

**APS MDINA
CATHEDRAL
CONTEMPORARY
ART BIENNALE
2020**

Regaining a Paradise Lost: The Role of the Arts
APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale
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Artistic Director:
Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

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**REGAINING A PARADISE LOST:
THE ROLE OF THE ARTS**

EDITED BY

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

Nikki Petroni

MDINA CATHEDRAL CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE 2020

Under the Patronage of:

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Department of Art & Art History

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It is my privilege to greet all the artists taking part in the third edition of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale 2020.

Art is a form of prophecy; it does not only speak through the heart of man but also warns him of the consequences of his actions or inactions. This role of art is more urgent today because humanity's actions and inactions are contributing to the destruction of natural habitats that constitute the sinews of the beauty that surrounds us.

Art itself has always used elements from nature and has transformed soil, minerals, stone, marble, wood and other gifts of nature into unique works of beauty. May this transformation remind us of our duty to be stewards of the beauty we find and admire in God's creation. Creation is a gift as is the artistic genius.

May we grow to be ever grateful for the gift of creation and for the human ability to express beauty through the genius of art.

H.E. Charles Jude Scicluna
ARCHBISHOP OF MALTA

This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration. In a world which is now, more than ever, concerned and aware of the importance of protecting the environment, the Third Edition of the APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art biennale is presenting visuals which promote this important mission for a better world.

All creatures and all forms of life are mirrors of divine love and beauty, in fact Jesus often made allusions to nature in order to explain the mystery of the kingdom of God. He referred to lakes, soil, fields, land, farmers, pruning the plants, sowing seeds, harvesting, mustard seeds, mountains, fishing, and so on. Thus he showed how the body and spirit are interconnected.

Some of the great philosophers, teachers, and poets were great spiritual men who discovered God in the environment. For instance, the western philosopher Freidrich August Froebel believed in the law of unity that governs all things. He said that God is the ground of all things, the all comprehending, and the all sustaining creature. All things have their origin in the divine unity and the right development of religious feelings depends on the communion of human beings and the realisation of the metaphysical unity of the universe.

According to St John Paul II, artists are called to be more conscious of their 'gift' to create beauty through their artistic works. Thus they are led all the more to see themselves and the whole of creation with eyes which are able to contemplate and give thanks and praise. This is the only way for them to come to a full understanding of themselves, their vocation and their mission.

The twentieth-century monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton wrote: "I do not insist on the division between spirituality and art, for I think that even things that are not patently spiritual if they come from the heart of a spiritual person are spiritual."

In today's digital world, where we are experiencing on-going changes in everything, down to the way we express our emotions, the participating artists are presenting a most valid invitation for all to ponder on the vital need for protecting the environment we live in, which is a pure gift of God and should be cherished for the future generations.

I would like to congratulate the Artistic Director Prof. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, curator Dr Nikki Petroni, and the entire team of the APS Mdina Biennale; Alexandra Camilleri, Tonya Lehtinen, Hannah Dowling, Emma Borg and Audrey Rose Mizzi, for putting together another thought-provoking and dynamic exhibition.

Rev. Mons. Dr Edgar Vella

CURATOR | MDINA CATHEDRAL MUSEUM

At a same time as our society is benefiting from unprecedented economic progress, it is also clear that there has never been such a high concern regarding the consequences arising from the planet's environmental and social upheaval owing to climate changes, internecine conflicts, refugee crises, genocides, data privacy issues and the encroachment of individual freedom.

The APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale, organised by the Mdina Cathedral Chapter, under the artistic direction of Prof. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, will bring the debate into the public space through art which highlights the role of spirituality.

APS Bank believes in supporting art, as it ties in with our community and sustainability values. Art has the power to educate people, as it can create awareness and presents information in a way that can be absorbed by many. Art makes you think about current ideas and inspires you to develop your own ideas, as it has the special ability of unlocking the potential of the human mind. In the hands of good people, art can be used to give back hope or instil courage in a society that is transforming and undergoing a lot of challenges.

APS Bank would like to congratulate the artists and organisers of the Biennale for giving us an opportunity to reflect on the world we aspire to bring about.

Mr Frederick Mifsud Bonnici

CHAIRMAN | APS BANK

The APS Mdina Biennale has now reached its third edition under the artistic directorship of Prof. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, a colleague and collaborator. The 2020 edition builds upon the success of two very challenging exhibitions. Each edition has matured and expanded due to Schembri Bonaci's tireless perseverance to put his lectures at the University of Malta into practice, and for his students to work alongside him in this venture.

The students from the Department of Art and Art History of all ages, past and present, form the team that brings this project to life. Some students have been part of the APS Mdina Biennale project since its revamping by the current artistic director, others have joined along the way, acquiring experience at all levels of curatorship. Their organisational acumen has been sharpened by their dedicated involvement in fulfilling the many demands such an endeavour presents.

This follows the ethos of the Department of bringing together history, theory and practice to nurture well-rounded and able art historians. The APS Mdina Biennale also gives them the opportunity to debate contemporary subjects that are significant to society at large, as well as to art. I am confident in the knowledge that the Department, with the help of the APS Mdina Biennale, is fostering not only competent professionals, but also conscientious citizens.

Regaining A Paradise Lost: The Role of the Arts is a theme which carries a lot of gravity for society, art, artists, and students alike. It is relevant and meaningful that this awareness of contemporary concerns is raised in the Mdina Cathedral Museum, a space that safeguards the past together with the present.

Prof. Keith Sciberras

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

PREFACE

The theme for the 2020 APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale - *Regaining a Paradise Lost: The role of the arts* – presented all those involved with a difficult challenge and a sense of responsibility. It has provoked debate, contemplation and disagreement. Yet such is the purpose of this project. The publication that accompanies the exhibition is intended not only to record the event, but also add to its discursive and critical nature. The collection of essays all underline the global necessity of the theme of the 2020 APS Mdina Biennale.

Rosanna Ruscio's scholarly work centres on the relationship between art and the environment. In her essay, she eloquently opens up the dialogue on the necessity of art and bio-aesthetics in the era of the Anthropocene, also giving an account of the environmental art movements which emerged on the scene in the latter part of the twentieth century. Art's role in establishing solidarity and harmony between people is underlined in Ruscio's text.

Kerstin Borchhardt further enters into eco-critical and eco-speculative theories and how these have been set into practice by contemporary artists, with an emphasis on Bruno Latour's notions of Gaia. Some artists from this year's APS Mdina Biennale and also from previous editions of the project, feature in her discussion of contemporary art's response to environmental issues. Borchhardt poses that the aesthetic of expanded ecotopias could lead to a revised relationship between man and our place in the ecosystem.

Activist art and performative gestures form the subject of Diana K. Murphy's essay. She inquires into how activism and performance can act as collective

artistic protest within the art institution, arguing that such public historical spaces provide a fertile and meaningful platform for such activity.

Gabriel Zammit's philosophical essay centres on aesthetics, resistance and art's response to terror and tragedy. This debate is a difficult one which is immersed in many philosophical and theoretical arguments. Concluding with Theodor Adorno's statement on rationality's imperviousness to suffering, Zammit infers that it is the non-rational which encapsulates the memory of humanity's collective experience.

The final essay returns to the Maltese Arvid Pardo's radical concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind and the International Law debate on the environment. Humankind's attitude towards nature as existing beyond the human is here tackled through the lens of legal concepts and norms, and how these have shaped human rights. Moving beyond art in its scope, the essay places the APS Mdina Biennale within the lineage of Pardo's concept and elicits Malta's central role in this global legal debate.

Further to the aforementioned essays, the publication includes an introduction to *Unearthing Metal: A Distance of Time*, an exhibition of metal sculptures by Toni Pace curated by Hannah Dowling. Continuing with the APS Mdina Biennale's tradition of exhibiting the art of Malta's modern masters alongside the contemporary, this display of Pace's sculptures is a historic event bringing together a near-complete selection of the artist's daring steel works.

The final section of the publication is the catalogue of artists and artworks being shown in the 2020 APS Mdina Biennale. Each artist has proposed a different perspective on the chosen theme, exploring these through a variety of visual explorations and layered with socio-cultural and philosophical notions.

Prof. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Dr Nikki Petroni

CURATOR

REGAINING A PARADISE LOST?

CRITICAL ESSAYS
ON ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT

LA VOCAZIONE ARTISTICA NELL'EPOCA DELL'ANTROPOCENE

Rosanna Ruscio

Solitamente l'arte viene associata alla spiritualità per il solo rapporto rappresentativo delle immagini sacre. Il più delle volte si tralascia il fatto che non esiste solo la spiritualità religiosa ma anche una spiritualità laica e che quindi non si collega a nessun culto religioso. Quando pensiamo alle potenzialità e alla ricchezza del pianeta terra, indipendentemente dall'essere religiosi o meno, capita che il pensiero si carichi di riflessioni e immagini evocative e spesso si insinua il desiderio di preservare tutto ciò che è natura. Il divino è qualcosa che sostanzia tutto ciò che sta fuori e ci contiene, dunque gli alberi, i fiumi, gli animali e noi.

Dall'antichità ad oggi, sono state espresse tante opinioni sul tema della natura e il suo potere 'trascendentale' e la sua bellezza. Eppure, come spiega il filosofo Paolo D'Angelo, nessun'altra epoca come la nostra ha dato spazio alla bellezza naturale, l'ha ricercata nella vita quotidiana, inseguita nei viaggi, riprodotta in immagine, protetta nel paesaggio, elevata almeno a parole a valore primario.¹ Questo non toglie che nei fatti l'abbia danneggiata o distrutta più di ogni altra epoca precedente dimostrando un dato importante: ovvero che "le immagini della natura hanno ucciso la natura, perché hanno reso

1 Paolo D'Angelo, *Estetica della natura. Bellezza naturale, paesaggio, arte ambientale* (Bari: Laterza, 2010), 177.

impossibile, con la loro proliferazione e il loro scadimento, un'esperienza autentica del mondo naturale".²

Nell'esperienza estetica dell'uomo contemporaneo la natura occupa un posto importante al punto che si è tornati a discutere di bellezza naturale. Negli ultimi decenni si è infatti largamente diffusa una coscienza ecologica ed una preoccupazione per la salvaguardia della natura che ha coinvolto tutti i settori, non solo scientifici ma anche artistici. Spesso, nei discorsi si sono scambiati termini e definizioni, si è parlato indistintamente di ambiente e paesaggio confondendo aspetto fisico e fenomeno percettivo e soprattutto è accaduto che ogni disciplina ne ha dato un significato differente. Ma se pensiamo al paesaggio come identità estetica dei luoghi, allora dobbiamo considerare il fatto che ogni paesaggio comprende la natura e la storia, il che vuol dire anche guardare alla natura superando uno dei più grandi pregiudizi, ovvero quello di intendere il rapporto tra arte e natura come la proiezione delle esperienze artistiche sul dato naturale.

Sappiamo che non si può continuare a pensare unicamente alla rappresentazione della natura in termini di immagini di essa, ma che è invece interessante pensare a un'arte in termini di esperienza nella natura. La natura non si lascia più rappresentare è stato scritto, ma forse sarebbe meglio precisare che la natura ha cambiato sede, non è più nella pittura che la ritroviamo ma nelle arti del cinema e della fotografia. Se è vero che la nostra epoca è quella del paesaggio, nella sua definizione più vasta del termine, quale fenomeno "ostentato, discusso e adulato, conservato e protetto, ed ugualmente venduto e rivenduto",³ dall'altro resta ancora difficile trovare una definizione esaustiva ed univoca dell'argomento che non sia limitante e parziale. E' stato scritto che le immagini della natura hanno ucciso la natura perché con la loro abbondanza ovunque presente ha contribuito a fare perdere l'esperienza autentica del mondo naturale. Di fronte a questo cambiamento di percezione e sensibilità, anche gli artisti hanno cominciato a cambiare il modo di vedere la natura: non più come simulacro da riprodurre con mezzi allusivi ma invece, come esperienza fisica in cui agire.

Senza entrare nel profondo di tutte le vicende che si sono succedute nella seconda metà del Novecento sono significativi i modi con cui molti artisti hanno raccontato la loro esperienza davanti la natura. Nonostante una differenza

2 Ibid.

3 Michael Jakob, *Il paesaggio* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 7.

sostanziale nei mezzi e nelle intenzioni, sia gli artisti della Earth art americana degli anni sessanta che quelli dell'arte ambientale europea degli anni successivi, hanno dimostrato una nuova coscienza della crisi dell'immagine della natura. E' vero tra le ragioni di questo interesse c'era la volontà di attaccare le convenzioni della scultura modernista e il sistema delle gallerie, ma c'era anche il desiderio di realizzare opere del tutto nuove attraverso un linguaggio non tradizionale e dentro gli spazi della natura. "Ogni ritualismo, ricorda Italo Calvino -che segna l'inizio dell'opera come passaggio dall'universale al particolare è caratteristico delle epoche in cui un'ispirazione religiosa è dominante, qualsiasi il nome della divinità invocata sulla soglia."⁴ Prendiamo le opere degli artisti della Earth Art o Land art, notoriamente americana, e di contro, osserviamo quelle realizzate qualche anno dopo dagli artisti europei di *Art in Nature*, sia gli uni e gli altri, al di là delle differenti motivazioni realizzano opere chiedendosi dove può cominciare nell'indagine della natura e decidono di cercarla nell'osservazione, nella contrapposizione e nel confronto.

Mentre i primi segnano l'ingresso nella natura con un rito che li fa restare fuori con opere gigantesche che modificano l'assetto dei territori più lontani e disabitati, i secondi ci portano nel cuore dell'esperienza fisica con interventi minimi ed effimeri.

L'aspetto paradossale è che sia le opere concepite come grandi azioni che quelle realizzate con materiali naturali si collocano in una dimensione comunicativa che di fatto ne consacra la loro 'invisibilità'. L'impraticabilità delle opere spesso ubicate in luoghi distanti e difficili da raggiungere e l'uso di materiali deperibili ne fa un elemento totalmente esclusivo per gli artisti che lo hanno scelto e quei pochi spettatori che lo hanno vissuto. "Il sentimento prettamente pioneristico degli americani e il panteismo romantico rintracciabile negli artisti europei, in diversa misura costituiscono due modi differenti di interiorizzare e visualizzare l'esperienza sensibile della natura. In entrambi i casi, si tratta di esperienze che hanno fatto il loro tempo e pertanto conclude."⁵

A distanza di anni sembra che l'unica pratica ancora perseguibile sia quella che implica una presa di posizione rispetto la nostra percezione della natura stessa. Lo sviluppo di una nuova coscienza 'ecologica' ha imposto nuove riflessioni nelle quali convergono tante considerazioni etiche e scientifiche.

4 Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane* (Milano: Mondadori, 1993), 155.

5 Rosanna Ruscio and Ada Ghinato, *Il Paesaggio prestato* (Roma: Aracne, 2014), 97.



Fig. 1. Ada Ghinato
Park of the Groane, where the moorland becomes a long forest
(Image courtesy: Ada Ghinato)

C'è l'interesse a salvaguardare la natura e contestualmente la preoccupazione di apparire superficiali se la si guarda soltanto come fonte di bellezza. C'è la tendenza a far coincidere esperienza estetica della natura con quella scientifica. C'è l'opera del passato che nei modelli costituisce qualcosa a cui attingere e dal quale emanciparsi. C'è l'ansia di contenere tutto il possibile e che non riuscendo a trovare alcuna unità resta incompiuta. C'è infine la consapevolezza di un'impossibilità di liberarsi del pregiudizio di misurarsi con la natura come proiezione di esperienze artistiche sul dato naturale.

Negli ultimi decenni, tra le tante questioni che affliggono il nostro pianeta c'è quello del disastro ambientale e la preoccupazione di come salvaguardare la propria specie e quelle dell'intero ecosistema. Sebbene sia un argomento complesso e di non d'immediata soluzione, tutti, dagli scienziati agli economisti, dai filosofi ai paesaggisti, concordano nell'idea che per prima cosa sia necessario ridefinire il termine del rapporto tra uomo e la natura individuando le responsabilità economiche, politiche e sociali che hanno permesso tutto questo.

L'intromissione delle attività umane sul sistema naturale del pianeta terra è stato definito negli anni ottanta del secolo scorso dal biologo Eugene F. Stoermer con il termine *Antropocene*, termine che non significa solo cambiamento climatico, ma anche alterazione di tutti i parametri del pianeta nella sua interezza, compresa la stessa percezione. In realtà la definizione Antropocene, divenuta di uso comune grazie al chimico Paul Josez Crutzen, non ha un'accezione del tutto negativa, ma "può essere genericamente inquadrata come la condizione globale di essere nati in un mondo che esiste più".⁶ Secondo Nicholas Mirzoeff, il fatto di vivere in una società visuale e non più testuale come in passato, ha determinato grandi mutazioni che sarebbe importante ricalibrare. L'arte, in questo senso, potrebbe contribuire a sensibilizzare il nostro sistema sensoriale e migliorare così anche ogni intervento nella natura.⁷ Si tratta di un radicale cambio di punti di vista, secondo anche il filosofo inglese Timothy Morton, l'unico modo possibile da sviluppare se si vuole imparare a 'vivere' il sapere ecologico: ovvero liberarsi dall'antropocentrismo e dell'idea romantica della natura per arrivare a una concezione della biosfera come un tutto superiore delle sue parti. "Esseri umani- spiega Morton- non vuol dire non affermare la nostra superiorità, ma stabilire un legame di solidarietà tra noi e gli altri esseri,

6 Gaia Bindi, *Eстетiche dell'antropocene* (Carrara: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 20-25.

7 Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Visualizing the Antropocene," in *Public Culture*, no. 2 (2014): 220.

resistendo all'invasione della tecnologia che tende ad incrinare l'alleanza tra uomini e le altre specie.”⁸ Questo tipo di riflessione ci aiuta a comprendere il fenomeno della 'bioestetica' che negli ultimi decenni ha visto impegnati molti artisti in tutte le parti del mondo. Si tratta di un fenomeno complesso dove l'estetica è in relazione con diversi ambiti di conoscenza e di linguaggio: dalla letteratura alla filosofia, dall'architettura al cinema, dalla moda al design con il fine di risvegliare dal torpore l'occhio e la mente.

Come scrive Lucy Lippard: “Gli artisti non possono cambiare il mondo da soli. Ma quando fanno uno sforzo concertato, collaborano con la vita stessa”. Lavorando con e in mezzo ad altre discipline e tipi di pubblico, avendo la possibilità di essere seriamente considerati al di fuori del mondo ristretto dell'arte, possono offrire sussulti visivi e sottili stimoli alla conoscenza convenzionale.”⁹ Gli artisti 'ecologici' o 'bio-artisti' pur riprendendo alcune intuizioni degli animatori della Earth Art e di Art in Nature, concepiscono i loro lavori come un esercizio dello sguardo. La maggior parte di essi è distante da qualsiasi ideologismo e non ha finalità politiche ma intendono l'arte, come un dispositivo capace di entrare in contatto con la vita ed individuare gli aspetti più oscuri e controversi del nostro pianeta. Essi non vogliono limitarsi all'atto di registrare gli eventi, non sono interessati al resoconto giornalistico o alla semplice critica sociale, vogliono invece, renderci consapevoli del fatto che ognuno di noi fa parte della natura e per questo non può essere né padrone né semplice spettatore. Insomma, l'intenzione di questi artisti è quella creare un corto circuito tra conoscenza del passato, crisi del presente e utopia del futuro, e proprio per questo, si interessano sia a temi gradevoli come gli orti domestici che a quelli drammatici come il surriscaldamento globale. Al di là delle diverse inclinazioni, la sfida comune è quella di riuscire a sollevare domande e spingere gli spettatori nel viaggio della scoperta di un pianeta sempre più fragile. Si tratta di una sfida ambiziosa nella quale è assai difficile seguire la rete di relazioni costruite dai vari artisti.

Nell'ambito di questo fenomeno troviamo gli artisti 'documentaristi' interessati a registrare le alterità della biodiversità, come John Gerrard (*Western Flag*, 2017) e Alastair Fothergill (*Our Planet*, 2019), gli 'scientifici' che si impegnano a stabilire un rapporto tra arte e tecnologia. Significativi sono in

8 Timothy Morton, *Noi esseri ecologici*, trans. Giancarlo Carlotti (Bari: Laterza, 2018), 36.

9 Lucy Lippard, “Weather Report: Expecting the Unexpected,” in *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change* (Boulder, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 6.

tal senso i lavori di Eduardo Kac (*Genesis*, 1999), Bernie Krause (*The Great Animal Orchestra*, 2016) e di David Monacchi, il quale ha pensato di raccogliere in zone del pianeta ancora disabitato i frammenti di un vasto repertorio acustico in via di estinzione (*Fragments of Extinction*, 2019). Ma ci sono anche gli artisti che invece preferiscono misurarsi con la dimensione 'fantastica', 'visionaria' e 'apocalittica' della natura e dunque immaginano paesaggi densi di elementi reali e irreali. Oltre alle ipotesi fantastiche di Christine e Margaret Wertheim (*Crochet Coral Reef*, 2017), Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster e Joi Bittle (*Cosmorama*, 2018), ci sono quelle visionarie di Tomàs Sareceno (*Spider/Web Pavillon 7*, 2019), Anto Milotta e Zlatolin Donchev (*Naturally Artificially*, 2017) e quelle apocalittiche di François Knoetze (*Cape Mongo*, 2013-2016) di Upper One Games (*Never Alone*, 2014). In questa mappa generica, in cui si inserisce l'azione di artisti, architetti e design, meritano un posto di rilievo i 'comunitari', ovvero coloro che costruiscono situazioni aperte, nelle quali il pubblico può riflettere sui rischi ambientali. Alcuni esempi interessanti sono *Extinct in the Wild* (2017) di Michael Wang che indaga sulle dinamiche di tutela della specie animale e vegetale, e *The Weather Project* di Olafur Eliasson, artista che consapevole dell'inesistenza di una natura incontaminata, rivendica il grandioso dovere dell'arte di mettere la propria immaginazione di fronte a soluzioni espressive che la facciano conoscere e sostenere.

Da sempre interessato alla natura e agli spazi urbani, Olafur Eliasson si adopera a misurarsi con l'immaginazione visiva della luce artificiale e nel farlo, chiama direttamente lo spettatore a rispondere lui stesso a quello che vede, partendo da sollecitazioni che la sua conoscenza riesce a trovare. Con l'ausilio di semplici dispositivi deformanti: specchi, lampadine e illusioni ottiche, egli tenta di riprodurre un fenomeno effimero, unico nel suo genere: ovvero l'effetto del sole con tutta la sua energia all'interno di un museo. L'ideazione di Eliasson è in realtà carica di significato: vuole attraverso collegamenti e tensioni indurre lo spettatore a riflettere sui propri modelli di pensiero e comportamento rispetto ai fenomeni naturali, compreso un sole che splende. Davanti alla luce, ricreata artificialmente con la sua immanenza che piove dall'alto lo spettatore ha una risposta corporea che si manifesta nei modi più vari: immagina di stare in spiaggia, socializza, si sdraia, passeggia, chiacchera. Si tratta di una esperienza che sviluppa il livello più alto di immaginazione aprendo scene di massa spettacolari: credere di stare all'aperto e godere di una luce eguale per tutti, stabilire collegamenti

con ambiti differenziati, come la natura, la vastità degli spazi, il tempo e la concentrazione dell'essere che talvolta esce da qualsiasi controllo.

Sono, questi, alcuni tra i più interessanti artisti ecologici del nostro tempo. E' vero, non è semplice cogliere tutti gli aspetti della 'bio-arte', nelle sue differenziate divagazioni. Tuttavia, ragionare sulla vocazione degli artisti che lavorano su una condizione ambientale che non esiste più, vuol dire concederci un'opportunità per riflettere su alcuni aspetti del contemporaneo. Sia che siamo religiosi sia che non lo siamo è impossibile non tenere conto dei numerosi processi di trasformazione che condizionano la nostra esistenza sul pianeta e dell'importanza di certi paradigmi di consapevolezza ecologica. La 'bio-arte' o l'arte ecologicamente esplicita è un'arte che dovrebbe portare in primo piano la solidarietà dell'uomo con gli altri esseri biologici, poiché tutto è interconnesso e nulla è separato. In un'epoca in cui la capacità degli uomini di imparare dall'esperienza non è ancora perduta, il ruolo dell'arte è anche quello di offrire stimoli visivi e immaginarie suggestioni, tra cui l'idea di aprirsi a nuove conoscenze del nostro pianeta. Per comprendere il senso della bio-estetica, potremmo servirci delle parole di Timothy Morton: "Sei un essere perfettamente incarnato che non è mai stato separato dagli altri essere biologici sia esterni che interni al suo corpo, nemmeno per un secondo. Sei significativamente sintonizzato con tutto ciò che succede nel tuo mondo."¹⁰

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10 Morton, *Ecologici*, 198-199.

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FROM MENTAL EXPERIMENTS TO MATERIAL PRESENCE:

EXPANDED ECOTOPIAS BETWEEN NATURE, SCIENCE
AND SPIRITUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Kerstin Borchhardt

1. Where are we going from here? An uncanny introduction

The clock moves on and so does evolution. During this evolutionary process there has barely been a life form on earth which has changed the planet's surface as radically as the human species throughout the Anthropocene.¹ Today, by facing these changes in a world with shrinking resources, climate change and species extinction severe concerns about the future gain more and more currency.² Over the last decades, public attention has increasingly focused on this problem and environmental theories, especially those which demand behavioural changes such as the sustainable use of resources, are booming in the context of postmodern end-time expectations.³ Despite their actual relevance to reconsidering human's ecological responsibility these alarming scenarios often neglect the fact that

1 See Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold concept* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), chapter: The Anthropocene.

2 See Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight lectures on the new climatic regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 8–10; 193.

3 See *ibid.* See also Nature Editorial, "Act Now and Avert Climate Crisis," *Nature*, January 6, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02734-x>.

the present is not a historical zero point. Regardless of humanity's future actions, massive and irreversible transformations have already occurred and project their shadows into the future.⁴ On that account, ecological activism and environmental protection are certainly important, but to cope with the actual and ongoing alterations there might also be a call for altered perspectives concerning mankind's position in the world, as well as a reconsideration of the interconnections between culture, nature, technology, and spirituality, which work out a more refined prospective coexistence than actual conceptions do. As humanity is equipped with the mental capacities for reflection, empathy, fantasy, hope, doubt, and fear, we are able to speculate on such altered relations or – as I call them – expanded ecotopias in fictional media, philosophy, and fine arts. This paper will argue that art offers unique possibilities to transform speculative mental experiments into an actual material presences. The argument will be demonstrated on selected examples and contextualised in contemporary eco-philosophy.

2. Back to Gaia: expanded ecotopias between fiction and eco-philosophy

One realm, in which speculations on expanded ecotopias most prominently flourish, is the science-fiction-genre which derives from utopias such as Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975),⁵ dystopian cyberpunk-scenarios such as the *New Weird* in Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* (2014)⁶ or the afro-feminist speculations in Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* (1987-1989).⁷ Besides their differences and an occasional bad reputation as escapist mass media, many of these works incorporate cunning mental experiments,

4 See Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), see also Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2017).

5 See Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The notebooks and reports of William Weston* (Indore: Banyan Tree, 1975).

6 See Gry Ulstein, "Brave New Weird: Anthropocene monsters in Jeff VanderMeer's 'The Southern Reach,'" *Concentric-Literary and Cultural Studies*, 43 no. 1 (2017): 71–96, <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8535381/file/8535383>.

7 See Octavia E. Butler, *Xenogenesis* (San Francisco: Guild America, 1987–1989).

not only in terms of conceptualising possible futures, but also as a critical examination of current and historical phenomena.⁸

Against this background, philosophical scholarship has also found inspiration in such fictions. In recent years numerous eco-critical and eco-speculative theories have been developed, such as Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology* (2014),⁹ Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016),¹⁰ Anna Tsing's *The mushrooms at the end of the world* (2017)¹¹ or Bruno Latour's *Facing Gaia* (2017).¹² Even so these philosophical speculations encompass a wide range of different ideas and methods, however, one key tenet is that multi-species survival will only be possible by altered interactions between human and non-human entities. Further central premises are different degrees of decentralisation from anthropocentrism as well as the discussion of traditional hierarchical binaries between nature and culture, physical and spiritual or science and religion. Thereby, such philosophy generally emphasises diverse conceptions of otherness to the classical humanist premises of reason, order, and category by stressing the strange and ambiguous, and are often accompanied by syntheses of scientific, philosophical, and religious approaches to the world.

One of its most prominent examples in recent times has been Latour's philosophical re-evocation of Gaia. Gaia refers to the personification of Earth in ancient Greek mythology, which has been rediscovered in contemporary scientific philosophy as the *Gaia principal* by James Lovelock and Linn Margulies, who state that different life forms interact with each other and their surroundings to sustain an ecological balance in a self-regulating system.¹³ Latour reinterpreted Gaia once again as an "occasion for a return to Earth".¹⁴ Thereby, his Gaia "[...] is not half science and half religion. It offers a much

8 See Thomas Macho, *Science & Fiction: Über Gedankenexperimente in Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2004), see also: Susan Merrill Squir, *Liminal Lives: Imaging the human at the frontiers of biomedicine* (Duram: Duke University Press, 2004), 208, 209; 256-257.

9 See Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a logic of future coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

10 See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

11 See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins* (Princeton: University Press, 2015).

12 See Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2017).

13 See Linn Margulies, *Symbiotic Planet: A new look at evolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998).

14 Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2017), 4; 218.

more enigmatic set of features that redistribute agencies in all possible ways [...]”¹⁵ On that account, Gaia is not a deity to worship but an altered way of perceiving the earth as a symbiotic network to interact with; neither is it something supernatural, rather Gaia is an inherent natural entanglement to belong to. In this gaitic linkage humanity is not the crown of creation but an agent in terms of an active and activating force which has to take care of the whole network. Given this entangled immanence Gaia contains religious and profane features at the same time, by recalling the qualities of a goddess from ancient mythology it implies an “enigmatic set of features”¹⁶ which also recall mythic traditions to approaching the world. On that account, Latour’s Gaia is not only perceivable by reflection but also by a more immediate encounter in terms of the experience of participation and of overcoming the traditional separation of culture and nature.¹⁷ Without any question, such philosophical speculations may sound fascinating but also a little abstract. Indeed, one of the big questions, which remains is the question of whether speculative expanded ecotopias are also transformable into tangible reality.

3. On art: entering the material presence

One of the most promising testing grounds for ascertaining the possibility of the above mentioned transformation can be found in visual arts as stated by several scholars like Haraway¹⁸ and Latour, who consider art to be a predestined institution for the exploration of the possibilities of altered ways of facing Gaia.¹⁹ This is hardly surprising, as expanded ecotopias between culture, nature, technology and spirituality also emerge as significant phenomena in contemporary art, traceable back to the 1960s and increasing in importance

15 See Bruno Latour, “Facing Gaia: A new enquiry into natural religion,” The Gifford Lectures, January 6, 2020, <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/facing-gaia-new-enquiry-natural-religion>.

16 Ibid.

17 See Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2017), 214–219; 235.

18 Haraway (similar to Latour) interacts closely with artists and is still influential for the art scene. This is proven by the fact that Artreview has mentioned her among the power hundred since 2017. See ArtReview, “Donna Haraway,” *ArtReview*, January 6, 2020, https://artreview.com/power_100/donna_haraway/. See also Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 139.

19 See Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2013).

over the last years. Works and exhibitions, among many others, are Monika Grycko's *Monika Grycko personal exhibition* (2010),²⁰ Moon Ribas *Waiting for Earthquakes* (2013),²¹ Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch's *Terra Coleoptera* (2015),²² Pierre Huyghe *After Alife Ahead* (2017)²³ Maja Smrekar's *K-9_topology* (2017)²⁴ and Victor Agius *Terrae* (2018).²⁵ In their paintings, sculptures, performances, and installations, the artists create immersive symbiotic explications of pioneering ideas, experimental techniques and practices of preserving neo-animistic empathy in order to give way for creative examinations of new kinds of relations between human, ecology, technology and spirituality. In order to do this, they simultaneously refer to philosophical, scientific, as well as mythical traditions of encountering the world while at the same time fusing reworked organic materials, with traditional artistic practices such as painting and photography as well as high-technology media like genetic engineering or augmented reality. This succeeds in creating and testing out new postnatural networks, not only as something to reflect on, but also as an aesthetic presence to encounter, as will be shown hereafter. This is the basis upon which I will develop my thesis, arguing that these artworks provide a first step in turning speculations on expanded ecotopias into realisation by transforming mental experiments into material presences. This also opens an altered perspective on new materialism and the eco-critical discourses surrounding the problem of the oscillation between matter and storytelling²⁶ by shifting the focus on to the importance of form and sensual experience. Because different to science-fiction-scenarios and philosophical scholarship, art doesn't operate primarily with story plots and detailed theories, but with an

20 Arte Laguna Prize, "Monika Grycko," *ArteLagunaPrize2019.20*, January 6, 2020, <https://www.artelagunaprize.com/special-prize-exhibitions/269-monika-grycko>.

21 Moon Ribas, *Waiting For Earthquakes*, Youtube, January 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Un4MFR-vNI>.

22 Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch, *TERRA COLEOPTERA*, Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch, January 6, 2020, <https://gernot-fischer.com/2016/11/27/terra-coleoptera/>.

23 Pierre Huyghe, *After Alife Ahead*, Skulpture-Projekte-Archiv, January 6, 2020, <https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/de-de/2017/>.

24 Maja Smrekar, *K-9_Topology*, Maja Smrekar, January 6, 2020, <https://www.majasmrekar.org/k-9topology-cyberarts-2017-prix-ars-electronica-exhibition.25>.

25 Victor Aguis, *Terrae*, The Mdina Contemporary Art Biennale 2015, January 6, 2020, <http://www.mdinabiennale.org/index.php/42-mdbn-artists/474-victor-agius>.

26 See Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories come to matter," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1–17.

immersive power which is generated by the sensually perceptible presence of an artistically shaped materiality which alludes to diverse eco-philosophical, political, aesthetic, and scientific discourses.²⁷ This materiality is exactly the point where speculation starts to transform into realisation, and this becomes especially obvious in artworks which use modern technologies, often related to the realm of science-fiction-speculations such as augmented reality, cyber-technologies or genetic engineering to stage cybernetic systems, modified bodies, altered tissues and even new ecosystems.

A good example of this is Pierre Huyghe's installation *After Alife Ahead* (2017) which takes the audience into an expanded ecotopian environment which includes not only natural organisms, but also a genetically modified glow fish and visualisations of proliferating cancerous cells in augmented reality which challenge the traditional conceptions of natural and artificial, art and environment or controlled and auto-poetical development.²⁸ Ryota Kuwakubo also creates in his shadow landscape *Lost #12* (2014) an "immersive virtual environment", which cunningly discusses perceptions of the ordinary world.²⁹ Other examples which also focus on body modifications are projects of cyborg artists expanding human sensory perception by technology in order to give way for new perceptions and interactions between mankind and the environment. Moon Ribas, for example, implanted a chip into herself which gave her the capability to detect earthquakes.³⁰ Similarly, Maja Smrekar's multidimensional project, *K9_Topology*, explores the relationship between human, dog and wolf as a struggle for survival in a post-tanatic environment which also includes the creation of a human-dog-hybrid cell.³¹ Thereby, many of these technologically inspired artworks also seek a linkage with mythopoetical and spiritual traditions. Ribas' work conducts a similar investigation, when she performs meditative dances in line with the rhythm of seismic and cosmic activities; or Smrekar, when she refers in her *K9_topology* to ancient myth by

27 See also Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 139.

28 Andrew Russeth, "Constant Displacements: Pierre Huyghe on his work at Skulptur Projekte Munster," *Artnews*, January 6, 2020, <http://www.artnews.com/2017/06/26/constantdisplacement-pierre-huyghe-on-his-work-at-skulptur-projekte-munster-2017/>.

29 Ryota Kuwakubo, *Lost#12*, Google Arts and Culture, January 6, 2020, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/lost-12/XQGEqA11VVr1Pg>.

30 Nadja Sayej, "The world's first cyborg artist can detect earthquakes within her arm," *Vice Magazine*, January 6, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8q8e4a/theworlds-first-cyborg-artist-can-detect-earthquakes-with-her-arm.

31 Smrekar, *K-9_Topology*, 2020.



Fig. 1: Victor Agius
Terrae: Mutter, Ggantija, 2018
Iniala Galleries Valletta
(Image courtesy: Victor Agius)

naming her hybrid cell installation *ArteMIS*,³² after the Greek goddess of hunt. This implies that, besides their highly technological character, the material presence of these artworks is not only accessible by scientific understanding, but it also bears another enigmatic dimension which refers to spiritual and mythopoetical practices by using intensive aesthetic experiences to connect the subject to its surroundings and turning it into a part of a greater whole .

4. The connecting spirit: experiencing matter

This sensually captivating, enigmatic or (spoken with Latour) gaitic dimension, which combines different approaches to the world such as myth and science in order to turn ecophilosophical speculations into a material presence, is not exclusively a hallmark of artworks associated with high tech. Since one should keep in mind that technology is only one of many techniques to shape matter which have developed through human's history, each of these techniques offers its own potential to realize a special gaitic presence. On that account, there are many different strategies and combinations of traditional and new techniques in contemporary art, like the synthesis of painting and virtual reality which can facilitate the exploration of the interconnections between speculation, reality, matter and spirituality, as is proven by Darren Tanti's stereoscopic images which aim for the integration of the digital into exploratory painting techniques whereby the tangible and spiritual world ended up expanding exponentially into virtual worlds entirely [sic] created by humans – a hyperreality!³³

But matter offered by nature can also inspire countless artistic techniques to arrange and rearrange it in gaitic experiments, as demonstrated by Victor Agius with his almost (neo-)shamanistic approach.³⁴

32 Maja Smrekar. *K_9 Topology*, Artemis Gallery. Maya Smrekar. January 6, 2020. <https://www.majasmrekar.org/k9-topology-artemis-gallery/fktgro2qvpq7ez8u8s8ieueh1osvl7>.

33 Darren Tanti, "Have You Seen the Real Thing?" *Think Magazine*, 6 January, 2020, https://issuu.com/thinkuni/docs/think_issue06/10.

34 See Greta Muscat Azzopardi, "At one with the Earth," *First Magazine*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-04-18/local-news/FIRST-At-one-with-the-earth-6736187832>.

Raw clay, soil, ceramics, stones and pebbles, straw, twigs, branches, and natural pigments, are just a few elements used to create bodies of work that draw upon his ecological experience.³⁵

Concerning his *Terrae* (2018, fig. 1) Victor Agius stated: “I was trying to link my language with Mother Earth and the primitive rituals which were around since the dawn of man [...] I want to communicate the way *Terrae* (Earth) is a timeless notion while we are appropriating it and consuming it as we speak. The cave drawings of Altamira and the ochre spirals of the Hypogeum, together with the sculptures found at Xaghra Stone Circle, along with our modern-day-rituals, are all the same in spirit.”³⁶

This connecting spirit doesn't only fuse history, present and future in the process of artistic production, it also offers the potential to be passed on to the audience who encounter the immersiveness of the artwork's material presence. Thereby, artistic expanded ecotopias address the audience not only as beholders but also as participants in the artwork. Such immersiveness becomes especially obvious in the works of Huyghes and Kuwakubo, who create whole new ecosystems and landscapes which draw the incoming audience into a participation with it. Many other artworks can be read as artistically generated environments too, not only as something to look at but as a living space to enter and to experience. Thereby, the artwork's material presence offers a kind of test soil for altered ecologies which, on the one hand, give the audience an impression of how it feels to become a part of the fascinating but also confusing expanded ecotopias, but on the other hand they also perform within the secure space of art, which can be entered, left, or abandoned at any time. On that account, art offers an experimental but immediate way to perceive and discuss altered conceptions of ecology. Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch's installation *Terra Coleoptera* for example (fig. 2 and fig. 3), takes the audiences into a surreal world of tiny people observed from a bird's-eye perspective, wandering without any detectable reason or destination on giant insect-like structures.³⁷ This installation questions the numerous layers of proportion, perspective, and orientation – in short it confronts the

35 Teodor Reljic, “Raw matter for a raw world/Victor Agius.” *MaltaToday*, April 5, 2018, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/art/85763/raw_matter_for_a_raw_world_victor_agius#.XbtM1vZFxPY.

36 Ibid.

37 Fischer-Kondratovitch, *TERRA COLEOPTERA*, 2020.



Fig. 2: Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch
Terra Coleoptera 3, Walking on Exotic Grounds, 2015
Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt
(Image courtesy: Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch)



Fig. 3. Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch
FILMSTILL *Terra Coleoptera*, 2017
Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt
(Image courtesy: Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch)

audience with a visual exploration of mankind's unsure position and agency within the ecological entanglements of today.

5. On the way: facing Gaia once again

In such a staging there is no harmony to archive, only a challenge to face. On the one hand, exploring such challenging entanglements might be somewhat disturbing and counter-intuitive³⁸ as they put familiar relations and structures of orientation at stake. On the other hand, it might be exactly this confusion which gives way to the reconsideration of such relations in terms of finding a better way to cope with the ecological trouble we face today and the ones expected for tomorrow as it urges us to break new ground and to think outside the box. However, there is certainly still a long way to go³⁹ and the process itself is ever open ended. In any case, art can provide some first important steps down this path, given that its creators fuse artistic practices with philosophical, mythopoetic, and scientific approaches which generate stirring material presences which offer intensive experiences of what expanded ecotopias could be. Time will show if this offer will be taken up by society and can actually contribute to make people rethink their role in the ecosystem and change their interactions with the planet in order to pave the way for sustainable future prospects for the world we share, no matter whether one calls it Gaia, Terra or Mother Earth.

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38 See Ulstein, "Brave New Weird," 76.

39 See Latour, *Facing Gaia* (2017), 13.

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LAND ART TO INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE:

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH PERFORMATIVE GESTURES

Diana K. Murphy

In June 2017, President Trump declared his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Spouting doltishly, “we’re getting out,” he unequivocally reversed the United States’ green energy policies and pact with global leaders to collectively reduce pollution and combat climate change.¹ As activists demonstrated in response to his announcement, the art world also engaged in the conversation. In the case of #J20, the goal was to repurpose museums and art spaces for political action, and not simply political art, as extrapolated in an announcement stating that “it is not a strike against art, theater, or any other cultural form. It is an invitation to motivate these activities anew, to reimagine these spaces as places where resistant forms of thinking, seeing, feeling, and acting can be produced.”² (fig. 1) Historically, artists, and to a somewhat lesser extent, arts institutions, have engaged with the latest research surrounding climate science to inform, teach, and render visual and immediate the discernable changes happening to our planet. The

1 Kevin Liptak and Jim Acosta, “Trump on Paris Accord: ‘We’re Getting out,’” CNN. Cable News Network, June 2, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/01/politics/trump-paris-climate-decision/index.html>.

2 Andrew R. Chow, “Artists and Critics Call for Culture ‘Strike’ on Inauguration Day,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/08/arts/design/artists-and-critics-call-for-culture-strike-on-inauguration-day.html>.



Fig. 1: Protesters outside of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018



Fig. 2: Activists lie on the floor of the Louvre museum to bring to attention the migration as a result of climate change
(Image courtesy: AFP)

extent to which artistic practice is engaged with the environment is extensive; art has the potential to act as a catalyst for collective calls to action.

The movement now known as “environmental art” is a relatively recent codification, emanating from the Land Art style and culminating in Robert Smithson’s seminal 1970 earthwork *Spiral Jetty*. This paper positions the current wave of artistic dialogue with climate science in the historical roots of environmental art. This essay will unfold in two parts: the first will assert that the current wave of contemporary artists engaging with climate issues can be traced to its antecedent origins in Land Art; the second will explore more recent examples of artists as activists who affect change from within and without institutional infrastructure. I will examine the potential applications that can be executed by those who wish to disrupt and reconsider the impact of mechanisms of power, ideology, and the discourse these systems have on real lives.

Contemporary disruptive and socially-engaged projects and performances of protest will be discussed in order to demonstrate the ways in which the art world is preoccupied in thinking about climate change and, at a higher level, human rights globally. Beginning with the origins of artists engaging with the earth in the Land Art movement, I argue that through both collective and singular artistic practices of protest, artists realise projects that affect real and tangible change, the results of which are especially visible within institutions. A fairly recent example from 2018 involved activists lying on the floor of the Louvre in front of Theodore Gericault’s painting, *The Raft of the Medusa*, to bring attention to the mass migration resultant from climate change (fig. 2). This work was chosen deliberately as the backdrop to the performance, as the contorted figures depicted, having recently survived a shipwreck, struggle for life upon embarking on a raft, and eventually die of starvation before being found at sea. A contemporary viewer can’t help but refer to the countless migrant lives that have been lost while making the dangerous crossing from Northern Africa to southern Europe, especially over the past seven years.



Fig. 3: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970.
© Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation/
Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
(Photo: Louis Arevalo)



Fig. 4: Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing
***Ice Watch*, 2014**
(Image courtesy: Phaidon)

Land Art as a catalyst movement for artists dealing with and reacting to climate change

The postmodern aesthetic emerged post-WWII as a response to the accelerated sociopolitical changes occurring in the second half of the twentieth century. Sexual liberation, feminism, the emergence of alternative lifestyles, and ecological concerns challenged Western societal norms, and artists were at the fore of these radical paradigm shifts. Pop Art and the increasing commodification of visual art, particularly in North America, prompted working artists to disavow the white cube gallery system and its sterile spaces in favour of art that could not be commodified.³ One of the results of this discursive concept was the Land Art movement, which, according to Tate terms, is broadly defined as art that is made directly in the landscape, sculpting the land itself into earthworks or making structures within the landscape comprised mostly or exclusively of natural materials.⁴ Works of Land Art such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Walter de Maria's *Earth Room* of 1968, and Ana Mendieta's oeuvre and her use of the environment as source material, are intrinsically ephemeral in nature, and many of these works change their forms over time. This impermanence poses certain conservation issues and thus photography becomes the evidence through which Land Art is preserved and perpetuated. It is also through photographs that the tangible evidence of climate change is made visible in the Anthropocene (the new geological era characterised by the impact of human activities upon the planet).

Built entirely of mud, salt crystals, basalt rocks, earth, and water, *Spiral Jetty* is located on the northeastern shore of the Great Salt Lake near Rozel Point, Utah (fig. 3). It consists of a 1,500-foot-long and fifteen-foot-wide counterclockwise coil jutting out from the shore of the lake, and is only visible when the level of the Great Salt Lake falls below an elevation of approximately 4,197.8 feet. Smithson reportedly chose the Rozel Point site because of the blood-red color of the lake waters, as well as its connection with the primordial sea.⁵ The red hue of the water is actually due to the presence of salt-tolerant

3 Timothy W. Luke, "Art and the Environmental Crisis: From commodity aesthetics to ecology aesthetics," *Art Journal* 51, No. 2 (1992): 72–76.

4 Tate, "Land Art – Art Term," *Tate*, January 26, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/l/land-art>.

5 Balasz Takac, "Swirling Into the Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson," *Widewalls*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.widewalls.ch/spiral-jetty-robert-smithson-utah/>.

bacteria and algae. Construction of the work itself took six days and it speaks to the subjectivity of the body: as one walks around and moves on the semi-permanent site, one feels the themes of the impermanence of the body echoed in the work - a common motif in postmodern sculpture.

I mention this highly influential and much-discussed work not only for its art historical significance, but because its very existence is being threatened by the ramifications of climate change. The Great Salt Lake is in essence an endorheic basin, which means that it retains water and allows no outflow to other external bodies of water. The rise and fall of such terminal lakes is due to the effects of the cycle of precipitation and evaporation. Upon Smithson's completion of *Spiral Jetty*, the entire work was submerged and imperceptible for more than two decades. Such variations in the water level are rapidly decreasing, and the work itself appears to be slowly dying up. According to the director of the Great Salt Lake Institute, Bonnie Baxter, the lake is now at a historic low.⁶ This does not bode well for the work's long-term preservation. She forewarns that "this drought is a permanent fixture and is likely going to get worse—and that's based on data."⁷ The Dia Art Foundation, which holds the work in its collection, oversees the site's accessibility and documentation over time. Smithson himself articulated his desire to leave the site untouched and to let nature alter the work through the natural corrosive process of entropy. The Dia adheres to Smithson's wishes to not take active conservation measures. This dialectical tension between the environment and the theory of entropy is prevalent in Smithson's writings as, according to the artist, "in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness."⁸ Yet the rapid dissolution of *Spiral Jetty* reflects the alarming rate at which the Earth's global average temperature is rising. Human-induced climate change is exacerbating the work's natural decomposition.

6 Angela Wang, "As the Great Salt Lake Dries Up, 'Spiral Jetty' May Be Marooned," *Hyperallergic*, February 7, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/356762/as-the-great-salt-lake-dries-up-spiral-jetty-may-be-marooned/>.

7 Ibid.

8 Paul Crowther and Isabel Wünsche, *Meanings of Abstract Art: Between Nature and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 167.

Contemporary artists and collective displays of protest responding to one of the greatest threats of our time

On October 26, 2014, Olafur Eliasson implemented his installation, *Ice Watch*, in central Copenhagen, to coincide with the publication of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report (fig. 4). The work comprised of multiple icebergs that were collected as fragments of the glaciers that are melting at a frantic rate. The melting ice blocks also function as a metaphor for the urgency with which international action should be taken. Eliasson's collaborator, professor of geology at the Natural History Museum of Denmark, Minik Rosing, interpreted the project, stating that "these icebergs didn't only come here to be beautiful, they're all carrying a story. You'll notice they're all individuals, they are like beings. And they whisper to you, if you put your ear to them, you can hear the bubbles pop and you can see they're all different. And what they tell us is about a world that is different from the one that we have today. The air bubbles contain air that is fresh and clean and has half the CO₂ that we have in the atmosphere today. It brings us a message of tremendous change that is happening right now."⁹

While *Ice Watch* was a collaboration between a singular artist and geologist and was displayed in a public and non-museum space, projects that result in tangible action are manifested through the collectivity of bodies working together. Perhaps one of the more successful displays of collective protest that resulted in real change was the Liberate Tate project (fig. 5). Liberate Tate's radical collectivity and generative performative projects used art to urge the Tate to completely cut its ties to the gas and oil company, British Petroleum. This was done through activist interventions that brought together otherwise unassociated people at the museum in London. In conjunction with direct interventions within the galleries which included performances and overnight sit-ins, Liberate Tate produced publications warning of the complicity of the Tate with ecological damage. Over a span of six years, the movement culminated in BP's withdrawal of their financial support and affiliation with the Tate in 2017. BP had donated about £250,000 annually to the Tate's program for over

9 Ben Luke, "Olafur Eliasson's Latest Work Is Melting Away on the Bank of the Thames in London," *The Art Newspaper*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/ice-watch-olafur-eliasson>.



Fig. 5: Liberate Tate's *Human Cost*, performed in Tate Britain on the first anniversary of BP's Deepwater Horizon spill, April 2011
(Photo: Amy Scaife, image courtesy Liberate Tate)



Fig. 6: Liberate Tate's *Time Piece*, performed in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, June 14, 2015
(Image courtesy: Liberate Tate)

26 years.¹⁰ By using the museum as a platform to gain press attention, Liberate Tate successfully achieved their objectives through non-confrontational and artistic trope techniques. It is noteworthy that despite these collective actions over six years, the UK system allowed the protestors to remain on site at the Tate in order to carry out their demonstrations. Would such constant and disruptive action be tolerated in American museums? Or, would our more draconian museum security practices prevent this sort of grey-zone of guerrilla performance? One could also ask the same questions for Maltese museums.

Liberate Tate began as a project by the London-based collective, Platform. According to their website, “Platform is different. We combine art, activism, education and research in one organisation. This approach enables us to create unique projects driven by the need for social and ecological justice.”¹¹ One of their on-site interventions, *Time Piece*, took place in the very visible space of the Tate’s Turbine Hall, and featured veiled protesters dressed fully in black writing messages on a large tablet that was laid out on the space’s massive floor while actors quietly sat and read books on the intersection of art and protest (fig. 6). The texts were responses to art, activism, climate change, and the oil industry. This durational performance of unsanctioned live art endured for around twelve hours.

The radical techniques employed by Liberate Tate and its subsequent successes provide a model which can be applied by other collectives and arts practitioners whose actions, I argue, should be sanctioned by art institutions. Artists and activists should receive a buy-in from curators and directors and, ideally, their actions should also be supported at the board level.¹² If museum administrators wish to reach younger demographics and new funding entities, they must recognise that museums are not neutral. Performative protests such as those conceptualised by Liberate Tate are such a successful model for

10 Mark Brown, “Tate’s BP Sponsorship Was £150,000 to £330,000 a Year, Figures Show,” *The Guardian*, January 26, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jan/26/tate-reveal-bp-sponsorship-150000-330000-platform-information-tribunal>.

11 Platform London, “Who We Are,” *Platform London*, 26 January, 2020, <https://platformlondon.org/about-us/>.

12 Perhaps the most successful art institution that sanctions, and was founded upon principles of the practice and theory of institutional critique is BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht. Its founder and director, Maria Hlavajova has endeavoured to create a space where the precarious classes feel welcomed and included and has reframed the notion of critique to be ‘in spite of’ to move towards changing the system in which museums operate in the West.

exposing art institutions - such as the Tate - that received funding from oil giants. They not only sought to make visible the argument that museums have an ethical responsibility to divulge funding entities, but also problematised the financing of their operations and the programming to the publics they claim to serve.

The post-Occupy movement's offsetting of museum politics recognised protest as a natural process of dismantling the foundational patriarchy and colonial doctrine that fueled the desire to collect, categorise, and order. Thus, we see performative gestures translated to real world implications.¹³

Conclusion

This paper has explored the ways in which socially engaged artistic practice can potentially shift the positions of power using the Liberate Tate's methodologies as case studies to analyse discursive spaces of museums and their role in contributing or reinforcing the narratives surrounding climate change via their funding entities and grassroots protests by artists and activists. The political, collaborative, and performative gestures discussed herein demonstrate the narrative-changing power of art resistance and protest by contemporary artists and collectives as well as activists and spectators. The success of Liberate Tate can, at least in part, be attributed to the notion of collectivity, and this contemporary promise of aesthetic equality has reemerged in the form of 'relational aesthetics' by artists who make work out of social interactions and social communities, as in the case with Liberate Tate.¹⁴ This type of practice was recently successfully executed by artists and activists collaborating to dismantle institutional funding by the Sackler Trust. Recently, the Tate announced that they would no longer accept funding from the Sackler family,

13 Art historian and activist Yates McKee has called this blending of art, protest, and activism the 'post-Occupy condition' in which collective and performative gestures that take place inside and outside of museums challenge social injustice, ecological destruction, and rampant societal inequities. Yates McKee, *Strike Art!: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2017).

14 The convergence of protest, dance, movement, singing, etc. within the museum space borrow Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics that begin with basic human interactions in a social context. It's a guiding principle that Liberate Tate appropriated to make their voices heard by the Tate organization. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2010).

who have profited off the production of opioids, which have contributed to an epidemic of deaths across the United States.¹⁵

This paper sought to amplify the urgency felt by the artists whose work, responds directly and with heightened awareness, to our planet's fragility as well as the ways in which artists occupy the space between art and activism.

Climate change is arguably the most pressing sociopolitical issue of our time, with subsequent issues such as famine, poverty, and mass relocation hanging in the balance. What will the relationship between art museums and the public eventually look like in the midst of such a pressing global event? The fact that Liberate Tate's performances happened within the museum space upends the prevailing notion that the curatorial position to decide what goes on display, at what point in time, and the conditions under which it's exhibited is a powerful act which produces cultural knowledge and values and, in turn, influences public opinion. Renegade interventions bring in other voices to shape the information which is disseminated as well as its underlying meanings. Daniel Buren asserts in *Function of the Museum* that "everything that the museum shows is only considered and produced in view of being set in it."¹⁶ This assumption sets into play the question of whether the activities of Liberate Tate had taken place outside the spaces of the Tate itself, would the end results have remained the same? Perhaps some of the collective's success can be attributed to the infrastructure of the museum and its coded spaces, which, I argue, are ripe for artistic protest that can inspire tangible action and results.

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15 Joanna Walters, "Tate Art Galleries Will No Longer Accept Donations from the Sackler Family," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/21/tate-art-galleries-will-no-longer-accept-donations-from-the-sackler-family>.

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AESTHETICS, ENGAGEMENT, RESISTANCE

Gabriel Zammit

According to an anecdote recounted by Theodor Adorno in an essay titled *Commitment*, “[w]hen an occupying German officer visited [Picasso] in his studio and asked, standing before the *Guernica*, ‘Did you make that?’ Picasso is said to have responded, ‘No, you did.’”¹ This moment demonstrates how artworks transcend themselves, becoming something more than their material form. The *Guernica*, according to Picasso, is the suffering caused by the bombing at Guernica. Assuming this to be true immediately begs the question of usefulness. It is easy for Picasso to utter these words, standing comfortably in his Paris studio, but art cannot change the present like violence can, and neither the *Guernica* nor the act of painting it intervened in the moment of suffering when a sleepy Spanish village was obliterated by a squadron of bombers. Does this make the *Guernica* and, more generally, the aesthetic response to human tragedy futile? Art is beleaguered by the problem of non-material engagement and retrospect. This vexation will constitute the focal point of the current essay and will guide the arc of an argument which suggests that art becomes meaningful in a manner which action cannot by superseding itself, providing moments of unmediated experience and thus standing critically against the structures of normalisation. By becoming the pure ‘other’ to relationships of constraint, good art manages to become the non-rational explication of utopic potential in a world which has become defined through the perpetual action of erasure and destruction – both

1 Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in *Notes to Literature vol. 2*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann, trans. Shierry Weber (New York, New York: Colombia University Press, 1992), 89.

physical and conceptual – which have become the operative principles of a diminished absolute which is lodged (perhaps irreversibly) at the centre of our most basic rational assumptions. Standing starkly against a world which has relinquished the imponderables which once suffused reality with a deeply meaningful narrative, art embraces pathlessness and creates meaning out of it. Aesthetic resistance does not depend on totality to function effectively, and by being able to alter the subjectivity of both the artist and the perceiver, the engagement with art objects apotheoses into an experience defined through its defiance.

In 1936, Walter Benjamin crystallised the contemporary experience of destruction and dissolution in no uncertain terms when he wrote that “never ha[d] experience been contradicted so thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath those clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.”²

The seeds of the change noted by Benjamin can be traced to the Baroque, wherein uncertainty took root as a historically significant force. The tension which developed between faith and rationality in the seventeenth century changed the course of human consciousness. During the 1600’s rational thought became synonymous with self-doubt and this laid the foundations for the critical perspective which accelerated into the development of science, mechanisation, and a vastly increased capacity for destruction and the rationalisation of contradiction.³ Behind the mathematics and the science of the seventeenth century there lay a new awareness of the limits of human knowledge. The certainty afforded by a previously indubitable theological paradigm was shaken.

In the late 1700’s Friedrich Hölderlin drew the Baroque feeling of groundlessness into the structure of judgement and subjectivity itself. In a fragmentary text titled *Judgement and Being*, Hölderlin claims that language contains within itself an inescapable contradiction which makes any human

2 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London, England: Pimlico, 1999), 83–109, 84.

3 See Didier Maleuvre, *The Horizon, a History of Our Infinite Longing* (London, England: University of California Press, 2011), 180-182

judgement or expression the perpetuation of a metaphysical irony. Taking the etymology of the German word for judgement (*urtheil*) as his cue, Hölderlin argued that separation lay at the root of any linguistic expression deployed in argumentation against the dissolution of indubitable principles, including that of wholeness. *Urtheil* can be traced back to *ur-teilen*, which when translated literally, reads as ‘original-separation.’ Judgement therefore, which can be said to synthesize fragments of perception into meaningful experience in the construction of language and reality, depends on a perspective of original separation to be able to differentiate the parts it goes on to unite. In Hölderlin’s own words, “[j]udgement in the highest and strictest sense, is the original separation of object and subject, [...] that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arche-separation in the concept of separation.”⁴

Given this background, Benjamin’s sentiment comes into focus as expressing the apex of humankind’s experience of the destruction which flows from a rationality which has placed doubt at the root of meaningfulness. Benjamin diagnoses the malady of an era wherein the absolute could only be present in the negative, and human rationality accelerated into self-destruction out of the insuperable principle of separation. In the mid-1900’s human bodies were objectified and turned into human matter in death camps while, in more recent years, the planet has suffered a similar fate of objectification, exploitation and destruction.

Within this context, art falls prey to the same constraints, and narrative based art, which comments explicitly on destruction and trauma, is exposed as an extension of the principles which led to destruction and trauma in the first place. In György Lukács’ words, art of this kind becomes symptomatic of “an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.”⁵ After the 1800’s, lived experience did not impel human beings into a perspective of wholeness. Contemporary art objects and art forms which do not take this into account fail to respond meaningfully to the modern experience of suffering and remain trapped within the metaphysical structure of constraint outlined above. Adorno puts this succinctly in an essay

4 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and letters on theory*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (New York, New York: University of New York Press, 1988), 37.

5 György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 56.

on Kafka, where he writes that “in a world caught in its own toils, everything positive [...] helps increase entanglement.”⁶ The creation of Renaissance art and Medieval art is therefore impossible in the contemporary context. The modern subject has nothing in common with Fra Angelico’s light filled spaces, Botticelli’s exuberant narratives or Michelangelo’s David. Historical art-moments cannot be repeated.⁷

We must therefore ask ourselves, ‘what art becomes relevant in a post-absolute world where an insuperable limit is embedded into the architecture of experience?’ Adorno gives one rebuttal by telling us that “art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concepts and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fibre.”⁸ In other words, artworks can come to embody truth through a position of disengaged engagement, and this paradoxical autonomy becomes the condition for an aesthetic moment which manages to exceed the normalising power of dominant thought paradigms. Genuine artworks and art-moments manage to function critically and reveal fragments of unmediated truth through a form of self-concealment. In order to remain separate from rational modes of constructed meaning-making they must appear to be ‘difficult,’ but by doing so open themselves up to meaning which runs much deeper than anything paradigmatically possible. By maintaining its separateness from the conditions of life, good art engages the social conditions within which it functions, merging a countless number of peripheral glances, so to speak, and building a negative image which does not limit its subject matter. Under this schematisation, good art does not, and cannot, merely say or directly expound some idea in narrative form. The contemporary condition for meaningful aesthetic engagement is that the art object must resist definitive delineation. Two responses to the destruction of

6 Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 271.

7 That is not to prompt the interpretation that pre-existing art becomes meaningless outside of its historical moment, and it is easy to adduce several works which acquire a prophetic dimension as time passes. Giulia Privitelli’s article in the *Times of Malta*, for example, uses Caravaggio’s masterpiece *The Beheading of St John* as a lens to analyse the corrupt and amoral political situation in Malta (see Giulia Privitelli, “Masterminds, Master Killers and Masterpieces,” <https://timesofmalta.com/>, 8 December, 2019). Gericault’s *Raft of the Medusa* is another example in its commenting on immigration and the suffering of human beings expelled from their native lands. And what of the universality of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*? The themes contained therein are inexhaustible.

8 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: The Athalone Press, 1997), 2.

World War Two will help illustrate this concept – Winfried Georg Sebald’s on the one hand, and Frank Auerbach’s on the other.

WG Sebald’s novels enact and embody the unsayable truth of suffering by aspiring to a synoptic perspective which provides a dreamlike atmosphere within which a sustained obsession with detail, description and the contingent interweaving of fact, fiction, and image, accumulates into a whole which, in the author’s own words, fulfils the “utmost need to communicate [which] comes together with the ultimate speechlessness.”⁹ Sebald’s texts do not try to circumscribe a subject which the author recognises to be inaccessible to a constructed trajectory of analysis. Instead, the texts build into a nearly non-narrative edifice, which in its indeterminacy overwhelms the reader, causing insight into what is otherwise unrepresentable through a kind of performance. Sebald’s books bear witness to the truth of suffering by incorporating its ‘unconstructedness,’ into the (lack of) narrative, and enacting this same suffering through a semantically open ended text which effects a sublime response in the reader.¹⁰ Sebald’s method does not diminish the truth of experience through a structure of ostensive representation which would necessarily fall short of true expression. In the author’s own words, his texts demonstrate the “notorious irrationality to which rational arguments lead”¹¹ and very cleverly step around the traps set up by that very rationality.

Auerbach does something similar in paint. Auerbach’s experience of exile and the second world war caused an extremely deep and silent suffering in the artist who felt that conventional portrait and landscape painting just couldn’t get to the spirit of the thing he was trying to depict. As a result, he began to produce the thickly smudged and warped images which are so typical of Auerbach, where the paint often protrudes centimetres off the canvas and looks almost sculptural. Each of his images documents a process of destruction whereby Auerbach would paint all day only to scrape the canvas the next morning, a process which he repeated over long periods. The end result is as much about what is absent as about what is left. His paintings challenge

9 Winfried Georg Sebald, “Strangeness, Integration and Crisis: On Peter Handke’s play *Kaspar*,” in *Campo Santo*, ed. Sven Meyer, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 55-67, 67.

10 See Gabriel Zammit, “WG Sebald and the Poetics of Total Destruction,” *Antae* 6, no. 2-3 (December 2019): <https://antaejournal.com/api/file/5df5110d55d1946b04932573>

11 Winfried Georg Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 66.

us, refusing to confirm the forms we are familiar with, dissolving categories and participating in suffering through their process. One has to surrender to Auerbach's paintings. They accumulate into a sedimented detritus of implications and layers of damage through which the viewer moves, alluding to something far more primitive and elemental than what is ostensibly their subject. "I'd destroyed all the remainders (that is, of painting)," Auerbach tells us, "to get a unique thing ... it began to operate by its own laws ... but it's senseless and irrelevant unless it's tied, anchored to truth. It's a question of freeing the possibilities of improvisation which contain the mysteries."¹² Auerbach twists the process of destruction against itself, and by obliterating his subjects and his own work, he enables both to emerge intuitively in the clearest and freest of detail.

The work of both Auerbach and Sebald disengages from the concerns of the art-world and the world in general, unfolding a unique internal logic which, through its resistance to interpretation and its independence from social conditions, stands defiantly against the levelling powers of instrumental rationality. Within Adorno's schematisation then, this is an act of resistance and the artist becomes a force for social change; the cumulative effect of his work and of others like his seeps into general consciousness, informing future decisions, shaping the drift of personal and collective memory while at the same time revealing and preserving the hidden truths of suffering, heretofore inaccessible through ordinary discourse. Art becomes a political act by being disengaged from hegemonic power-discourse structures¹³ and through its very existence, good art critiques the anatomy of normalisation and the thrust of consciousness which leads to trauma and catastrophe. In Sebald and Auerbach the disengagement from literary, painterly and overt social concerns lifts their subject matter into a non-rational clarity which steps around the hazards of narrative-based meaning making. The art-encounter becomes an encounter with the art-object's subject matter, which is now freed from the social narrative which is necessarily limited in truthfulness of vision.

In *Commitment*, Adorno goes on to make the point outlined above about Picasso's *Guernica*¹⁴ and following this line of thought, the *Guernica* becomes

12 Auerbach as quoted in Catherine Lampert, *Frank Auerbach: Speaking and painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 104.

13 See Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 23.

14 Adorno, *Commitment*, 89.

the illustration of a metaphysical order thrown out of synch. All the figures transcend their painted expression and become fragments of experience which Picasso can gesture to, embodied only inasmuch as elemental suffering requires human consciousness which it can act on and blot out. Picasso himself said that “a painting is a sum of destructions.”¹⁵ The aesthetic object of resistance destroys the perspective which it functions against, and destroys itself as an artwork, becoming the truth and experience contained within itself.

Adorno’s position on engagement and resistance holds a great deal of weight, yet it falls prey to the accusation that, in the face of tragedy, the soft and dispersed influence of art seems rather inadequate. Should artists therefore abandon their efforts and arm themselves with pickets and weapons instead? In wider terms, art is often labelled as useless because it seems not to contribute to the *materiality* of survival – at least not directly, like tools or weapons.¹⁶ However, the fact that societies which do not produce aesthetic objects are unheard of, evidences the deep necessity of art as an institution of thought which responds to patterns of behaviour, both social and personal. Whether as mechanisms of psychological warfare, as Alfred Gell, would have it,¹⁷ or as a force for bringing together the abstract notions that govern a world still imponderable and full of mystery, as John Berger suggests in a subtle essay on the Chauvet cave paintings,¹⁸ art and art objects have existed for as long as thinking has existed. The conceptual flexibility and infinite malleability of aesthetic objects is the most basic reason for their existence. By virtue of these properties, human beings have been able to think reflexively and shape reality through a process of knowledge which is separate from and moves across the general stream of consciousness, commenting on it and changing it.

Art has never had any pretensions of replacing human action, and to ask it to respond to the physicality of destruction is to ask the wrong question. The twentieth century saw the development of an art which, in Sebald’s words was an attempt at a new understanding of “[t]he horrible, the shocking and disturbing

15 Pablo Picasso, Domenico Porzio, and Marco Valsecchi, *Understanding Picasso* (Michigan: Newsweek Books, 1974), 79.

16 While even this is debatable – and most anthropologists would debate it – I think it is safe to say that art does not shorten the route towards some desired physical end in the same way that tools do. Materiality is lacking in its technique.

17 See Alfred Gell, “Technology and Magic,” *Anthropology Today* 4, no. 2 (April 1988): 6–9.

18 See John Berger, “The Chauvet Cave Paintings,” in *Portraits*, ed. by Tom Overton (London: Verso, 2015), 1–6.

things that previously haunted only the darkest corners of the Romantics.”¹⁹ Modern and contemporary art is therefore marked by a recognition of its own limits and an impulse towards the unique new forms which grew alongside the non-rational and unintelligible structures of nineteenth and twentieth-century suffering. The moment of aesthetic engagement and resistance pushes through the limits of reason and supersedes the constrictive materiality of the art object. In Maleuvre’s words, it is “[t]he unknown [which] is at the basis of art’s enduring power to fascinate and overwhelm us.”²⁰ The aesthetic moment therefore responds to materiality by producing a non-paradigmatic and intractable experience. Aesthetic resistance happens though the fact that art occurs in spite of, and despite, the conditions within which and parallel to which it exists. Art tends towards itself in a perpetual struggle to make itself into its own end and critically engages and comments on constrained modes of existence by becoming the pure ‘other’ of a society which is structured by antithetical sociohistorical forces. Active, corporeal rebellion works very differently to aesthetic resistance, and the informative atmosphere provided by aesthetic defiance bolsters the reach of action by subtly shifting the architecture of thought within which physical rebellion happens. It is thus that the paradoxical position of engaged autonomy supersedes the argument of non-materiality.

At this point, the analysis is drawn into the space of the individual aesthetic experience, and it is here that we can speak of utopia regained. Standing starkly against the loss of an absolute that previously functioned to ground meaning, aesthetic engagement doesn’t require a metaphysical context of totality to function with force and, as we have seen, embraces pathlessness, creating deep and intuitive meaning-moments out of indeterminacy. By being able to alter the subjectivity of both the artist and the perceiver, good art becomes the explication of utopic potential. Art therefore retrieves utopia by existing externally to the flow of life regulated by the totalising mechanisms of structured understanding. By uniting disparate fragments of experience, the art object becomes an occasion for the manifestation of a truth constantly in recession. Art creates a moment of infinite potential which is not limited by the synthetic

19 Sebald quoted in David Kleinberg-Levin, *Redeeming Words: Language and the promise of happiness in the stories of Döblin and Sebald* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 36.

20 Didier Maleuvre, *The Religion of Reality* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 195.

constructs of consciousness and thereby it brings the potentiality of utopia into play.²¹ It is in this manner that art objects can destroy the perspectives against which they function by destroying themselves, turning themselves into pure and unmediated experience which cannot be fully comprehended. Following the etymology of the word ‘experience,’²² and George Bataille’s definition as “a journey to the end of the possible,”²³ pure experience is understandable as a deep participation in the world which, in its excess,²⁴ apotheoses into an intimation of utopia, of non-rational truth. Art therefore bypasses the figures of consciousness that lead to suffering and tragedy by moving through them and subverting them against themselves.

Aesthetic engagement supersedes the rational structure of meaning making, which is exposed as the perpetuation of groundlessness. In clearer terms, art must be anti-teleological and intentionally refuse any guiding end which would limit the scope of aesthetic objects. The artwork does not seek to fit into a pre-determined idea of what it should be or should do. Kant intimated this concept in the *Third Critique* when he stated that for something to merit the title of art, it must have purposiveness without purpose.²⁵ In the moment of moving towards it, in the subjective aesthetic moment, the art object comes into being-for-the-subject in a relationship defined by indeterminacy, and every instance of this relationship draws embodied subjectivity beyond itself. The artwork is a mechanism for moving beyond the limits of consciousness and Maleuvre summarises this in the phrase “[a]rt is the dedicated practice of non-knowledge.”²⁶

Adorno’s ideas track powerfully into the concept of art as pure and sublime experience. “The experience of art, as that of its truth or untruth,” Adorno

21 Of course, it is debatable whether utopia is actualisable. As soon as it is drawn out of potentiality it acquires the limits of the context within which it comes to exist, thereby prompting the current author to opine that utopia is probably more productive as a limit concept which orients the course of thought.

22 “By etymology *experience* suggests daring, strain and danger. The root word, *experiri*, ‘to try’, carries an image of passing [...] beyond borders” (Maleuvre, *The Religion of Reality*, 196).

23 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 7.

24 In relation to understanding which tries to structure it and fails.

25 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105-106.

26 Maleuvre, *The Religion of Reality*, 196.

writes, “is more than a subjective experience. It is the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness.”²⁷ Art becomes the final haven for truths which have been obliterated by discourse which levels the world to whatever axiomatic first principles assume absolute authority. When we speak about extreme trauma or global suffering, representation mediated by synthetic concepts necessarily diminishes the truth of an experience which exceeds the abilities of embodied consciousness and is defined through the extent to which it obliterates personal subjectivity.²⁸ By *embodying* the subjective experience of incomprehensibility, good art manages to push beyond its own limits and say something truly objective in the face of terror, warfare and a dying planet. “Along the trajectory of its rationality,” Adorno writes, “and through it, humanity becomes aware in art of what rationality has erased from memory.”²⁹ It is this conceptual background that colours Picasso’s words to the visiting German officer, and the defiance in his statement and flippant gesture is impelled forwards by the weight of non-rational truth.

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27 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 244-245.

28 See Winfried Georg Sebald, “Between History and Natural History: On the literary description of total destruction,” in *Campo Santo*, ed. Sven Meyer, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 68-101, 92-95.

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NOT ART ONLY:

THE COMMON HERITAGE OF MANKIND AS AN ALTERNATIVE ROAD TO PARADISE

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci

1.

The environmental debate is a question that is substantiating the idea of fragmentation of the human species from its own habitat and existence. The very fact that the species is actually debating the actual status of its own existence is ample enough proof of how it is alienated and fragmented from its very source of life. By substituting the species-character of humankind with one of abstract individuality, and the universal good with that of particular interest, humankind succeeded in misplacing the whole idea of nature to that of a class property relationship. Thus, ultimately and oxymoronicly, the human species succeeded in transforming its own organic structure of nature into an inorganic element. If one retains the traditional dichotomy between organic and inorganic, this situation has to be deemed as bizarre and strange, even a dangerous paradox. The paradox consists in attempting to understand how an organic element of nature, that is the human species, can be successful in not only imposing an inorganic structure onto organic nature, but also in creating an inorganic world that slowly infiltrates and subdues its actual organic existential essence. In other words, the organic existence of the species is misplaced by the species action itself with one of inorganic, dead existence, which hence forward would create the illusion that the inorganic part of humankind is in fact organic. Thus, oxymoronicly inorganic-ity has been subsumed into its negation - the organic. This rooted

establishing of an inorganic infrastructure over the organic part of nature is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster, which, due to its erroneous sensed intangibility is in fact intangibly mystifying this distinction.

Through this paradox and the corresponding engineering-manipulation, the human species not only 'refines' or better still 're-de-fines' Dmitri Mendeleev's (1834-1907) periodic table but organic-ises the inorganic - the actual genetic map of the cosmos. One may here underline that it is the human species that is the only part of nature capable of achieving this apocalyptic re-mapping through its existential necessity to work upon, change, develop and destroy nature, hence itself. If humankind succeeded in creating an inorganic supra-nature, nature in its entirety becomes mankind's inorganic body. This aspect leads to either a utopian dream of a heaven-on-earth or to a dystopian nightmare, both implying some kind of purpose innate in nature.

This permanent, perpetual process with nature compelled G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1830) to conclude that without the human species as the locus of will, mind and reason, nature remains without purpose. The human species, it seems, gave this purpose with vengeance. That is, humankind is the ultimate objective of nature in its strive to 'know itself', that is only via the human species' action on nature can nature itself acquire self-reflectiveness. However, this very same humankind which nature made evolving as its source of self-reflection has the power to manipulate and alienate itself from this very nature. Strikingly similar, but from a radically different position, Epicurus believed that the world without humankind is a-teleological, that is, non-purposeful.

This Hegelian and Epicurean idea that the human species is only an ultimate evolutionary point by which nature can reflect upon itself was also developed much closer to our times by Vladimir Vernadsky (1863-1945), who believed that the earth changes and perfects itself together with the actual will, action and control exerted by the species which, according to the Russian physicist and philosopher, is able to artificially create and give to the earth a new vital energy, impossible as a result of natural laws alone. Vernadsky, and later Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), are saying that the human species has come to a point where it is ultimately succeeding in pushing nature beyond its own innate-nature laws via its ability to labour and create. When Hegel underlines that it is the species that gives purpose to nature, he furthermore asserts that it attains such purpose by means of a transformative historical relationship between itself and the evolutionary planetary labour role of the human species.

Working over organic nature is giving property title, to a species labouring with nature. Hence, the species acquires more and more control over blind natural forces through nature and produces a new humanised natural environment. Furthermore, it produces a wealth of its own capacities and needs which then become a starting point for a new self-development.

Nature, thus 'begets' the human species so that with the role played by this element, organically and genetically embedded within its own organic existence, it can reflect upon itself. This is achieved through a productive, transformative relationship of the species' labour over nature. According to Hegel and later developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883), this same process of labour industry which has an actual historical relation to nature engenders a new radical process, a process by which, through this very same labour, it not only engineers a new, this time inorganic, essence over the thing being worked upon but it concurrently endows a thing with a particular property-bond.

If it is only through the human species action of labour that nature evolves its own purposeful essence and by so doing evolves its self-reflective power, one is, however, further endowing the actor with a solid property title over the object being labored upon. Thus, species-labour and its manipulation over nature creates a new nature *and* a corresponding solid title of property. Nonetheless, since species-labour on nature is the characteristic of the totality of the species itself, the property-title appertains to the species and not to abstract particular individuals. But can the species even if termed as humanity own planetary spaces? Can 'humankind' acquire property? Ultimately can the species-humanity-humankind be recognised as a subject of law and international law? Although many legal schools refused to recognise 'mankind' or 'humankind' as a subject of international law *The Declaration of Principles Governing the Seabed and the Ocean Floor Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction* (document A/Conf.62/WP.10 (July 15, 1977): Informal Composite Negotiating Text, Resolution 2749 of December 17, 1970) unequivocally stipulated that the exploration of the area and the exploitation of its resources "shall be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole". Art. 136, 137, 138, 140, 141 of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea and the regime of activities in the area complimented the concept of mankind equating it to that of 'international community'. Art. 136 specifically states that "the Area and the resources are a common heritage of *mankind*" and furthermore art. 137 of the 2749 Resolution underlines that "all rights in the resources of the Area are vested in mankind

as a whole". Art, 1 of the 1967 *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, states that the use and exploration of outer space shall be the province of all *mankind*". The 1972 *Convention on the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage* also uses similar, although not identical, language. Thus, it has to be noted that 'mankind' as a concept exists within the parameters of international law, recognised as a 'subject'. These three major treaties, and more (Climate Change, Information Technology, Genetic Engineering, The Arctic and Antarctica Regulation regime) do underline *humankind* as being vested with rights, vested rights. However, in the present moment substituting the concept of *humankind* with that of the actual human *species* would, I believe, enhance the strength of argument.

The differentiation, alienation from, and fragmentation between species property over the planet and the individual control and power of this very same nature brings us closer to the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind. It is not amiss to underline that the birth of the Common Heritage of Mankind concept, as a legal norm regenerating a struggle against this very fragmentation, arose in the second half of the twentieth century after the modernist tsunami that encompassed all fields of human behavior, including that of the arts. The latter defined and structured the whole idea of an apocalyptic alienation, deformation, fragmentation and differentiation as established by twentieth-century modernist movements, movements which were manifesting the actual abyssal dislocation of the human species from its own existence. Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, the dissected robotisation of the dismembered species, complemented by the anti-art Dada mutilated philosophy which culminated in Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) *spare-part* art of *objet-trouvé*. Moreover, the Russian Constructivist upheaval negated, practically speaking, all the transcendental ideas of beauty and humankind as known hitherto. This led to further alienation from the very essence of the species' human-category. All this engendered the present situation of post-truth, alternative facts, and the re-beginning of a Darwinian jungle pragmatism of power via aggressive corporate capitalism reaching for all the skies after the total and successful annihilation of the Earth's planetary existential resource for survival of all species.

The present APS Mdina Biennale is attempting to introduce this debate within this philosophical-legal and artistic context of alienation.

2.

The philosophical concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind forms an integral part of the evolutionary process of utopian social theory, but with a difference: Arvid Pardo (1914-1999) succeeded in transforming this utopian thought into one of the most important imperative international norms regulating relations between states. Many were the similar experiments attempted throughout the evolution of human social thought, that led to many a tragic result. Plato's Sicilian debacle, early Christian communal thought together with the medieval belief of universality, Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and Robert Owen (1771-1858), the nineteenth and twentieth century's back-to-nature movements, the 1960s international commune uprisings, and ultimately the engineered idea of a universal heaven proposed by the tragedy of the Soviet Union were all experiments attempting to struggle with the same question relating to humankind's relationship with the species' planetary occupation of nature.

By postulating a positive transcendence and sublimation over the Roman Law *occupatio* principle that underlines a divine private-propertisation of the planetary territories, and space vital for the species existence, the Common Heritage of Mankind concept as advanced by Pardo together with Elisabeth Mann Borgese (1918-2002), precaviously operates on a symbiosis between Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469-1527) principle of self-interest (as the source of all human activity) and an attempt to integrate it with the concept of the species' self-interest for survival. Such unity between utopian philosophy and pragmatic political theory under Pardo dis-utopies the Common Heritage of Mankind from its idyllic metaphorical utopian sentimentality and actually establishes it as an internationally recognised scientific norm, thus provoking a multi-level effect on major human species' behaviour. In effect Pardo and Mann Borgese, as all previous utopian philosophers, believed that the disintegration of ownership is a fundamental direction observable in today's world, as society shifts to a social model that gradually abolishes private ownership. Pardo whilst retaining this utopian aspect believed, more pragmatically, that the human species has no option other than to evolve into a socially controlled environment that would ultimately entail the disintegration

of private ownership as hitherto perceived, taking us back to Thomas More's (1478-1535) communistic beliefs.

In a fascinating way, the Malta initiative manifested how the absolutisation of Machiavelli's 'self-interest' met More's revolutionary call against private property as a reaction to the unequal distribution of wealth, which is in fact the central point to the common heritage concept, a concept that has become an international legal norm determining the human species' relationship with nature and its corresponding space. Space is that form of existence characterising *extent*, *interdependence* and *mutual influence* of all elements and processes. Space is the form of existence of the human species. The species-space is the form of existence of the species, characterising its extent, structure, interdependence and mutual influence of all its elements and processes, and all this has to be understood holistically. The problem of alienation and fragmentation, which is discussed in my different publications, has brought about a differentiated 'breakdown' of the species' extent and structure via an *occupatio* of parcelling different spaces and areas such as those bits-and-pieces under state-national jurisdiction, other areas defined as *res nullius*, areas of common use, formal frontier property division of planetary spaces, and their consequent contradictions in interdependence and mutual influences of all elements and processes, such as north-south/west-east discrepancies, ecological and nuclear threats. This radical modernisation of the concept of *occupatio*, is understood today, quite paradoxically as globalisation.

All space starts to be recognised as belonging to the species *via* as above indicated the species' capacity of labour manipulation of nature and space. Owing to the alienation of the species' space from the species-being as a whole and the ensuing parcelling and jigsaw-puzzling of space territories which were made subject to the political-military-economic jurisdiction of separate individual states, the Common Heritage concept, under Pardo's astuteness, was compelled to restrict itself initially to 'spaces' *not* being under explicit state jurisdiction. Although objectively this is in fact a contradiction in terms, this humble but revolutionary compromise not only implied and still implies an explicit prohibition of asserting sovereign rights over such 'space', but is also begetting a legal provocative question on 'space' *already* classified as appertaining to separate states. No space has an objective independent existence from other so called spaces. For clarity's sake only, one might assume that every space is completely interdependent and overlapping the other. Only

for pragmatic-legal-logical reasons may one differentiate space units, e.g. space that is under state jurisdiction and that which is not - yet. Thus, such 'latter' space, that is space not under state jurisdiction, defined as common heritage of mankind, cannot be subject to any kind of appropriation. There is no need for a deep debate to manifest how powers are today attempting violently enough to limit and further narrow the remaining space not under state jurisdiction, bringing the whole Malta initiative to naught.

The radical difference between Arvid Pardo and previous utopian philosophers and social thinkers is that Pardo based this prohibition of appropriation on his concept of 'absence of property' instead of the communistic idea of common property juxtaposed against private property which is implied in this present discussion. This has its dangers of interpretation due to its similarity with *res nullius*. Pardo himself admits the vitality still of traditional international law concepts of *occupatio*, which are in fact directly based on the principle of *res nullius naturaliter fit primi occupantis*. The Maltese thinker and diplomat, in order to propose his structural non-utopian variant on such planetary space regulation, had to differentiate between *res nullius* and his idea of 'absence of property'.

But what does *res nullius* mean? The most general meaning given is 'property belonging to no-one'. According to the *Institutes of Gaius*, there are two different types of property that cannot belong to 'no-one': "what is under divine law, cannot be private property; what is under human law, on the other hand, is generally someone's property but may also be no-one's: things which are under human law are either public or private.... Public things are regarded as no-one's property; for they are thought of as belonging to the whole body of the people.... Private things are those belonging to individuals"¹ One must underline the important assertion that according to Gaius, the *belongingness of a thing to the whole deprives the thing of belonging to a part*. Furthermore, only a thing which is not *res extra commercium*, and which forms part of private law and which belongs to no one *could*, by Roman law, become the property of the first occupier (*primo occupanti*). The qualification that a thing must be *in commercio* and must form part of private law in order for the *res nullius* to be applicable is sometimes forgotten, better still, was always forgotten, in order to justify the occupation of spaces.

1 *The Institutes of Gaius*, trans. William M. Gordon and O.F. Robinson (London: Duckworth, 1988), 127.

According to Roman law *res extra commercium* include *res omnium communis* which by their very nature exclude domains such as air, sea and water. Thus, the *res nullius* principle does not apply to the *res omnium communes*. An appropriation, a first occupation of a *res omnium communes* does not create any property claims, according to Roman law. One may find a development of this in Hugo Grotius's (1583-1645) *mare liberum* claiming that earthly resources are of their nature not *res nullius* but *res communes*, and thus *extra commercium*.

Many Common Heritage theoreticians refused to recognise any property aspect to the common heritage, bringing it thus dangerously close and synonymous to the *res nullius*, its own negation. Pardo coined the expression 'absence of property'. This was the reason why I had proposed a synthesis of both negations: *res nullius* and *res communis humanitatis*. In other words, if one were to apply Roman legal terminology, Species Space, is the property of the species, that has to be interpreted in its generational evolutionary aspect. Actual society-in-history has the right only to *usufruct*, which in itself has a *res universitatis* character, that is, common property to all to be distributed accordingly. This means that actual society has the right to *enjoy* such heritage from the property not owned by it but by the human species, and actual society is under the obligation of preserving its substance in matter and form.

This concept of international *usufruct* implies mainly the management, regulation and distribution of the fruits and the use thereof concerned. In the late 1960s and after two decades of diplomatic and international tensed conflicts against the Malta initiative, the international community recognised, albeit heavily compromised, this Pardo principle, which henceforth found other concrete echoes in all the political-economic systems of the time, ensuring and guaranteeing the rational use of the planet's resources as the *possession of all mankind*. Malta's position at the time quite consistently underlined that such *usufruct* necessitates an international system of management which has to be based on an international legal responsibility of protecting, maintaining, preserving, and refraining from doing anything that might jeopardise this heritage to the prejudice of future rights of mankind. The normative implications of the Common Heritage of Mankind provoke necessary and inevitable procedural consequences. The international legal recognition of lawfulness of interests of all the countries in respect to such planetary regulation prohibits thereby separate bargains and negotiations.

'Closed' agreements and unilateral actions, taking no account of the interests of other states and common interests of mankind, would be illegal.

All this mentioned above leads to the important logical proposition that any action contravening such provisions of the Common Heritage of Mankind may be defined not only as a qualitative new crime against peace and humanity, that is a grave act threatening the existence of humanity, of states and of nations, their progressive development and peaceful international intercourse, but also as an international crime, that is internationally wrongful acts which result from the breach by a state of an international obligation so essential for the protection of fundamental interests of the international community.

3.

In order to understand how the Maltese initiative spearheaded by Pardo transferred the utopian character of the relationship between humanity and its resources, one has to underline Pardo's five essential aspects of Common Heritage of Mankind:

1. The common heritage cannot be appropriated by any state, individual or other entity. It can be utilised but it cannot be owned.
2. It implies a system of management, rational planning and orderly law regulated development.
3. This management must act on behalf of mankind as a whole.
4. The common heritage is reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes.
5. The common heritage must be managed also with the interests of future generations in mind.

A crime based on the contravention of the Common Heritage of Mankind would hence take a high position in the hierarchical legal structure of a new order. In fact, it is here that the 1960-70s Malta initiative can become a dangerous one for the powers that be if, as I had proposed, the international community would in the twenty-first century, recognise the *jus cogens* character of the Common Heritage of Mankind norm.

The concept of *jus cogens* is an ancient one: *jus publicum privatorum pactis mutari non potest* and *privatorum conventio juri publico non derogate*, understood as simply all norms from which no one can derogate, which later was normatively developed in many national codes. It was Johann Kaspar

Bluntschli (1808-1881) who, for the first time in modern legal history, analysed *jus cogens* as forming a fundamental part of international law presupposing a relationship between imperative/peremptory norms and *treaty-validity*. It was in 1932 that *jus cogens* as a peremptory normative norm became the subject of recognition per se, as can be attested in the works of F.A.F. von der Heydte (1907-1994) and Alfred Verdross (1890-1980). Such doctrinal acceptance of *jus cogens* was soon followed by Court recognition as in the Oscar Chinn case; the case related to the Austrian-German Customs regime, 1932; International Court consultative decision to the Genocide Convention; the Corfu incident case; the South-East Africa Case, 1962; Krupp case, 1947; North Sea Continental Shelf cases, and many others. Adding to all this, many are the judges' special and reserved opinions given which enhanced the international legal recognition of the *jus cogens* legal concept. Ultimately the *jus cogens* norm was recognised as forming part of treaty law by the Vienna Convention of International Treaties enacting that "a treaty is void if at the time of its conclusion it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law ... a peremptory norm is a norm accepted and recognised by the international community of states as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character" (s.53).

Modern international law for the time being recognises the following *jus cogens* norms: the principle of peaceful coexistence, the principle of the non-use of force or threat of force, the principle of territorial integrity of states, the principle of inviolability of boundaries, the principle of peaceful settlement of international disputes, the principle of disarmament, the principle of sovereign equality of states, the principle of non-intervention, the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the principle of cooperation among states, the principle of respect for human rights, and the principle of fulfilling in good faith international obligations.

The legal essence of *jus cogens* norms is explicitly directed towards a precise delimitation of the otherwise free-anarchical and unilateral activity of states. This objectively reflects the fact that the development of the world-earth as one entity has directly caused a curtailment of the previous unlimited freedom of a state's right to formulate the essence and character of its relations independently and irrespectively of the community's and of humankind's interest as a whole. The Common Heritage of Mankind legal norm is playing the same role: the

Common Heritage of Mankind as a *jus cogens* norm would similarly reinforce a further radical limitation since such a concept is in fact subjecting the state's freedom over planetary exploitation to the international community's interest, to humankind's interest, humankind considered as a species-in-progress.

Malta should again take the initiative and propose a *jus cogens* regime to the Common Heritage of Mankind. If Malta loses its chance to participate in the development of its interpretation, future generations may be implementing a 'Common Heritage' far more differently than the concept founded by Malta in modern times. During the years of our missed personal relationship, Arvid Pardo, in quite a paternal yet comradely way, would criticise my idealism which, according to him, precluded me from differentiating between *lex ferenda* (what and how law ought to regulate) and *lex lata* (what and how the law actually regulates). Today's situation, unfortunately enough, has proved him right, yet again.

Within this context, the APS Mdina Biennale is modestly enough participating in this debate so vital at this present stage of human survival.

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Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci studied Philosophy, Law and the Arts. He graduated from the University of Malta, from the State University of Kiev, and from the State University of Moscow, and undertook postgraduate research studies at the State University of Milan. He has authored several books on Modern and Contemporary Art, Philosophy of Art, and Maltese twentieth-century Art. Schembri Bonaci is coordinator of the Fine Arts Programme in the Department of Art and Art History, Artistic Director of the APS Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale, and Artistic Director of the Strada Stretta Concept, a project which forms part of the cultural programme of the Valletta Cultural Agency. He has recently published a series of thematic and theoretical publications on the history of Maltese twentieth-century-art.



Arvid Pardo and Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci
at the latter's Malta home in the 1980s



Confidential
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Institute for Marine and Coastal Studies
UNIVERSITY PARK · LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90089

16 Jan. 1989.

Dear Giuseppe,
I much appreciated your interesting and friendly letter of last December which I have not been able to acknowledge before owing to a bout of ill-health. Thank you also for sending me copy of Betty Jew Shih's. I enjoyed it, especially the irony.

I was interested in what you write about yourself. Your story reminds me of a friend, a young man called Tangranchi, with whom I spent nearly three years in jail during the war. Tangranchi was brilliant, also an idealist. He had worked for the destruction of fascism and for a new Italy, purged of nepotism and corruption. After the war he became a communist, he wrote several books, all interesting and one or two real masterpieces. He thought he could change the world or at least Italy or as a modest minimum the mentality of the bureaucracy of the Italian communist party. After decades of work as a writer and journalist he found himself becoming suspect in the party because heretical thoughts could not always be suppressed; he began to lose his idealism, then hope. One day he was found with a revolver in his hand and a bullet in his brain. The party gave him a funeral at its expense and buried him - body and soul.

The lesson: be careful. Do not let your

Letter from Arvid Pardo to Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci dated January 16, 1989. This forms part of a collection of letters exchanged between Pardo and Schembri Bonaci on the subject of international law. In this letter, Pardo elicits some crucial points on the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind.



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statism carry you away totally. Be prepared for pain and skimpy meals if you want to be independent, independence is a privilege "che si paga di persona!"

Having said this, I am very glad that you have decided seriously to study the common heritage principle and that you are doing it with Albo ~~Chirac~~ Chirac and the International Ocean Institute. The seminars seem an excellent idea.

Perhaps I could give a few suggestions, you have probably thought of them already.

1. Philosophical roots of CH principle - Christian (world belongs to God not man, etc. etc. words of Christ, social teaching of Church, etc) Marxist (you are the expert... -). Synthesis: ??

2. Why is CH principle (or something similar) necessary - Here, it is necessary to look at the development of science and technology in the modern world. It is a common interest of mankind to curb the abusive use of modern technology: this cannot be done under the present principle of co-equal sovereignty of states. Under the CH principle abuse of technology would be "ipso facto" illegal. A similar reasoning would apply to the protection of the environment at the international level (ex. the destruction of Amazonian forests ^{etc}). Another approach would be empinging upon olim states



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to say that the principle of state sovereignty will inevitably continue to expand both on this earth and wherever man will penetrate bringing contention and discord, unless it is curbed by the CH principle, etc.

It is extremely important (also politically) to demonstrate the need for a new legal principle (conveniently called the CH principle) as foundation of international law.

3. Definition of the CH principle. — The first question that arises is whether the CH principle should be officially defined at the international level. There are obvious advantages ~~in this~~ (particularly for the legally minded) in obtaining an agreed definition, but all things considered, I believe that it may be preferable to discourage over-eager attempts at definition. Let the CH principle (like the doctrine of the Church) develop over time in accordance with the needs of man... Definition gives precision, but also limits and circumscribes.

4. What is the minimum content of the CH principle? I believe there are, at least, five major aspects (a) the common heritage ~~can be appropriated~~; (b) it can be used but not owned (c) the CH requires a system of management in which all users share (although not necessarily to the same degree) (d) the CH implies active sharing of benefits not only financial but also those derived from shared management and transfer of technologies (e) the CH implies reservation for peaceful purposes and, finally (e) reservation for future generations. Each of the five major aspects requires in depth analysis, I would only underline here — and it is a vital point — that under a CH regime there must be



an equitable balance of duties and benefits for all participants in the regime: balance is essential, all participants whether rich or poor must feel that they are better off under the CH regime than under the previous regime.

5. What is the scope of the CH principle: As of now I believe the territorial scope of the CH principle should extend to all areas which are now beyond the limits of national jurisdiction - either res nullius or res communis - such as ocean space (beyond the limits of national jurisdiction), Antarctica, the Moon and other celestial bodies. It should also extend to the air we breathe, ^{and} to outer space ~~and to~~. Thirdly, CH regimes should be adopted in respect of activities of individuals and states which ^{can} adversely affect the existence of individuals or basic rights of the states: examples: climate modification, certain aspects of nuclear power, bio-technology, environmental destruction the consequences of which have international consequences, etc. etc. Question: should stationary earth orbits come under CH regime?

6. Should outer space exploration come under CH regime? Should technology come under CH regime and, if so, what technology? How to deal with question of patents and equitably to compensate inventors?
7. CH and the international responsibility of states for tortious acts.
8. Political aspects of CH principle: for poor countries (change structural relationship with rich countries): for ^{poor and} rich countries (duty of cooperation, etc.): for rich countries (duty of assistance). From 27



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international competition to international cooperation, etc.

9. Malta and the CH principle.— Where do our interests lie? How would action of govt. be circumscribed? Obligation to clean up marine pollution, etc.
10. Trends; the future.— A new world is developing ~~up~~ under our eyes: the national state is increasingly unable to protect its citizens from the effects of (legal) actions taken by other states. National sovereignty has become porous and is inadequate to deal with an increasing number of problems. On the other hand, however, states are increasingly sensitive about the forms of national sovereignty, also the rhetoric of international cooperation has been abused at the United Nations and often is ^{now} counter-productive. Hence very great sensitivity is required in proposing CH solutions. The CH solution has to respond to a felt international need: it has to be equitable and balanced. Rich countries are suspicious of the term CH because of the ^{intuitive} excessive rhetoric of poor countries: their suspicions must be allayed, etc., etc. Opposition of rich countries can delay but eventually cannot prevent the adoption by the international community of the CH principle (or something similar) in an increasing number of fields for this is required by the evolution of man. Eventually (sometime in the next century) the (conceivable) sovereignty of states will be recognized as subordinate to the needs of mankind as a whole for peace, dignity, and constructive progress.

I have written far more than I had planned and

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still have failed to mention a number of important
prints, but I must hurry on.

Re my father, I really would prefer that he not be
included in your proposed book at this time. Believe me I thank
my reasons which I will explain to you 'via voc' when I next
see you.

Finally I must tell you with great regret that I
cannot come to Malta in February as I had hoped. I have
a blocked artery and the doctor says that I should
not travel until I am operated upon. I have asked
Fr. Peter to postpone my proposed course at the university
until May.

All the very best to you. May 1989 bring you
all happiness. Arnold J.

P.S. I have read the seminar proposal: everything OK,
but would suggest a paper on is the common
heritage principle necessary in the modern world?

Please forgive this long scribble.

In haste

A.

UNEARTHING METAL: A DISTANCE OF TIME

**AN EXHIBITION OF METAL SCULPTURES
BY TONI PACE**

As the years go by, times change and so does society. Maltese Modern art has certainly been evolving throughout the years, thus reflecting the everchanging values and beliefs of Maltese society. As a result, this allows for an unearthing of aspects which were once buried in the past. By bringing a fresh new outlook, this has not only unveiled a new age, but also a hidden master; Toni Pace.

Toni Pace was a Maltese artist who produced his metal sculptures in the 1960s. Despite having studied alongside Maltese modern artists who are now well-renowned, he is perhaps the lesser published of the masters. Nevertheless, he still conveys a talent which surpasses the ordinary. His unique handling of steel transforms sculptures beyond their conventional qualities, immersing the viewer and artist into a new dimension by catapulting these historic pieces into the present day, thus transforming the direction of Maltese art. Essentially, these modern masterpieces transmute within the surroundings which they inhabit. Therefore, by placing them within the Baroque and Medieval context of the Mdina Cathedral museum, this allows for a beautiful paragon to be created between the diverse art historical periods, thus constantly shifting the perspectives of the viewers in a beautifully intertwined compositional play of light and atmosphere. By placing them at intervals throughout the museum, they serve as the middle ground for the two extremes of traditional and contemporary art, which will find themselves at play during the APS Mdina Biennale.

Pace was an artist who was rarely placed in the spotlight. In the newly published book by Professor Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci entitled *Metal and*

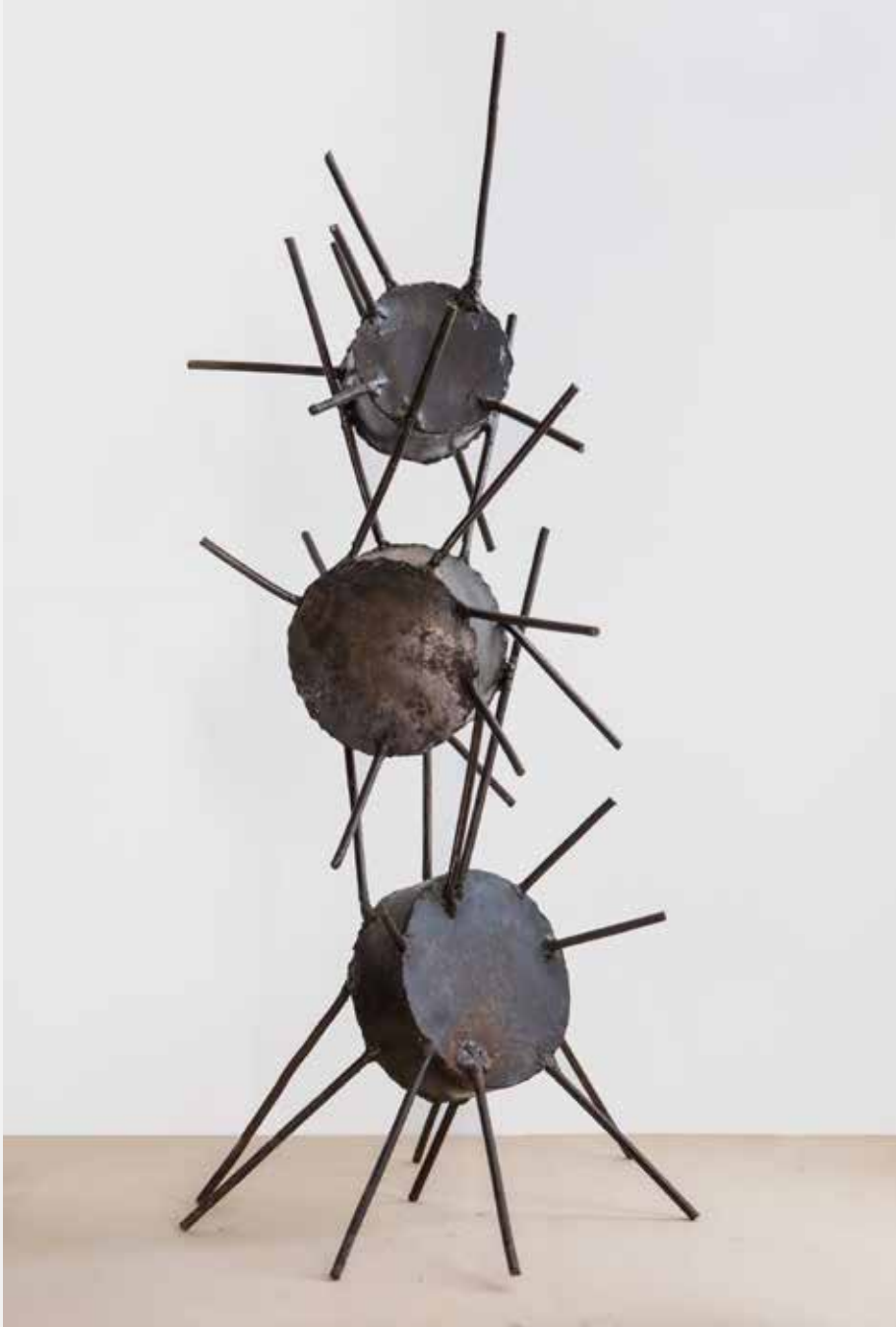
Silence: The quest for daringness and authenticity in the arts (Horizons, 2020), Pace is given the fame he deserves in the twenty-first century. This exhibition is the first dedicated to showcasing his metal sculptures and is thus the first ever opportunity to appreciate them fully and in their own right. This exhibition establishes Pace as Malta's master of metal sculpture.

Curated by Hannah Dowling

Photography of artworks by Elisa von Brockdorff



Toni Pace's Valletta studio



Toni Pace, *Sea Urchins*, 1965
Mild steel | 73 x 30 x 30cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Cathedrals*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 67 x 45 x 12cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Prickly Pears*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 86 x 36 x 25cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 1*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 43 x 89 x 18cm

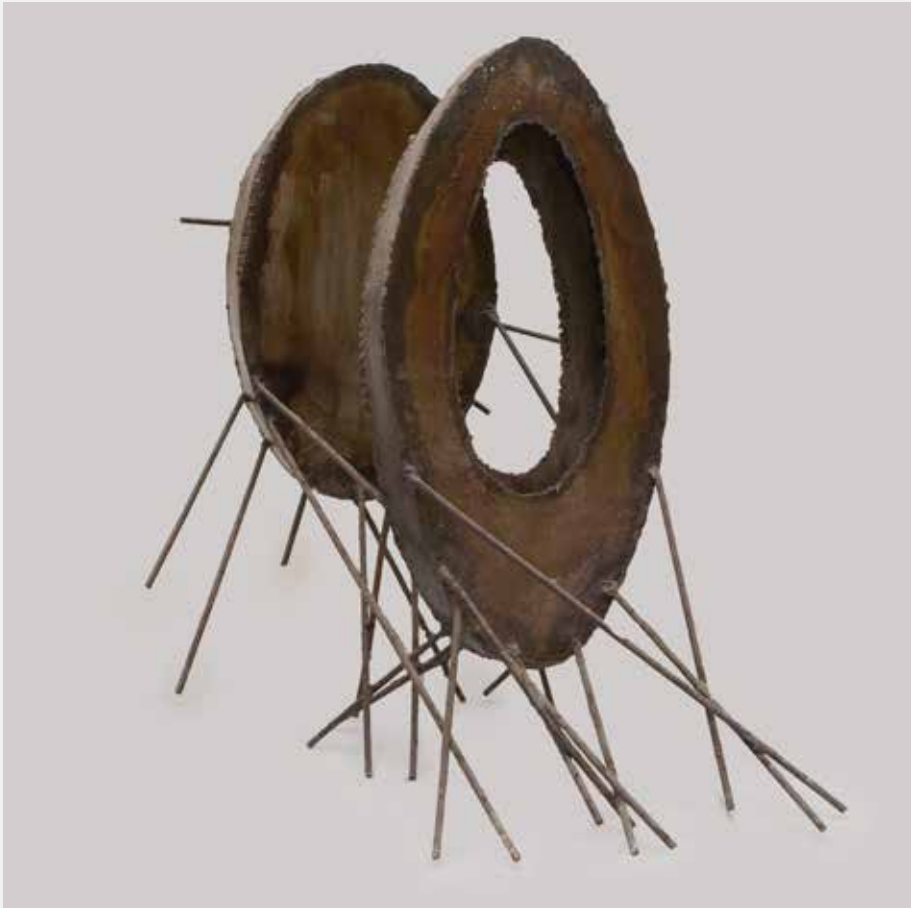
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Crescent Moons 1*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 76 x 46 x 7cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Spikes Composition 1*, 1966
Mild steel | 34 x 60 x 5cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Cactus*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 70 x 60 x 50cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 2*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 92 x 29 x 15
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Trojan Horse*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 62 x 52 x 8cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Homage to Mondrian*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 56 x 26 x 20cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Insect 1*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 15 x 31 x 9cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 3*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 69 x 37 x 9cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Crescent Moons 2*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 65 x 38 x 15cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Spikes Composition 2*, 1965

Mild steel | 44 x 42 x 6cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Two Figures 1*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 37 x 22 x 13cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 4*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 190 x 51 x 15cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Two Figures 2*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 29 x 21 x 6cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Ballerina*, 1966
Mild steel | 185 x 30 x 30cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Crucifix*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 51 x 32 x 7cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Woman with a Ladder*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 104 x 35 x 12cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Insect 2*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 17 x 21 x 8cm,

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Human Figure*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 117 x 25 x 20cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Woman with a Faldetta*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 125 x 28 x 20cm
Private collection



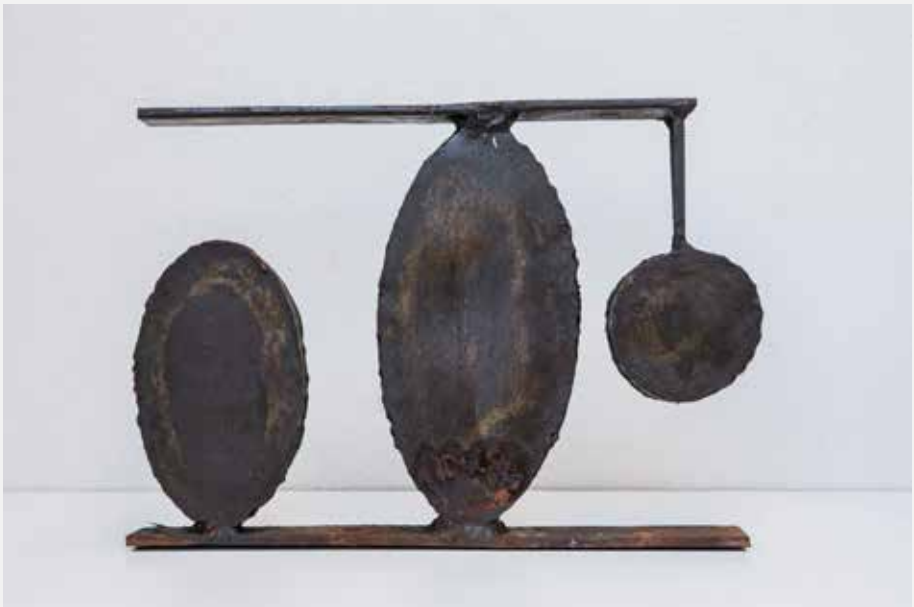
Toni Pace, *Untitled 5*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 47 x 47 x 5cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 6*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 51 x 44 x 8cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 7*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 27 x 38 x 5cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Crescent Moons 3*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 88 x 50 x 25cm
Private collection



Toni Pace, *Spikes Composition 3*, c. 1964-66

Mild steel | 51 x 60 x 22cm

Private collection



Toni Pace, *Untitled 8*, c. 1964-66
Mild steel | 40 x 19 x 14cm
Private collection

Right:
Toni Pace's unfinished final work, 1989



**EXHIBITION
CATALOGUE**



Alberto Favaro, “The Fifth Day” ... (the creation of animals according to Genesis), 2020
Mixed media, video animation of the woodcut *The Fall of Man* by Albrecht Dürer,
taxidermy executed by Mark Buhagiar and sound | Dimensions variable
(Image: Alberto Favaro)

ALBERTO FAVARO

Italy

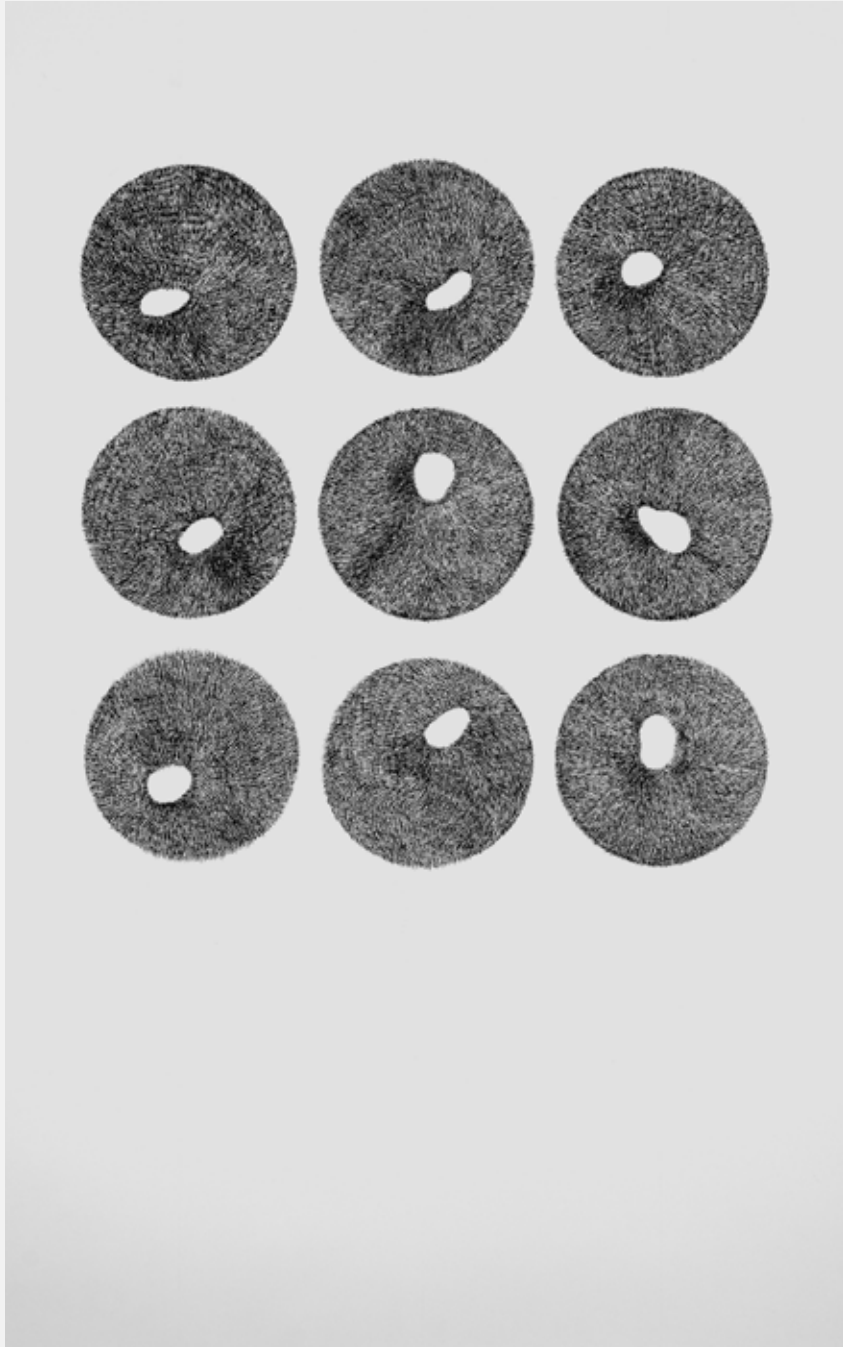
THE FIFTH DAY

As humans, we are both natural beings and creators of sacredness and yet, we exclude ourselves from these two categories. We define our actions as anthropisations, pointing to a supposed unnaturalness in our ways of being in the world. This relation, which sets humans and environment against one another, is mirrored by our relation to the sacred. Sacrality is defined through a process of differentiation which ritualises the demarcation of spaces and objects elected to become ‘other than human’.

Museums are the perfect demonstration of the human process of pigeonholing reality in circumscribed fields and categories of belonging. Within their spaces we observe the attendant epistemological detachment and self-exclusion caused by our process of understanding. Nature and the sacred are experienced either as aesthetic objects, or as items of knowledge, there is a single absolute division between the observer and the observed.

The installation questions the contemporary crisis that separates humanity from nature and the sacred by focusing on the process of museification. Taxidermied animals (typically on display in Natural History Museums) are placed in front of a sacred artwork by Albrecht Dürer. The two fields will overlap in an uncanny juxtaposition, thereby querying the conventional human role, which we take for granted, between examiner and examined object.

Alberto Favaro is an architect residing in Malta. His architectural work has always been accompanied by artistic research which questions and problematises space. He makes use of various mediums in his work, combining drawing, printing, imaginary architecture, photography and installation. His most recent investigation into the spatiality of borders was presented in Mdina as an art performance and photographic installation entitled *Geography Of Life* which was part of Utopian Nights 2018. Favaro also participated in the exhibition *To Be Defined*, held at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta, with the installation *Do Not Cross*. Inside the Border was presented at the Mahalla Festival in Valletta and his installation *Just Waste* featured in the exhibition Momentum.



Alina Aldea, *CELLS*, 2019

Video animation, 3 televisions, stands | 170cm x 125cm x 20cm

(Image: Alina Aldea)

ALINA ALDEA

Romania

CELLS

CELLS evokes the broad microscopic organic universe and brings it into a visible perspective. The images can be interpreted as the result of laboratory experiments which also imply the human observer. When arranged in a matrix, cells invoke the idea of control and systemic predetermination where random occurrences don't seem possible. The choice for using spherical shapes is not accidental: the sphere is considered the form which most closely approaches perfection but is naturally consigned to approximation. *CELLS* becomes the study of alienation in possible research trajectories. The drawn cells have been transposed into an animated video language in order to emphasise and emulate the living organism.

Alina Aldea is a visual artist who expresses herself through installation, drawing, sculpture and interior design, creating strong interdependencies between these various media while exploring aesthetic echoes, visual paradoxes and algorithms. She dives deep into the non-figurative perspective where she devises small representations of possible mental exercises and detachments from reality. Living and working in Bucharest, Aldea has participated in various national and international exhibitions such as the collective exhibition *Fresh Legs* at the INSELGALERIE in Berlin. Her solo exhibition, *Out of the Black. Experiment X* (2019) was held at the Kube Musette Gallery in Bucharest. In the permanent collection of the Bucharest Museum of Contemporary Art are two of her bronze works; *Anonyms*, acquired in 2001, and *Anonymous*, acquired in 2007.



Andreas Mares, *Zugvogel*, 2008
Video projection | Dimensions variable
(Image: Andreas Mares)

ANDREAS MARES

Austria

ZUGVOGEL

A bird crashes against my window pane. This event is the mirror of my own inner journey. Where do I stand? Wherever I go? How much time remains? ...

Andreas Mares was born in Linz, Austria in 1969. Since 1980 he had been working on drawings, and from 1990 - 2006 he worked on paintings using oils and mixed media. In 1994 Mares produced objects using meat, which led to the execution of his first action in 2006. Since 2007, he has been creating videos, and more recently has been working on drawings, actions and objects. He lives and works in Linz, Austria.

ANDREW P. HANCOCK

United Kingdom

THE ORACLE OF OUR SPECIES (TEMPLE TO THE UNSEEN ARTIST)

The *Temple* is built of a series of immersive landscapes represented as 'digital altarpieces'. The *Oracle's* voices create a multifractal immersion of avant-garde sound.

Existentially, it represents the living community of the Arts – its fates, loves and futures and the mental experience of the art's 'genius'.

The pilgrim steps into a temple of aesthetic delight for a digital age.

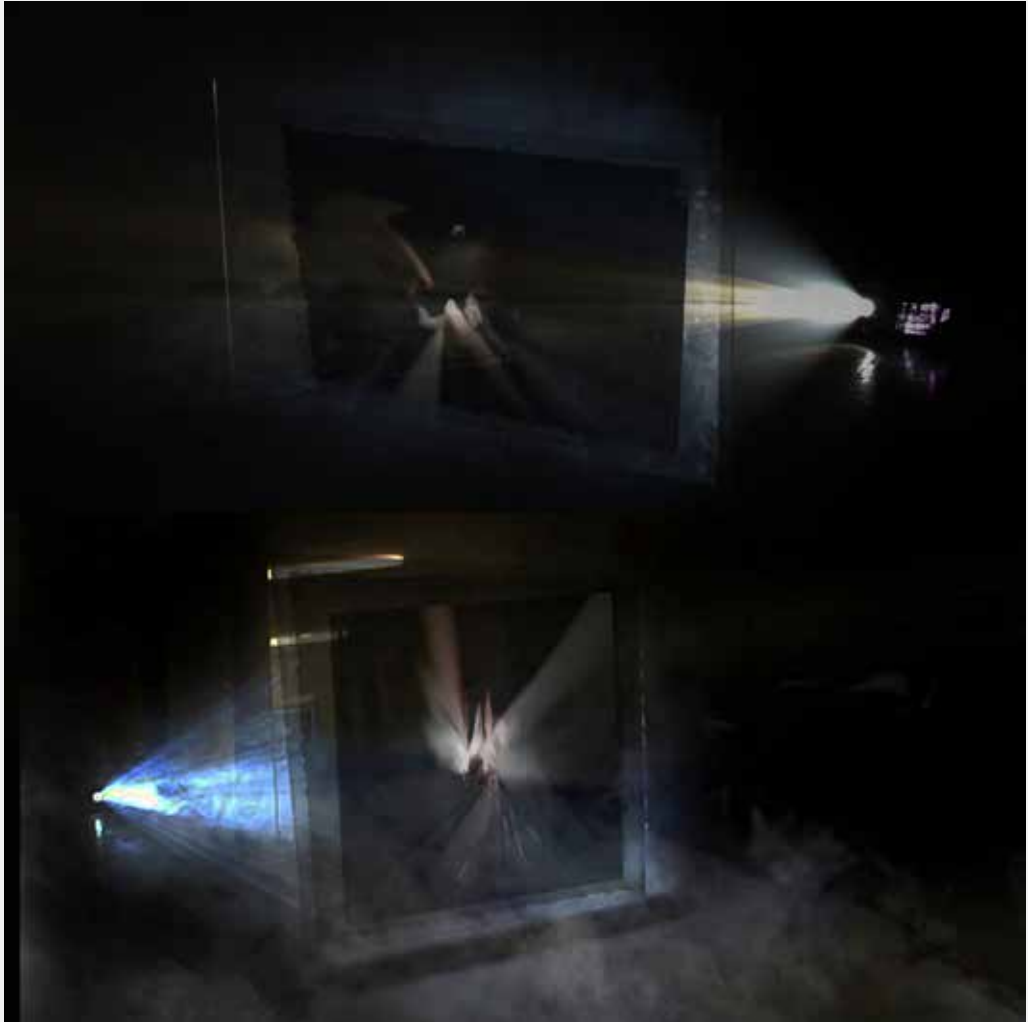
The Muses, Death, Work, Chaos, Harmony and Ecstasy are its pillars.

Technology – mystical, powerful, vast and faceless – is the All, the enigmatic *Who* at its core.

This dream-like abstraction of the art-world ruminates a *paradise* constantly being found and lost, being beyond fixed reality it is made and destroyed like the beating of an atomic pulse. It's ecosystems are self-created and self-sustained, they are classically timeless yet fragile as bubbles.

This art-film piece was partially filmed in Malta, and has since, in fact, been loaded aboard the NASA 'OSIRIS-Rex' deep space probe.

Andrew P. Hancock, born in 1982 in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, has received an undergraduate degree in History of Art from Manchester University. He lives and works in the UK and Malta. Hancock's polymorphic methods produce varied artwork. Primarily a painter, his performances, installations and digital works have been exhibited worldwide and even blasted into space on NASA's Osiris-Rex probe. Hancock brings the incisive eye of a connoisseur to his work, often playing games with art history and the traditional. Major institutional acquisitions include the 'CSPACD,' National Collection, China (Beijing) and the National Collection, Malta (Valletta). Hancock's work has been exhibited at the Barbican (London), Christie's (London), and the National Centre for Contemporary Arts (Moscow). Hancock is represented by the Lily Agius Gallery (Sliema, Malta) & TBurnsArts (London).



Angelina Voskopoulou, *In Between*, 2019

Video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Angelina Voskopoulou)

ANGELINA VOSKOPOULOU

Greece

IN BETWEEN

In this installation, fog is presented as a ghost memory. The ghost is a symbol, a personification of the past that has come back to literally and metaphorically haunt those who have wronged it. Ghosts are relics from a darker era, and the more one upsets and invokes their personal ghosts, the closer they come to absolute destruction of their body and mind.

Fog symbolises obscurity, indistinction; in the Bible it precedes great revelations. Fog is the 'grey zone' between reality and unreality. It accompanies uncertainty about the future and heralds a transformation into the unreal.

This installation has also been likened to the 'scenography' of dance performances which are systems of dance as language (dance seen as a human story, with the intent of expressing or communicating emotion, feelings, ideas etc.)

There is of course the possibility of a sudden radiation that changes the formula, or a tectonic betrayal that creates new lands while sinking others. Possibility is always present, both in its promising and threatening forms ... something to wait for, something to keep you going ...

Angelina Voskopoulou, born in Athens, Greece, is a graduate in Fine Arts and Technology. She also read for a Masters degree in Digital Arts at the University of the Arts, London. Angelina creates videos as well as sculptures made from polyester. She has shown her work at many art festivals and exhibition spaces worldwide (Greece, Italy, Canada, Sweden, London, USA, Spain, Peru, Argentina, Bulgaria, Morocco, Paris, Hong Kong and Russia). In 2018, Angelina received the International Caravaggio Award. She was awarded a prize in the video art category from Bibart, Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, Italy, an HM award at the London International Creative Competition and also chosen for the Giotto contemporary art award in Lisbon. Angelina's work was recently selected for the Contemporary Art Biennale in Cremona, Italy.



Astarti Athanasiadou, *Not a Footprint to be Seen*, 2020

Performance

(Photo: Sophie Krier, image courtesy: Astarti Athanasiadou)

ASTARTI ATHANASIADOU

Greece

NOT A FOOTPRINT TO BE SEEN

A live performance that will honour art's capacity of storytelling against the misogyny and colonial character of any gesture that results in the destruction of our planet. In between the polarities of spirituality and supra-humanism, the performance will focus on the narrative of healing, considered in this case to be a female practice in terms of receptivity, holding space and understanding the interconnectivity of form, materiality and life. What do we have to heal and be healed from in order to reconnect and return to our land, in a collectively shared rather than power-based perspective?

Astarti Athanasiadou works as choreographer, performer and teacher. She studied dance and choreography in Athens and Lausanne, and received her Master's degree from the University of Malta in Performance Studies, and the Dutch Art Institute in Art Praxis. Alongside self-initiated and commissioned projects, Astarti releases work under the aliases of supergroup, Bad Royale and achaperformance. As a teacher, Astarti is an active member of the Body Weather Amsterdam Platform led by Frank van de Wen and Katerina Bakatsaki, and an aligned researcher/transmitter of the Body Weather practice in the form of roaming teaching, and also of the Dangerous Mouses platform. She has produced performance and film projects for the Strada Stretta Concept, a project which forms part of the programme of the Valletta Cultural Agency, under the artistic direction of Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci.



Bozica Milojevic, *Breathe in - Breathe out*, 2019

Video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Bozica Milojevic)

BOZICA MILOJEVIC

Serbia

BREATHE IN - BREATHE OUT

*B*reathe in - Breathe out is a video performance which seeks to answer a few questions which interest the artist. This aim of the video performance is to awaken human consciousness to an awareness of existence, essence and humanity's place in the natural world - how human beings depend on nature and the world around them.

The first action of a newborn human being is to breath in, and the last is to breathe out.

The four elements - earth, fire, air and water - represent concepts which were used by early philosophers to explain the basic structure of nature. Earth represents that property by which matter possesses a certain degree of solidity and is the basic context for all other material phenomena. Water has the characteristics of flow, fluidity and connection while fire does not necessarily imply a flame but the general property of heat which can be found in every object. Air is associated with movement, expansion and contraction. All four elements are present in different proportions in every single particle of matter and this schema has the practical purpose of delineating the basic elements of the human body. The number of elements in the sutras varies, and the initial list expands with the addition of space and consciousness.

Bozica Milojevic was born in 1992 in Nis, Serbia. She finished art high school in 2011 and completed her basic and master studies at the University of Nis in 2016. Bozica has had 4 solo exhibitions and has participated in 35 group exhibitions which featured work from both national and international names. In addition to painting, Milojevic works with sculpture, video and performance art. She has won several awards for her work and is currently based in Nis.



Brigitte Stepputtis, *The Fall* (image from the artist's sketchbook), 2019-2020

Video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Brigitte Stepputtis)

BRIGITTE STEPPUTTIS

Germany/United Kingdom

THE FALL

The Fall is a new work created in response to the APS Mdina Biennale and the location of Malta. It considers Judeo-Christian narratives about the fall from grace — Lucifer and his angels cast out of heaven; Adam and Eve driven from the Garden of Eden — and older myths such as that of Daedalus and Icarus. Using the leitmotif of birds, it weaves this iconography together with eclectic local references; from seventeenth-century still life paintings in Maltese museum collections to the traditional cull of birds that gather on the island during their age-old seasonal migration.

The poetic quality of birds—simple creatures that trump humanity with an autonomous ability to soar towards heaven—offers diverse and potentially contradictory meanings. Are we looking at the dove of Peace or the wings of a fallen angel? The work harnesses the silent anxiety of seventeenth-century still lives: at that time painters were preoccupied with reconciling spiritual teachings with conspicuous consumption and the celebration of wealth surrounding them. *The Fall* repositions the questions to today's world of massive gaps in wealth; excessive luxury for some who live in a worldly paradise reliant on the unethical production and which ignores environmental crises. Are the birds a portent signalling the end of the post-WWII 'Golden Age'?

Brigitte Stepputtis works in a range of media; film, photography, assemblage, prints and emerging digital technologies. While many of her works have a highly aestheticised surface quality, they all share a point of view that is essentially political, often drawing on influences from the arts culture of her native Germany. Her solo exhibitions include Röhsska Museet, Gothenburg, Hanmi Gallery, London and Fondazione Gervasuti, 56th Biennale di Venezia and a two-artist show at Cheongju Art Centre, South Korea. She has shown in numerous group exhibitions including at the Biennale Of Sacred Art, Villa Malfitano, Palermo, New Art Projects, London and Gallery Mytoto, Hamburg. She was one of 10 invited artists who created a public work for the 2012 London Cultural Olympiad.



Christiane Spatt, *Smoke and Mirrors*, 2019

3 mirrors (50 x 50 cm each), 3 screens, video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Christiane Spatt)

CHRISTIANE SPATT

Austria

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

*S*moke and Mirrors is reminiscent of a triptychon. The 3 mirrors with round cut-outs form the frames for looped film sequences which show artificial water lilies burning and an inflatable swan losing its air.

The title of the work refers to a phrase which is used to describe something that proves to be an illusion when examined closely. The expression itself references the performances of conjurers, who use smoke and mirrors to deceive their audience.

The motifs I use, the mirrors, the burning flowers and the plastic swan, are full of symbolic associations. The mirrors, which double as the water surface, could also be doorways into another world - like in the story of Orpheus. Vampires have no reflection but by definition a mirror implies an observer. *Smoke and Mirrors* draws the observer into becoming part of the artwork through its mirrors. Fire, a natural element, reminds us of transience. The air escaping from the inflatable swan is almost like the creature's breath. There is also a tension between symbols of nature (the swan and the lily) and the synthetic material of their representation. *Smoke and Mirrors* deals with the desire for an ideal world and its parallel destruction.

Christiane Spatt was born in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1966. She currently lives and works in Vienna. Spatt has studied painting and graphic arts at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, with Oswald Oberhuber and Ernst Caramelle, completing her diploma in 1995. In her visual work she uses painting, photography, collage and installation. Christiane also develops and organises interdisciplinary projects and art projects in a social environment. She takes part in international exhibitions and residency programs and her work is represented in several art collections.



Darren Tanti, *Forgive Us, For We Have Misunderstood*, 2019
Mixed media on paper and projection | 150 x 110cm
(Image: Darren Tanti)

DARREN TANTI

Malta

FORGIVE US, FOR WE HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD

Forgive Us, For We Have Misunderstood is a hybrid artwork that comments on the ill-fated relationship between humans and nature. Human beings exploit the natural environment as if it is their right and privilege to do so. This attitude shows little regard for the narrative of Adam and Eve's banishment from eternal Paradise. The human will to become gods – by eating from the tree of knowledge – led to their expulsion from the Garden into the desolation and sorrow of the world. This story is emblematic of all the suffering that human beings are capable of inflicting on themselves and their environment, whether urban or natural. Perhaps one of the greatest sins of contemporary humanity is arrogance and denial in the face of the disasters inflicted upon the natural world.

This artwork, by virtue of its 'cut-out' aesthetic, represents a contemporary human reclining nonchalantly on a couch. Shown through his (absent) body and in the background of the image are the results of his arrogance and faulty wisdom – scenes of destruction, sorrow and paradise lost. This background layer consists of a projection that can be manipulated by the viewers, who will also become active participants in deciding the context within which this tragic figure is portrayed.

Darren Tanti (b. 1987) is an artist and educator based in Malta. He has participated in numerous art projects and exhibitions, both in Malta and internationally. These include *Time, Space, Existence*, Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2014, *HomoMelitensis*, Venice Biennale of Art, 2017, the 2015 & 2017 editions of the Mdina Cathedral APS Contemporary Art Biennale. Amongst other awards, Tanti has won the Divergent Thinkers 2 prize and was shortlisted for The Commonwealth Young Achievers Award, 2015. Tanti is currently working as a senior lecturer of Fine Art and is the Fine Art Coordinator at the Malta College of Arts, Sciences and Technology (MCAST).



George Kiewalter, *Glory to God, Glory to Allah, Glory to Buddha...The artist is not your Saviour. Use your own brain!* 2017-2019

Light installation with two images and one video projection | Dimensions variable
(Image: George Kiewalter)

GEORGE KIESEWALTER

Russia

GLORY TO GOD

The project *Glory to God* reflects our simultaneous interconnectedness and segregation against the background of a single and unitary nature which is still able to bear and support us. We all value clear water, clean air, ecologically safe food and clear skies. Lately, however, environmental issues have become extremely important. It is easy to forecast further deterioration of the worldly ecological situation. In many cases these problems are caused by irresponsible political decisions skewed in the direction of national or global economic lobbies. I am sure that the material life on our planet is tightly intertwined with the spiritual. Thus, alongside natural and man-induced disasters, climate change and ecological problems, we also have to speak of political and moral ecology. In order to understand the roots of the unfortunate events happening in our times we have to return to our spiritual origins.

Artists cannot directly influence politicians, but if we show that we care, that we are worried about the situation, maybe those in power will start to consider the future with a little more regard for the ecology of life and a little more respect towards natural resources. This is what my project calls for, amongst other things.

George Kiesewalter, b. 1955, is a Moscow-based post-conceptual artist, photographer, and writer. He began working as an artist in 1975. From 1976 to 1989 he was a member of the Russian conceptual performance group, Collective Actions. In the mid 1970s to the 1980s, Kiesewalter was in the close circle of artists like Ilya Kabakov and Erik Bulatov, and actively participated in unofficial artistic formations such as AptArt, the Moscow Archive of New Art (MANI), and the Avantgardists' Club. He is the author of several books on Soviet unofficial art and a finalist in the Innovation prize in category for 'Scholarly Work. History and Theory of Contemporary Art' (Moscow, 2016). His works can be found in many institutional and private collections around the world.



Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch, *Terra Coleoptera*, 2016

Video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch)

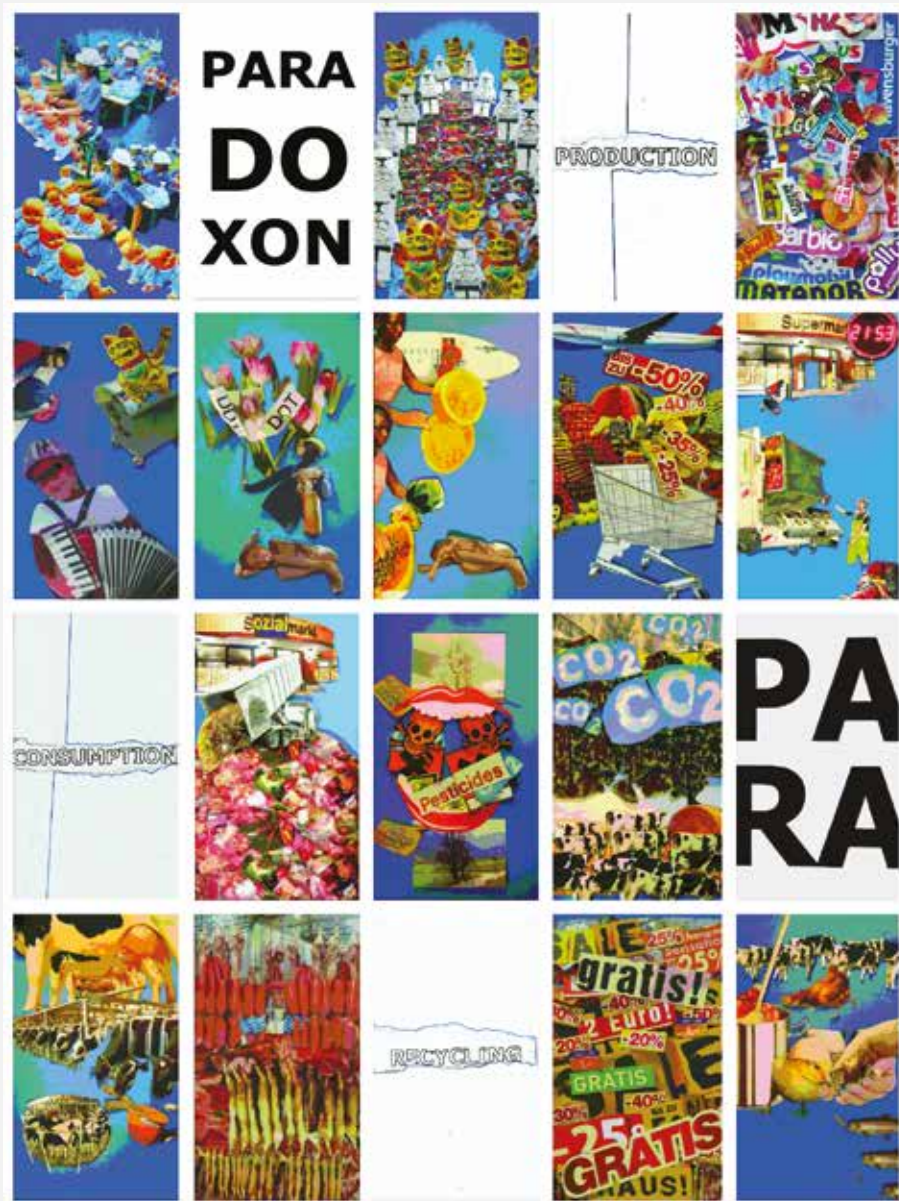
GERNOT FISCHER-KONDRATOVITCH

Austria

TERRA COLEOPTERA

If aliens could watch us walking around on our earth we would look like tiny ants running around in senseless circles. From this outer-space point of view, humans appear to be small insects crawling over their planet. Human beings have forgotten about the unconsciousness of existence and their pettiness in the universal picture. Cosmic thoughts and existential considerations have been replaced with artificial dreams and consumption.

Gernot Fischer-Kondratovitch was born in Villach, Austria, in 1968. He studied art in Venezuela, at the Escuela de Artes Visuales Cristobal Rojas, at the Mozarteum Salzburg, in Salzburg, and the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna. Kondratovitch participated in exhibitions all around the world and he has performed and made music at home and abroad. His work has been acquired by various official institutions such as the MMKK (Museum of Modern Art of Carinthia) and many others. Kondratovich focuses primarily on painting but also works with music and video.



Ina Loitzl, *PARADOXON*, 2012
 Video animation | Dimensions variable
 (Image: Ina Loitzl)

INA LOITZL

Austria

PARADOXON

In the three-part video *PARADOXON*, which was created using the laying technique, Ina Loitzl deals with the serious misconduct of our society in its processes of production, consumption and disposal in the energy, food and product industries. Loitzl based her works on extensive research into environmental organisations, supermarket chains, social institutions and energy companies. *PARADOXON* is comprised of matter found from magazines, the Internet and advertising material.

The sequence of images runs in a loop like a perpetual motion machine. Sometimes furiously fast, the loop symbolises the often paradoxical cycle of our actions. Loitzl works with slapstick elements and loud, colourful pictures - an emphatic and startling plea for a more socially just, economical, more environmentally friendly and less consumer-driven world.

Ina Loitzl was born in 1972 in Austria. She studied graphics, textile and multimedia art in Salzburg and Vienna. Loitzl also produces animation, installations, cutouts and textile objects. Her work focuses on social issues and the role of women in society. Loitzl's films have been featured in national and international animation festivals. Her art has been presented in group and solo shows in galleries, museums and off-spaces in Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Slovakia, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium and Malta.



Irena Paskali, 2202 m, 2018

Video projection | Dimensions variable

(Image: Irena Paskali)

IRENA PASKALI

Macedonia

2202 M

Finally free – an escape from civilisation - freed from all constraints. The mountain world, which is so hostile to life in the first place, immediately conveys a feeling of security and immediately becomes a place of longing for the beholder. The floating ceiling gives the place something mystical, the little church spirituality awakens - the unapproachable place becomes the source of deeper knowledge for those who reach it. It shows that no one owns the land. Footprints in the snow reveal a departure to another life.

Irena Paskali was born in 1969 in Macedonia. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts of Skopje before going on to complete a Masters in 2007 at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. Paskali works across various media; photography, video, drawing and experimental film. The human being is always central to her work and Paskali explores the fragmentation of culture and religion as well as the themes of identity and alienation. She currently lives and works in Cologne.



James Alec Hardy, “120200312”, 2020,
Audio and video installation with mixed media | Dimensions variable
(Image: James Alec Hardy)

JAMES ALEC HARDY

United Kingdom

“120200312”

Envisaging a point in the future when the peak of human technological endeavors has climaxed and collapsed under its own weight, Hardy constructs a narrative of the possible surviving aspects in the wreckage of technology’s self-destruction. Hardy has been producing works exploring the artificiality of inner-city woodlands, attempting to construct idealised connections to the heritage of the English countryside, but finding that tranquil and unsullied locations are virtually impossible due to the effects of urbanisation, flight paths, etc.

Inspired by a research trip to Malta, he attempts to metaphorically connect the vaults in the museum building to the exterior cave spaces of Ghar il-Kbir, presenting an installation which mirrors the era when troglodytic societies emerged from their cave dwellings.

The multi-channel video and audio installation depicts nature’s regrowth over the detritus of technology. Interspersed within the fantasy landscapes, stacks of screens appear like crashed alien spacecraft, revolving around a centrally composed sacred tree, haunted by dark figures retracing rituals and worship.

Hardy believes that *Mother Nature* is the dominant force on our planet and possesses the power to recover from the effects of the Anthropocene. Through his work he attempts to highlight environmental issues and the downsides to collective progress.

James Alec Hardy (b. 1979, Colchester, England) is an artist whose creative focus is concerned with the impact of technology on our experience of contemporary life. He questions our evolving relationships with screen-based devices, mirrored in his installation constructions using video screens shown symbolically. Hardy works with obsolete technological devices. In 2002 he established a practice centered on creating analogue video and audio feedback systems, both in studio and in live performances. He represented Britain in 2019 at the Karachi Biennale, Pakistan, and the Stads Triennale, Belgium. Hardy’s work was shown at Art Brussels 19 by his representative, the Gallery Kristin Hjellegjerde and he has also exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery, Saatchi Gallery, Tate Britain and the Tate Modern, London.



Lena Lapschina, *Those Were The Days*, 2020

Mixed media images, augmented reality, display cabinets | Dimensions variable
(Image: Lena Lapschina)

LENA LAPSCHINA

Russia/Austria

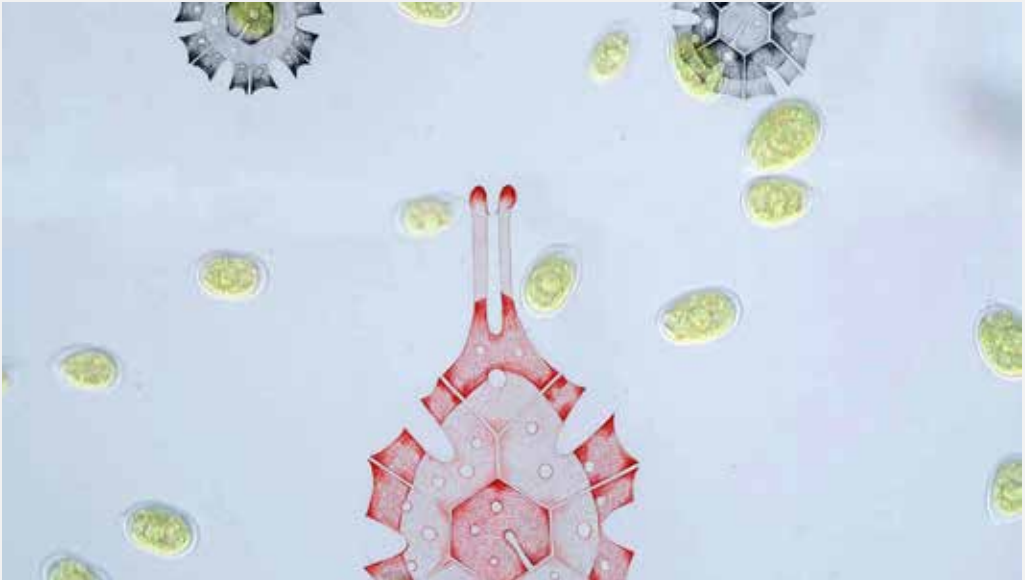
THOSE WERE THE DAYS

A display cabinet will be filled with various objects which all evoke memories of paradise. But as often happens in life, appearances are deceptive. As soon as viewers point their smartphones at these glossy images paradise falters and they become immersed in video streams that deal with the fragility of the planet and the possibility of turning a paradise into hell – and possibly back again.

In her latest work, Lena Lapschina plays with human perception and expectation. Using augmented reality for her installation, she draws in unsuspecting viewers by what seem to be static display cases, inducing them to take an active role in the reception of the work and mentally moving them to an alternate place and time.

Not all of the narrative strands offered in her installation lead reliably and without detour to paradise.

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



Martina Tscherni, *Crtyoconite*, 2016
Video stills and air cushion | 100 x 200cm
(Image: Martina Tscherni)

MARTINA TSCHERNI

Austria

CRYOCONITE

For the animated film *Cryoconite* I use several layers of reference: the Far Eastern tradition of role image, graphic images, nineteenth-century representations of organic and plant microorganisms and microscopic images of algae, ciliates and tardigrades. The algae structures are the main characters in this film. Algae are found both in high alpine regions and are also part of the deposits - cryoconites - on glaciers. They live in all bodies of land-bound water as well as in the seas and oceans.

With *Cryoconite* I react to the fast-paced and destructive contemporary moment. The more that destruction affects me, the deeper I immerse myself in my work, withdrawing from the environment and delving into ever more meticulous labour. I spend endless hours trawling through algae structures, transforming them and rearranging them. Through graphic attention, the organisms I depict receive a kind of individuality and become the repeated protagonists in my 'sketchbook'. This sketchbook then serves as a storyboard for my animated films. Subtle changes are made visible through the slowed movement of my video-works. Temporal processes are formed in different time dimensions.

My work thus forms a counterpoint to our over-accelerated modern times.

Martina Tscherni was born in Hall in Tyrol, Austria. From 1982 to 1988 she studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, being tutored in tapestry by Prof. M. Rader-Soulek and studying graphic arts under Prof. Ernst Caramelle. Tscherni has received several awards such as the STRABAG Art Promotion Prize in 2000, and was the 33rd Austrian Graphic Arts Competition winner in 2013. She has also had some of her work implemented in public spaces, such as the 2013/14 *Four Noise Protection Walls*, in Hall, Tyrol, and the Strabag company building, in Zirl, Tyrol. Tscherni has shown her work in various exhibitions, both at home and abroad. She currently lives and works in Vienna.



Michael von Cube, *genesis.com*, 2019
Video installation | Dimensions variable
(Image: Michael von Cube)

MICHAEL VON CUBE

Germany

GENESIS.COM

In the last few decades, our 'brave new world' has changed rapidly. The quick access to anything and everything has opened up new spheres and areas of activity for humankind. Yet, the constant change of standards, values and procedures requires flexibility and adaptability. Whoever cannot or does not want to cooperate is rendered useless for the 'community'. The global interconnectedness of communication, production and trade has had its impact on those affected and is beyond anyone's control.

Progress appears unstoppable.

Adam & Eve & La MÉR is an allegory of tragedy. It shows an economy that prides itself on creating a better world for its 'users', but, at the same time, destroys the natural conditions for human existence by polluting the oceans and turning soil and air into poison.

Genesis deals with the internet: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple - G.A.F.A. By allocating a monetary value to every single move we make, these gigantic profit machines have turned our basic human needs into data for the sole benefit of their business.

National Governments welcome automated facial recognition technology, the widespread use of CCTV. 'Big Brother is watching you' has become our reality and we have imposed 'him' upon ourselves. For ever?

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



Nicola Arkell Reed, *The busy bee has no time for sorrow*, 2020

Projected illustration, wax and acrylic on canvas | Canvases: 76.2 x 76.2cm each,
projection dimensions variable

(Image: Nicola Arkell Reed)

NICOLA ARKELL REED

United Kingdom

THE BUSY BEE HAS NO TIME FOR SORROW

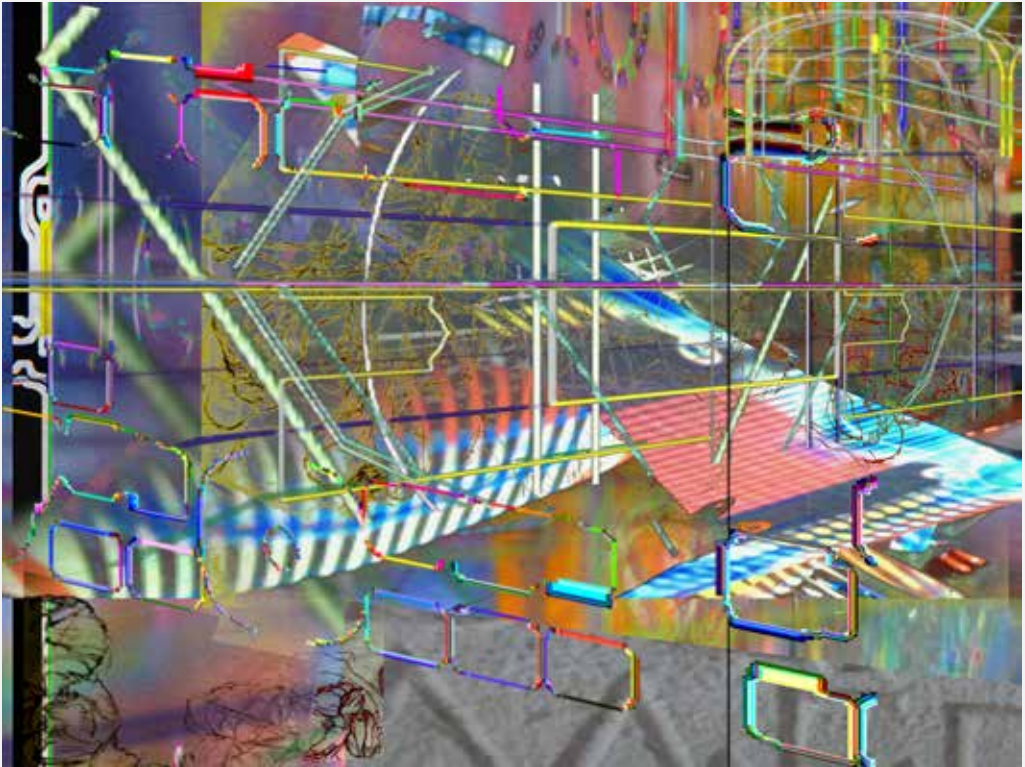
Nicola Arkell Reed is a beekeeper who has ten hives in Wiltshire. She felt that the theme of 'Regaining a Paradise Lost' presented the perfect opportunity to create an installation that celebrates bees and their incredible work ethic.

The Maltese honey bee, *Apis Mellifera Ruttneri*, is a subspecies of the western honey bee and originated in Malta, where it is considered native. The bee is really dark in colour and has adapted to high temperatures and dry summers.

In the words of Victor Hugo, 'life is a flower where Love is the Honey ...'. However, the Maltese bee can only bear so much. If the Maltese replace every bush and flowering shrub with more buildings, the beautiful Maltese honey bee will not survive. My installation hopes to raise awareness about our bees's requirements. I am working on a projected piece, a cry for attention! Bees are indispensable to nature and to mankind. Of the 100 crop species that supply 90% of the world's food, bees pollinate more than 70%. Air pollution, construction, and the use of harmful chemicals are having a devastating effect on our bee colonies.

We need to protect our bees...

Nicola Arkell Reed is an artist and a beekeeper. She has a BA and an MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins. She also has a degree from the Chelsea College of Art and a PGCE from UCL. Nicola currently teaches at The Connection at St Martin's Piccadilly, London. Nicola's recent exhibitions include the 2017 APS Mdina Biennale, Malta, and a solo show at The Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London. Between 2008 and 2010, Nicola held a chair on the Tate Advisory Council. She then went on to be the Arts Adviser to The Big Give Charity until 2015. In 2016 Nicola was the winner of the National Geographic Magazine's photography competition and illustrated two published novels.



Phil Dobson, *Anima Mundi*, 2020
Video installation | Dimensions variable
(Image: Phil Dobson)

PHIL DOBSON

United Kingdom

ANIMA MUNDI

Has humankind ever lived in harmony with nature? Perhaps, if we are to regain Paradise, we must find a different way of life.

We can equate Paradise with unspoilt nature, which can be viewed through the lenses of technology, science, culture, religion, a combination of these, historically or contemporarily. The influence on our ecosystem can be seen as a superimposition of influences which results in the physical erosion of landscape, the extinction of species and the concealment of paleontological and archeological evidence. Under this schema, nature becomes a palimpsest of complex interrelationships. *Anima Mundi* is an attempt to represent these processes. The video is derived from digitally manipulated images of my paintings and this has the effect of extending painterly principles into the medium of video. I have also combined organic forms with images from my 'typographical' paintings, thereby representing the relationship between Nature and logos/reason. The ultimate truth that is depicted in *Anima Mundi* is that, as taught by St Paul (drawing on his background in Stoicism), God is interchangeable with Nature. Nature is seen as a beginningless, endless, eternally self-destroying and renewing force.

Anima Mundi is made to be projected onto the fabric of the cathedral, implying the dematerialisation of the stone structure and the Church as both the physical and spiritual manifestation of Christianity, as with the effect of stained glass.

Phil Dobson studied architecture at Oxford before taking a degree in Art and History of Art at Reading University. He then read for a diploma in Ecology and Conservation at London University before working on various nature conservation projects in London for a number of years. His work is informed by his interest in science and natural history. Dobson's work has recently developed more towards installation, moving image and the use of sound. Significant projects include the production of a four storey 'stained glass' window at the Cheongju Arts Centre for the Jikji Biennale which celebrated the invention of movable metal type in South Korea (2016, in collaboration with Brigitte Stepputtis).



Umberto Buttigieg and Pietru Farrugia, *Garden Party*, 2019-2020
Assemblage, children's toys, seeds, soil, pebbles, grass, video projection
and sound installation | 4.67m x 18.58m
(Image: Umberto Buttigieg and Pietru Farrugia)

UMBERTO BUTTIGIEG AND PIETRU FARRUGIA

Malta

GARDEN PARTY & FLISKATUR

Whether explored psychologically, spiritually, or aesthetically, the experience of paradise retains a powerful hold over the imagination. At a time in global history when rapid changes are taking place across societies, the discursive formation of “paradise lost” evokes challenging feelings of nostalgia, disorientation, and impossible innocence. Malta’s particular and difficult relationship with these changes creates complex feelings, and a sense of estrangement from our collective past. Such sensations link the concept of paradise with its natural developmental counterpart, namely the experience of childhood.

The secret life of toys is the secret life of childhood. Imaginative seeds that take root, and grow. In an increasingly urbanised environment, where concrete and plastic have replaced more familiar organic forms in many Maltese localities, how can the arts speak in the voice of childhood, to share valuable messages about our utopian hopes for paradise?

By interrogating polarities of innocence and experience alongside growth and decay, a new awareness gradually emerges. The promise of growth and change can now be explored, through the interplay of childhood and its loss. Each moment of every day is an invitation to reflect upon our experiences of social and cultural change, and the different layers of memory that re/create our childhood mysteries in the here and now.

Umberto Buttigieg (b. 1989, Malta) is an art practitioner and curator who explores socio-political issues and collective behavioural attitudes. He adopts performance and video art strategies to observe the performing body in ritualistic and repetitive practices and focuses on ways in which human behaviour creates systems of meaning. He is deeply interested in how art and creativity can be catalysts for wellbeing and healing. Buttigieg is a founding member of the Gabriel Caruana Foundation.

Pietru Farrugia (b. 1986, Malta) is a multidisciplinary artist and researcher. His research interests focus on art-based psychotherapy, youth work and peacebuilding. His method involves participatory art and the manipulation of materials. Farrugia's practice includes workshops and group sessions that explore identity and spiritual development. Pietru has recently investigated these same themes in a series of layered works on paper and canvas, shown in a collective exhibition at ArtHall, Gozo (2019).



Umberto Buttigieg and Pietru Farrugia, *Garden Party*, 2019-2020
Assemblage, children's toys, seeds, soil, pebbles, grass, video projection
and sound installation | 4.67m x 18.58m
(Image: Umberto Buttigieg and Pietru Farrugia)



Roderick Camilleri, *An Unlikely Crown*, 2020

Modular compositions, wood on panel, box framed | 60 x 80 cm each

(Image: Roderick Camilleri)

RODERICK CAMILLERI

Malta

AN UNLIKELY CROWN

This project explores the materiality of *organic found-objects* through readings and creative practice. It uses a particular species, namely the Sweet Thorn (*Acacia Karro*), as its main material component. *Acacia Karro* was introduced to Malta in around 1492 and has since grown into large, invasive populations which have overtaken and suffocated the native flora and local indigenous ecosystems. The Sweet Thorn is an example of an alien species which has colonised part of the endemic territories of local flora.

The creative process of this project presents a body of abstract reliefs accompanied by a digital sound component. *An Unlikely Crown* makes implicit reference to the Maltese context by focusing on environmental issues.

The artwork reflects the capitalistic mass development and destruction of the local urban, built environment, teasing out aesthetic and philosophical content concerning the contemporary milieu. *An Unlikely Crown* is inspired by aerial views of local cities and overdeveloped areas such as Gżira, Sliema, Buġibba and Naxxar.

The work comprises an installation of seven modular compositions, assembled together into a large mural. The reliefs are set in large box frame panels which are each 600mm by 800mm.

Roderick Camilleri is a practising artist and curator. He studied art, art history and philosophy at the University of Malta, obtaining a BA in 2010 and an MA in 2015. He attended various professional development programmes and furthered his studies at international institutions such as the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, amongst others. His interdisciplinary visual art practice explores ontological themes. Camilleri is also a full-time art educator, teaching studio practice and theory at the Malta School of Art. Roderick Camilleri is the Artistic Director of AMuSE, an international art project led by the MSA, selected and co-funded by the European Commission. He is an active participant in the local art scene.



Ryota Kuwakubo, *LOST#16*, 2017

Daily commodities, toys, model train | Dimensions variable

(photo: Yoshisato Komaki, image courtesy: Sapporo International Art Festival Executive Committee)

RYOTA KUWAKUBO

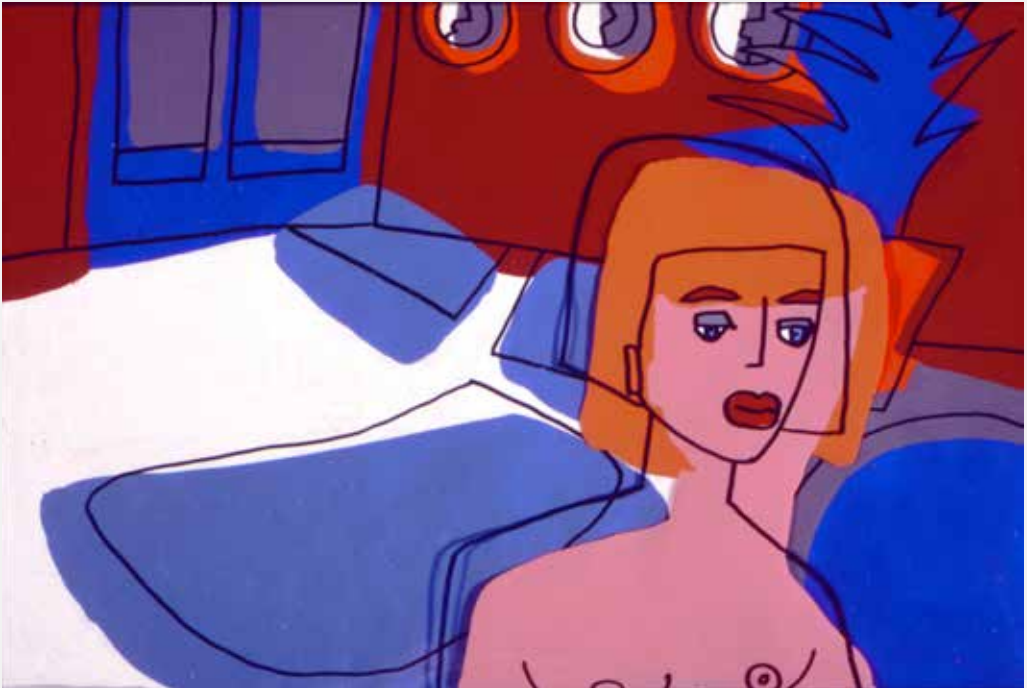
Japan

LOST#18 (SCALES ON THE EYES)

We get busy in the constant exchange of messages in a vast network. As long as we are on the right cycle of consumption, we can assume that we live in one world. However, sometimes, when we hit a bit of a stumbling block, we are immediately divided. That's the time we are given to stop and be alone and meditate in silence. What is it that could fill that emptiness and loneliness?

Turn your eyes to this installation. There are many daily commodities laid on the floor. A small moving light source projects shadows onto the wall. While some shadows appear usual or as expected, some others may not. That's because they appear in the mind in connection with memories, beliefs and desires. In this case, it is impossible to share what you have felt in your heart with anyone else. In the same way, you can never know how someone else has truly felt. I hope this work makes viewers think about what can overcome this isolation and what has overcome this isolation so far.

Ryota Kuwakubo is an artist based in Gifu and Tokyo, and was born in 1971 in Tochigi, Japan. After studying contemporary art, he started creating work using electronics, starting from 1998. His unique style, 'device art', emerged from work that takes a close-up view of phenomena arising at the various boundaries between digital and analogue, human and machine, information transmitters and receivers, etc. Since his installation *The Tenth Sentiment*, first exhibited in 2010, he has focused on work that invites visitors to weave their own experiences by installations composed of light and shadow. He is also active as a member of Perfektron, an art unit exploring life themes and experimentation.



Sabine Groschup, *Guten Morgen Madam Mona (Good Morning Madam Mona)*, 1989

Video projection | Dimensions variable

(Image: Sabine Groschup). Music by Martin Lauterer.

SABINE GROSCHUP

Austria

GUTEN MORGEN MADAM MONA

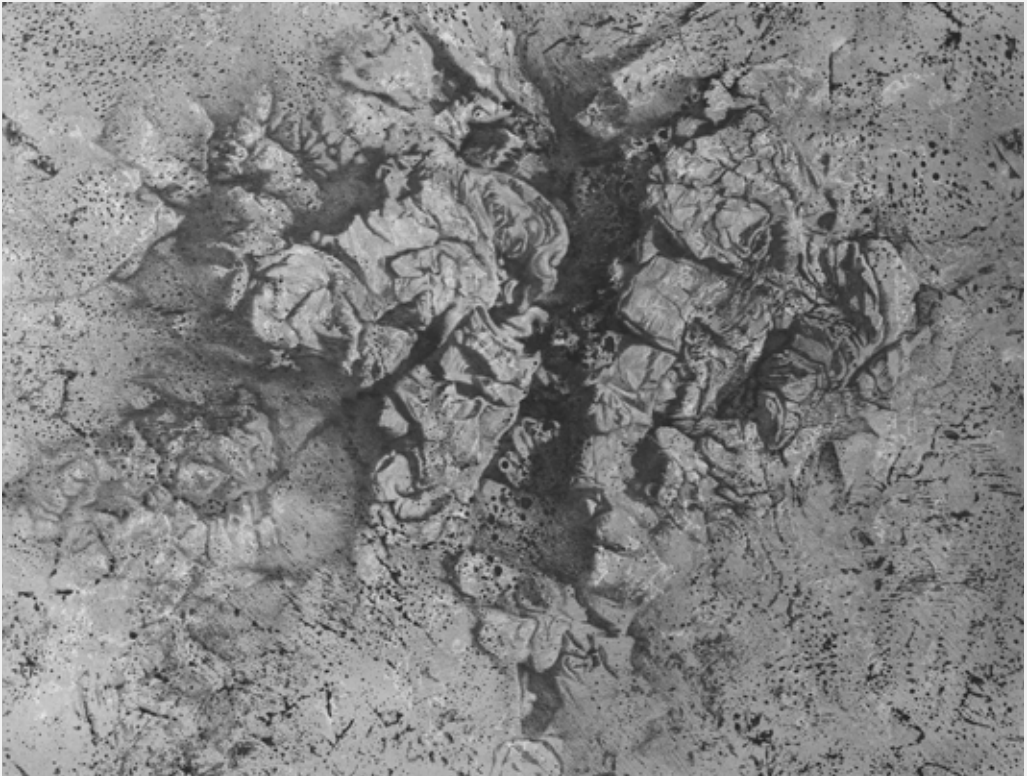
(GOOD MORNING MADAM MONA)

Quite a normal morning for Madam Mona. The day starts dreamily, but when she walks onto the street ...

Director's statement:

Thirty years ago I followed the news in magazines and newspapers for some months. I was stunned by the amount of horrible political incidents and the reports of rampant environmental destruction such as the oil disaster in the sea of Alaska and the burning of the Amazon rainforest. The summary of these events were realised in my animation *Good Morning Madam Mona*. Unfortunately, since then, nothing has changed. *Good Morning Madam Mona* is therefore quite appropriate for our current time.

Sabine Groschup has been active in the broad cultural contexts of visual art, film and literature. As a visual artist, the former Lassnig student works across various media, showing her paintings, video art, installations, textile work and photographs internationally. Solo and participatory exhibitions have taken Groschup to New York, Seoul, Zagreb, Karlsruhe, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Copenhagen, Ostrava, Roanoke, Halberstadt, Amsterdam, Innsbruck, Munich, Bolzano, New Orleans, Schaffhausen, Istanbul, Venice, Bremen and Lausanne. Within the global film community she is one of the most renowned proponents of artistic animated film, although Sabine also makes experimental films and documentaries. As a writer she is a narrator of fiction, a poet and an essayist. Sabine was awarded the 2012 Preis der Landeshauptstadt Innsbruck für künstlerisches Schaffen.



Seishi Irikawa, *Appearing and Disappearing*, 2017

Video projection | Dimensions variable

(Image: Seishi Irikawa)

SEISHI IRIKAWA

Japan/Austria

APPEARING AND DISAPPEARING

I am looking for a way to present a painting as a topic in itself. My paintings don't seek to depict objects but intend to be objects in themselves, taciturn and impassive. The painting-object can be a thing like any other, a stone on a path or a shell at the beach. For many, these objects won't mean much, but for a few active observers they are a discovery.

The forms in nature are in a constant process of appearing and disappearing, shifting from one form into another, one appearance into another reappearance. It is a perpetual repetition. Alternatively, this process can be seen as a cycle of death and rebirth. The theme of "Appearing and Disappearing" is deeply rooted in the Buddhistic idea of eternal reincarnation.

For the video projection I use pencil-drawings made in 2017 which bear the title *Appearing and Disappearing*. The drawings are aligned in one video-stream with a rolling effect on top, and presented in a loop. This produces a rotating movement which hints at the perpetual repetition of slightly different images of coral, stones and bark. The video-projection will be accompanied by a presentation of a few of the original drawings.

Seishi Irikawa's first inspiration for creating art was the sea and the dead and living animals, drift-wood, stones and shells that were left on the shore by the ocean, washed out and bleached by salt, sun and wind. Irikawa was born 1958 in Japan, in a town named Shizoka which is situated on the Pacific Ocean. He attended the University of Design and Visual Arts (Zokei Daigaku) in Tokyo. From 1986 to 1989 he studied at the University of Applied Art, Vienna, where he met his wife with whom he lived in Switzerland for two years. They moved back to Tokyo in 1992 and returned to Vienna in 1996, where Irikawa has been living and working ever since.



Tan Kian Ming, *Qiān Zàng*, 2015

Photography and single-channel video | Dimensions variable

(Image: Kian Tan)

TAN KIAN MING

Malaysia

QIĀN ZÀNG

Q*iān Zàng* is a Taoist/Buddhist term which applies to the deliverance rite for rescuing the deceased from the gateway that delivers them to Pureland. There are two different forms of this ceremony; one works with water (for victims of drowning) and the other with blood (for accidental deaths). These are mostly practiced in south Chinese society. When it comes to death, burial rites and beliefs are an integral part of Chinese funerary culture. Death is conceptualised as the completion phase in the process of life.

The cemetery scene is a medium, a double exposure of life and the after-life which relates to storage, communication, memory and illusion. Tan Kian makes reference to the *Qiān Zàng* in reflecting the fantasy of the after-life through conveying an imaginary scene of ritual ceremony.

Tan Kian Ming (KIAN) was born in Malaysia. He is currently reading for an MFA in fine art at Goldsmiths University of London. Tan Kian examines the interplay between folk customs and contemporary religious issues through installation, video and painting. His long-term project is a series of rubbings from various ancient tombstones and war monuments which probes the postcolonial condition and immigration issues which connect to the ambiguous position of the Chinese diaspora and the reconstruction of monumental spatiality.



Thomas C. Chung, “*And Then The Sun Was Gone.....*”, 2019-2020

Video installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Thomas C. Chung)

THOMAS C. CHUNG

Australia

“AND THEN THE SUN WAS GONE.....”

In our efforts to regain a lost paradise, we first have to peer into our past to understand our future. Confronting our reality is not an easy task. In our current global climate, this generation has been built upon an excess of information, where false truths and artificial beliefs are oppressing our senses. Our world is in a state of flux.

“*And Then The Sun Was Gone.....*” is a video installation speaking of our fate, should we continue to be misguided. Distilled as a critical observation of humanity, it imagines our world as once pure, drifting over time and feeling displaced. Representing both good and evil the apple is a paradoxical symbol. Seen throughout mythology as an object of perpetual youth and wisdom, it also embodies the origins of sin and love.

Referencing the biblical tale of The Garden of Eden, our initial taste for knowledge, vanity and immortality has led us into an uncertain future, preoccupied with an existential crisis.

Thomas C. Chung is a Chinese-Australian artist based in Melbourne and Sydney. In 2004, Chung completed a B.A in Fine Arts at the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales. He is currently pursuing a future in psychotherapy. Over the last several years he has represented Australia at the 2nd Land Art Biennial in Mongolia, 4th Ghetto Biennale in Haiti, 9th Shiryaevo Biennale in Russia and the 1st Karachi Biennale in Pakistan. His recent exhibitions have included the 65th Blake Prize, at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Australia; *Korea Through The Lens*, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Korea; *Central Russian Zen*, at the National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Russia, and the YIA Art Fair #10, Basel Art Center, Switzerland.



Tony Cassar, *AVARITIA*, 2020
Mixed media digital installation | Dimensions variable
(Image: Tony Cassar)

TONY CASSAR

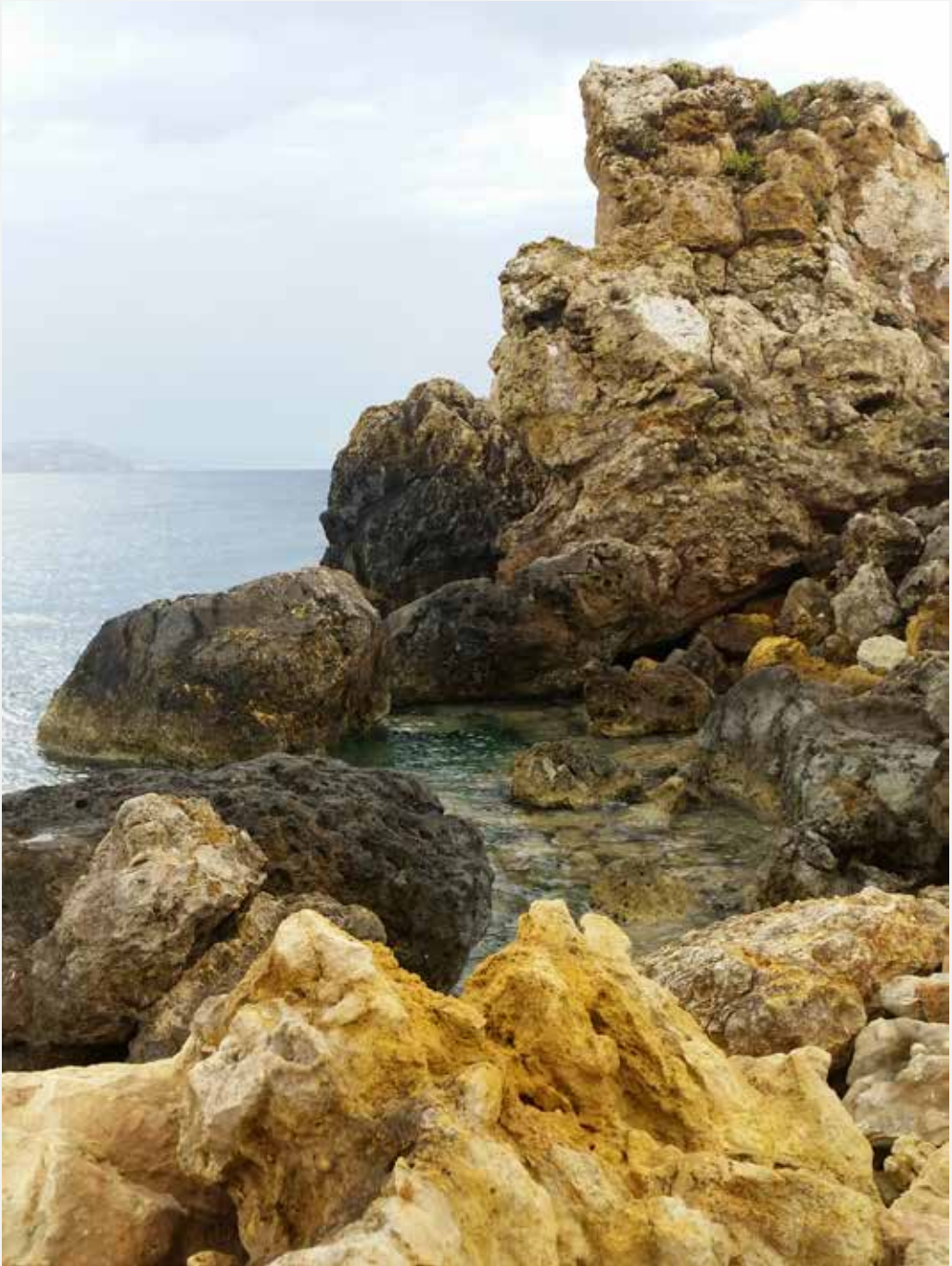
Malta

AVARITIA

Avaritia, alongside pride, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth, is one of the seven deadly sins. Greed, or avarice, is the artificial and rapacious desire of material possessions. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “Greed is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things.” In Dante’s Purgatory, the penitents guilty of avarice are bound and laid face down on the ground for having focussed excessively on earthly thoughts and material possessions.

AVARITIA creates a temple dedicated to the god of avarice, thus encouraging spectators to ponder on how they are participants and passive spectators in a world being destroyed by greed. The current state of affairs often causes feelings of helplessness and desperation. Yet not all is lost, there is still some hope as we stand, in the words of Mike Oldfield, “on the edge of the underworld, looking at the abyss ... hoping for some miracle, to breakout.” That hope lies in art which makes us think critically and reflect on our condition. It is my hope that art can also push us to act and to change.

Tony Cassar is a practicing multimedia artist and museum experience designer who has managed his own design company for the last 25 years. Cassar has just concluded a Masters in Digital Arts at the University of Malta. His research focussed on the use of digital tools within museum contexts. As an early digital migrant, Tony has embraced the use of digital tools as the principal medium for his work. As an existentialist he values authentic individual choice as the only way of giving true value to one’s existence. Cassar’s work involves the intermingling of digital media with his identity and beliefs. Cassar has exhibited various digital installations and designed a number of visitor-centred digital projects and experiences in museums and cultural heritage sites, both locally and abroad.



Victor Agius, *Sublime Landscapes*, 2020
Mixed media, photography, video and sound installation | Dimensions variable
(Image: Victor Agius)

VICTOR AGIUS

Malta

SUBLIME LANDSCAPES

*S*ublime Landscapes attempts to dialogue with the sense of place that is present on sites around the Maltese islands which are linked to the heritage of St Paul's shipwreck. The body of work incorporates a digitally modified photo of the large painting by Stefano Erardi, *The Shipwreck of St Paul*, located at the Collegiate church of Rabat in Malta, as well as a looped video and sound installation. The sublimity of the picturesque, primal sites found around the northern bays, cliffs and valleys of Malta and Gozo narrate a utopian wilderness but also bear the permanent scars of man's monstrous interventions in concrete and cement. The drama of the terrifyingly violent tempest that wrecked the vessel of St Paul and flung it into the abyssal darkness of the raging waves is a spectacle of shape, colour, theatrical sound and motion. *Sublime Landscapes* retraces the elements of water, fire, gale force winds and earth which are all present in the Biblical account of the famous shipwreck. At the same time *Sublime Landscapes* investigates the relevance of the sublime in today's rituals, thereby engaging aesthetic, spiritual, ecological and ethical values.

Victor Agius is an artist who works in sculpture, painting, video, performance and installation. He studied at the University of Malta, in Perugia, Italy, and at Central Saint Martin's College for Art and Design in London. He is co-founder of the Ars Vitae Ensemble and is also a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta. He has exhibited at various historical and cultural sites around Malta and Gozo, as well as in local and international galleries. He was twice invited to represent Malta at the Ceramic Context in Bornholm, Denmark, and exhibited his work at the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza, Italy. His work *Terrarossa* was shortlisted for the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts in London.



Yael Serline and Yaniv Kuris, *Jerusalem Below*, 2019

Sound installation | Dimensions variable

(Image: Yael Serlin)

Yael Serlin AND Yaniv Kuris

Israel

JERUSALEM BELOW

For over a year, Yael Serlin filmed and recorded voices in the underground spaces of the Old City of Jerusalem. Included in her project was the famous subterranean cave underneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which Serlin found especially intriguing. The sound piece, made in collaboration with sound artist Yaniv Kuris, creates a new layer of reality out of the sounds taken from the same radius under Jerusalem.

The piece for the APS Mdina Biennale is an attempt to transplant the specific space underneath the Holy City of Jerusalem to a different site around the walls of Mdina. This particular version of the piece will include additional sound layers from Malta which will be recorded and folded into the original work. The layers of sound-spaces will create a new place which, through its localisation in Mdina, attempts to cross walls and mediate the barriers of location, religion and faith in an encounter within a complex reality.

The work interrogates place and spiritual memory as well as the possibilities of connection beyond political and religious conflict. The possibility of relocating a site-specific and localised experience is considered and questioned.

Yael Serlin (b. 1983) engages in drawing, printmaking, sculpture, installation and video. Serlin lectures at and heads the Art Department at Emunah College of Art, Jerusalem, and has recently participated in the Apexart Artist's Residency in New York City. She has had solo shows at the Podroom Gallery in Belgrade as well as in Israel and elsewhere. Serlin has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, both at home and abroad. Serlin's work is inspired by her journeys into the memory and events of the personal and collective past. She exposes new narratives in local identities, seeking to highlight the oblivion and the erasure of memory as a living presence.

Yaniv Kuris (b. 1973) is a sound artist and experimental musician based in Jerusalem. He is a graduate of The New Music Department (2009) and The Musrara Art School's Advanced Studies Program for Experimental Music and Sound Art (2016). Yaniv Kuris' works, exhibited and performed in Israel and abroad, utilise various methods of composition and manipulated samples to create soundscapes and sound installations. Kuris also occasionally utilises text in his work and is also involved in multimedia collaborations such as soundtracks for experimental films.

