Sultans*, 80.

25 Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

26 Paralleled too in shared Muslim-Jewish north African places of worship (cf. Louis Voinot, *Pelerinage judeo-musulman au Maroc* (Paris: Editions Larose, 1948)).

been arbitrarily introduced.<sup>27</sup> Collective natural disasters (such as drought, etc.) often encouraged joint supplications from which all could benefit.<sup>28</sup> At the grassroots Christians and Muslims shared many holy places which Hasluck calls ‘transferred sites’. Every expanding religion inherited ‘territories of grace’, landscapes already imbued with ‘kaleidoscopic numinousness’<sup>29</sup>, embedded in particular social ecologies and fulfilling various multiple functions from boundary-maintenance to therapeutic soteriology, to trade and the redistribution of surpluses.

### Bibliography

- Albera, Dionigi and Couroucli, Maria, eds. *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean. Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- Baer, Marc David. ‘Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul.’ *Gender & History* 16, no. 2 (August 2004): 425–458.
- Baer, Marc David. *The Dönme. Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Bromberger, Christian. ‘Towards an Anthropology of the Mediterranean.’ *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (June 2006): 91–107.
- Dietzel, Irene & Makrides, Vasilios N. ‘Ethno-Religious Coexistence and Plurality in Cyprus under British Rule (1878–1960).’ *Social Compass* 56, no. 1 (2009): 69–83.
- Doja, Albert. ‘Instrumental Borders of Gender and Religious Conversion in the Balkans.’ *Religion, State & Society* 36, no. 1 (March 2008): 55–63.
- Durham, M. Edith. *High Albania*. London: Edward Arnold, 1905.
- Fabre-Vassas, Christine. *The Singular Beast. Jews, Christianity and the Pig*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Fortes, Meyer. *Oedipus and Job in west African religion. With an essay by Robin Horton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Goody, Jack. ‘Bitter Icons and Ethnic Cleansing.’ *History and Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2002): 1–12.
- Hart, Keith. *Money in an Unequal World*. New York and London: Textere, 2000.
- Hasluck, Frederick William. *Christianity And Islam Under The Sultans Vol I, II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929.
- Herrenschmidt, Clarisse. ‘Writing between Visible and Invisible Worlds in Iran, Israel, and Greece.’ In *Ancestor of the West: Writing, Reasoning, and Religion in Mesopotamia, Elam, and Greece*, edited by Jean Bottéro, Clarisse Herrenschmidt, and Jean-Pierre Vernant. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

27 Quoted in Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 32. He also notes ‘the Greek no less than Turk admits the idea that, if his own saints fail him, an alien may be invoked.’ (ibid., 76–77)

28 Diderot’s reaction to Pascal’s Wager was both disingenuously representational and misrepresentational at the same time: ‘An Imam could reason just as well this way.’

29 Horden & Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 458.

- Horden, Peregrine and Purcell, Nicholas. *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Jennings, Ronald C. *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571-1640*. New York: NYU Press, 1992.
- Lopasic, Alexander. 'Islamization of the Balkans with special reference to Bosnia.' *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no 2 (1994): 163-186.
- Lloyd, G.E.R. *Magic Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Lloyd, G.E.R. *Science, Folklore and Ideology: Studies in the Life Sciences in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Michell, R.L.N. 'A Muslim-Christian Sect in Cyprus.' *The Nineteenth Century*, no. 63 (May 1908): 751-762.
- Melammed, Renee Levine. *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Porqueres i Gené, Enric. *Lourde alliance. Mariage et identité chez les descendants de juifs convertis à Majorque (1435-1750)*. Paris: Editions Kime, 1995.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *What Kinship Is-And Is Not*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012.
- Seaford, Richard. *Money and the Early Greek Mind. Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Shatzmiller, Maya. 'Marriage, Family, and the Faith: Women's Conversion To Islam.' *Journal of Family History* 21, no. 3 (1996): 235-266.
- Tieszen, Charles L. *Christian Identity amid Islam in Medieval Spain: Studies on the Children of Abraham Vol. III*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, edited by Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Voinot, Louis. *Pelerinage judeo-musulman au Maroc*. Paris: Editions Larose, 1948.

**Paul Sant Cassia** has been Professor of Anthropology, University of Malta since 2009. He was previously Curator, Anthropology Collections, Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and University Lecturer at Cambridge (1985-1991); Lecturer, then Reader in Anthropology (1991-2009) at the University of Durham. He established the Anthropology Programme at the UoM and is founding Editor of the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* in 1992-94. He has conducted research in Cyprus (since 1977), Greece (1987), Australia (1983), Tunisia (1983-4) and southern France (2005). He is the author of *The Making of the Greek Family* (1991) (with C.Bada) (CUP), *Bodies of Evidence: Burial, Memory and the Recovery of Missing Persons in Cyprus* (2005) (Oxford: Berghahn), and edited (with Thierry Fabre): *Entre Europe et Méditerranée. Les défis et les peurs* (2005) (Actes Sud/ MMSH).



# CUBISM BEYOND PARIS MEDITERRANEAN INTERPRETATIONS

AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

BY FRANK PORTELLI AND ESPRIT BARTHET

Cubism is recognised as the first avant-garde movement to radicalise the vision and conception of reality that led painting down an unprecedented path of discovery. The cubist movement created by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque continued to cause shockwaves across the global artworld for decades. Artists working in and outside of Paris adopted its aesthetic and compositional fragmentation. This gave rise to numerous variations, understandings, and renditions of the cubist philosophy, many far-removed from its original manifestation.

In Malta, two leading modern artists, Frank Portelli and Esprit Barthet, adapted the cubist idiom to their local experience, developing a vernacular language born from that of the influential international movement. Although stemming from a deep respect for the cubist revolution, the Maltese artist's importation of the term was both chronologically and conceptually distanced from its nascent form and the socio-political context of pre-WWI Paris. Portelli described his style as a form of crystallised cubism, linking him to the second generation of cubist painters in France. Barthet recognised a cubist character in Valletta's urban environment.

This exhibition presents a selection of paintings by Portelli and Barthet wherein cubism is debated formally, compositionally, and thematically. It is a satellite event of the international academic conference 'Cubism Beyond Paris: Mediterranean interpretations and the crystallisation of cubism: A Maltese test case' organised by the Modern and Contemporary Research Programme of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Malta that will be held on December 15, 2017 at the Faculty of Arts Library, Msida Campus.

*For more information visit: [conferencehoa.wixsite.com/cubismbeyondparis](http://conferencehoa.wixsite.com/cubismbeyondparis)*



**Frank Portelli**

***My Life*, 1954**

Medium: tempera on plywood | Dimensions: 138x67cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*



**Esprit Barthelet**

***Study of Blacks, 1984***

Medium: mixed media on canvas | Dimensions: 76x105cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**  
***Motherhood, 1954***

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 87x68cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*





**Esprit Barthez**

***Rooftops*, 1981**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 47x56cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**

***Study for 'Rockin' the Blues', 1963***

Medium: watercolour and gouache on paper | Dimensions: 20x51cm

*Private Collection*

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*



**Esprit Barthez**

**Nudes, 1982**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 47x46cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**

*Still Life with Mask, 1957*

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 45x61cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*



**Esprit Barthelet**

***Townscape, 1988***

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 37x46cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*





**Frank Portelli**

***Study of 'Resurrection', 27th October 1957***

Medium: watercolour on paper | Dimensions: 60x40cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*



**Esprit Barthet**

***Rooftops*, 1977**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 32x37cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**

***Introspection*, 1958**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 111x65cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*





**Esprit Barthe**

***Rooftops*, 1991**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 49x55cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



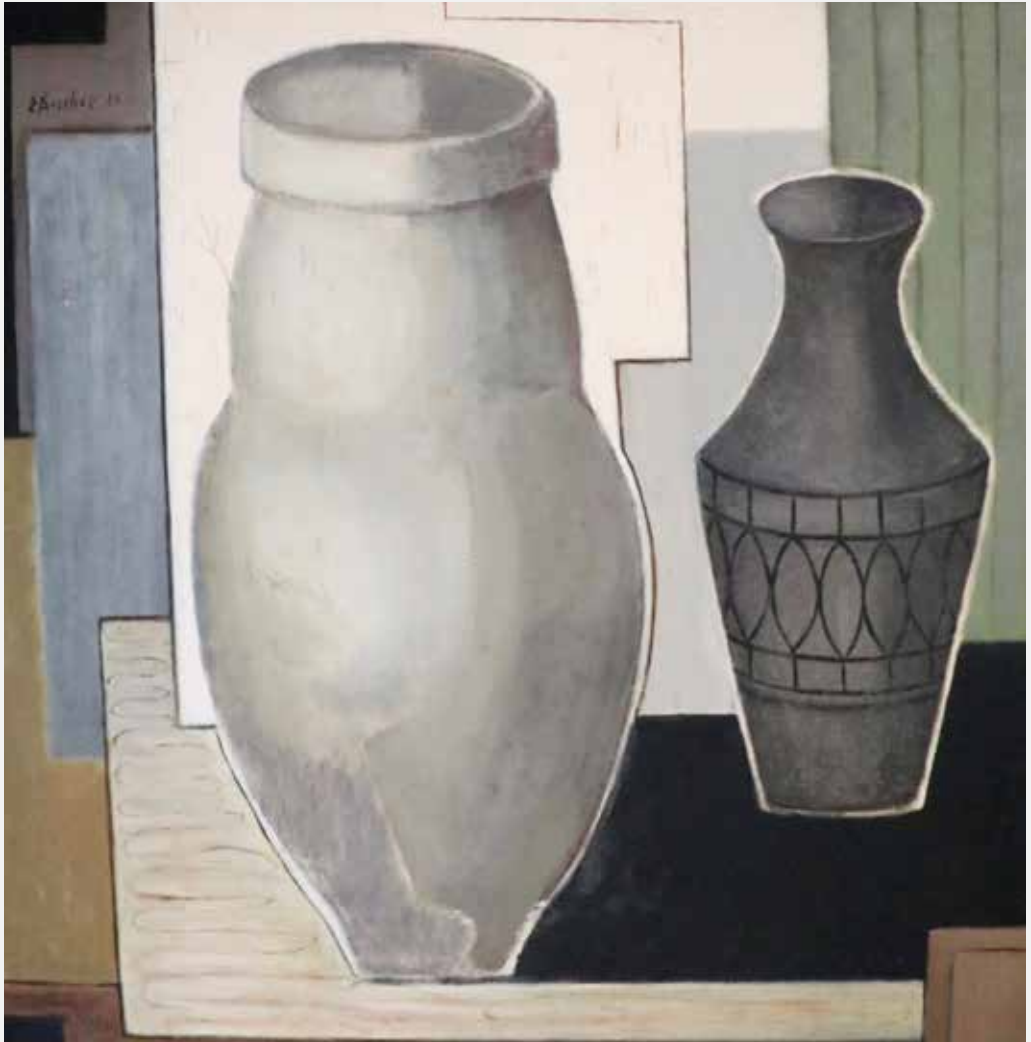
**Frank Portelli**

*Masked Figures*, 1957

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 69x43cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Ramon Portelli*



**Esprit Barthez**

***Still-life with Vases, 1988***

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 80x80cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**

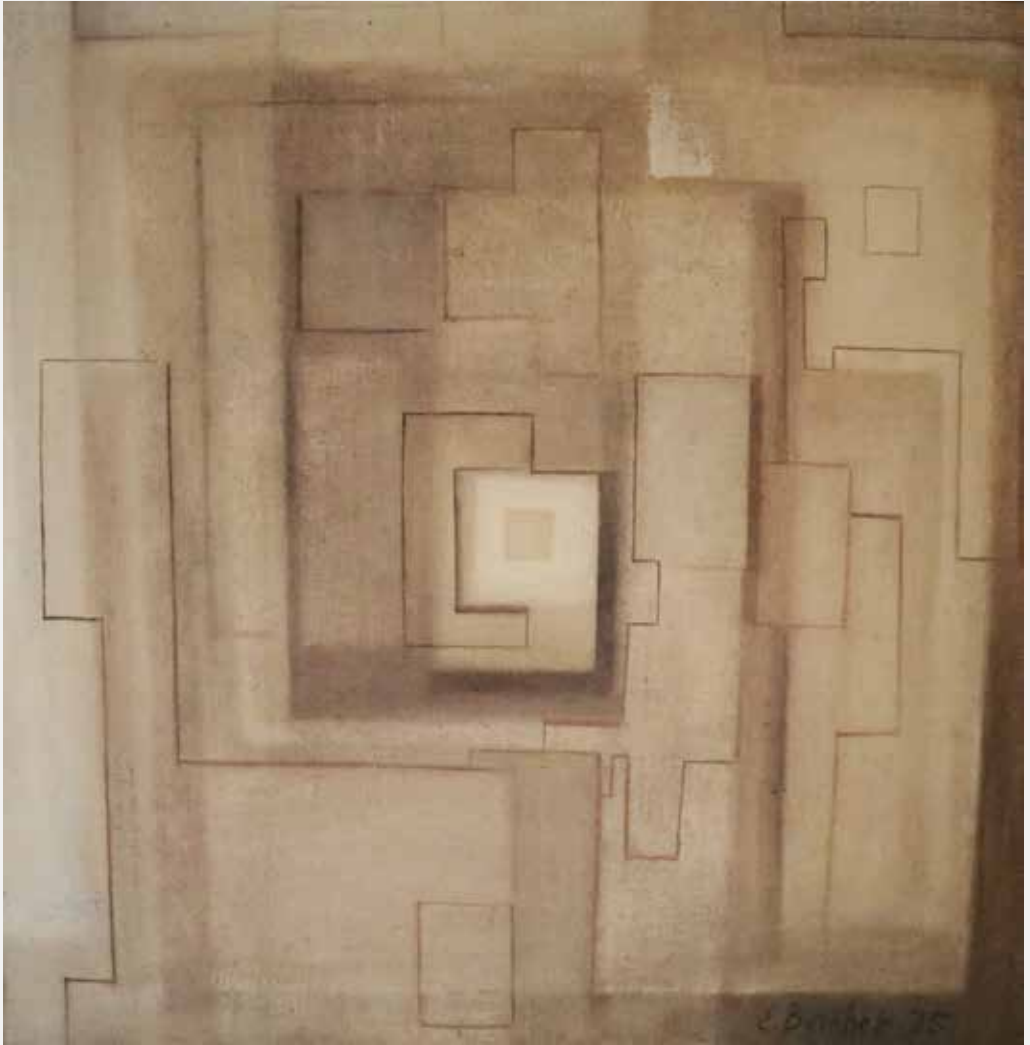
***Fantasia*, 1959**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 97x46cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Ramon Portelli*





**Esprit Barthez**

**Abstract, 1975**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 81x81cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Emma Micallef*



**Frank Portelli**

*Study for War and Peace Mural, 1957*

Medium: tempera on panel | Dimensions: 60x110cm

Private Collection

*Photo credit: Peter Bartolo Parnis*

**EXHIBITION  
CATALOGUE**



*Not afraid of heat, nor of the frozen winters (detail), 2017*

Medium: steel and lead | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# ANA CATARINA PEREIRA

*Portugal*

## NOT AFRAID OF HEAT, NOR OF THE FROZEN WINTERS

**A**na Catarina Pereira was born in Lisbon and now works and lives in London. After doing her BA at University of Westminster, she completed a Masters degree at Chelsea College of Arts in 2012. Pereira produced a multi-sculptural installation for the Clifford Chance/UAL Sculpture Prize in 2013, and a year later was awarded the Royal British Society of Sculptors bursary. Her work was nominated for a number of competitions, which includes the Aesthetic Art Prize 2014 and Anthology 2016. Pereira was a finalist for the Signature Art Prize 2015 and First@108 in 2017. Her piece created for the 2015 Mdina Biennale was later included in the sculpture park created by Keli for London Fashion Week 2016. 2017 marks her first experience with creating an outdoor sculpture, which is being shown at Broomhill Sculpture Garden.

“The Mdina Biennale’s theme ‘The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities’ made me reflect on possible ways to embrace the whole world with understanding. It was also a reminder to be conscious of our ephemeral passage.” Pereira’s belief is that the nature of certain materials epitomise human nature, and her work is centred on the composition and behaviour of these materials. The project is based on steel’s atomic structure and the way it changes when heat is applied. In her opinion, this transformation is a mirror of our political and social environment, and of humankind.

Any heat process implies, above all, change. On the surface we perceive a variety of colours that appear when heat is applied to the steel, whilst on the molecular level new grains are formed. How they will share the space with the existing crystals depends on the speed of the cooling process. If too quick, the result is a hard and brittle structure in which cracks may appear. If cooled slowly, the steel is tougher, being, therefore, more resistant to shock and impact. This process of the inclusion of new elements into an existing structure echo the dangers and the beauty of our globalised society.

Pereira combines steel with lead, a rare material found in nature, to symbolise the potentiality of transcendence to a higher level. Lead, although poisonous, is still widely used because of its ability to resist the elements while steel, although one of the strongest metals, is the most susceptible to the elements.

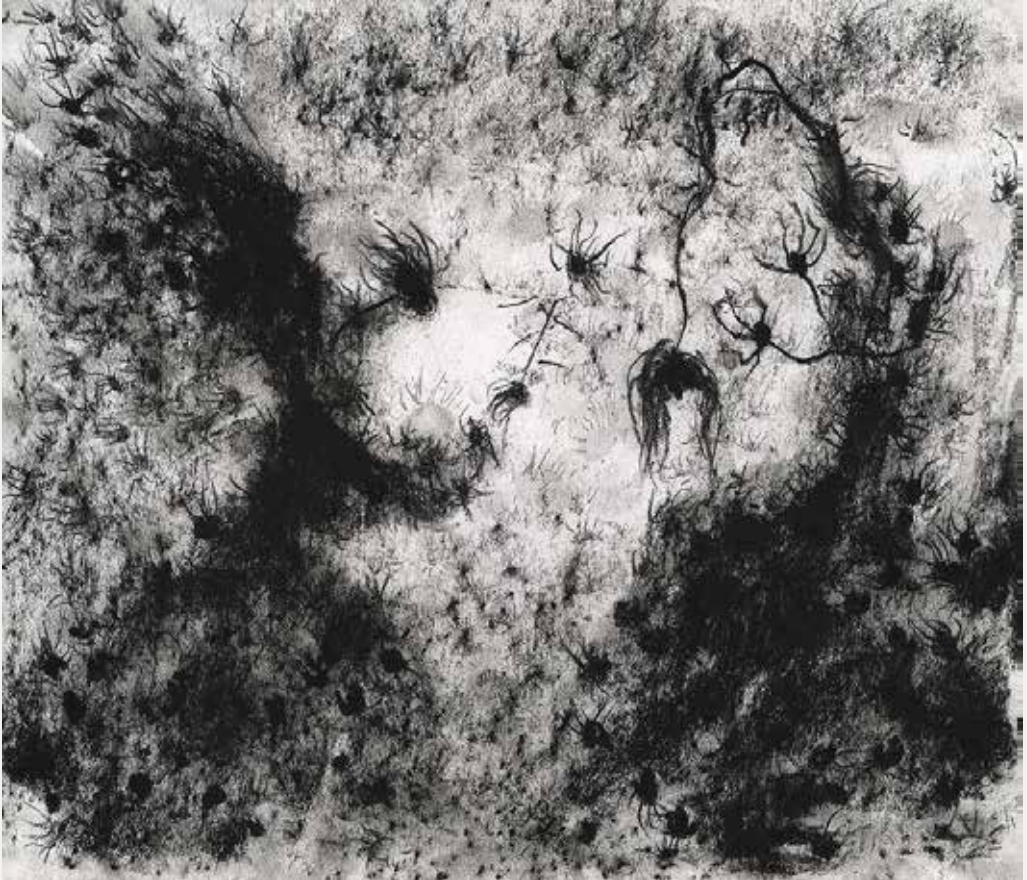
Inspired by Dürer’s theory of the magic square, wherein the sums in any of the four quadrants, as well as the sum of the middle four numbers, are all equal, this project explores this idea of equality within the differences that characterise us as human-beings. Moreover, the square is a form that has been present throughout time, both as a structural element and as an object.



*Not afraid of heat, nor of the frozen winters (detail), 2017*

Medium: steel and lead | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Wilted Annunciation 1, 2017***

Medium: pastels on paper | Dimensions: 21x24cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# ANTHONY CATANIA

*Malta*

## A PASSIO FOR A WILTED ANNUNCIATION

**A**nthony Catania is a visual artist specialising in myths and fables. Often on the threshold of grotesque figurative painting, his style attempts to capture subversively idiosyncratic portraits of legendary beings embedded in bizarrely anachronistic settings. His personal exhibitions; *Selve Oscure*, *The Cave of Centaurs*, *The Piper's Requiem*, *Spectre-Bark and Last Light*, were held at the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Malta Maritime Museum and Heritage Malta. In 2014, Catania was awarded a Masters degree in Fine Arts (Digital Arts) with distinction from the University of Malta where he is presently undergoing Ph.D studies under the tutorship of Prof. Vince Briffa. Catania worked as a concept designer for the indie game *Will Love Tear Us Apart?*, as a poster designer for Unifaun theatre productions and as an illustrator of academic book covers. He currently lectures on illustration, primitivism and sequential art at the University of Malta.

*Wilted Annunciation* depicts the typical scene wherein the angel Gabriel announces the birth of Christ and incarnation of God. The announcement is that of Christ's passion endured for our redemption from the agony in the garden until His death on Calvary. It also depicts the passion of a Mater Dolorosa who will cradle the corpse of her son through fertile/dead sunflower seeds. Death and life are depicted in an oxymoronic manner.

As the expression 'falling in love' denotes, the suffering experience of a 'passio' is not considered as something that you actively *do*, but as something happening *to you*. The Virgin's passion shown here is that of the presaged suffering about to be bestowed upon her seared heart and the divine progeny she carries. The seeds of the decaying sunflowers, whether blackened or spectrally white, portray a craving love for embryonic life through pain; whether mirrored through the Virgin's agony, reincarnated from a van Gogh canvas or undulating against the Mediterranean blood sea.

Metamorphosis and hybridism always emerge as recurring motifs in Catania's work. The surreal anthropomorphism in the flora of the naturalistic imagery of this project is reminiscent of the surreal portraits of Giuseppe Arcimboldo who animates the *nature morte* genre into one of a *nature morte vivante*. The decayed outcrops, dasyphyllous offshoots and other vegetative excrescences in these works represent the grotesque limbs, joints, torsos and heads of the (im)mortal subject forms. The visual expression drawn from nature is their inescapable DNA and thus the confluence of atmosphere, landscape and abstraction becomes equal fertile territory. When nature eventually supersedes humankind after our inescapable demise, spiritual faith and myth will still haunt our world.



***Wilted Annunciation 2, 2017***

Medium: mixed media on paper | Dimensions: 28x42cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Wilted Annunciation 3, 2017***

Medium: mixed media on paper | Dimensions: 28x42cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*





***Tfittxija, 2017***

Medium: limestone | Dimensions: 200x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# ANTOINE FARRUGIA

## TFITTXIJA

**A**ntoine Farrugia 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.

*naghmlu wegħda, naghmlu hafna wegħdiet u  
nghollu ħarsitna lejn is-smewwiet*

We all behave very differently in good times and in bad times. When luck is on our side, we feel like we are on top of the world - we don't need anyone and think of no one except of ourselves. However, in times of great need, uncertainty, and misery, we desperately try to seek divine intervention and search for a way to communicate with the greater being. We realise that we are nothing and that a metaphysical force may provide hope.

*Why me, God?  
Please help me God  
Don't forget me God  
Thank you God!*

There are many different religions, different deities, different visual forms. Everyone makes up their image of God according to their imagination or beliefs.

Farrugia's art is all about forms and the pure form is the climax of his creative process. The sculpture produced by Farrugia portrays a hollow cocoon-shaped shroud that encapsulates a multiplicity of forms. The sculpture features a large fissure on its front that invites the viewer to interact with the extremely polished interior of the work – permitting one to feel the fulfilment of perfection.



*Tfittxija (detail), 2017*  
Medium: limestone | Dimensions: 200x30cm  
*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Modern Argonauts, 2016***

Medium: wood | Dimensions: 80x450x123cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# CLINT CALLEJA

*Malta*

## MODERN ARGONAUTS

Clint Calleja graduated in 2006 from the University of Malta with a degree in History of Art. He furthered his studies in 2011 with an MA in Baroque Studies. In 2016 he acquired an MA in Fine Arts, with both postgraduate degrees being awarded by the University of Malta.

There is an equitable history of Maltese immigration in which the 'boat' has become a paradoxical symbol. The same sea vessel now being used by illegal immigrants as a last resort for survival and emancipation, and which European countries are trying to keep away from their shores, was once in earlier Maltese history seen as a means of salvation. The wooden boat with common Maltese surnames inscribed on its hull is both a watercraft and a symbol for the movement of these people.

Emigration from Malta reached its peak in the period succeeding World War II because of the precarious economic and demographic conditions on the island. Rapid growth in population, increasing unemployment, and limited economic resources that Malta had to offer caused a political crisis. Mass and rapid emigration functioned as a safety valve for the people. The common Maltese surnames carved on the hull of the boat represent the people of this emigration era; the boat itself represents their relatively unobstructed movement. Therefore, up until the end of the twentieth century, Malta did not regard immigration as a critical concern but rather as a solution to a crisis. However, when the topic of irregular immigration developed into a national issue, the 'boat' began to be seen as a harbinger of this crisis - a threat.

*Modern Argonauts* was the final work presented for Calleja's MA Fine Arts degree, completed under the tutelage of Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci.



***Modern Argonauts, 2016***

Medium: wood | Dimensions: 80x450x123cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Blurred Lines*, 2017**

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 270x190cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# DARREN TANTI

*Malta*

## BLURRED LINES

**D**arren Tanti is an artist renowned for his technically accomplished and thematically loaded paintings. His focus is on hyperreality and the integration of the digital into explorative painting techniques. Tanti has participated in numerous art projects and exhibitions. Some of the most prestigious exhibitions that Tanti participated in are the 15th edition of the Biennial of young artists from Europe and Mediterranean held in Thessaloniki in 2011; *Time, Space, Existence* at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2014 together with Architecture Project Malta; as well as *Homo.Melitensis*, the Malta Pavilion at the 2017 57th edition of the Venice Biennale. Apart from many awards received, Tanti was the winning artist of *Divergent Thinkers 2* and was shortlisted for The Commonwealth Young Achievers Award in 2015. One can find artworks by Tanti in the national art collection at MUŻA, Valletta and at the Embassy of the Republic of Malta in Washington D.C.

*Blurred Lines* is an explicit artwork that seeks to illustrate, without pretensions or self-righteousness, the conflicting creeds embraced within our societies. The conflicts between these creeds are omnipresent, engulfing most of the global political agenda and manifested in various forms according to the societies in which they are observed. The Mediterranean Sea, being the natural meeting point for European, Near Eastern and African people, as well as for various other people from different ethnicities, tends to be a hotspot for collisions. Different people have different ways of dealing with spirituality; for some it is essential and for others it is optional; for some it is valuable whereas for others it is irrelevant; some are militant about it and others oppose these militants with liberalism. The issue becomes salient when unrest is caused on a personal or societal level due to differing feelings on such matters. Can a very spiritual individual and his 'world' cohabit with a non-spiritual individual and his 'world' and/or with spiritual individuals of a differing denomination? If they affirm so, how genuinely ready are they to coexist? The artwork is the result of a superimposition of a screenshot from a provocative pop music video by Robin Thicke called *Blurred Lines* onto a delicate and sensitive representation of a woman in a posture evocative of a crucified person. The image is open to the perception of the viewer; in fact, the artist does not provide any route of action or interpretation. Perhaps, in such a context, the music video screenshot, with its capitalist paradigms of hedonism, is an instance of corruption of a spiritual contemplation, or perhaps it is an open challenge to the ones absorbing the image to accept different ways of life coexisting in the same place. This artwork, in relation to the plural culture of the Mediterranean Sea, questions the current state of the region's intense religious traditions and its relationship with less spiritual contemporary ways of life.



***Blurred Lines (detail), 2017***

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 270x190cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Bonjour Tristesse - Diptych no 3***

Medium: archival cotton fine art giclée mounted on A.C.P. | Dimensions: 50x50cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# DUŠKA MALEŠEVIĆ

*Serbia*

## BONJOUR TRISTESSE

**D**uška Malešević is a Valletta based photographer working in the fields of documentary, contemporary urban, and minimalist photography. Her education includes a Masters in Psychology of Art from La Sapienza University of Rome.

In 2016, she published *Postcards from Paradise*, a photography book that was launched in Rome and received an Honorable Mention from International Photography Awards.

Her exhibitions include *Postcards from Paradise*, Architecture Project, Valletta and Libreria del Viaggiatore, Rome, 2016; *The Summer Collective*, Lily Agius Gallery, 2014; *Selekted Malta*, Malta Design Week, 2014.

The title and its message enhance and affirm the gestures of this body of work, or at least lend it a feeling of soft irony.

*Bonjour Tristesse* explores the motifs and textures of abstraction in the context of contemporary urban photography.

Presented in diptych form, the project accentuates the feelings of tenderness and melancholy with absence of human life but replete with its reckless imprints.

Approaching her subject with a cool objectivity and with utmost attention to light and shadow, to composition and to colour, *Bonjour Tristesse* results in images both personal and ambiguous.

Ultimately, it is a poignant study of humanity and a stark reminder of environmental legacy; something it is so easy to detach ourselves from.



***Bonjour Tristesse - Diptych no 5***

Medium: archival cotton fine art giclée mounted on A.C.P. | Dimensions: 50x50cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Foreign Shadow, 2016-2017***

Medium: glossy postcard paper and postcard rack | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# ESMERALDA KOSMATOPOULOS

*Greece*

## FOREIGN SHADOW

**E**smeralda Kosmatopoulos is a multi-disciplinary conceptual artist working around themes of language and identity. Born in Greece and raised in Paris, she now lives and works between Paris and New York. Her work has been exhibited in galleries, institutions, and public spaces in North America, Latin America and in Europe, these include Kunsthall Charlottenborg (Copenhagen, Denmark), Künstlerhaus Wien (Vienna, Austria), AMA | Art Museum of the Americas (DC, USA), Palazzo delle Arti Napoli (Naples, Italy), and Kunsthall Aarhus (Aarhus, Denmark).

Often working in-situ, Kosmatopoulos has been invited to several residencies including Kooshk Residency (Tehran, Iran), BAR (Beirut, Lebanon), Victoria Square Project (Athens, Greece) and MASS MOCA studios (North Adams, USA). Kosmatopoulos also worked alongside socially charged entities such as the Organization of American States (United States), the Kayani Foundation (Lebanon) and the Museum Louis Braille (France) creating large-scale installations to raise awareness on social issues.

*Foreign Shadow* takes a critical look at the ethnocentric way we as foreigners approach other cultures in the post-Internet age.

In the book *Persian letters*, Montesquieu recounts the experience of two Persian travellers visiting France for the first time and, through their falsely naive comments and innocent astonishments over the local customs and traditions, presents a satire of the 18th century French society. *Foreign Shadow* takes the opposite approach and explores how cultural clichés and over-simplifications are formed, disseminated and perpetuated at a time of technologically accelerated global cultural homogenisation where we all become virtual receivers and emitters of information.

The work was created during a residency in Tehran. Kosmatopoulos drew from her personal account of living in an Iranian society and made a case study. She delineated a list of historical, cultural, and economical Iranian stereotypes of how Iranian culture is perceived abroad - be it through the mosaics of its historical monuments, the Persian carpets sold in the bazaar, or the commodities exported abroad - and an accumulation of her own photographs that would emphasise these clichés. These unprocessed images personally snapped during her daily explorations of the city, were then virtually transformed, enhanced with photo editing filters and watermarked with an image of the shadow of her hand holding a phone, before being posted on social media platforms.

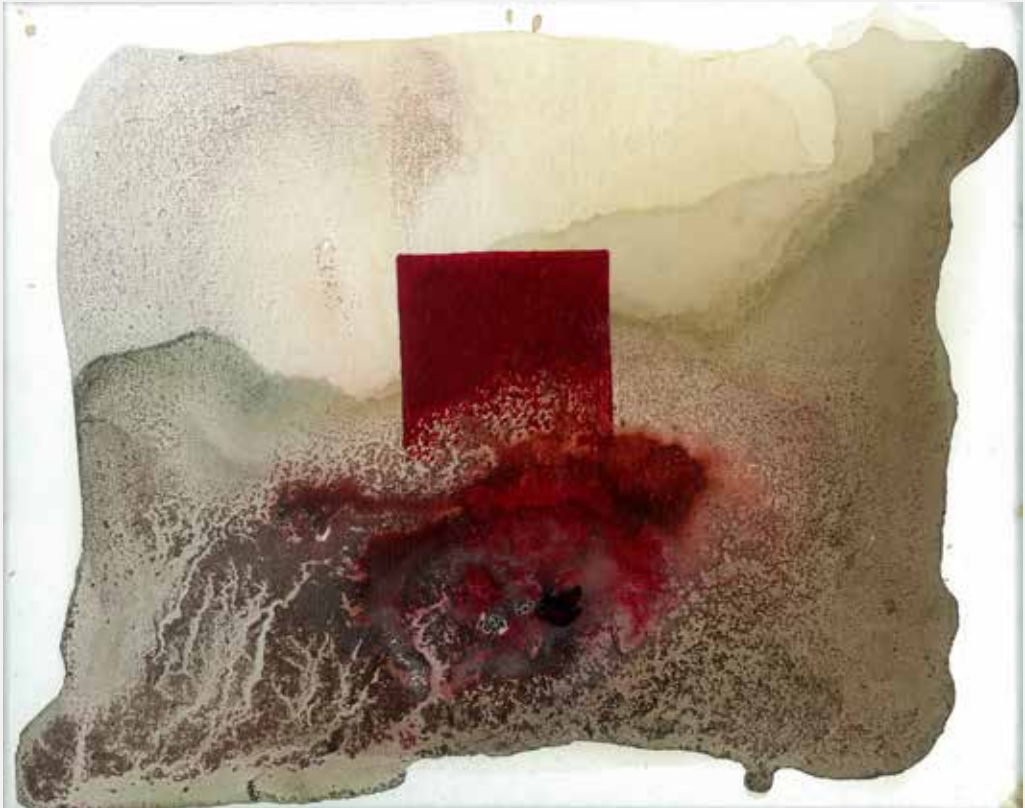
In the installation space, the 150 digitally modified images, printed on glossy postcard paper are casually strewn over the floor around a postcard rack. In a world where images are replacing words and social media posts have taken over personal letters, the postcard rack has intentionally been left empty, looking irrelevant in the centre of a sea of instantly consumable and disposable images.



*Foreign Shadow, 2016-2017*

Medium: glossy postcard paper and postcard rack | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*Disintegration of red square, 2017*

Medium: ink on canvas and oil on paper | Dimensions: 24x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# GENIA CHEF

*Germany/Russia*

## “DISINTEGRATION OF THE BLACK SQUARE THROUGH MEDITERRANEAN COSMISM.” VISUAL DIARY

**G**enia Chef was born in 1954 in Aktjubinsk, Kazakhstan/USSR, where his father had been banished to during Stalin’s regime. In 1961 the family returned to Moscow. From 1972-77 Chef studied at the Polygraphic Institute in Moscow and received first prize for his diploma. He participated in nonconformist exhibitions. In 1985 the artist moved to West Germany. From 1988-1993 he studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts where he received the Fueger Gold Prize. Today Chef lives in Berlin and participates in exhibitions worldwide. His work has been shown at the following institutions and exhibitions: Museum of Modern Art, Ostende (2001); Yeshiva University Museum, New York (2003); Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide (2005); II Moscow Biennale (2007); a solo show at the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (2011); CUA Museum of the University of Colorado (2011); Palazzo Bembo, 55th Venice Biennale (2013); UNMART/ University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque (2014); Telluria Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale (2015).

The Mediterranean region is a region seeped in controversies and Malta embodies the quintessence of this condition.

The island is geographically located between the European and Oriental worlds; this is the reason for its turbulent history which has enriched its multifaceted subversive culture. The Mediterranean Sea has always been a sea of spiritual, political, religious, cultural and social contradictions, provoking conflicts to this day.

Chef's project reflects these diverse contrarities. It juxtaposes historical events with current affairs, facts with mythologems, and portraits of historical figures with contemporary people living on the Mediterranean coast and abstract forms with their organic disintegration.

The project consists of numerous small works united to form an expanded installation which formally combines contradictory elements: calligraphic diary notes, hand-written with ink on canvas, oil portraits on paper combined with biographical information, and profane and spiritual symbols. The work also reflects the dichotomy of our modern world and its transitional state.

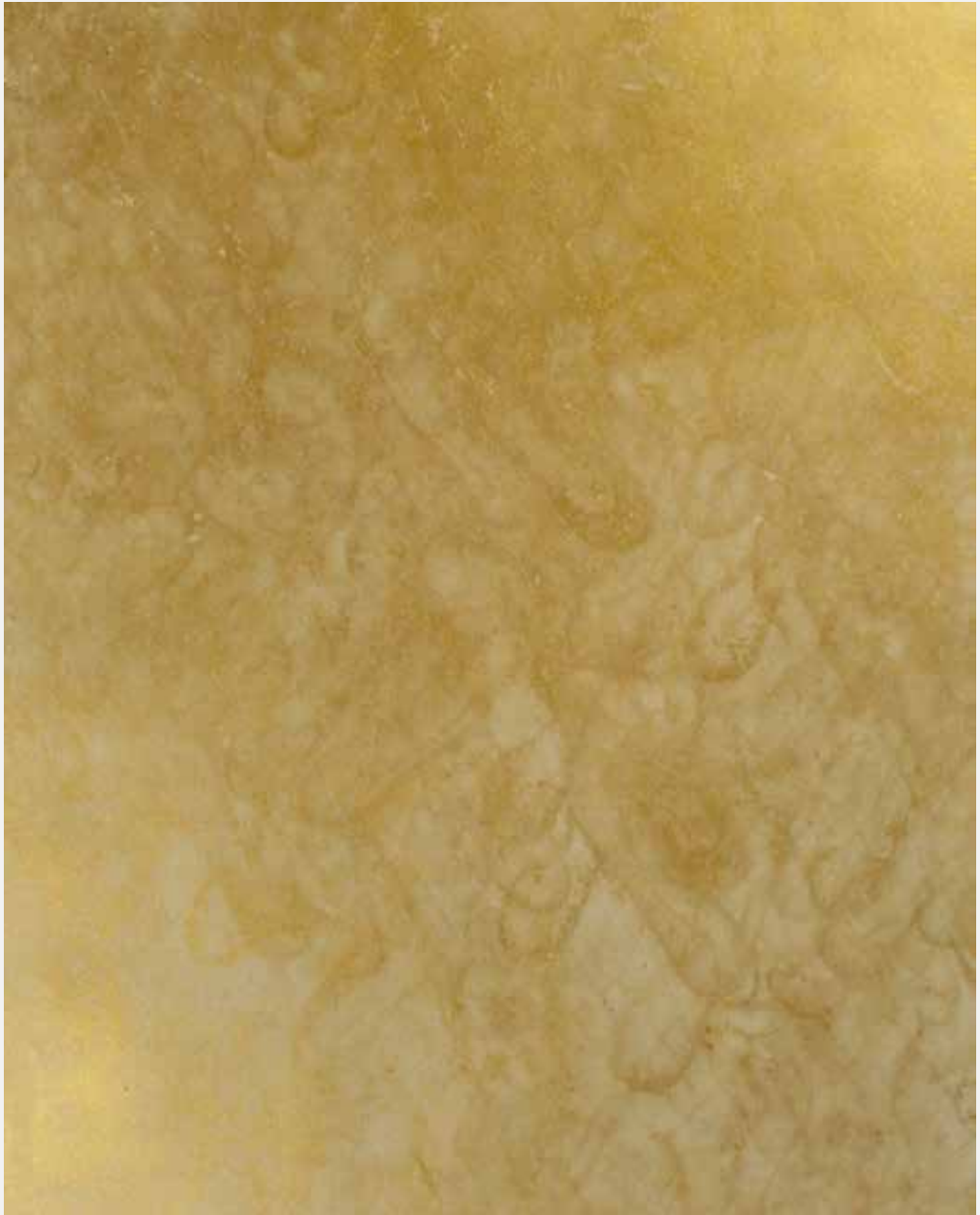


**Franco, 2017**

Medium: ink on canvas and oil on paper | Dimensions: 24x30cm

Image courtesy of the artist





***In the face of the Lord, 2017***

Medium: paper, golden powder | Dimensions: 120x1800cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# GOR CHAHAL

*Russia*

## IN THE FACE OF THE LORD/ ST. GEORGE STRIKES CY TWOMBLY

**G**or Chahal was born in Moscow in 1961 and is one of Russia's most highly accomplished contemporary artists. His creative method synthesises a scholastic approach with the elements of ritual. Chahal is of a type rarely found in the Russian artistic community: a 'universal master', with a diploma in science and applied mathematics from the Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute, a contributor to numerous creative experiments undertaken in cooperation with groups of poets, musicians and artists of the Soviet-era underground. The style of Chahal's creations lie within the parameters of Actual Art, yet in substance they are at the other end of the spectrum. His themes often encompass faith and show a deep awareness that true art simply cannot exist without a connection to tradition of the sacred, Christianity in his case.

Gor Chahal often works intuitively, convinced of the necessity of something that has not yet realised its meaning. Comprehension usually comes afterwards, upon completion of the work. It can be said that the final end reveals the meaning of the whole duration of existence. By making everything complete, the end highlights the significance of an individual's life and its historical role. Death turns life into a biography, retroactively regulates it, gives it new coverage, and sometimes even a moral meaning.

The theme of retrocausality is significant to the Christian worldview. *Iliotropion* by St. John of Tobolsk teaches us to co-ordinate the human will with the divine on the same basis; "Try to do what you must, and understanding will come at the end of the life path, when you meet the Creator".

The exhibition project develops on a series of experiments on the polyphonic union of the traditional liturgical language and that of contemporary art. A spatial image of a person walking to the face of the Lord is created by a long piece of paper rolled across a gallery floor at the Mdina Cathedral Museum towards the *St. Paul* retable, the gold powder markings show traces of people walking upon it towards the *St. Paul* retable. These footprints are hardly perceptible at the beginning yet seem to merged into the golden ground at the end of the path. The movement flows forward from a blank sheet towards the gold-filled surface. It dawns on the viewer that this movement is not plausible in reality. Technically, everything happens the other way around. Dipping his feet into a golden powder, the artist moved backwards from the gold end of the path towards the blank end, leaving footprints with traces of powder on the paper until the gold powder ran out. The viewer feels the movement of the tracks in reverse, the visual image of retrocasuality. Thus, two 'arrows of time' have been created. The arrow of action directed to the future, and the arrow of understanding directed to the past.

The installation titled *St. George strikes Cy Twombly* is based on the orthodox iconography *The Miracle of St. George* and depicts the relationships between Truth and Falsity; Good and Evil; Tradition and Contemporaneity. The straight line of St. George's spear corresponds to straight gold path of the previous installation.

Thus, despite all cultural and spiritual conflicts centered in the Mediterranean region, we need to find ways that lead to the resolution all problems.



***St. George strikes Cy Twombly, 2016***  
Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 100x70cm  
*Image courtesy of the artist*



***The Prayer Circle, 2016***

Medium: acrylic and gold paint on linen canvas | Dimensions: 240x210cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# GUY FERRER

*France*

## INSPIRATIONS - REVELATIONS

**A**s an artist, Ferrer's commitment is to work in his studio, a special and spiritual place which allows him to be connected with what may be called the Great Mystery. God, Angels, Nature... the words we use have little importance. What is important is being conscious of the wonderful mysteries of life and the miracle of light for which we must be thankful, and using artistic inspiration to create and share emotions with other human beings.

Sharing art and ideas with an international audience is the *raison d'être* of his art. The process of interacting with others is the achievement that drives him to work and create. He dedicates his whole life to art.

Paintings and sculptures are his usual media, as well as poetry and architecture.

## **GRAND REBUS-REBUS**

Man is a question, a living question awaiting an answer on his becoming, his hope of becoming, on his reason to be here.

Man here is a sign, like a letter, in formal equilibrium that says he is waiting for this answer, as a cup ready to fill with spiritual revelations.

Gold is his element, his decoration, his emptiness and his fullness.

## **INSPIRATIONS**

Whatever the cultures or the religions of the world, all have laid down the principle of a creative energy that has thought about the world, which gives it its immanence.

Here the anthropomorphic figure suggests the Christian god, but the luminous orange which he radiates could also make one think of the religions of India.

## **LE GRAND MYSTERE**

This painting depicts three characters in the position of priors, gathered around an empty and very large face, suggesting the form of a star. While the canvas is quasi bi-chromatic in black and gold, a light, luminous and multicoloured, energises the whole composition

## **THE PRAYER CIRCLE**

In the elliptical centre of this large brick-red canvas, a few sages are united in council. They seem to be conversing on the course of the world or on the collective conscience, and great decisions could be made about peace or love. Who knows...

## **MERE-MORT**

On a golden background, suggesting the sacred, a trilogy seems to dance. Like a light, the Spirit dominates the cycles of life, life that is present in the circular footprints marked in gold.



***Inspirations, 2016***

Medium: acrylic and gold paint on linen canvas

Dimensions: 240x210cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Mere-Mort, 2016***

Medium: acrylic and gold paint on linen canvas

Dimensions: 240x210cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*Tondo I, 2017*

Medium: lightbox | Dimensions: 180cm diameter

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# HANIA FARRELL

*Lebanon*

TONDOS

Hania Farrell was born in Lebanon and now lives and works in London. Farrell has exhibited widely in London (National Portrait Gallery; Royal Albert Hall; Royal College of Art), around the UK (The Beane, Canterbury; Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens; Banbury Museum; City Arts Centre, Edinburgh) and internationally in Beirut, Lebanon (Ministry of Tourism; Bellevue Medical Centre; Beirut Art Fair; Beirut Art Week), Dubai (Art Dubai), and Singapore (Singapore Art Fair).

Her work has been included in the biennial *Of the Sea, Art in the Dockyard 2016* (The Historic Dockyard Chatham, UK) and in major shows such as the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 2016.

She was a finalist of the SOLO Award (2017); RPS International Images for Science (2016) and Saatchi Magazine ART&MUSIC's Point & Shoot (2013). Farrell was awarded the ArtGemini Prize for the Photography and Digital category (2016) and The Dockyard Prize (2016).

*Tondo I* and *Tondo II* are part of *Tondos*, a larger ongoing series of sizable lightboxes featuring digital collages. The series borrows its name and circular format from the Italian Renaissance Tondos; round paintings, sculptures or architectural elements often depicting religious scenes. Each collage fuses together a variety of architectural elements, frescoes, sculptures and digital technology, representing different religions, faiths and philosophies throughout history and within the confines of the Mediterranean and its Diaspora.

The framing of the collages within the confines of lightboxes serves to reinforce the metaphorical value of light as a metaphysical path of faith and equally as a vehicle towards Enlightenment.

The elements included in *Tondo I* and *Tondo II* in particular are sourced from the artist's own photographic archives, including amongst others, images of the Basilica Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the Temple of Haroeri and Sobek in Kom Ombo, Saint Isaac's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg, CERN in Geneva, Angkor Wat in Siam Reap, and Jantar Mantar in Jaipur. Some portions of the imagery might be more easily recognisable than others. Because of the digital processes of layering and juxtaposing, the collages invite the viewer to spend time in contemplation, seeking to unearth a web of hidden symbols.

This complex and multilayered syncretism ultimately attempts to generate a new iconography, which is of course, not aiming to substitute traditional religions. Yet, it might represent *a third way*, where sets of beliefs from different faiths and philosophies merge, to provide the foundation and facets for the identity of truly global, open-minded individuals. For instance, Christian teachings could then live through and alongside Islamic ones by means of Buddhism and ancient polytheistic religions as well as rationalist philosophies explaining the world through measurable sciences.



***Tondo II, 2017***

Medium: lightbox | Dimensions: 180cm diameter

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**Aina Putnina**

***River and Night, 2016***

Medium: digital print on canvas | Dimensions: 100x140cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**Aina Putnina**

***River and Rain, 2016***

Medium: digital print on canvas | Dimensions: 100x140cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# IAF ANIMA MUNDI AINA PUTNINA

*Latvia*

## ENCODERS

**A**ina Putnina graduated from the Art Academy of Latvia in 1992 and from the Baltic International Academy in Riga, Latvia in 2011. Since 1994, she has participated in exhibitions, workshops, and other projects in Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Georgia. Since 1993, Putnina has been employed at the Art School for children and adults, teaching painting and computer graphics.

Her creative interests are painting and digital graphic media. She uses expressive abstract and landscape elements, together with ornaments, for the emotional narration of composition. Putnina combines traditional painting with technological applications, often exploiting the expressive use of colour and tonal contrasts.

The artist's works are characterised by an emotionally expressive mood using colours, lines and shapes to tell subjective stories. In the works we see the interpretation of natural forms, found in our environment, that we use in our everyday lives. The simple geometric shapes and forms are messages from the past, linked to the witnessing of our creative and abstract thinking processes.



**Aleko Lomadze**

***Abstract 1, 2017***

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 30x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**Aleko Lomadze**

***Abstract 2, 2017***

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 30x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**Aleko Lomadze**

***Abstract 3, 2017***

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 34x45cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# IAF ANIMA MUNDI ALEKO LOMADZE

*Georgia*

## ENCODERS

**A**leko Lomadze is a Georgian artist and iconographer. His icons are stored in different temples in Georgia; in Tbilisi, Ozurgeti, Choxatauri, Xobi, as well as in Vienna's Holy Mother temple.

For almost 15 years his work consisted of carvings on mill stones as well as other stones, collected with the assistance of his close friends, from all over Georgia. He has also created artistic marble rugs which have a special radiance and are used in some paintings.

Over the past 15 years Lomadze has participated in many exhibitions. His works can be found in private collections and public institutions in Georgia and abroad. He has the blessing of the Georgian Patriarchate and several works are housed at the Patriarchate.

Lomadze participates in different art projects, exhibitions, festivals, art seminars and workshops in Georgia and other countries, including Lithuania, Latvia, and Portugal, together with others.

He joined the ANIMA MUNDI project in 2013.





**Zita Vilutyte**

***Can You Hear My Heart Beat*, 2016**

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 200x200cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**Zita Vilutyte**

***Exist no Exir*, 2016**

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 150x110cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# IAF ANIMA MUNDI ZITA VILUTYTE

*Lithuania*

## ENCODERS

Zita Vilutyte is an artist – painter, musician, composer, founder and artistic director of the Holistic Theatre of Movement S, a neuropsychology educator, lecturer, curator as well as a journalist. Vilutyte has been Director of the international art project ANIMA MUNDI since 2016 and became President of the association in 2016.

Since 1992 she has organised personal exhibitions and has taken part in joint creative projects in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, India, Italy, Denmark, Holland, Croatia, Germany, Georgia, England, Macedonia, and other nations. By 2016, Vilutyte held more than 40 solo exhibitions of paintings and graphics. In 2011, she received the bronze award in an art contest organised by Five Golden Stars Gallery, Netherlands.

She has released 17 solo music albums and composed music for film and theatre. Vilutyte has also collaborated with the music group VARTAI to create many audio - visual projects. An additional four albums have been produced together with various Lithuanian musicians.

## IAF ANIMA MUNDI

*Aina Putnina (Latvia), Aleko Lomadze (Georgia), Zita Vilutyte (Lithuania)*

The greatest encoder master of Renaissance ambitions, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, said that man is allowed to lead his own life without any guidance from above. As Mirandola wrote, God created a man as a centre of this world and said to him:

*“We have given you, Oh Adam; no visage  
proper to yourself, nor any endowment  
properly your own, in order that  
whatever place, whatever form, whatever  
gifts you may, with premeditation, select,  
these same you may have and possess  
through your own judgment and decision...  
It will be in your power to  
descend to the lower, brutish forms of life;  
you will be able, through your own decision,  
to rise again to the superior orders  
whose life is divine.”*

Nowadays came the moment to our society to recognise that every one of us can take a decision and become responsible for life, not only his own, but also for LIFE as a whole, for every thought, word, action and everything what we do. The role of the artist in this is to have a very deep purpose. Art and culture are increasingly seen as a central element in the development of humanity. Artists are the facilitators between different groups of society, they create a dialogue with a language which is understandable in any part of the world.

Never has civilisation been threatened so seriously as now. The artist creates the art at a historical moment, under the blows of reactionary forces - political, economical, religious, ideological, forces armed with an arsenal of modern technologies. To be an artist in today's world is a multifaceted effort.

ANIMA MUNDI movement was born to be the platform of a new higher culture, longing for transcendence and real meaning.

They would like to bring together exponents of all the arts; painters, writers, musicians. Rooted in traditional values, they transport the eternal spirit against the dissolution of the profound using different means, old and new, from Folk arts to Avant-garde.



**Aleko Lomadze**

***Abstract 4, 2017***

Medium: acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 30x54cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



**171111, 2017**

Medium: video screens and magnifying lenses | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# JAMES ALEC HARDY

*United Kingdom*

171111

James Alec Hardy is preparing for a new Epoch by objecting to the hijacking and colonisation of our minds. His concerns as an artist are focused on how propaganda is delivered through television, internet and media advertising, which are all products of manipulation, and the effect they have on the sublime consumer. Hardy states that “we are products of manipulation and the forces of mainstream information controlled by the media, resulting in our collective cultural identity mirroring a farcical ‘interactive reality TV mega-drama’ stuck on continuous-loop!”

His intention is to create subjective interpretations of video and to positively use the effect it has upon spirit in a meditative form. Based in London UK, he is represented by the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery.

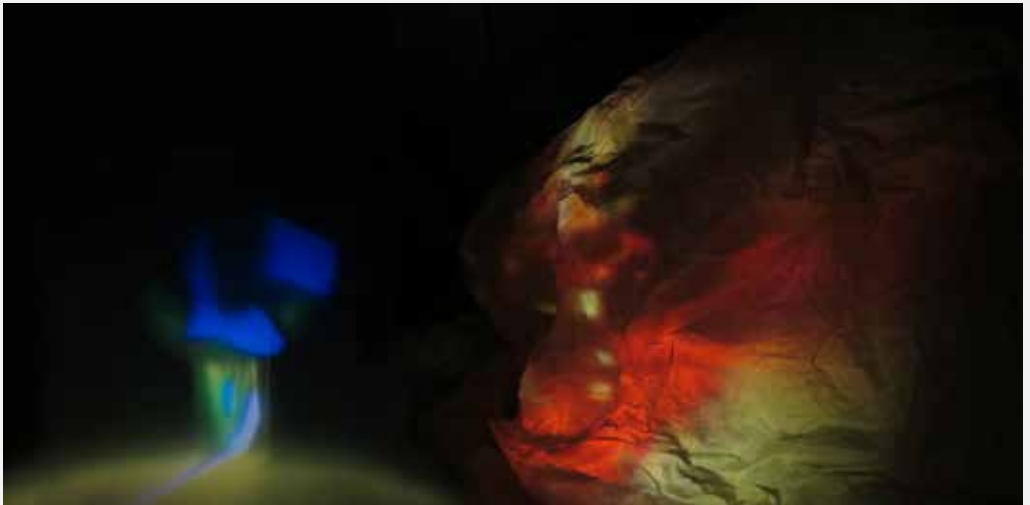
Deep underground, within the subterranean vaults of the Mdina Cathedral Museum, are the special historic remains of a Byzantine wall, never again to see daylight.

This unique location has inspired James Alec Hardy to sensitively create a site-specific installation, transforming the crumbling remains into an ethereal experience, producing an otherworldly-effect resembling a portal opening up into another dimension.

Using old televisions mounted with magnifying lenses, the moving image is projected strategically into the room. The viewer is restricted from entering the space, but is invited to step onto the 'edge of the abyss', evoking an intimate experience whilst engaging the viewer with the installation. These TV-projectors create 'imperfect' versions of the original video footage so that the focus and attention is placed on the effects superimposed on the underlying architecture, rather than on the raw subject matter.

Inspired by the Hockney-Falco thesis, which argues that the Old Masters used optical technology to assist them in creating paintings, Hardy began to experiment with magnifying lenses that distort the projections of video content. In this work he has attempted to rupture the format frame of a video, which always correlates to that of the technical device that contains it. Hardy has ensconced his practice with the materiality and physicality of the equipment he uses to create and present video. He collects and then incorporates obsolete analogue equipment into his works wherein video screens are used as building blocks, typically arranged as totemic motifs of power, control and worship.

With darkness being a primary requirement for cinema, the construction of moving image and video installation artworks is often confined to blacked-out rooms and isolated. The dominance of an electronic flickering screen or projector thrives on such basic conditions, allowing a unique dialogue to develop between the video, the environment and the space between the two.



**171111, 2017**

Medium: video screens and magnifying lenses | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*Souls Lost to Lust (detail), 2017*

Medium: stoneware ceramics and wooden palettes

Dimensions: 235x120cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# JOSEPH AGIUS

*Malta*

## SOULS LOST TO LUST

Joseph Agius is not inspired by beauty. He is inspired by life's vicissitudes, decadence and deterioration, by wanton destruction and death - the singularly democratic leveler. He philosophises on man's despicable brutality and violence. Although he does not moralise, he exposes and condemns man's heinous acts of deceit, hypocrisy and betrayal. Agius began his ceramic studies 13 years ago at the School of Art and Craft in Targa Gap, Mosta. He has participated in several collective exhibitions and organised four solo exhibitions including a solo show at Palazzo Castellania in April 2010. Along with his ceramics he often uses rusty sheet metal recycled from 45-gallon barrels found abandoned in Malta's countryside. In addition to these 'found objects', Agius uses old newspapers that, in his opinion, transform into a symbolic protest of the media that obscures everyday reality.

The subject matter tackled in this work is synonymous to themes often depicted in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch. Lust and will are the dominant themes of *Souls Lost to Lust* inspired by Bosch's paintings centred on this same subject. Agius uses a large wooden gate to set the scene onto which he attaches figures representing the sinners who have fallen to lust and saints praying for the dead. The perspective gives the scene a feeling of the scene being watched from God's eye view.



*Souls Lost to Lust (detail), 2017*

Medium: stoneware ceramics and wooden palettes

Dimensions: 235x120cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Runtime, 2017***

Medium: specific three-channel video installation with sound | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# LENA LAPSCHINA

*Austria*

## RUNTIME

Lena Lapschina graduated from the State Stroganow University of Fine and Applied Arts in Moscow. Currently she lives and works in Vienna and Lower Austria. Lapschina won the Austrian State Grant for Video and Media Art in 2011. She has also been awarded several prestigious residencies, including the Djerassi Residence Artists Program (Woodside, California), KuS (Heerlen, Netherlands), ORTung (Strobl, Austria), and Nordens Hus (Reykjavík, Iceland).

In Lena Lapschina's three-channel video installation *Runtime*, the main character is moving with great haste. It does so for minutes, for hours, for days. There is nothing in sight, not even a fata morgana. Synchronously, a timepiece slowly but surely wanders across the scene.

At first glance it seems the piece is about a character driven by customary stress and inner conflicts, it turns out that this work is tackling the more sensitive issues of modern societies.

The character's attire gives us an indication that this is about modern civilisation at large, which, in the eyes of many people, is at stake.

Perhaps the artist wants to remind us of two facts: 1. Through the ages people on this planet have been running along the surface of the earth's crust in search of paradise. 2. Once again, it is the Mediterranean that is the arena for many of the world's greatest conflicts.



***Runtime, 2017***

Medium: specific three-channel video installation with sound | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Silence, 2017***

Medium: digital art print on photo board | Dimensions: 45x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# MARIA KALETA

*Poland/United Kingdom*

## SILENCE

**M**aria Kaleta holds a Masters degree in Fine Art from The Academy of Fine Arts in Poznan, Poland and has since also studied Exposition and Display at The Poznan National College of Arts. She is currently living in London.

Kaleta's portfolio includes painting, drawing, pastels, traditional printmaking and desktop publishing. She particularly enjoys working with oils, watercolours and, her latest fascination, digital art. Working on a computer or a computer tablet she creates artworks - often in the form of a digital sketch - with a focus on capturing the momentary impressions. These computer generated artworks are dynamic and offer an honest and refreshing representation of any given subject.

Kaleta's work has been exhibited across Europe, Russia and Latin America, where she has earned several awards. Her most recent solo exhibitions in London, titled *Identity & CoExistence* and *Together* were very successful.

In the series of works entitled *Silence*, Kaleta renders the unmistakable faces of people in urgent need of help; silent faces that have no words to describe their desperate state of affairs.

It is her view that life on Earth has become increasingly complicated and unpredictable and that the negative impact we have had on our planet has been underestimated. The critical tipping point for our planet used to seem like light years away, beyond the imagination, but suddenly it is upon us as is the urgency to resolve these issues. In addition to environmental issues there are political problems, but very few volunteer to tackle these responsibilities beyond the next election. It is in these troubled times that the spirit of division becomes stronger than the need for unity. Blame becomes the common language. It is easy to dissociate ourselves from these problems with border control and fortified walls. We barely pay attention to distant wars apart from when we are watching news coverage.

Kaleta feels lucky to live in a unique city like London. She considers this multicultural society as a successful social experiment where people of all races, creeds, and colour work together for the common good. She is hopeful that this optimistic view of London's social structure can be applied as a model for our future civilisations.

On the other hand, in the light of recent political decisions - such as the proposal to build segregating walls and tighten passport controls - she has become more pessimistic. Every stranger crossing a border is no longer treated as a guest but as a thief.

No solution is simple but people suffering from hunger, homelessness and rejection need to be considered. The striking portraits in these artworks represent this marginalised group of people who are in urgent need of help. Here Kaleta also tries to portray their silence, because they have no words that describe the pain of their plight.



***Silence, 2017***

Medium: digital art print on photo board | Dimensions: 45x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Genesis 1, 2016***

Medium: egg tempera, true gesso on birch plywood | Dimensions: 40x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# MERNA LIDDAWI

*Jordan*

## ILLUMINATION: A NEW VISION

**M**erna Liddawi is a British-Jordanian artist born into an Orthodox Palestinian family in Jordan. She describes her art as ‘a spiritual journey to discover hidden beauty in the universe’. Her work has been described as ‘touching the unknown’.

After completing a science degree in Cairo, Liddawi moved to the UK in 1994, where she taught maths for many years. She gained a BA in Fine Art and in 2017 was awarded an MFA with distinction from West Dean College (Sussex University). She is now based in the UK.

Liddawi’s work has been shown in several group exhibitions in London. She had a solo show *Revelation* at Asia House, London and exhibited internationally in Venice, Portugal and at the XI Florence Biennale. She was awarded the prestigious ‘Lorenzo il Magnifico’ painting award at the XI Florence Biennale 17 and won ArtGemini Prize in Painting and Sculpture 2016.

The palimpsest of Liddawi's life – a childhood in Jordan, a grounding in the Orthodox church, a career in mathematics and science – is glimpsed through her pieces. The process is at once meditative and draws on the mystery of creation, repetition in nature and the calligraphic marks of the Arabic script. Her work opens a window onto a belief in harmonious universe and creates a space for contemplation in a world that is discordant and conflicted. For Liddawi art is a spiritual journey to discover the hidden treasures of beauty around us and in the universe.

Using methods handed down from Byzantine artists, imagery is worked in tempera made of ground minerals and earth pigments mixed with egg yolk solution. The tempera is laid down on gessoed panels prepared in the artist's studio using a lengthy process, preparing organic glue and sanding to a smooth finish. Multiple thin glazes of paint create luminous images. The panels are gilded with genuine gold leaf of various colours using medieval methods.

Process is absolutely central to the art: the authenticity of the base elements, the careful preparation of the materials and the layered depths of a gradually evolving work. The physical process of creating art was a form of worship for the medieval artist, a prayer in itself, as it can be for Liddawi too. The hidden treasures and depths glimpsed in base elements are revealed by time as if through alchemy. Yet the images created remain simple.





***White Light 3, 2017***

Medium: white gold leaf, bole, true gesso on birch plywood | Dimensions: 40x30cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Heaven (Europium), 2016-2017***

Medium: photo on plastic foil | Dimensions: 100x200cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# MICHAEL VON CUBE

*Germany*

## HEAVEN AND EARTH

**M**ichael von Cube was born in 1952 and now lives and works in Munich, Lower-Bavaria and Malta/ Gozo. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich under Prof. Mac Zimmermann, and has been awarded a number of scholarships and prizes: Scholarship of the city of Munich. Scholarship 'Cité international des arts', Paris. He received a working grant at the Art Foundation, Federal Republic of Germany.

His works can be found in the following public and private collections: Gov. Graphic Collection, Munich. National Library Frankfurt. Collection of the city of Munich. Collection of the ADAC, Munich. Collection of the city of Nuremberg. Collection Schörghuber, Munich. Foundation Niederreuther, Gauting. Foundation Schivkova, Sofia. Von Cube's art has been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad.

## HEAVEN

When writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe set off on his travels to Italy, Europe was passing through what is referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. The education system and lifestyle of the ancient world was seen as the model for a civil society. Committed to Goodness, Truth and Beauty (Winckelmann), artists and romantics from all over the continent were drawn to the cradle of European culture: The Mediterranean. The painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein created *Goethe in the Roman Campagna*, the famous portrait of the German writer.

*Europium* takes an ironic look at this idealistic approach or what is indeed left of it today:

The princess of peace and her system of values surrounded by lemons symbolising a united Europe. It refers to the vision of the writer, Goethe, just like *Peace-game* does to the abolition of violence and war.

## EARTH

Realistic art does not come without observing reality. Artists who express themselves through this form of visual art feel compelled to look very closely at their object of study.

*Peace-game* uses the graphic novel style: dark, brutal and direct. This drawing was created entirely from messages and images that flood the Internet, the press and social media on a daily basis. *Peace-game* refers to Ego Shooter, Counterstrike and similar games that play with concepts of war and death as the underlying reality.

This piece of work strongly mirrors Goya, Munch or Picasso's art tradition, spotlighting the human heart and mind where it hurts the most. The quotes in *Peace-game* refer to these artists.

The reality of the political situation in the Mediterranean surpasses the image of brutality spread across media channels, and so the picture remains what it is and what it should be – art with a helpless plea.



***Earth (Peacegame), 2016-2017***

Medium: watercolour on paper | Dimensions: 200x270cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Bees1, 2017***

Medium: giclee pigment print | Dimensions: 73x49cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# NICOLA ARKELL REED

*United Kingdom*

**BEE CHOSEN, HAVE A HIVE...**

**AN INVESTIGATIVE ESSAY INTO BEEKEEPING**

**N**icola Arkell Reed is an artist working in film, photography and printmaking and is a lecturer who holds a BA and MA in Fine Art from Central St. Martins. Arkell Reed had a solo show at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, Mayfair, London and won the National Geographic Magazine's photography competition with an image published in the October 2016 issue. She has illustrated two novels: *Fox* by Anthony Gardner and *Tittle Tattle* by Bill Keeling. Arkell Reed has tutored Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art and the University of Gloucestershire in addition to running drawing workshops at the University of Malta, Chelsea College of Art and *The Idler* Magazine. One of her projects explored Mother-Daughter Dynamics, using herself and her three daughters as the subjects. Another project was a series of photographic portraits focused on the dissipating tribes and cultures in Ethiopia, the intention being to celebrate the individuality, unique style and personality that is so pertinent to the people of the Omo Valley in Southern Ethiopia.

The theme of the APS Mdina Biennale 2017 explores the concept of the Mediterranean as a 'Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities'. Malta, in the heart of the Mediterranean, boasts proof of this theme perfectly with its incredibly diverse culture that reflects the various societies that have come into contact with the Maltese Islands throughout the centuries.

The eventual naming of Malta is an example of the diverse mix of societies that have inhabited and left their cultural mark on the island. The Greeks called the island *Melite* which derives from the Greek word *meli*, which means honey. This name was also used under the Roman rule but was changed to *Malta* during Arab rule. The Greeks originally named the island after honey due to the long history and importance of beekeeping in Malta. Through the centuries, honey from Malta was considered a delicacy and used to be an export product from the island. It is acknowledged that the Phoenicians introduced domesticated beekeeping to Malta, using apiaries and earthenware jars. Only some punnic apiaries remain on the island.

As a passionate beekeeper and keeper of seven hives in Wiltshire in the United Kingdom, Arkell Reed's current project focuses on the urgent matter of saving our bees. Protecting our bees benefits the human population since without bees and their natural pollination, global food production would be severely damaged. At the APS Mdina Biennale, Arkell Reed is exhibiting a series of large scale prints that depict a female subject surrounded by bees. These etched prints will reference the traditional European custom of 'telling the bees', in which bees would be foretold of important events in their keeper's lives, such as births, marriages or departures and returns in the household. If this custom was omitted or forgotten it was believed that the bees abandon their hive, stop producing honey, or die. The etchings will reverse the notion of 'telling the bees'; the bees are telling us, they are encircling the female protagonist to raise awareness and explain the importance of protecting their species and saving our environment.



*Bees 2, 2017*

Medium: giclee pigment print | Dimensions: 73x49cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*Heart of the Tieqa tad-Dwejra: Stone imprints of the lost arch, 2017*

Medium: paper and 6 stone blocks | Dimensions: 50x50cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# PATRICE PANTIN

*France*

## HEART OF THE TIEQA TAD-DWEJRA

Patrice Pantin lives and works in Pantin, France

In July 2017, he participated in the exhibition *Folded-Unfolded* at Galerie Réjane Louin, Locquirec, France. In December 2017, he was one of the artists included in occupy Space Despalles, Paris 3, in collaboration with Dominique De Beir.

In May 2018, he will be participating in the Paper Project group exhibition on the theme of violence in paper at Gallery 104, Busan, South Korea, and in the same month will be part of Mac Paris, a collective show to be held in Paris.

There is a direct correlation between Pantin's work and the history of painting. He often borrows classical aspects of painting and drawing from old masterpieces, and then translates them into something contemporary.

These draped works are both pictorial and photographic, a juxtaposition that challenges traditional historic frameworks for painting. The interior of the Mdina Cathedral provides an ideal site for Pantin's installation as he feels that his work is complimented by the museum's collection of 'masterpieces and patrimonial heritage'. Pantin's work is confrontational, a physical rapprochement of these opposing forms that are simultaneously similar and yet different. The drapery is in keeping with traditional painting styles and is symbolic of pictorial virtuosity, the exaltation of the body and of modesty, though drapery can also be indicative of power. Through the pictorial character of the work, set alongside contents of the museum, a powerful dialogue is formed.

This series of works on paper (50x50cm) presented under framed glass vitrines, showcase the six stone blocks recovered from the Azure Window site. These stones provide the original impetus for the work. The recovery of stones from an underwater environment was documented in spring / summer 2017 on Gozo, a small island forming part of the coastal shores of Malta.

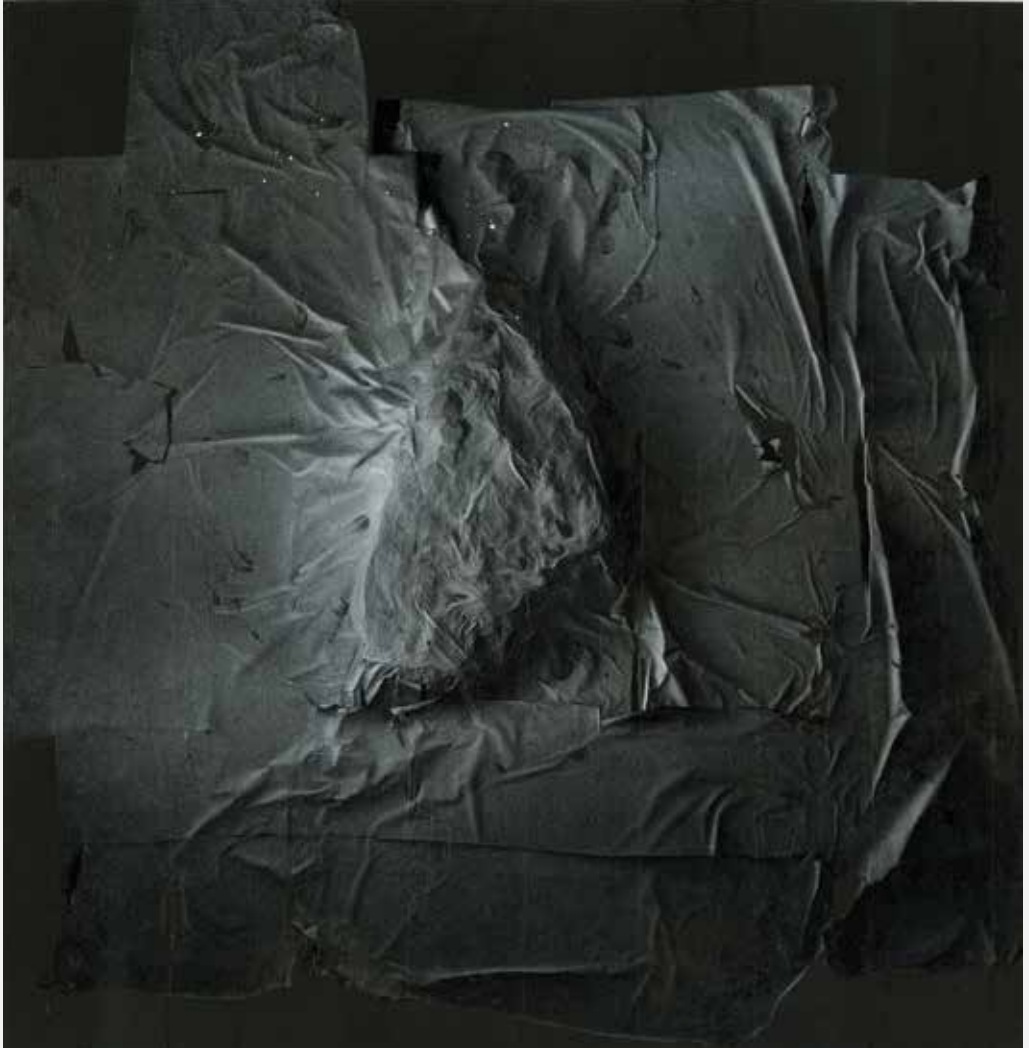
Extracts from diary entries covering the underwater excavations at the origin-site of the project:

**May 2017:** "I will dive at the site in the coming days but I must first get into shape because it is quite deep: 30 to 40 metres!! I'll bring back what I can!"

**May 2017:** "As you will see, we have put our hands on the heart of the Azure Window, considered the Guardian (tieqa) of this extraordinary place (Dwejra)."

**Early June 2017:** "I believe in the history of the heart of the stones. Two beautiful stones (in the form of a heart) are at your disposal for your homage project to the Guardian (tieqa) of Dwejra, that fell on March 8 during a big storm."

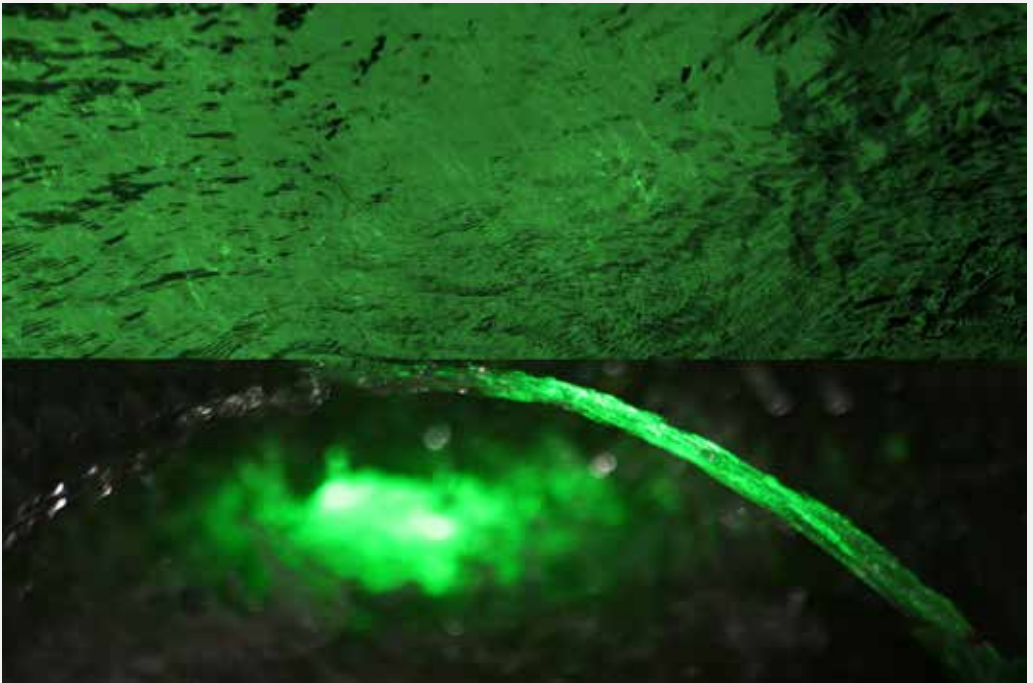
**End June 2017:** "I have been able to acquire 2 new stones at a depth of 28 metres! You certainly know that I will not be able to bring back tonnes..."



*Heart of the Tieqa tad-Dwejra: Stone imprints of the lost arch, 2017*

Medium: paper and 6 stone blocks | Dimensions: 50x50cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***vetro di mare / sea glass, 2016***

Medium: archival pigment print | Dimensions: 107x76cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# RENAY ELLE MORRIS

*United States of America*

## IL MARE

**R**enay Elle Morris is an internationally recognised writer, award-winning graphic designer and a photographer. Throughout her career as a creative director, she incorporated the use of design and photography in the development of media campaigns for private and public organisations. These include campaigns for Universal Pictures, CBS Records/CBS Publications, and TDS Time Warner. Morris extends this platform for visual communications for a global clientele, through CorporateIDeasWorldwide, and her personal online platform.

As a journalist and member of the US and overseas press community, Morris was the international news editor for *Picture* magazine - a nominee for the coveted 'Lucie' award. In addition, as of 2016, she is the editor of the photographic & fine art development/content of the online artist resource/gallery [arstler.com](http://arstler.com).

Currently her primary focus is fine art photography presented in a large-scale format. She participates in gallery exhibitions in the United States and abroad with representation.

### Thoughts on Malta, the Mediterranean and Spirituality

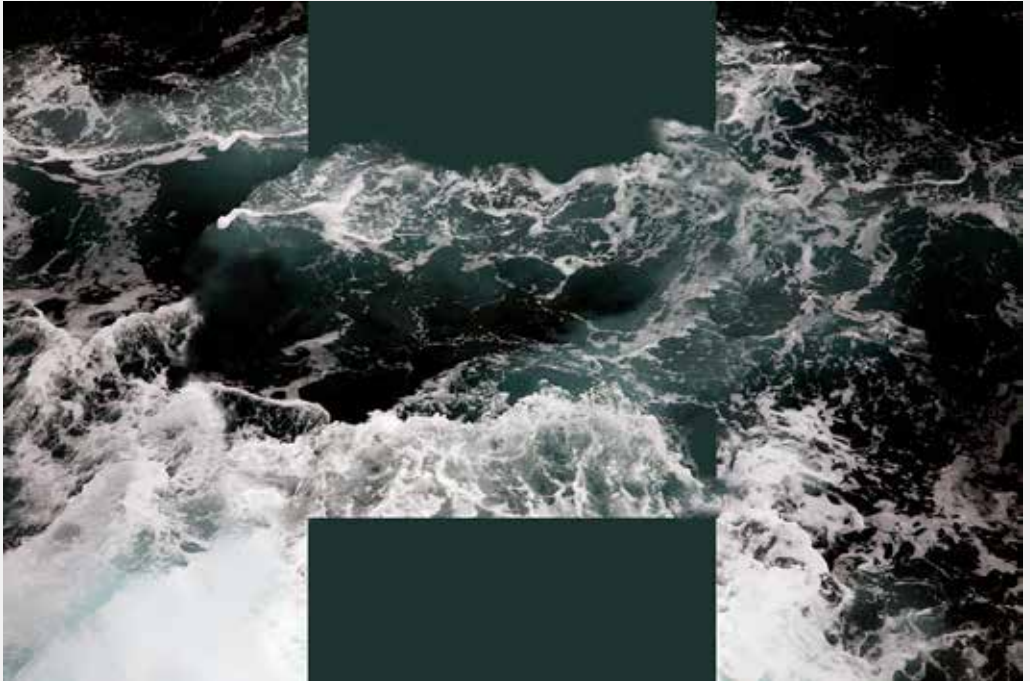
I have always been fascinated by the great seas. All those who desire to set sail, navigate, and explore this vastness of the unknown, from the ancient mariners to twenty-first-century explorers, are trespassers. Yet man and the sea have an illustrious history, measured in the words of important writers and poets who have triumphantly paid homage. Revered in religion and spirituality, scholars on biblical verse note “...*the collection of waters cited in scripture, signify truths.*”

The Mediterranean is a sea that boasts a trove of hidden secrets, a glorious energy, it is littered with shards of glass that illuminate its shores, and while what is lost in its depth remains mysterious, we know it continues to lure and seduce with its limitless power and chaotic verse. We know that it also found play in battles between barbaric states, as merchant ships passed one another in sea-lanes and in ordinary souls of diverse origins seeking salvation, life's liberties and freedom through faith, all the while clinging onto overloaded transports. And what prayers were said when the sea was angry and those lost their way only to be forgiven and allowed to continue on in uncertain currents, finding relief in its calm, its grace.

On Malta: “*Whenever I breathed its sea air, I felt renewed. I vowed to return.*”

At the crossroads of the Mediterranean is Malta, the island nation, captive to battle and territorial reign. A pristine archipelago, a beacon of hope still undiscovered in this era by many, yet as history observed, so important. The photographic series, *Il Mare*, was born after a first visit in 2015. I was captivated by Malta's beauty; its faraway space. The work is a modern interpretation - ethereal, spiritual, and mythical in nature.

The artist's inspiration for and participation in the 2017-18 APS Mдина Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale is dedicated to the memory of her beloved sister Pamela M. Bernard.



*passagio a malta / passage to malta, 2016*

Medium: archival pigment print | Dimensions: 152x102cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*structures [ mdina ]*

*Structures [ mdina ], 2017*

Medium: multichannel sound installation

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# ROBERT ELIAS STOKOWY

*Germany*

## STRUCTURES [ MDINA ]

Robert Elias Stokowy is a sound artist and researcher from Cologne, Germany, whose work is focused on artistic research and radical site-specific sound installations. The sonic surroundings of the sites selected for these installations are explored by the artist and become a key element in the installation. Through his work he delves into themes of instability, sensory balance, as well as the qualitative characteristics and potentiality of sound. The bases of his work revolve around phenomenological practices and consist of small, fragile sounds which hold very haptic and organic qualities. The installations are set up to give the viewer a multifaceted experience while drawing them into consciously connecting with their surroundings.

Robert Elias Stokowy has exhibited in Germany, South Korea, UK, Japan and the USA.

*Structures [ mdina ]* is a radical site-specific work of Sound Art through which recipients can experience the quintessence of Mdina. By focussing ontologically on the incorporeal essence of the City, the artist wishes to bring forward the spirits and their dynamic behaviour. From this perspective one gets an insight into the historic influences of these spirits on the city. Through sound, the artist explores the spirit of Mdina by working exclusively with and from its sonic environment. Spirit, in this context, is to be understood as the animating or vital principle held, giving life to physical structures as well as recognising the intangible, immaterial nature of the structure. For this Mdina Biennale, the artist will explore the spirit of Mdina through his Sound Installation by means of artistic research, meaning that art will be created from research conducted and then the art will become the research platform .

This reciprocal combination of art and research is at the core of the process that connects both parts. The aim is not to just create an artwork but rather to gain a greater understanding of sound's potential in the sonic environment of a site, inducing a conscious perception through the process of research. The sound material of the installation as well as the conceptual and compositional structure will be designed according to the research findings gathered in the City. The artist conducted listening studies in selected areas and noted his observations (which were documented as writings, drawings, diagrams, photographs and sound recordings). These studies are based on methods and practices of practical phenomenology and enactivism. While the sound recordings function as the raw material with which he works, the documented observations create the *Gestalt* and the inner form of the artwork. Thus, the project emerges intrinsically from the City itself, while his role as an artist is reduced to a mediator between environment and artwork.



***Structures [ mdina ], 2017***

Medium: multichannel sound installation

*Image courtesy of the artist*



*The promiSSed land, 2017*

Medium: oil and acrylic on canvas | Dimensions:100x130x3cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# SAVINA CAPECCI

*Italy*

## THE PROMISED LAND

Savina Capecci currently lives in Pordenone, Italy and studied at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts where she got her BA in Painting in 2014, moving on to her Master degree which she completed in 2016.

Capecci has worked as assistant to the professors of Painting at the Free Academy of Fine Arts in Klagenfurt, Austria as well as participating in selected exhibitions including *Transgenic Attack*, Atelier der Stadt Klagenfurt, Austria; BV Sommerausstellung, BV Galerie, Professional Association of Visual Artists, Klagenfurt, Austria; *Memento Andy*, Atelier 3+10, Venice; *Avviso di Garanzia*, Fuori Uso, Ex Tribunal, Pescara; Prize Lilian Caraian dedicated to young artists of the region, Museum of Modern Art Revoltella, Trieste, *Incident III – Accident*, Czestochowa Museum, Poland. Capecci has also received several art awards and was a finalist at Premio Arte Cairo Mondadori, Palazzo Permanente, Milan where her work was included in publications.

These seminal artworks presented by Savina Capecci under the theme ‘The Mediterranean: A Sea of Conflicting Spiritualities’ are titled *The PromiSSed Land*. The painted images depict the human aspect of the current immigration crisis happening throughout the Mediterranean

Capecci feels that these works are expressive of the essence of the concept of ‘waiting’ in all its forms. Here ‘waiting’ is an elucidation of a psychological state, an internal turmoil of feelings arising while sitting in a boat that becomes an ephemeral ‘non-place’.

These works vividly express the many conflicting feelings that are intertwined with ‘waiting’, such as good and evil or joy and confusion mingled with hope and anxiety for an unpredictable and uncertain future. The Promised land inevitably becomes a ‘pro-missed’ land.



***The promiSSed land 2, 2017***

Medium: oil and acrylic on canvas | Dimensions: 30x120cm (polyptych of 4 canvases 30x 24cm each)

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Waiting for triptych, 2017***

Medium: oil on canvas | Dimensions: 25x100cm (24x30cm each)

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Lack of Spirituality, 2017***

Medium: video installation, water, ink and paper | Dimensions: 102x54cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



# SEPHORA BALDACCHINO

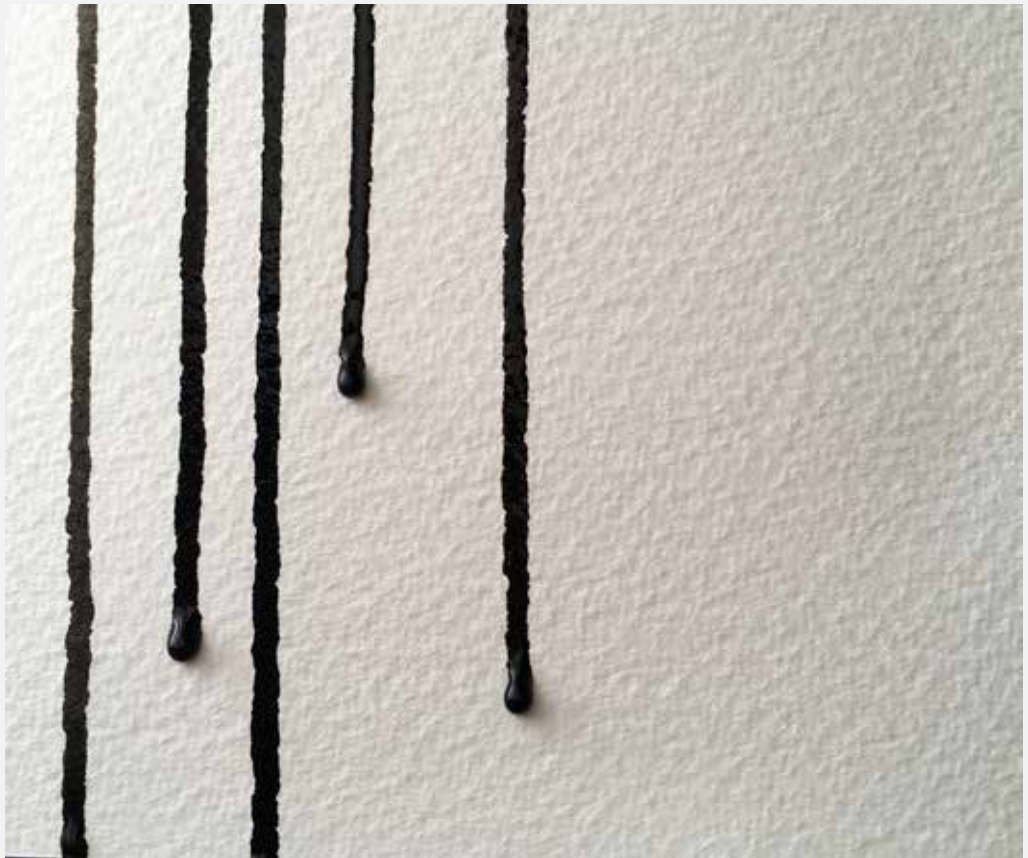
*Malta*

## LACK OF SPIRITUALITY

**S**ephora Baldacchino is a Maltese-based freelance artist who has been drawing from a young age. After six years of intense studies in drawing and painting with various tutors, she started to formulate her style by the age of 16. She graduated with a BA in History of Art from the University of Malta in 2015 and is currently undertaking an MA in Fine Arts at the same university under the tutorship of Dr. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci.

The installation piece *Lack of Spirituality* is an artwork that reflects and highlights a twenty-first-century perspective upon the possibility of a spirituality that lacks importance and arguably has lost its value amongst the mainstream issues of individuality, community, socialisation and technology. The work narrates the concept of a community with abundant spirituality formed by religion and culture that is being transferred through each person, family member, friend and the community. Ruefully it is going unnoticed. This artwork inspires the viewer to listen, observe and be inspired.

The format of this piece is a video installation showing black ink moving across paper and through glasses of water. This moving ink symbolises the passing of spirituality through each individual, attempting to guide them in the right direction. Spirituality is often disregarded or passed on so subtly through traditions and cultural beliefs that it may be ignored or not recognised, even though it is ever-present. The ink eventually forms an image of the reproduction of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, but without Christ, leaving the weeping Madonna lamenting the non-existent spiritual value in humanity. The spreading of the ink in the video, forming an image of the Madonna, symbolises the spreading of spirituality within the community, however culminating with it being neglected and leaving the Madonna without her Son. This artwork is symbolic of how selfish individuals can be, and is an allegory of how a community deprived of the significance of spirituality and the guidance of something spiritual sometimes leads them down paths in life that are not necessarily beneficial to them.



*Lack of Spirituality, 2017*

Medium: video installation, water, ink and paper | Dimensions: 102x54cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Dal-Bahar*, 2015-2016**

Medium: ceramics | Dimensions: 45x25x55cm

*Image credit: Kevin Casha*

# SINA FARRUGIA MICALLEF

*Malta*

## MEDITERRANEAN/MEDITERRAN

Sina Farrugia Micallef is fascinated by clay, fire and the alchemical process of change. The imagery of her ceramic work relies on the subtleties of tone, texture and nuances wrought from the manipulation and metamorphosis of this malleable material. Working with clay often requires contemplation, tranquility, and considered assessment - qualities which appeal to the artist. In a world of impermanence and change, she is mesmerised by the process of transforming this tactile but seemingly dormant matter into a more enduring, stable and dynamic manifestation. Her challenge is to create work that has both the memory of a human hand yet still exhibits spirit in spite of the technical constraints and dogmatic procedural requirements.

Sina Farrugia Micallef studied ceramics in both Malta and the UK and has taught art and ceramics since 1971. Her work has been exhibited in Malta, Cyprus, France and Rhodes, at Plymouth University, England, University of California Berkeley, USA and at Weiterbildung Centrum in Düsseldorf, Germany.

## MEDITERRAN

dal-baħar  
 li jgħaqqad  
 u jifred  
 li jidfen  
 u jwelled  
 għejun  
 ta' ħajjiet  
 u ġrajjiet  
 kaxkarni  
 għollieni  
 sabbatni  
 w imlieni  
 battalni  
 kissirni,  
 naddafni  
 u sqieni  
 kull qatra  
 mitlufa  
 imħabbla  
 b'ġrajjietha  
 imħażża  
 b'għeliemha  
 ta' tama  
 ta' rieda  
 ta' mħabba  
 w mibegħda  
 ta' sliem  
 u taqbid  
 ta' qilla  
 w indiema  
 ta' mewt  
 ta' twelid  
 dal- baħar  
 li jgħaqqad  
 u jifred

## MEDITERRANEAN

*(translated by the artist)*

this sea  
 that unites  
 and separates,  
 buries  
 and begets  
 sources of lives  
 and tales  
 swept me  
 raised me  
 beat me  
 and nourished me  
 emptied me  
 destroyed me  
 cleansed me  
 and nurtured me  
 every drop  
 adrift  
 pregnant  
 its tale  
 engraved  
 in runes  
 of hope  
 of faith  
 of love  
 of hate  
 of peace  
 and conflict  
 of harshness  
 atonement  
 of death  
 of birth  
 this sea  
 that  
 unites  
 and separates



***Dal-Bahar (detail), 2015-2016***

Medium: ceramics | Dimensions: 45x25x55cm

*Image credit: Kevin Casha*



***“We Are Not All Gods”, 2017***

Medium: yarn, acrylic stuffing, perspex-cutting, phosphorescent paints and audio | Dimensions: variable  
*Image courtesy of the artist*



# THOMAS C. CHUNG

*Australia*

“WE ARE NOT ALL GODS”

Thomas C. Chung is an Australian artist, born in Hong Kong in 1981, and now based in Sydney. In 2004, Chung completed his BFA at the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales.

Since 2008, Chung has presented 12 solo exhibitions and participated in the 2nd Land Art Biennial Mongolia. In 2012 Chung exhibited at the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery and in 2013 he was invited to the prestigious artist's residency The Swatch Art Peace Hotel. In 2015 he completed a commissioned artwork for Swatch® to commemorate their Swatch Club 25th Anniversary.

He recently represented Australia at the 4th Ghetto Biennale in Haiti, 9th Shiryaev Biennale in Russia and 3rd Santorini Biennale in Greece. His work is included in various private collections in Australia and internationally.

Since ancient times, heroes have illuminated the human condition, creating their immortality through narratives that have been passed down through generations. Suffering from the same frailties as us mere mortals, our superheroes battle with the same human struggles but on a more dramatic stage than our own. Superheroes have become enshrined in our modern mythology, comic book characters have become surreal and comics have transcended to become the 'new bible'. Created through popular culture rather than mythological folklore, rising from child-like tales and psychological epithets that have connected with contemporary society, these nascent fables have found a global audience.

To be worshipped by those who believe in these fables and what it means to be a 'God' is subtly referenced in this installation. Carefully constructed from yarn and acrylic stuffing (benign materials traditionally associated with craft and femininity) and re-appropriating it with modern techniques such as perspex-cutting and phosphorescent paints, the ideological conflict created within this setting is both strikingly conceptual and object-based; Iron-Man, Spider-Man, The Hulk, Superman and Batman being the chosen simulacrums to illustrate this. Set against a soundtrack, starting from Oceania towards Europe, the recording was taken whilst facing the open sea.

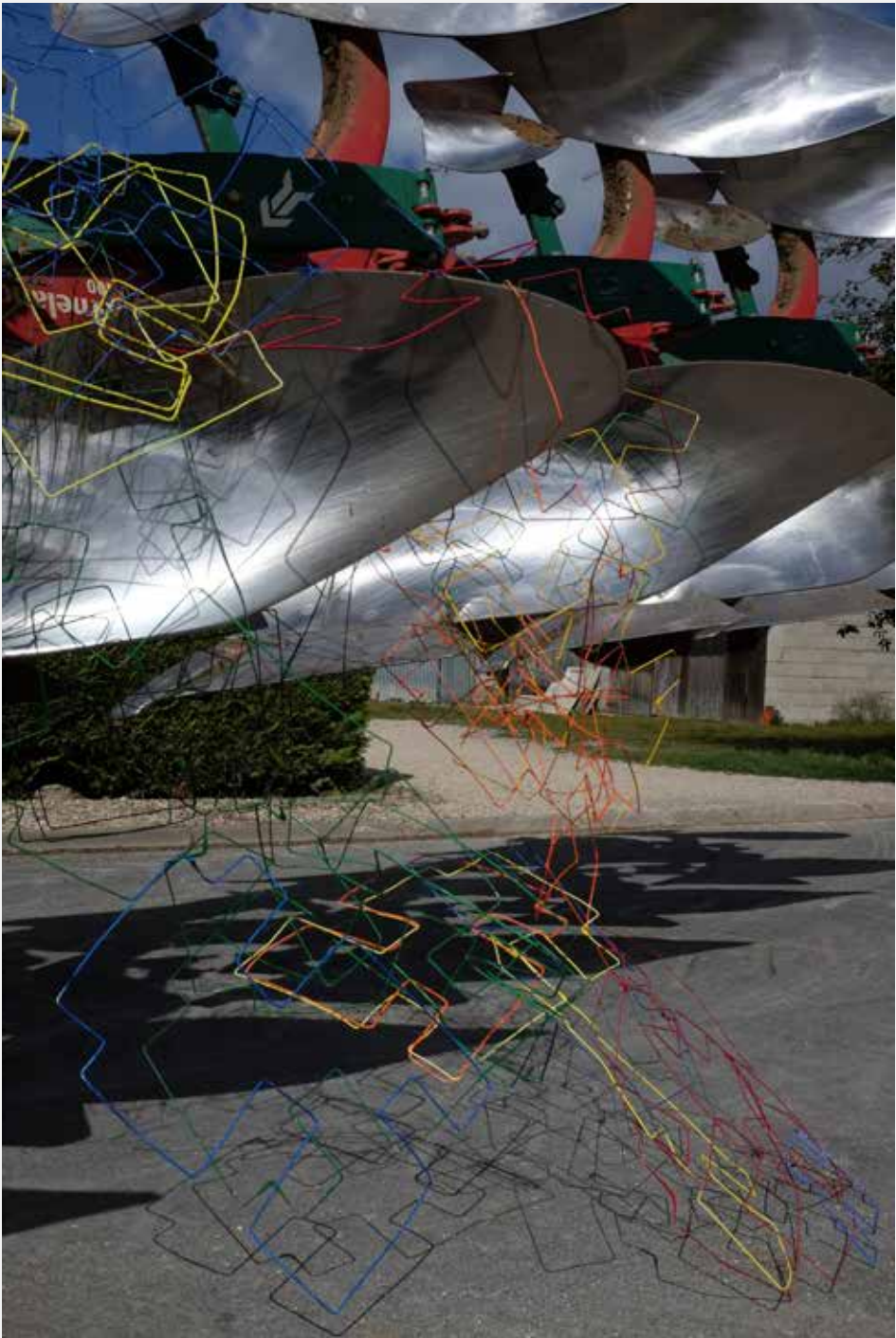
To question the origins of religion and its current standing, "*We Are Not All Gods*" is an artwork seen from a child's perspective, discussing the dichotomy of what it means to be iconic yet fictional in an increasingly complex world.



*“We Are Not All Gods”, 2017*

Medium: yarn, acrylic stuffing, perspex-cutting, phosphorescent paints and audio | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*



***Istrata, Strata, Strates, 2017***

Medium: painted wire | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*

# VINCENT CÔME

*France*

## ISTRATA, STRATA, STRATES

Vincent Côme's artistic practice involved, for a time period, the realisation of video and sound installations produced for different art centres and exhibition venues (Chauny, Hénin-Beaumont, Amiens, Paris, Malta). For a few years now, he has been making a return to painting and recently to the idea and exploration of form, thus ridding himself of the technical working process that technological installations require.

The completion of the work and installation in his new workshop and home is further transforming the continuation of his practice. Leaving the city as a place of residence for the countryside has changed his perspective on the world. The rhythm of the seasons is clearly visible. One is able to gaze at the sky and the permanent presence of a horizon...

Côme is one of the founding members of Friville Editions that has been publishing artist's research books since 2011.

Des strates, couches, empilements, surperpositions, amoncellements, recouvrements, emmêlements, accumulations, déplacements, migrations, glissements, enchevêtrements, mélanges, croisements, intersections, compilations, confrontations, entrechoquements, fusions, frottements,... conversions et reconversions... Strata, ħrieqi, stacks superpositions, munzelli, irkupri, taħbiliet, akkumulazzjonijiet, spostament, il-migrazzjoni, valangi, taħbiliet, taħlitiet, qsim, intersezzjonijiet, kumpilazzjonijiet, entrechoquements konfrontazzjonijiet, amalgamazzjonijiet, frizzjoni, ... konverzjonijiet u l-konverzjonijiet ... Layers, layers, stacking, overlaying, piles, overlaps, entanglements, accumulations, movements, migrations, landslides, tangles, mixes, crosses, intersections, compilations, confrontations, clashes, frictions, ... conversions and reconversions ... Strati, pannolini, impila, superpositions, cumuli, recuperi, coinvolgimenti, accumuli, spostamento, migrazione, frane, coinvolgimenti, miscele, incroci, intersezioni, compilazioni, scontri entrechoquements, fusioni, attrito, ... conversioni e conversioni ... Tabaka, bebek bezleri, superpositions, yığınlar, geri kazanımlar, karışımlar, birikimleri, yer deęiřtirme, gōç, toprak kaymaları, karışımlar, karışımlar, geçiřleri, keřiřme derlemeler, yzleřtirme entrechoquements, birleřme, sirtünme ... dōnüşümleri ve dōnüşüm yığınlarının ... Strata, pañales, pilas, montones superpositions, recuperaciones, enredos, acumulaciones, el desplazamiento, la migraciōn, deslizamientos, enredos, mezclas, cruces, intersecciones, compilaciones, enfrentamientos entrechoquements, fusiones, fricciōn, ... conversiones y conversiones ... Shtresa, pelena, oxhaqet superpositions, grumbujt, recoveries, pengesat, akumulimeve zhvendosje, migrimin, rrēřhqitje tē tokēs, pengesat, pērzierjet, kalime, kryqēzimet, compilations, konfrontimeve entrechoquements, bashkimet, fērkitim, ... konvertim dhe konvertim ... Strata, pánves, stoίβες superpositions, σωρούς, ανακτήσεις, εμπλοκές, συσσωρεύσεις, μετατόπισης, μετανάστευσης, κατολισθήσεις, εμπλοκές, μίγματα, διαβάσεις, διασταυρώσεις, συλλογές, αντιπαραθέσεις entrechoquements, συγχωνεύσεις, τριβής, ... μετατροπές και μετατροπές ... Slojeva, pelene, gomila superpositions, hrpe, povratima, vezama, akumulacija, pomak, migraciju, klizanje, vezama, smjese, prijelaze, križanja, kompilacija, sučeljavanja entrechoquements, spajanja, cijedenje, ... konverzija i konverzija ... Stratume, plenice, zлага, superpositions, kupe, vračila, zaplete, zbiralnikov, premik, migracije, zemeljski in zaplete, zmesi, križiřča križiřč kompilacijah soočenj entrechoquements, združitve, trenje ... konverzije in konverzije ... Strata, pelene, slaže superpositions, gomile, oporavak, zapleta, akumulacija, Zapremina, migracija, kliziřta, zapleta, smjese, prelaza, raskrsnica, kompilacije, konfrontacije entrechoquements, spajanja, trenje, ... konverzije i konverzije ...



*Istrata, Strata, Strates, 2017*

Medium: painted wire | Dimensions: variable

*Image courtesy of the artist*





**PIETA, 2016**

Medium: 3D animation

*image courtesy of the artist*



# Yael Toren

*Israel*

## PIETA

Yael Toren is a video artist working simultaneously in computerised 3D animation, painting and sculpture. Her main focus is on human imagery depicting the fate of people in the twenty-first century. This covers the subject of emigration and the plight of refugees in a disintegrating world. Themes like cycles of time and history, anthropocene and birth versus extinction, feature in her videos, along with cutting-edge 3D technology.

Toren completed her Bachelor's degree with honours at the Bezalel Academy of Art and studied theatre and stage design at Tel Aviv University. In 2015, she won first prize in the final exhibition of her MFA studies at Haifa University for her 3D animation artwork. For many years she has been deeply involved in the world of ancient illuminated manuscripts.

The return of the Pieta' personifies the ultimate symbol of grieving in an image of a mature figure bearing a corpse in its arms - the eternal refugee smitten by destiny as he wanders to and fro. This figure has been replicated and lined up in an endless succession of figures bearing their dead in their arms, creating a very haunting image. PIETA was chosen to be exhibited as part of the 'Turbulence Area' project, 5th Odessa Biennale of Contemporary Art 2017, curated by Mikhail Rashkovetsky.

# MUSEUM OF EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN CIVILISATIONS

The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale and MuCEM have come together to present contemporary art and dialogue on the Mediterranean at the Mdina Cathedral Museum. This international exchange between institutions and nations serves to emphasise the common and diverse elements that unite cultures across the region.

In the words of Mikael Mohamed, head of international relations at MuCEM;

“The French national Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations based in Marseille, on the shore of our common sea, is pleased to present two contemporary videos pieces by very talented Mediterranean artists at the APS Mdina Biennale: Ymane Fakhir and Lia Laphiti. The museum is delighted to be part of the APS Mdina Biennale, a collaborative opportunity that has permitted MuCEM to reinforce its presence in Malta.”

Lia Laphiti, an artist from Cyprus, twists everyday aspects of her country's geopolitical division in her installations, photographs and videos in order to create brash and playful tension through her ironic paradoxes. Her work falls somewhere between political fiction, documentary and experimental film, disrupting conventional fields and genres to show us how we have come to accept and normalise violence.

Recipe for Marinated Crushed Olives (*Le Recette des Olives Marinées*, 2006) is a pseudo-documentary of 2 minutes 48 in length in which Lapithi presents the necessary instructions for the preparation of marinated olives. It initially appears as a simple, innocuous demonstration for food preparation, yet the artist's habitual gestures are filmed against the backdrop of newspapers portraying the political situation in Cyprus.

The recipe concludes with an image of the closed jar, in which the olives are marinating, juxtaposed with a subtitle that evokes the ongoing division of the island since 1974.

This work is based on the importance of olive culture in the Mediterranean basin; its identity and strong symbolism. The artist captures everyday objects and the banal vocabulary of a recipe to portray the superficial treatment of the precious fruit. The olive, symbol of the Mediterranean, of peace, common to the two parts of Cyprus, is used to show how the marinating process, within a state of general indifference, can serve as a metaphor for a prolonged political situation.

Ymane Fakhir lives and works in Marseille. She creates photographs and videos which are a cross between documentaries and fictional works, focusing on the permanence of long-standing social and anthropological phenomena. She works across an extendable geographical area, in both private space and public space, building bridges between France and the Mediterranean.

Fakhir is a contemporary artist fascinated by methods of ethnographic investigation. She is particularly interested in rituals and gestures associated with the specific know-how and traditions unique to her culture and country of origin, Morocco, and her adopted country, France. With this background, she completed a residency at La Timone Hospital, Marseille, where she observed the attitudes and gestures of caregivers.

Taking Care (*Prendre Soin*, 2012) is a series of photographs and several films that express the links between carers and patients in a hospital situated within a large cosmopolitan city. This film is an ode to the practical knowledge and to the random choreographies that develop in this context.





MAIN PARTNER



SUPPORTED BY



Department of Art & Art History

Mucem



BUNDESKANZLERAMT  ÖSTERREICH



