

Lifestyle & Culture

Qed thossa is-shana? (Are you feeling the heat?)

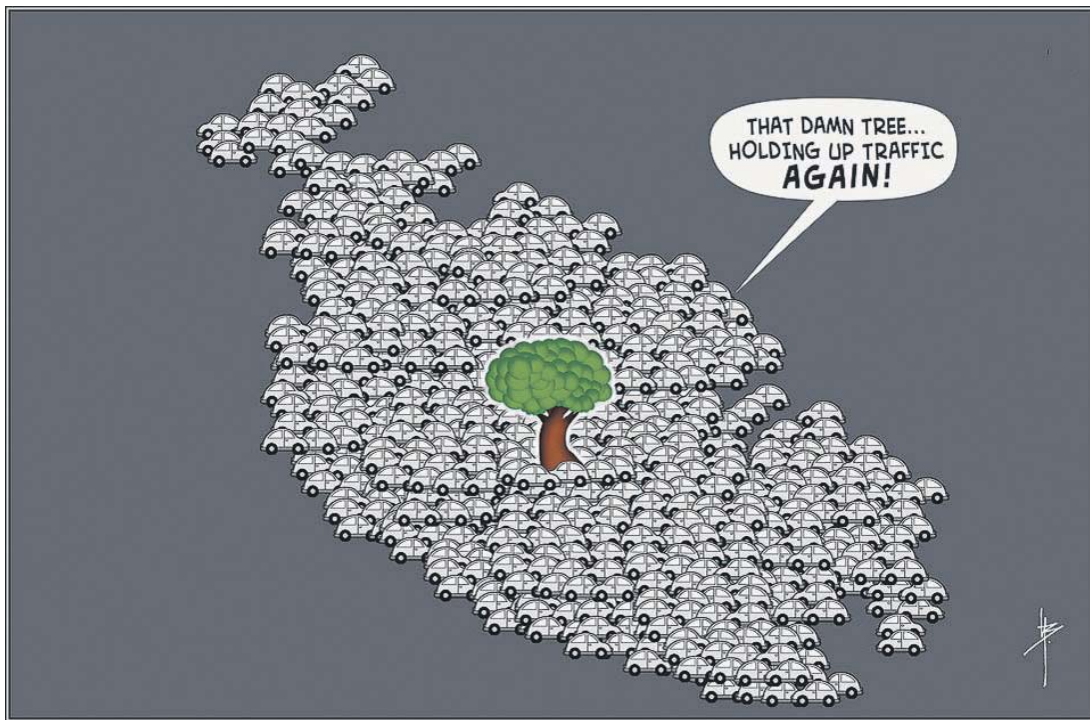
■ Alexandra Mara Camilleri

The APS Contemporary Art Mдина Biennale is focusing its theme on the question of Nature versus Man. Hubris and avarice, like germinating seeds, separated mankind from its ecosystem. Spirituality, belief and non-belief are part of the human experience. Thus, next year's edition is questioning and pushing artists to reflect on this point, and on whether nature is spiritual in essence, or simply a material expression.

Malta is 316 km², with 33% of its land devoted to building mass. With 104.8 km² covered in buildings, Malta has the highest proportion of building mass in the EU. The ongoing onslaught of concrete boxes and tower cranes has presented a new precedent for many. While many cite the building boom as a sign of immense economic growth, most question the viability and safety of such projects. When philosophical questions come into play, namely the question of future generations, to what extent can the desires of a few overshadow the needs of many? Astronomical projects of incredulous girth and mass seem to have become the status quo. When the status quo has become so inverted, one needs to find a way to revert back to sanity.

This dilemma between space and development has existed in Malta for long, with perhaps the first expansion of civil protest emerging in the 1990s, centred around the Portomaso and Hilton developments. The encroachment onto public land, supplied by governments to local enterprises so as to bolster the economy, is both commendable and problematic at the same time. Although protests – big, small, personal or public – are being enacted to convey antagonism, an alternative to the ongoing problem is not being proposed. Sentimentality and nostalgia for the past, whilst endearing, does not always have credence in such a fast-paced and constantly evolving world.

To mind comes the poem *Hitan tas-Sejjieh*. Written in 1975, the words penned by Marjanu



Steve Bonello's 'That damn tree...' (June 2018)

Image courtesy of Steve Bonello

Vella resonate to this day. Vella describes the cubic and rectilinear forms created from concrete as blasphemous whence compared to Maltese vernacular architecture. The sterility of these cubes jarred with the deteriorated limestone and quaint old houses found in village cores. Vella uses an ironic tone to describe the 'miracle of concrete', wallowing that now limestone is only used to separate winding country roads. The 1970s had also presented an immense building boom, one which affected the future landscape of Malta. This building boom stems from the post-war British led efforts to create a sustainable economical environment for war-stricken Malta. The 'un-Maltese' characteristics of these buildings, whilst understandable in hindsight especially due to the need for housing for displaced families, allowed this type of building to become rampant in Malta. This extended towards a change in building material, aesthetics, and design. A lack of a conscientious and well-informed set of regulations that were not developed in time to curb this, allowing contractors and archi-

itects the freedom of choice.

The crisis of land use, whilst an imperative issue in Malta, is not the only thing one should be wary of. The cruise liner industry is one of the highest polluting industries, exerting 'ten times more air pollution than all of Europe's cars.' (<https://www.transportenvironment.org>). While a number of checks and fines are in place to punish these companies, a change in the makeup and usage of this line of transportation has not been evidently proposed. Studies show that even so-called 'green' cruises pollute the earth at staggering levels. (<https://www.globalcitizen.org>). In light of this, Venice's ban of large cruise ships seems like a step forward in curbing this excess of pollutions. The earth's delicate ecosystem, as expounded by a number of environmentalists, is being destroyed daily. The alarming news emerging from the Amazon and the Arctic should be addressed as global emergencies, not just media filler articles and shared posts. The burning of the Amazon is mainly due to land reclamation, supported by the global greed/need for palm oil, and the far-right policies of President Jair Bolsonaro. Brazil's refusal, and subsequent acceptance, of global aid given by the G7 comes in as alarming news as well, especially as this acceptance of funds hinges on Bolsonaro's interest in the distribution of funds.

This is the crux of this APS Mдина Biennale edition. How can artists, museums, collectors and art lovers contribute to this debate? The question of idealism versus materiality comes to the fore. The philosophical debate

centred on materialism is that matter is the fundamental aspect of all nature. It comes in direct contrast to idealism, which elevates consciousness and the mind above all. In idealism, matter and materiality become subjects to the mind and to the self. In several ways, art operates in idealism. The artist expresses a self-induced idea and manipulates matter to reflect this. The relationship between Art and Nature finds its roots in history, from cave art, to Plato's Aesthetics, to Land Art. A waterfall, a grassy knoll or a

winding coastline are things of beauty. However artists must now delve into the fundamentals of nature, and not only extract the beauty, but also the reasons for saving it. In creating a new expression, a new means forward can be created. One is reminded of the incredible *Guernica*, which, while is centered on human-rights issues, proposed a new wave of artistic and social cognizance. The power of Picasso's message not only effected people at the time of its creation, but continued to disturb policy-makers decades later. This is in reference to the covering of the Rockefeller tapestry in the UN Headquarters in New York during the bid for an Iraqi war by the Bush administration. Thus, in many ways, a new *Guernica* is needed to spearhead this new movement.

The problem of arm-chair critics is an emblem of Maltese society. Harumphing and discussing at an arms' length has allowed for a sense of isolation and desensitization. The malleable touch of decay and despair does not form part of our mollycoddled lifestyles. Only now are people realizing that not only is our local way of life, but our global way life, is in danger. The APS Mдина Biennale is thus proposing a new way at tackling this problem. Through the creative process, the streamlining of ideas, actions and proposal can be sought. Art, which is in many ways a documentation and a reflection of humanity, is needed more in time of need.



CANA MOVEMENT MOTHER & BABY CLUB

The Playgroups of the Mother and Baby Club are starting in October 2019 till June 2020. Children's age vary between 18 months to three years old. Child has to be accompanied by an adult at all times during the session.

Ten sessions /term two hours weekly. Activities are organised for the children such as: *crafts, painting, and nursery rhymes.* Educational toys and playground toys are also available at all times.

Other educational activities are organised for all the family by the club during the year for both members and non-members.

Book early the Playgroup you desire:

St. Julian's – Monday: Joyce Camenzuli	T: 21360710
Paola – Monday: Theresa De Gabriele	M: 99463037
Gharghur – Tuesday: Joanne Catania	M: 99246271
Mosta – Tuesday: Charmaine Debattista	M: 79846159
Żebbuġ – Tuesday: Theresa De Gabriele	M: 99463037
St'Venera – Wednesday: Therese De Gabriele	M: 99463037
Mosta – Friday: Charmaine Debattista	M: 79846159
Lija – Friday: Therese De Gabriele	M: 99463037

Please note that **St Venera** Playgroup is being held in the **afternoon** between 4.30-6.30pm. For more information please contact: **Playgroup Coordinator Tania Cortis – M: 79326034**