Freedom Monument, Malta: Conceptual Design Sketches and Ultimate Realisation

Lino BIANCO

University of Malta, Faculty for the Built Environment
Pontifical Gregorian University, Faculty of Social Sciences
E-mail: lino.bianco@um.edu.mt

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Abstract: Freedom Day in Malta is the day when the island and its dependencies gained full sovereignty from colonial rule as a free, independent, and neutral republic. The Freedom Monument is a statement of Malta's struggle for freedom and peace; it symbolises the day when the nation became truly run by the Maltese for the Maltese. Following an introduction to Malta's historical–political context, this article reproduces and critically describes a set of conceptual design sketches by sculptor Anton Agius. It also includes a discussion on the monument as executed and concludes by noting factual observations on the process of the design and realisation of the monument. The resulting social realistic design is the work of the artist entrusted with the responsibility to translate the idea of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff into sculptural form. It is an iconic statement of Mintoff's comprehension of Malta's history and its direction for the welfare of present and future generations.
Keywords: Freedom Monument, Freedom Day, Jum il-Helsien, Malta, Anton Agius, Dom Mintoff.

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Introduction

Winberry defines a monument as "a structure ... that has a symbolic or memorial value. It is the creation of people, and as a symbol it 'encapsulates and nurtures an idea or a set of ideas' that incorporate certain values and ideals of that society."[1] Based on the work of Yi-Fu Tuan,[2] Cudny and Appelblad recall that a monument "can be recognized as both a symbol and a sign: as a symbol, a monument relates to thinking, whereas as a visible landmark, it is a useful sign for orientation, and thus it relates to both behaviour and action."[3] They identify the following main spatial functions of monuments: artistic, symbolic, commemorative, political, social, religious, and marketing.[4] Monuments are a tangible artistic statement of symbolic capital in a given geophysical context which generates "a symbolic material landscape in an urban context, which is reflected in the urban morphology."[5] They create "visible symbols that build 'collective memory' or 'social memory'";[6] "memory is not simply a recollection of times past; it is also anchored in places past and visualized in masonry and bronze."[7] Monuments are often the location of national official celebrations on state holidays.

Freedom Day, known in Maltese as Jum il-Helsien, is a significant national day falling on 31 March in remembrance of the expulsion of the British military from Malta in 1979 when the island and its dependencies – the Maltese Archipelago – ceased to serve as a colonial base once and for all. According to the agreement between Malta and the UK, reached in March 1972, Malta's role as a military base for foreigners was to end on 31 March 1979.[8] This date commemorates not only the day of the departure of the last British military personnel but recalls the country's emerging status as a neutral state in the Mediterranean, based on the politics of neutrality and non-alignment from military blocs. Prime Minister Dom Mintoff (1916–2012)[9] described 31 March 1979 as the

day of destiny: "That's why we made this appointment with destiny. That's why for us the year 1979, at midnight of the 31st of March, will be the biggest feast that Malta has ever seen" [GĦalhekk għamilnieh aħna dan l-appuntament mad-destin. GĦalhekk għalina s-sena 1979, u l-31 ta` Marzu f'nofsillejl, tkun l-ikbar festa li qatt rat Malta].[10] Freedom represents the achievement of the full sovereignty of Malta; without it neither economic nor political freedom were possible.[11] It gave the Maltese people the right to choose which directions to take and which to avoid.[12] Without freedom and neutrality, the social and economic development that has taken place in Malta in the last 50 years would not have been possible.[13]

In 1964, the United Nations debated issues touching on Malta's Independence process. Anton Buttigieg (1912–1983), who represented the Malta Labour Party, made the following statement:

> "The Labour Party is against the continuation in Malta of military bases, whose presence provides a most artificial economy for our islands. Now we have had enough of wars. Now it bothers us to see our friendly neighbouring countries being attacked by forces stationed in Malta. We want to live in peace with them. We would like to see Malta like Switzerland in the Mediterranean, enjoying the fruits of industry, tourism and transhipment, a shop window between Europe and Africa. We want Malta as a non-aligned country freed from the chains of colonialism. We consider any defence treaty as a threat to peace and security for the Mediterranean countries."

[Il-Partit Laburista huwa kontra it-tkomplija tal-bażijiet militari f'Malta, li l-preżenża tagħhom tipprovidi ekonomija mill-aktar artificjali għall-gżejjer tagħna. Issa kellna biżżejjed mill-gwerer. Issa iddejjaqna naraw pajjiżi girien ħbieb tagħna jigu attakkati minn forzi stazzjonati f'Malta. Irridu ngħixu fil-paci magħhom. Nixtiequ naraw lil-Malta bħal Svizzera fil-Mediterran tgwadi l-frott ta' l-industrija, it-turizmu u trasbord, vetrina ta' ħanut bejn l-Ewropa u l-Afrika. Aħna irridu Malta bħala pajjiż mhux allinejat ħieles mill-ktajjen tal-kolonjalizmu. Aħna inqisu kull trattat ta' difiża bħala theddida għal-paċi u s-sigurta` għal-pajjizi tal-Mediterran].[14]

The anthem for Freedom Day has lyrics by the Maltese poet Karmenu Vassallo (1913–1987) (Fig. 1a) and music by the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis (1925–2021) (Fig. 1b).[15] The Freedom Monument recalls Freedom Day. This article addresses the design of this monument, situated on a man-made hillock in Birgu colloquially known as l-GĦolja tal-Ħelsien, freely translated as Freedom Hill: "a mound, a veritable man-made hill, an elaborate roundabout commemorating a turning point in Malta's modern political history."[16] It is based on primary and secondary sources. The former comprise (i) a set of conceptual design sketches for the monument drawn by the sculptor Anton Agius (1933–2008)[17] which have not been published to-date; (ii) a set of historical photos of the site; and (iii) the Freedom Monument as realised. The secondary sources include published interviews with the sculptor and monographs on his works namely by Saliba[18] and Schembri Bonaci.[19] Following an introduction to Malta's historical–political context, this article reproduces, reviews and briefly discusses each sketch. An art history-based critical overview of how and why the monument was realised is also included to illustrate the significant artistic encroachment on the sculptor's ideas by Prime Minister Mintoff. Agius was recommended to Mintoff by some members of his cabinet of ministers.[20]

The Context

The Freedom Monument – designed according to the dominant ideology of the government at the time – marks the important point in Malta's political history when it became de jure independent. De facto, it was granted independence from Britain on 21 September 1964; on 13 December 1974 it became a republic within the Commonwealth. The monument is located along the quayside in Birgu in front of the 17th century Baroque Collegiate Parish Church of Saint Lawrence and south of the Old Naval Bakery, which now houses the Malta Maritime Museum (Fig. 2). Anton Agius is Malta's foremost sculptor, and a prolific artist.[21] The President Emeritus of the Republic of Malta, Ugo Mifsud Bonnici (1932–), in his speech at the opening of an exhibition held in 1999 to mark the 50 years of the artist's career, described him as Malta's national sculptor.[22] Agius designed a number of state monuments commemorating main events, patriots and personalities in the social history of Malta: "His public monuments capture ... the ethos of a period of social and political upheavals that were the birth pangs of a new Malta."[23] He associated himself with the working-class movement, a pioneering movement that transformed conservative–quasi-feudal Malta into a modern independent state based on social justice. He became the "artistic representative of the Malta Labour Party in government, its court sculptor."[24] Schembri Bonaci further claimed that "it is rather difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two, and it is impossible to understand Agius without trying to interpret the Malta Labour government policies of the time."[25] Monuments designed by Agius, listed with their location and inauguration dates include the Workers' Memorial (Msida, 1980)[26], Sette Giugno 1919 (Valletta, 1986)[27], Dun Mikiel Xerri and his Companions 1799 (Valletta, 1986)[28], Manwel Dimech (Valletta, 1976)[29], Ġużè Ellul Mercer (Dingli, 1986)[30] and Mikiel Anton Vassalli (Żebbuġ, 1987).[31] These monuments all form part of Agius's "social/socialist realist oeuvre."[32] Agius admired "the revolutionary, the 'fighter' (a word often on his lips)."[33] Scerri notes that the Malta in which Agius was

brought up was characterised by a "colonial mentality that over the centuries had bred into our people the belief that we could never compete with the foreigner; that had inculcated the suspicion ... that we were a lesser breed.... Finally there was the havoc, destruction and deprivation brought about by the war years of 1940–45."[34] The style of Agius's major monuments was erroneously attributed to Socialist Realism, which only illustrates the lack of knowledge of local members of the intelligentsia with interest in art;[35] they were not fully cognisant of the difference between Socialist and Social Realism:[36]

> "Socialist Realism is a teleologically-oriented style of realistic art which has as its purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism. It should not be confused with social realism, a type of art that realistically depicts subjects of social concern, although it is related."[37]

The former depicts heroic worker/s in an ideological struggle predominantly rooted in twentieth-century political philosophy, while the latter, rooted in the philosophy of the earlier century, depicts the worker/s in the daily struggle for living. In terms of this definition, Agius's work does not call for a Socialist revolution; rather, it recollects the evolution of society. He "did not harbour any violent, revolutionary ideology. His works represented Malta's striving towards independence, its recognition in the international scene, and its presence-in-being,"[38] making his work social realist rather than socialist realist. His style was "Gothic Socialist Realism [and] his works do not call for any kind of Socialist revolution, unlike true orthodox Socialist Realist works."[39] Schembri Bonaci notes that

> "[a]lthough Agius exploits the philosophy of Socialist Realism he anchors his work in Romanesque, rather than classical, imagery. This is another enigmatic paradox in Agius, since Socialist Realism in fact underpinned classical imagery, as opposed to the so-called naivety of the Gothic. Anton Agius incorporates both idioms, sometimes with a certain level of success and sometimes maybe with less."[40] Schembri Bonaci further notes that "the artist interestingly attempted to unite the exciting medieval-gothic idiom which can be found around the whole gothic world ... and his socio-political commitment which could not remain neutral. ... Together with this gothic idiom he succeeded in creating a world which emerged from the artistic principles of Socialist Realism, one which was born and which grew around the years of the Second World War, in the countries which chose the road of Communism and also those which began the global anti-colonialist battle."[41] In 1972, Agius stated "I still love modern art, but I must say that I have put it aside, freed myself of it ... The public ... could not understand the message ... I want my life to be understood through art beyond my life here on earth. Abstract art proved inadequate."[42]

Referring to Saliba's opinion that Agius's works are not a "fusion of the abstract with the figurative,"[43] Schembri Bonaci argues that Agius did strive for one, "a sincere struggle to combine both the abstract and figurative, albeit unfortunately without success."[44]

Conceptual design sketches

After a site visit to the piazza in front of St Lawrence Church, Agius began designing a monument to complement the historical context. This approach tends to establish what Cudny and Appelblad describe as "a kind of dialogical relation and mutual understanding between the artist and the people who look at and use the space around and sometimes also within monuments."[45] Based on an interview with the sculptor undertaken five years after its inauguration, Xuereb notes that "prominent in his [Agius's] original design was an allegorical shape of a feminine figure symbolising Malta, carrying the flag, followed by a throng of citizens. The design also included a naval ship and a warplane leaving the island."[46]

Most of the figures were nude, a recurring theme in his work, intended "to symbolise how the people had been liberated from poverty and colonialism."[47] Mintoff vetoed nudes in state monuments. Figures 3 to 6 reproduce a set of twelve conceptual design proposals presented to Mintoff, likely all dating to 1977. Some are labelled and only nine were actually numbered consecutively by Camilleri at the top left-hand corner. Proposal number 5 (Fig. 5a) has another sketch along the short side of the overleaf (Fig. 5a_1). All are in caput mortuum colour pencil except for those reproduced in Fig. 3 and Fig. 5a_1 which are graphite pencil and red ink pen, respectively. Most of the sketches include reference to the materials to be used in the construction/manufacture of the different elements.

Fig. 3 includes sketches on two A3 sheets.[48] Those in the first sheet, Fig. 3a, show two human figures shaking hands next to a stone pylon inscribed with the year 1979.[49] The sketch on the bottom left below develops the idea by adding Malta's flag at the top of a pylon and transforming the platform into the shape of a ship; a ship is also depicted on the plinth of the sketch in the top left corner. In this and subsequent sketches the theme of two figures remains, with slight variations. However, the figures lack sculptural expressiveness, the dynamism of movement. They do not give the viewer a sculptural form to respond emotionally but rather convey a sign that can be easily decoded. The pylon is easily recognizable as a symbol of Malta's fortifications. The ship, which is just present there and without any sculptural treatment, is included as an additional message. In all the sketches, the elements represent what Barthes would call parataxis (standing next to each other) and not syntaxis (a unison of form that corresponds to idea of something irreducible to the mechanical sum of its parts).[50] In Fig.

3b, from the second A3 sheet, the sketch on the left is an iteration of the sketches discussed above, the difference being that the two figures are pulling on ropes to raise the flag instead of shaking hands.[51] The sketch on the right, again portraying two figures in shaking hands, includes a third figure in the background holding and gazing at the flag high up in the sky. The cap on one of the figures could be interpreted as policeman: the sailor saying farewell to the local as the latter raises the Maltese flag.[52] The figure raising the flag is the only dynamic and expressive part of the composition. It could be that the artist deliberately made the figures shaking hands emotionally lacking, formally dull – to emphasise that it is just a farewell greeting, following which neither will miss the other. In contrast, the raising of the flag by the third figure displays an emotional focal point. The true content of the sculpture is the celebration of freedom, not formal procedural arrangements.

Figs 4a to 4d present the first four numbered sketches.[53] Fig. 4a develops the composition in Fig. 3b – the handshake and the embrace – but the figures have become clearer.[54] The third person is standing in front of a small rock on which Malta's flag has been raised. Looking up, his gaze meets the doves, symbolizing peace,[55] circling around the torch or urn on top of the rock. This version of the monument has more overall expressiveness. The static figures become less noticeable as the boulder towers over them, the flag waving against the sky. The third figure almost emerges out of the boulder, thus making visual reference to the bas-relief which adorns buildings from Malta's baroque period.

The sketch in Fig. 4b does away with the rock, doves and fire but includes a monumental base which displays the year 1979 and a bas-relief of a female figure on one side.[56] In this sketch, the sculptural group is notably placed on an architectural element instead of an allegorical ship or an unspecified base. The artist further develops the architectural aspect of the monument. By replacing the boulder with an architectural base, the sketch returns to the original static and schematic idea.

In Fig. 4c the vertical slab is complemented with a horizontal base.[57] Two rectangular blocks intersect one another. The two figures performing the farewell ritual sit atop the vertically oriented base, unobstructed. The female figure present in Fig. 4b appears again on the base, between two torches. The silhouette is evident, with the sky providing the backdrop. On the right, placed on the horizontal element of the base a separate rectangular slab is erected. The figure lowering one flag and raising the other is portrayed by means of bas-relief. With the aid of architectonic arrangement of the blocks, the composition gains dynamism, maybe even an emotional aspect. Paradoxically, these geometrical blocks are dynamic and emotional, whereas the human figures remain mute.

The sketch reproduced in Fig. 4d changes the narrative altogether.[58] It represents a vertical arrangement of rectangular blocks. Four parts are clearly articulated: (i) the lower block bears a bas-relief showing a group of people; (ii) a smaller block on top displays the year 1979; (iii) the next block, larger in size, is a cube bearing a relief of two large hands grasping each other tightly; and (iv) the final block, vertically oriented, upon which the country's flag is erected, and depicting a female figure – an allegorical representation of Malta – holding a dove, symbolizing peace. By removing the human-scale figures, this sketch becomes the most monumental interpretation.

Fig. 5a to 5d correspond to the next four numbered sketches.[59] Fig. 5a returns to the previous narrative.[60] Two figures shaking hands stand on an architectural block; the vertical block is erected at the top of the base. The flag of Great Britain has been lowered and hung on the face of the upright block, doves circle around the same block. The Maltese flag is waving on top, where a memorial fire is burning in a metal receptacle. The stele becomes the centrepiece and the two human figures stand as toy figurines.[61]

Fig. 5a_1 is basically a repeat of Fig. 4d.[62] Fig. 5b includes a base and figures similar to Fig. 5a but introduces a new symbol relating to industry – a cogwheel, a symbol of progress.[63] The giant cogwheel placed on the upper part of the base is being handled by what appears to be female figure. Birds of peace are carved on the circular face of the wheel. This version depicts the human body enacting its will to steer progress.

The theme of the cogwheel is further developed in Fig. 5c.[64] This time, it serves as circular base for the next block, where two figures grasp one another's hands in farewell. A circle of doves frames the two men. A cylindrical tube, resembling a mast of a ship, tops the base displaying the flag. The human figurines are reduced to almost nothing; accessories in some kind of an enlarged gadget.

In Fig. 5d, the two figures are carved in bas-relief on a cubic block. On top of the cube, an off-centred obelisk adorned with figures of doves supports the flag.[65] A giant cogwheel leans against the obelisk. The two figures have decisively found their proper place: no three-dimensionality is required for such a static emotionless posture; here they become like a poster, a part of the surface. This solution seems to fit the main idea. Yet one remains puzzled as to why an obelisk and a cogwheel symbolise independence. Sketch 9, reproduced as Fig. 6, presents a complex narrative and composition.[66] A giant boulder supports a series of cogwheels – similar to those in sketches 6 and 8 – over which a horse with a female rider is riding at speed. Human bodies are dragged across this machine, which appears to be an allegory of Malta moving forward based on work. The years 1814 – 1979, representing the island's military significance for the colonisers, is carved on the boulder. On a smaller boulder the two men hold hands as a sign

of peaceful farewell, putting the military history past behind. This version seems to be the most sculptural. The artist created not just a message using sign-forms – forms whose only essence is to signify something else allegorically – but solved a complex sculptural problem: how the movement of the horse influences the rider, and how to convincingly portray a human figure being dragged by a horse. It is surprising to see that in this expressive and dynamic interpretation the two static figures still appear, not letting the viewer forget the schematicism of the whole idea.

The design as realised

The Freedom Monument as realised is reproduced in Fig. 7. Photographic black and white images at the time of the design are reproduced in Fig. 8.[67] They were included in the file containing the set of conceptual design sketches and they tally with the official aerial photo shot in 1978.[68] The photographs include an image of the site (Fig. 8a), access to it towards the Neoclassical Old Naval Bakery building at the rear of the image (Fig. 8b), views of the streetscape overlooking the site (Fig. 8c) and the parish church (Fig. 8d). A section of the 1978 aerial photo of the area, enlarged to indicate the site, and a superimposed sketch of a proposal on the site are reproduced as Fig. 8e and Fig. 8f, respectively.

The design of the Freedom Monument was close to Mintoff's heart. He directed Agius to construct a hillock with figures. He not only put forth a specific brief and guidelines for the design of the monument to the sculptor, he also included explicit and definite details with respect to i) the arrangement of the four figures, notably their hands; ii) the visual finish of the lettering; and iii) the design of the steps up to the hillock.[69] Congruent with the observations of Stevens and others,[70] Cudny and Appelblad note that the perception of modern monuments "evolved from seeing to experiencing. Therefore, [they] have tended to become a type of experience space. They are often combined with ... elements such as green spaces or water. People can ... walk on the monument, learn about the person or story it represents, and they can touch ... it."[71]

Despite the symbolic associations of the design and materials employed, Freedom Monument does not connect with the visitors' experience. It is an object in space at a given place which is experienced once annually by state authorities while ascending the steps from street level to the top of the hillock. The monument is not spatially removed from the surrounding roads; it effectively functions as a roundabout.[72]

The executed design was a compromise after a number of attempts. The hillock, surrounded by a low-lying fence, was erected in large limestone boulders extracted from the uppermost surface of Ta` Zuta hardstone quarry in Dingli. This local limestone, colloquially referred to as rustica, has a coarse texture (Fig. 7a).[73] Agius experimented with this hardstone and was the first to use it for sculptural purposes.[74] The hillock supports a mix of plants, including those indigenous to Malta alongside Mediterranean, naturalised alien, cultivated and alien species.[75] On top of the mound are four life-sized bronze figures grouped in two pairs: a British sailor and a Maltese worker in a boiler suit and boots, and another Maltese worker in similar attire and a Maltese policeman sounding the bugle in salute (Fig. 7b).[76] Mintoff objected to "the hand of the British sailor resting on the shoulder of the Maltese worker while shaking hands."[77] On entering Mintoff's office, he rose to greet Agius who, in turn, "offered one hand while placing the other, which happened to be in plaster, on Dom's shoulder. Mintoff immediately requested Anton to first remove his hand from his shoulder and then go and remove that of the statue from the shoulder of the Maltese worker."[78] The passage along the hillock is lined with Maltese phrases cut in bronze at the Malta Dockyard, the largest industrial complex at the time and the crucible for riots against the British in 1958.[79] Overall, this commemorative landscape can be interpreted along the lines of Hammond:[80] "an approach that builds on a rich tradition of geographical scholarship.[81] I focus in particular on the meanings communicated by design,[82] the choice of materials,[83] and the 'public texts'[84] inscribed in and upon the landscape."

The realised design has specific three objects – the hillock, the four figures and the flag – respectively corresponding to the natural, the representational and the symbolic. The first, including the vegetation, brings the rural into the urban landscape. The figures are a literal re-enactment of a scene; they are allegorical, each character representing a political entity: a sailor shakes hands with a worker whilst the Union Jack is lowered and another worker hoists the Maltese flag while the policeman blows a bugle.[85] This is the last handshake: a farewell in peace to Malta's colonial past, which was not only characterised by dominion but also by being forced to fight wars for others. The scene represents the final handover to the Maltese to form their own destiny. A Maltese poetic verse set along the path to the top evokes the workers' fight for freedom: "GĦollew leħinhom il-feddejja, ingħaqdu l-ħaddiema, batew, tqabdu, ħadmu fuq li ħadmu u wasal il-jum, rebħet Malta l-ħelsien" [The redeemers raised their voices, the workers united, they suffered, they worked hard, they worked tirelessly and the day came, Malta won freedom].[86] Mintoff initially wanted the lettering to be highly polished, but later changed his mind, ordering them to be treated with acid to remove their lustre and rendered green.[87] He also objected to Agius's design of the steps, which were easy to climb, arguing that "nobody laid easy steps for the Maltese in their acquisition of freedom.... The nation had to struggle, suffer and risk."[88] To comply, Agius added sand to the

surface of the steps to render the path rough.[89]

Schembri Bonaci argues that "the static puppet-like postures of the figures on the monument show Agius's artistic inconsistency. Such theatrical realism, albeit harbouring a beautiful idea of the friendship between Malta and Great Britain, is artistically slapdash, and somewhat sentimental. It does not transcend the real event and its ritual, which the monument is attempting to emulate."[90] He also criticises the "almost gothic frontal expressionlessness of the figures,"[91] an aesthetic which features in Agius's Worker's Memorial (1980) in Msida. In reference to the Freedom Monument, Schembri Bonaci concedes that "the idea of the 'Freedom Day' monument is brilliant and historically intriguing, yet Agius produces blank-marionette faces,"[92] describing this as "artistic inconsistency." This point of view would be valid if the monument represented the free artistic expression of the sculptor. Agius's artistic independence was significantly encroached upon by Mintoff;[93] he made many concessions in the overall design and especially the figures. The Freedom Monument cannot be compared to Agius's monument to Manwel Dimech or the one of St Francis, where he had the artistic freedom to express his own ideas. The Freedom Monument was a transliteration of Mintoff's idea in sculptural form; the realised form was determined by fiat from Mintoff himself.[94] The character of monuments marking political/colonial domination are often imposed by their creator;[95] such is the case for Freedom Monument. In an interview with Mizzi, Agius explicitly stated that "Mintoff created that monument and not me. But it is a great honour for me that I was chosen because it is the most beautiful occasion that has happened in the country during my entire life" [Ngħid li dak il-monument ħolqu Mintoff u mhux jien. Imma unur kbir għalija li ntagħżilt jien għaliex hija l-isbaħ okkażjoni li ġrat fill-pajjiż kemm ili ħaj].[96] Despite other criticisms of the realised work,[97] and the difficulties that Agius had to go through in its execution, the monument was the one that he dearly loved. He recalled that "Mintoff wanted to show suffering and simplicity representing the turning of a previous military base into a republic built on work and peace. He also seems to have wanted to bring to urban Vittoriosa, the first city of the Knights on the island, a piece of the countryside, complete with cactus and palm trees."[98] More trees were planned around the square but the parish objected on the grounds that they would hinder parishioners going to church.[99] The end result is an absence of a dialogical relation; the mutual understanding between the artist and the locals was not present as he was absent in such a rapport; he was only transliterating Mintoff's idea in sculptural form.

Endorsing the comments published in the popular daily national newspaper by Baldacchino,[100] Lorenzo Zahra, Secretary of Vittoriosa and Cultural Society, argued that the monument's location was "undeniably out of place. The heap of rustic garigue blocks artificially placed jar strikingly with the baroque facade of St Lawrence church in the background and, indeed, with the entire classic style palaces along the Vittoriosa waterfront."[101] Although he agreed with having such a national landmark recalling the freedom from foreign domination – typical political function of such a monument[102] – he felt it should be adorned by a "more edifying structure. The present bronze statues ... should, of course, be retained. However, they should be arranged prominently on a dignified and artistic plinth and surrounded with an open public space, decorously designed and fittingly called Freedom Square, with the renovated Freedom Monument standing at the centre."[103] Kipphoff notes that "[p]ublic spaces, however, are being redefined and overtaken by media and other manipulative spaces. These are making obsolete the staging of the individual human body as a figure in public display against the backdrop of the city."[104]

The attempt to redefine this public space has, to date, not been successful. Citing de Certeau –who read the city as overlays of time, people, and behaviour[105] – Kipphoff asks the question: "where do people find themselves positioned in the daily drama of the staging of cultural hegemony that they witness in their surroundings, at once familiar and bewildering?"[106] Although her thought-provoking question – recalling the experience of strolling through the Brandenburg Gate after experiencing being on either side of the wall in 1989 – is not directly applicable to Freedom Monument, the experiences of the younger generations are remote from Malta's colonial past and thus they cannot appreciate prima facie what it stands for.

> "The public spaces of historical importance of the twentieth century in Europe feature monuments representing the factual and figural expressions of the cultural politics of the time. As the political, social, and cultural developments of the twentieth century unfolded, these spaces and their monuments were in some cases destroyed, in others neglected, forgotten, altered, or redefined."[107]

Freedom Monument, the site of an annual celebration since its inauguration, is neither destroyed nor forgotten. It is given a face lift for the state event held on site. To date, it has neither been altered nor physically redefined, albeit some people are metaphysically redefining its significance through reinterpreting Malta's neutrality and military equidistant policy and its civil religion regulating foreign and European affairs.

Final Comments

Unlike typical twentieth-century art – in which figurative forms gave way to more abstract ones and artists made use of materials to express a new aesthetic, and thus included an aesthetic dimension to the urban context[108]

– the Freedom Monument is a traditional design. As is typical with such monuments, it is in a central location. Its forms are used to convey its symbolic function. It represents a statement to affirm the annual Freedom Day; its message is conveyed unequivocally, with limited space for interpretation. The focal point of each of Agius's original design sketches was the figures shaking hands. It is the setting of this tableau that the artist was concerned with. He used various objects in distinctive symbolic imagery surrounding these figures, from pure architectural themes, to animals to fire, in order to frame the tranquil farewell scene. Although the earlier conceptual sketches draw parallels with social realist messages and the typical way of representation, the Freedom Monument as realised quietly plays the eternal scene almost unnoticed, a gesture devoid of excess pathos. The quiet tableau celebrates the gesture of farewell and the raising of the flag – which is not an artistic image but an actual object in the sculpture. The landscape takes the focal point of the composition, representing Malta's mineral and floral essence; it connects with the commemorative event of 31 March 1979 as a national day in the historical time scale of the archipelago. If not examined the figures might go unnoticed. In this way, the monumentality characteristic to social realism is avoided.

In both the conceptual sketches and in the realised monument, Malta is associated with the female gender whilst the workers and members of the security forces are male.[109] Commemoration is a political act and thus it is not neutral.[110] Citing Warner,[111] Fodor notes that artists have

> "used the female form since ancient times as an expression of desiderata and virtues. ... Allegories of Victory and the Motherland are the most frequent representations of the female form .... The artistic choice of the sculptors can be explained by the fact that, through such an artistic convention, abstract notions could be made understandable for everyone and identifiable with anyone. Such representations of the female figure, do not refer to particular women, do not describe women as a group, and often do not even presume to evoke their natures, yet they stand for us regardless of sex."[112]

The Freedom Monument is not different; reading it goes beyond the stereotype. For Agius, "a work of art is a child born of Mother Artist and Father Environment."[113] Saliba sums up the Freedom Monument thus:

> "it might appear strange but it is indeed true that the most significant part of the monument is not the group of figures ... but the mass of rock which towers above everything else, rendering everything small by comparison. But it was meant to be that way. The mound, rocky, craggy, filled with pitfalls, with a path winding its way to the top, represents Malta and the innumerable sacrifices and obstacles that the people, led by the Prime Minister, had to make and overcome. Emphasis shifts therefore to the struggle, rather than to the triumph, however important it was. It records the culmination of a sequence of events: 1964, Independence; 1974, the proclamation of the Republic; 1979, the end of the military bases and the start of economic independence. The flame burning at the top symbolises the courage that the Maltese have always shown and the love they cherish for Malta."[114]

Derived from the Latin "moneo," this quotation elicits the etymological multiple-meanings of term "monument." The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* provides three translations of the Latin term: "to bring to the notice of, remind, tell (of); ... to suggest a course of action to, advise, recommend, warn tell; ... to serve as a reminder or warning to/of things, events, etc.."[115] The Freedom Monument is an edifice intended to commemorate not only the event but the actions leading to the moment of the country's total freedom from foreign rule came into effect. It executes a commemorative function which, as argued by Johnson[116] and DeLyser[117], is an important dimension in the politics of memory.[118] In his speech, which was broadcast live on national radio and television on 31 March 1979, President of the Republic Anton Buttigieg stated: "Maltese and Gozitans, we gathered here tonight to swear together that there will never again be another foreign military base on our land, and that Malta will always remain a free Republic led by the Maltese for the Maltese" [Maltin u GĦawdxin, inġbarna biex illejla flimkien naħilfu li qatt iżjed ma terga' fuq artna jkun hawn bażi militari oħra tal-barrani, u li Malta tibqa' dejjem Repubblika ħielsa mmexxija mill-Maltin għall-Maltin].[119]

Why was the piazza in front of St Lawrence Church – a Baroque ecclesiastical building –the preferred site for Freedom Monument, a neo-Baroque didactic statement of civil religion? "The construction of monuments in urban contexts is not simply a contested commemorative practice staged in public space but a claiming of place[120] through which identities and imaginaries are articulated and performed at multiple scales[121]."[122] With the advent of the Order of St John in 1530, Birgu became "a political mecca governed by a religious triad of checks and balances."[123] This triad included the Grand Master, the bishop and the inquisitor, all of whom declared allegiance to the pope.[124] Further to the island being ruled by a theocracy, "throughout the siege [of 1565], the main place of hope and prayer has been St Lawrence," the conventual church of the Order.[125] It is a historically and politically charged context – the iconic victory of 1565 against the Ottomans is commemorated by the Great Siege Monument erected in 1705 in the city's mediaeval square, the first time Malta was portrayed as victorious through the allegory of a young woman in drapes and armour holding a sword, a shield, and a palm frond in her hands. In this location, the Freedom

Monument represents the contemporary Zeitgeist: from a naval base to a place of commerce, a waterfront space for tourists and locals to enjoy, rather than for foreign military personnel.

Author's Note

This paper was written and submitted to *Revista Transilvania*, a leading academic journal of Transylvania, in the later part of 2023, the year which marks the 55th anniversary since Malta and Romania established diplomatic relations.[126] Together with Bukovina, Crișana, Maramureș and Banat, this province was united with Romania on 1 December 1918, and formed part of the Kingdom of Romania through the Treaty of Trianon signed on 4 June 1920. A key player was British-born Queen Marie of Romania (1875–1938), who spent a portion of her early years in Malta when her father, the Duke of Edinburgh, was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet.[127] The Queen remembered her time in Malta as "the happiest memory of my existence" [cea mai fericită amintire a existenței mele].[128] The family resided at San Anton Palace, then the family residence of the British Governor but now the official residence of the President of the Republic of Malta.

Furthermore, this paper is dedicated to one of my foremost mentors in my professional career, the late Prime Minister Emeritus Dr Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici – a staunch believer in Malta's quest for freedom and national independence, and in the politics of military neutrality and non-alignment. His integrity was, and still is, a beacon for making politics a conversation from people to people, based on the notions of solidarity and well-being.[129] Our hour-long meetings over a coffee prior to his illness were instrumental in understanding and comprehending foreign affairs and historical milestones between Malta and other sovereign states, including Romania.

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Notes

1. John J. Winberry, "'Lest we forget': The confederate monument and the southern townscape," *Southeastern Geographer* 23 (1983): 107-121, 107.
2. Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sign and metaphor," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68 (1978): 363-372.
3. Waldemar Cudny and Håkan Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography* 73, no. 5 (2019): 273-289.
4. Ibid., 276-285.
5. Ibid., 276.
6. Ibid., 280. With respect to collective memory and to social memory, Cudny and Appelblad cite Nuala Johnson, "Cast in stone: Monuments, geography, and nationalism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 51-65; Nuala Johnson, "Mapping monuments: The shaping of public space and cultural identities," *Visual Communication* 1 (2002): 293-298; and Dydia DeLyser, "'Thus I salute the Kentucky Daisey's claim': Gender, social memory, and the mythic West at a proposed Oklahoma monument," *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008): 63-94.
7. Johnson, "Mapping monuments: The shaping of public space and cultural identities," 294.
8. In terms of this agreement, Great Britain could not, until 1979, use its military facilities in Malta to honour any international agreement it may enter into. These facilities could only be used for defence purposes and not against any Arab country. While under the old treaty Great Britain had the right to prohibit the entry of other foreign forces into Malta, from March 1972 until 31 March 1979 it could only object to the entry of Warsaw Pact countries (Godfrey Pirotta, "Mintoff, il-Helsien u n-newtralita ta` Malta 1947–1972," in *Mintoff: Il-bniedem u l-istorja*, ed. Mario Cutajar (Hamrun, Malta: Sensiela Kotba Socjalisti, 2012), 525).
9. A Rhodes scholar at Hertford College, Oxford, and leader of the Malta Labour Party from 1949 until 1984, Mintoff was known for his socio-democratic ideals. He was prime minister of Malta from 1971 until he resigned to make way for his anointed successor, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici (1933–2022). The ideology of the party shifted from social-democratic to a socialist one based on Christian values and the teachings of Christ, particularly the parable of the Good Samaritan. This was diametrically

opposite to the progressive socialist ideologies underlying communist and totalitarian regimes at the time. Soon after Mintoff was elected prime minister in 1971, he proceeded to replace the British-installed governor-general, Sir Maurice Dorman (1912–1993), with a Maltese successor, Sir Anthony Mamo (1909–2008), then Chief Justice of Malta. Furthermore, he declared Gino Birindelli – head of the Mediterranean Command of the NATO fleet based in Malta – persona non grata, subsequently leading to the closure of NATO's headquarters in Malta. US navy vessels were no longer authorised entry (Aleks Farrugia, "Lejn il-kisba tal-Ħelsien ... l-ikbar festa li qatt rat Malta," in *Il-35 anniversarju mill-Ħelsien: 31 ta` Marzu 1979–2014,* ed. Meli Brian (Marsa, Malta: Union Print Co. Ltd, 2014), 11). During Mintoff's tenure, Malta became a republic in 1974 and free from colonial forces in 1979 (Michael J. Schiavone, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies*. Pietà, Malta: Pubblikazzjoniet Independenza, 2009, no. 2, 1183-1185).

10. Cited in Farrugia, "Lejn il-kisba tal-Ħelsien ... l-ikbar festa li qatt rat Malta," 17. See also Godfrey A. Pirotta, "GĦaliex il-Ħelsien kien hemm bżonnu," in *Il-35 anniversarju mill-Ħelsien: 31 ta` Marzu 1979–2014*, ed. Meli Brian (Marsa, Malta: Union Print Co. Ltd, 2014), 53.
11. Ibid.
12. Godfrey A. Pirotta, "L-isfidi tal-imgħoddi – l-isfidi tal-futur: Diskors ta' l-okkażjoni fl-erbatax-il anniversarju ta` jum il-ħelsien," *Il-Ġens*, April 2, 1993, 5.
13. Pirotta, "Mintoff, il-Ħelsien u n-newtralita ta` Malta 1947–1972," 506.
14. Anton Buttigieg, *United Nations Debate on Malta's Independence* (New York, 1964); cited in Pirotta, "Mintoff, il-Ħelsien u n-newtralita ta` Malta 1947–1972," 523. Given that this speech was delivered at an event held prior to 21 September 1964, when Malta was not yet a member of the UN, it is not included in Saviour F. Borg, ed., *50 Years of Malta's Foreign Policy (1964-2014)* (Malta: Printit, 2015).
15. The anthem was played for the first time on 31 March 1979 by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of its principal conductor Herbert von Karajan (1908–1989). By 1978, Theodoarkis had composed anthems for Nasser (1970), the Socialist Movement in Venezuela (1973), the victims of Athens Polytechnical uprising (1973) and the French Socialist Party (1977) (Unearthing the Music. "Mikis Theodorakis," *Unearthing the music: sound and creative experimentation in non-democratic Europe*. http://database.unearthingthemusic.eu/Mikis_Theodorakis). He was a symbol of resistance against the Greek military junta (1967–1974), which subjected him to imprisonment, deportation and torture and also banned his works. Mikis Theodorakis, *Journal of Resistance*, trans. Graham Webb (London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon), 1973; Alexander Prokhorov, ed., "Theodorakis, Mikis." In *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* no. 25 (New York: Macmillan Educational Corporation, 1980), 584. Like Mintoff, he opposed the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank by Israel.
16. Adriana Bishop, "Monuments explained: Freedom Monument, Birgu." *GuideMeMalta.com.* https://www.guidememalta.com/en/monuments-explained-freedom-monument-birgu. Birgu is known as Citta` Vittoriosa which translates to Victorious City, recalling the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 when Malta was victorious over the Ottoman Empire. It is a maritime city with a long history of mercantile and military activities.
17. Agius completed his education in his homeland and overseas, first at the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (1950–1953) where artists Emvin Cremona (1919–1987), Vincent Apap (1909–2003) and his later inspiration and mentor George Borg (1906–1983) taught – Godwin Scerri, *Anton Agius: Maltese sculptor* (Marsa, Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group Ltd, 1986); Louis P. Saliba, *Anton Agius: A retrospective exhibition* (San Ġwann, Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group Ltd, 2005), 6-7. This was followed by stints at the Malta School of Art, the Academia di Belle Arti (Rome) and St Martin's School of Art (London). He taught art at secondary schools in Malta and at the University of Malta, and was examiner of ceramics at ordinary level examinations of the University of Oxford. Further to winning a number of national and international awards in art competitions, he was made a Member of the National Order of Merit of the Republic of Malta and awarded the prestigious Gold Medal Award of the Malta Society of Arts in 2005 and 2007, respectively Michael J. Schiavone, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies*, no. 1 (Pietà, Malta: Pubblikazzjoniet Independenza, 2009), 26-27; see also Louis P. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*. San Ġwann: Publishers Enterprises Group Ltd, 2002), 19-21. For a critical appreciation of his work see ibid., 127-130.
18. Ibid.
19. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism* (Qormi, Malta: Horizons, 2011).
20. Anthony Xuereb, "Making of a monument," *Times of Malta*, March 31, 2017, 16. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/Making-of-a-monument.644004
21. Anton Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin* (San Ġwann, Malta: Book Distributors Limited, 2019).
22. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 127. Recalled also in Emanuel Fiorentino, "The emotive powers of a sculptor," *The Sunday Times of Malta*, March 30, 2003, 34; Saliba, *Anton Agius: A retrospective exhibition*, 12; and Anon, "'National' sculptor's works to go on display," *Times of Malta*, May 13, 2005, 26. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/national-sculptors-works-to-go-on-display.90531.
23. Mario Buhagiar, "Introduction," in *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, Schembri Bonaci Giuseppe (Qormi, Malta: Horizons, 2011), 5.
24. Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 9.

25. Ibid.
26. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 95-96; Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 250-251.
27. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 97-99; Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin,* 375-376.
28. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 96-97; Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 377-379.
29. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 94; Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 398-399.
30. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 99; Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 86-87.
31. Ibid., 490-491.
32. Schembri Bonaci. *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 8.
33. Saliba, *Anton Agius: A retrospective exhibition*, 5.
34. Scerri, *Anton Agius: Maltese sculptor*.
35. For example, see the opinion of Henry Frendo in Adriana Bishop, "Monuments explained: Sette Giugno 1919, Valletta," *GuideMeMalta.com.* https://www.guidememalta.com/en/monuments-explained-sette-giugno-1919-valletta#:~:text=The%20monument%20was%20inaugurated%20on,one%20succumbing%20to%20his%20wounds, and the obituary by Paul Xuereb in Paul Xuereb, "Anton Agius: Fine artist, humble man," *Times of Malta*, October 27, 2008, 11. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/anton-agius-fine-artist-humble-man-1.230656.
36. Fiorentino. "The emotive powers of a sculptor," 34.
37. New World Encyclopedia contributors. "Socialist realism [Internet]." In *New World Encyclopedia*, January 30, 2023. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Socialist_realism&oldid=1098626. Schembri Bonaci defines these terms thus: "Socialist Realism was based on the desire to depict reality, just as in Social Realism, but this 'reality' in Socialist Realism had to be made manifest, not in its neutral and passive aspect, but in its revolutionary development." Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism,* 12.
38. Ibid., 10.
39. Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 17.
40. Erika Brincat. "Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism," *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, June 3, 2012, 27. https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2012-06-03/news/anton-agius-and-gothic-socialist-realism-310903/cookie-declaration.
41. Ibid.
42. Television programme *Il-polż ta` l-artist* [*The pulse of the artist*] broadcast in January 1972, cited by Saliba (*Anton Agius: Sculpture,* 23) and in turn by Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 15.
43. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 45.
44. Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 15.
45. Cudny and Appelblad. "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 277.
46. Xuereb. "Making of a monument," 16.
47. Ibid.
48. The sketches numbered by the artist are on non-standard, roughly rectangular conventional paper. Agius was frugal both in character and because he was not wealthy. Most of his works, especially the public ones, were miserably paid, if paid at all (Anton Calleja, personal communication, July 1, 2023. Calleja, Agius's nephew and a respected contemporary artist in Malta, worked from the age of nine as a "studio hand" at his uncle's workshop). The following are the approximate sizes of the sheets in cm of the numbered sketches, given in consecutive order: 1, 21.2×30.4; 2, 24.5×40.7; 3, 24.5×30.4; 4, 21.2×30.7; 5, 21.7×35.7; 6, 21.1×31.0; 7, 21.6×30.0; 8, 21.3×30.3; and 9, 32.2×42.5.
49. The sketches at the top left and right side of the sheet include the year 1979. Only the latter sketch is signed and dated 1977.
50. Roland Barthes, "Semantics of the object," in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 179-190.
51. The sketch on the left is signed and dated 1977. This proposal had the base in "limestone" [ġebla], the figures in "bronze" [bronż], and a "mast" [arblu]. It includes a note: "a Maltese is handing the English flag and hoists that of Malta" [Malti jati l-bandiera Ingliża u jtella ta` Malta]. The sketch on the right is a relief with "three figures coming out from a rock" [tlett figuri ħerġin min ġo blata].
52. See footnote 76.
53. All sketches are signed but not dated expect for that reproduced in Fig. 4d, which is neither signed nor dated.
54. The year 1979 is in bronze, the base and figure in "travertine" [travertina], the doves circling the torch/urn are in bronze whilst the Maltese flag is "either actual or in bronze" [ta' vera jew bronż].
55. See footnote 64 and footnote 66 with respect to Fig. 5c and Fig. 6, respectively.
56. The year 1979, the figures, the mast and the flag are in bronze; the base is in travertine.
57. The base and blocks are in travertine; the figures and flag are in bronze.
58. The base is in travertine and bronze. The blocks on top of the base are also in travertine and the year 1979, the figures, the mast and the flag are in bronze.
59. All sketches are signed and dated 1977.

60. The dimension stones are in travertine; the other elements, including the flag, are in bronze.
61. Mintoff consistently referred to the figures as "pasture." Xuereb, "Making of a monument," 16.
62. The materials used for the figures in the proposal included in the sketch reproduced as Fig. 5a_1, which is neither signed nor dated, are in bronze.
63. The base is in travertine or stone, as is the cogwheel. The figures, the mast and the flag are in bronze. Agius designed a similar profile of a wheel in the Workers' Memorial (see photo in Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 36).
64. In Fig. 5c, the base, which includes a fountain at the second tier, is in travertine. The column is likewise in travertine; the figures, the lettering, the mast and the flag are in bronze. On top of the column there is a bronze urn with a note which reads that the flame symbolises freedom [Fjamma libertà]. There is also a note that the cogwheel symbolises progress and the doves symbolise peace [Rota Progress; ħamiem paċi].
65. The note next to the wheel reads "progress in peace, independent" [progress fill-paċi, independenti].
66. This sketch, signed and dated 1977, includes notes written horizontally (top left corner) and vertically (bottom left). The former reads "Malta on the horse symbolises the energy of the Country for the future of the progress of Malta. The men symbolise the freedom in the country from the foreigner and the work in the country. The wheels show progress in work and in factories. Doves symbolise peace" [Malta fuq iż-żiemel tissimbolizza l-enerġija tal-Pajjiz għal futur tal-progress ta` Malta. L-irgiel jissimbolizzaw il-liberta fil-pajjiz mill-barrani u xogħol fil-pajjiz. Ir-roti juru progress fix-xogħol u fil-fabbriki. Il-ħamiem jissimbolizza paċi]. The latter states that "the lower base shows a Maltese handing back the flag so Malta moves in progress and in peace and in friendship they are shaking hands" [fuq il-bażi t'isfel turi Malti fejn tah il-bandiera lura biex Malta timxi fil-progress u fil-paċi u bi ħbiberija qegħdin jieħdu b'idejn xulxin].
67. The approximate size of the photos is 17.8×12.4 cm.
68. The reference number of the photo is 1978/strip 3_522.jpg (source: Mapping Unit, Planning Authority, Malta), The original scale is 1:10,000.
69. Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 54-55.
70. Quentin Stevens, "Visitor responses at Berlin's Holocaust Memorial: Contrary to conventions, expectations and rules," *Public Art Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (2012): 34-59; Quentin Stevens and Shanti Sumartojo, "Memorial planning in London," *Journal of Urban Design* 20 (2015): 615-635; Quentin Stevens, Karen A. Franck, "*Memorials as Spaces of Engagement: Design, use and meaning* (London: Routledge, 2016).
71. Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 277-278.
72. There is a rumor, notably among the residents of Birgu, that Mintoff wanted to be buried in the space beneath the monument accessible from the street facing St Lawrence Church. Through personal communications with members of Mintoff's private secretariat who were engaged with his office in the years around 1979, all stated that the Prime Minister never shared such an idea. This opinion was also shared by his brother, the Franciscan friar Dionysius Mintoff (personal communication). Furthermore, Mintoff's character, as read through his 60 years in the political scene in Malta, does not suggest someone who was after a lasting memorial for his work. Although he was very forceful in character, he was keen on the collective rather than individualism.
73. Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 54. This an open pit mine which extracts the Upper Coralline Limestone, the uppermost and most durable stratum of the island's lithostratigraphy.
74. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 21. Rustica is the "Upper Coralline Limestone found on barren land like Dingli Cliffs. The rock is riddled with hollows and holes.... Its weird shapes and holes were worked upon and developed by the sculptor to get the desired effect." Ibid.
75. Without accessing the precinct of the monument, the following trees and shrubs were identified by Antoine Gatt (landscape architect and Research Support Officer II, Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta) during a site inspection held on 3 July 2023: (i) *Cupressus sempervirens*, (ii) *Pinus halepensis*, (iii) *Phoenix dactylifera*, (iv) *Capparis spp*, (v) *Aloe sp* (vi) *Santolina chamaecyparissus* and (vii) *Opuntia spp*. According to the website Maltawildplants.com (Stephen Mifsud, MaltaWildPlants.com (2002-2022), https://www.maltawildplants.com/), (i), (ii), and (iii) are naturalised aliens; (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) are indigenous, Mediterranean, cultivated and alien species, respectively (Antoine Gatt, e-mail to author dated 5 July 2023).
76. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 21.
77. Xuereb, "Making of a monument," 16.
78. Ibid. Mintoff even directed the artist on the length and the physiognomy of the figures (Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 54).
79. Salvu Fenech, "It-28 ta' April 1958: Qawmien ta' poplu," *Orizzont*, April 21, 2017, 22-23. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/35000/1/L-Orizzont%2021-04-2017%20-%20It-28%20ta%20April%201958%20Qawmien%20ta%20Poplu.pdf.
80. Timur Hammond, "Making Memorial Publics: Media, monuments, and the politics of commemoration following Turkey's July 2016 coup attempt," *Geographical Review* 110, no. 4 (2020): 536-555, 537.
81. Richard H. Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A conceptual framework for interpreting an American scene," *Annals of the*

Association of American Geographers 87, no. 4 (1997): 660-680; Nancy Duncan, James Duncan, "Doing Landscape Interpretation," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, ed. Dydia DeLyser, Steve Herbert, Stuart C. Aitken, Mike Crang, and Linda McDowell (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 225-248.

82. Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, "Security and Atonement: Controlling access to the World Trade Center Memorial." *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 3 (2012): 405-411.
83. Susan A. Sci, "(Re)thinking the memorial as a place of aesthetic negotiation," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 50, no. 1 (2009): 41-57.
84. Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public* Text (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
85. During the 31 March 1979 ceremony, the roles were played by David Gilchrist (radio operator, HMS London), Richard Cauchi (police constable, Hamrun), Carmel Boxall (civil servant with the Department of Public Works, Birġu), and Alfred Xuereb (welder at the Malta Dockyard) (Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 55). During the event the urn was lit; it is lit again each year during the ceremony marking Freedom Day (ibid., 55).
86. Ibid., 54.
87. Xuereb, "Making of a monument," 16.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Schembri Bonaci, *Anton Agius and Gothic Socialist Realism*, 27.
91. Ibid., 29.
92. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, "A symbol of his contradictory epoch," *Malta Independent*, May 4, 2015, edited and trans. by Nikki Petroni. https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-05-04/newspaper-lifestyleculture/A-symbol-of-his-contradictory-epoch-6736134894.
93. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 94.
94. Before being sent for casting at the Fonderia Chiurazzi in Naples, Mintoff visited Agius's workshop and instructed him to reduce the length of the model's neck – Camilleri, *Monumenti u busti fil-gżejjer Maltin*, 54. A few days prior to 31 March 1979, Mintoff visited the site with the Minister of Works and discussed logistical details with an official from the Committee of National Feasts. The director of Department of Information was also present. Anon. "Mintoff izur il-proġett ta` Bormla u l-monument tal-31 ta` Marzu 1979," *L-Orizzont*, March 27, 1979, 16.
95. Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 280.
96. Charles Mizzi, "Tony Agius: L-iskultur li għex l-istorja ta` Malta f`xogħlu," *Torċa*, March 14, 2004, 21.
97. In 2013, environmentalist Alfred Baldacchino stated that the monument was infested by exotic invasive species. Alfred Baldacchino, "The caper at Couvre Port," *Times of Malta*, November 7, 2013, 16.
98. Xuereb, "Making of a monument," 16.
99. Ibid.
100. Baldacchino, "The caper at Couvre Port," 16.
101. Lorenzo Zahra, "Freedom monument needs to be renewed," *Times of Malta*, December 5, 2013, 15. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/Freedom-monument-needs-to-be-renewed.497629
102. Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the threads of history: Soviet-era monuments and post-Soviet national identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002): 524-547; also cited in Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 280.
103. Zahra, "Freedom monument needs to be renewed," 15.
104. Karen Kipphoff, "Self and the City: The politics of monuments," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 51, no. 1 (2007): 86-95, 94.
105. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
106. Kipphoff, "Self and the City: The politics of monuments," 87.
107. Ibid., 86.
108. Martin Zebracki, Rob van der Vaart, Irina van Aalst, "Deconstructing public artopia: Situating public-art claims within practice," *Geoforum* 41 (2010): 786-795; also cited in Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 277.
109. In the course of research completed under the academic supervision of the author on Valletta, Malta's capital city, Willian Camilleri observed that when read as a fort, Valletta is associated with the male gender, while when read as a city, it is associated with the female gender – William V. Camilleri, *Valletta: A surrealist interpretation*. BE&A (Hons) dissertation, University of Malta, 2013. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/82719.
110. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
111. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The allegory of the female form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
112. Georgeta Fodor, "Female Representations and Presences in Romanian First World War Commemorative Art." *Territorial*

Identity and Development 7, no. 2 (2022): 29-53, 34. https://territorial-identity.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2_Fodor_TID-2-2022.pdf.

113. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 21.
114. Saliba, *Anton Agius: Sculpture*, 94-95.
115. Peter. G.W. Glare, ed., "Moneo," in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, no. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 1243.
116. Johnson, "Cast in stone: Monuments, geography, and nationalism."
117. DeLyser, "'Thus I salute the Kentucky Daisey's claim': Gender, social memory, and the mythic West at a proposed Oklahoma monument."
118. Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and their functions in urban public space," 280.
119. Cited in Farrugia, "Lejn il-kisba tal-Helsien ... l-ikbar festa li qatt rat Malta," 17. President Anton Buttigieg is the same personality who delivered the speech in the United Nations is 1964.
120. Johnson, "Cast in Stone: Monuments, Geography, and Nationalism"; Katharyne Mitchell, "Monuments, memorials, and the politics of memory," *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003): 442-459.
121. Karen E. Till, "Places of Memory," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, Gerard Toal (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 289-301.
122. Hammond, "Making Memorial Publics: Media, monuments, and the politics of commemoration following Turkey's July 2016 coup attempt," 538.
123. Charles Fiott, *Town and Villages in Malta and Gozo; Part 1: The Twin Harbour Area*. Rabat, Malta: Conventual Franciscans, 1994, 123.
124. Ibid., 124.
125. Ibid., 119.
126. The year 2024 will mark the 45th anniversary of Freedom Day.
127. Romanian Prime Minister Ion Brătianu (1864–1927) invited Queen Marie to Paris Peace Conference to consolidate the case for the entire territory to form an integral part of Greater Romania (Tessa Dunlop, "Romania's Wartime Queen," *History Today*, November 6, 2018. https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/romania%E2%80%99s-wartime-queen). In 1919, Romania was being treated with contempt and indifference by the Allies due to the separate peace treaty it signed in 1918 with the Central Powers. Queen Marie was the grand-daughter of Queen Victoria (1819–1901) and Tsar Alexander II (1818–1881), also known as Alexander the Liberator, as his brief war with the Ottoman Empire (1877–78) led to the independence of Romania, Bulgaria, and other states.
128. Marie, Queen of Romania. *Povestea vieții mele*. Bucuresti Editura Adevarul SA, 1990, 178. https://media.oiipdf.com/pdf/db8be889-cde5-407b-acfe-290coda6e297.pdf .
129. Mifsud Bonnici, a lawyer by profession who majored in taxation and industrial law at the University College of London, was a lecturer in Industrial and Fiscal Law at the Faculty of Laws, University of Malta (Schiavone, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies*. Pietà, no. 2, 1175-1176). He was "a Nationalist by birth, but a Labourite through free choice and conviction" (Matthew Vella, "Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, whose premiership was marred by harrowing 1980s, dies at 89." *Malta Today*, November 5, 2022. https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/119608/karmenu_mifsud_bonnici_whose_premiership_was_marred_by_harrowing_1980s_dies_at_89#.ZEYL5HZBw2w; The Editor, "Editorial: A man guided by conviction." *Times of Malta*, November 13, 2022. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/editorial-man-guided-conviction.994347). He was designated by Mintoff as his successor and, on the latter's resignation in 1984, he was appointed prime minister until the upcoming election of 1987. On his demise, the editorial column of the main local newspaper summed up his career as follows: "Even his political adversaries sang his praises on his demise ..., and not merely as a matter of convention or courtesy, or to let bygones be bygones.... He cannot be labelled as disgraced, much less corrupt. His 'road map', if he ever had one, was not charted to lead to personal gain or glory. The record shows he was upright and he appeared to be genuine in making decisions that he believed would be good for the country and its people, especially workers" (ibid).
130. Simontabone, Untitled. 2019. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Freedom_Monument_in_Birgu_Square.jpg
131. Picman, *Freedom Monument in Birgu Malta*, 2006. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Birgumonument.jpg

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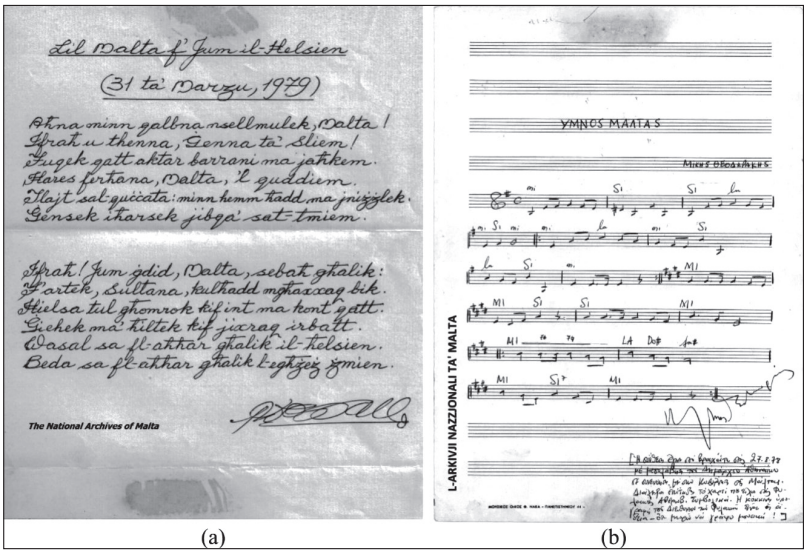

Fig. 1. Anthem for Freedom Day: (a) lyrics by Karmenu Vassallo; (b) composition by Mikis Theodorakis, dated 27 August 1978. Source: National Archives of Malta.

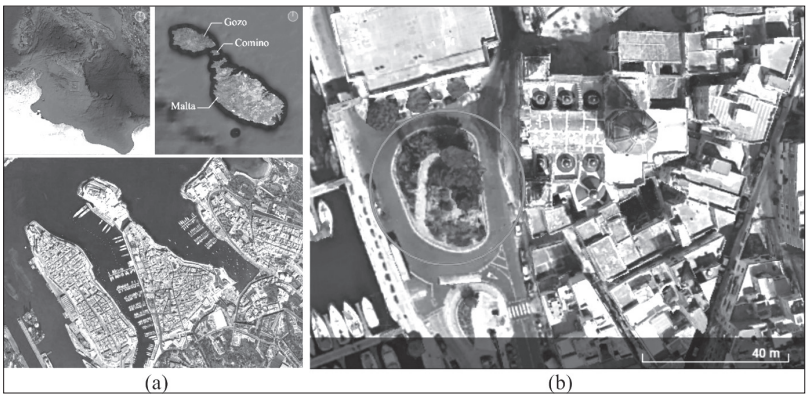

Fig. 2. Freedom Monument: (a) site location map; (b) the site circled. Source: Google Earth.

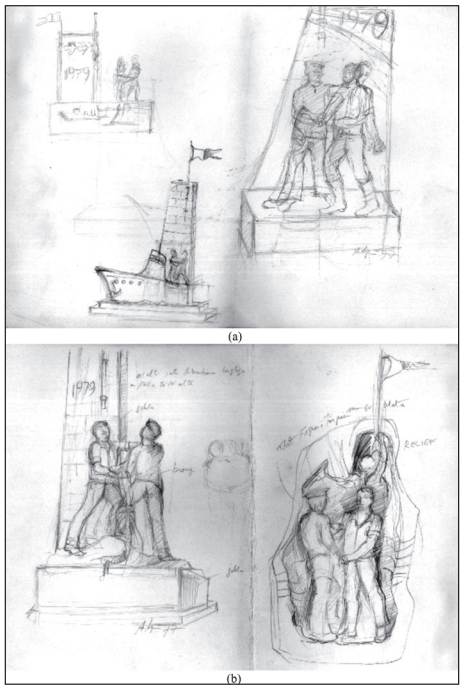

Fig. 3. Unnumbered sheets in graphite pencil, both on A3: (a) sketches predominantly included the year 1979; (b) sketches are labelled with materials and profiles to be used. Source: Author.

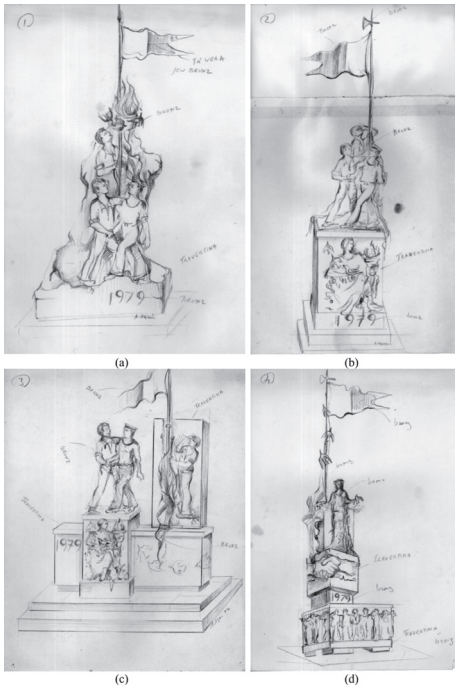

Fig. 4. Sheets in caput mortuum colour pencil as numbered by Agius:
(a) sketch 1; (b) sketch 2; (c) sketch 3; (d) sketch 4.
Source: Author.

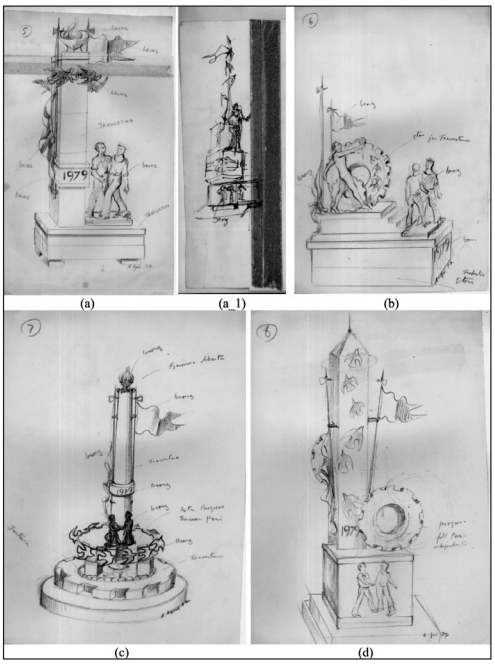

Fig. 5. Sheets in caput mortuum colour pencil as numbered by Agius: (a) sketch 5; (b) sketch 6; (c) sketch 7; (d) sketch 8. (a_1) sketch in red ink pen drawn on the overleaf, along the shorter edge, of the sheet including sketch 5. Source: Author.

Fig. 6. Sheet in caput mortuum colour pencil, numbered 9 by Agius. Source: Author.

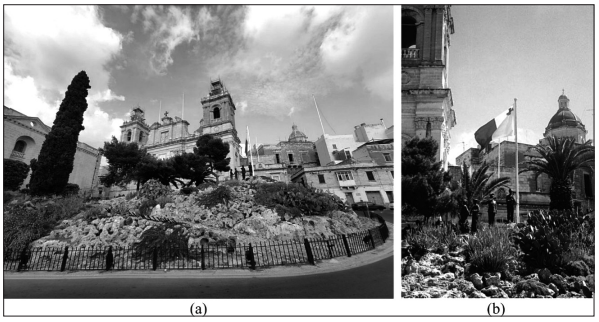

Fig. 7. Freedom Monument as at present: (a) panoramic view from the waterfront; (b) detail, image taken from the west facing elevation. Source: Simontabone / CC BY-SA 4.0 (a)[130]; Picman (b)[131].

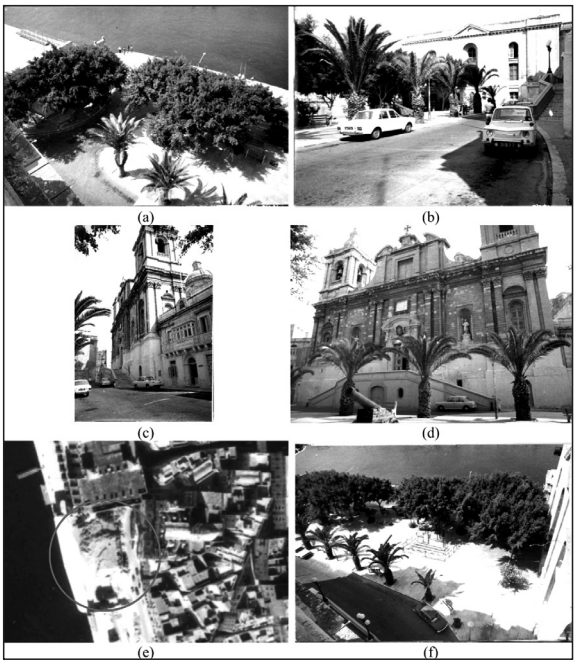

Fig. 8. Photographic survey of the site at the time of designing the Freedom Monument: (a) site location; (b) access to the site towards the Old Naval Bakery; (c) view of streetscape overlooking the site; (d) the Collegiate Church of Saint Lawrence; (e) section of the aerial photo dated 1978, site location circled; (f) sketch on a proposal on the site, author of sketch not identified. Source: Author (a, b, c, d, f), Planning Authority (e).