

ART Connect: UM Library as a Living Canvas

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*The ART Connect project offers UM students, academics, and administrative staff a platform to exhibit their creative work at the UM Library. **THINK** speaks with Assistant Librarian **Ryan Scicluna** to learn more about the inspiration behind the initiative, how it came to life, and the impact it's having on the university community.*

Have you ever wanted to showcase your art but didn't know where to start? ART Connect at the UM Library offers the perfect platform for students and staff to share their creativity with the wider campus community. From photography and painting to sculpture and digital media, this initiative turns the Library into a vibrant space where artistic expression and academic life come together.

'The initiative took off from a comment made by one of our colleagues, who pointed out that

the walls were empty, just like a blank canvas. So we thought, why not turn the Library into an ever-changing exhibition space?' explains Assistant Librarian Ryan Scicluna.

Scicluna has worked at the UM Library for 14 years, primarily in marketing, training, library instruction, and outreach, with a focus on bringing communities together in a library setting. From that initial spark, the team began collaborating with a student from the History of Art Student Association, aiming to connect people through creativity and drawing inspiration from the beloved TV show *Art Attack*, which also inspired the name ART Connect.

A PLATFORM FOR ALL

Every year, ART Connect holds two open calls, one around February/March and another in October/November, inviting students to submit artworks they've created either as part of their studies or as personal projects. The initiative embraces all forms of creative expression. 'Once, we had a submission featuring a traditional

Ghonnella made from recycled materials, resulting in the Library purchasing a mannequin, which is now also used by fashion students,' claims Scicluna. One current display includes a tree sculpture crafted from old books and electronic parts, symbolising the blend of knowledge and creativity. Staff and Erasmus+ students are also encouraged to participate. 'Many international students have contributed artworks that reflect their home countries, helping them feel more connected and offering a sense of ownership over the space,' explains Scicluna. ART Connect goes beyond simply displaying artwork. Each submission is celebrated with an artist spotlight on social media, where participants share their story and creative journey. Submissions typically begin with a simple sketch or draft and are displayed alongside a QR code linking to the artist's profile, offering exposure at no cost. Whenever feasible, all submitted artworks are displayed to ensure



Ryan Scicluna
Photo by Kristov Scicluna



A selection of artworks featured during ART Connect. The artworks were carried out by the following artists (in order of appearance): Adriana Mintoff, Michelle Gialanze, Anneleize Emily Strauss, Martina Psaila and Emily Therese Salnitro. Photos courtesy of Ryan Scicluna

everyone's creativity is showcased. Pieces are usually exhibited for up to a year, giving the Library a continuously evolving atmosphere. Once taken down, artworks are either collected by the artists or safely stored to preserve their place in the ART Connect journey.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

The Library is often called the heart of the University, and through initiatives like ART Connect, that phrase is being brought to life. 'As libraries around the world evolve into "third places" – welcoming spaces beyond home and classroom where people can relax, connect, and engage – showcasing student artwork is a natural extension of this shift,' notes Scicluna.

ART Connect has become a powerful tool for encouraging self-expression beyond academic or professional roles, offering students and staff a safe space to step outside their comfort zones. 'Because it comes from within the institution, it allows people to come out of their shell,'

Scicluna explains. Many participants, particularly staff members who may be shy about showcasing their creativity, find encouragement through the positive feedback they receive, often leading them to submit more work.

One student, for example, submitted a photograph that resonated so deeply with a peer it was purchased on the spot, an empowering moment that offered a glimpse into the potential for creative work to be both personally and professionally rewarding.

While the team initially expected only art students to participate, submissions have come from across the University, from ICT, engineering, and psychology to education, economics, and even dance studies, with one participant using AI to generate choreography.

With up to 18 pieces exhibited at a time, the Library space has become increasingly dynamic, filled with artworks of all shapes and sizes that reflect the creative pulse of the UM community.

The team hopes to extend ART Connect to other libraries, including

public ones, encouraging a shift toward libraries as creative community hubs. The long-term goal for ART Connect is to keep it growing as a yearly initiative while boosting its reach and visibility.

Beyond ART Connect, the Library also supports this broader vision of a welcoming space through events such as bibliotherapy sessions, canine storytelling with the SPCA, and exhibitions hosted in collaboration with embassies, each one reinforcing the Library's commitment to fostering connection, wellbeing, and expression on campus. [T](#)



Scan the QR code to find out more and submit your work. The Art Connect page is regularly updated with new submission dates.