

## **The Artist behind the Art: An Interview with Adrian Abela**

### *The Biographies of Adrian Abela and his Inspiration*

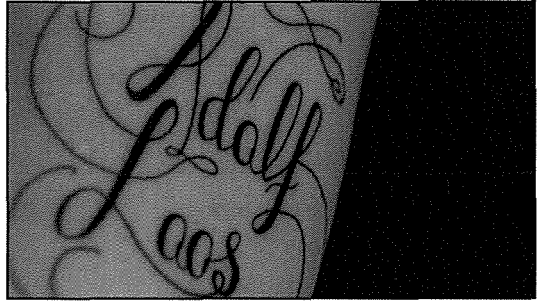
Adrian Abela read for a Degree in Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Malta, during which he also furthered his studies at the Polytechnic of Milan. His work is defined by the interest in things that surround his life. Materials



that contain a narrative, or a narrative that dictates materials, are constantly present in his work. These investigations manifest themselves through painting, drawing, objects, sculpture, actions and architecture which function as tools of artistic research for the intangible.

Adolf Loos (10<sup>th</sup> December 1870 – 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1933), was an Austrian/Czechoslovak architect, most famous for his essay, 'Ornament and Crime'. In this essay he declares the end of Ornament from any object comparing Ornament with people who tattoo themselves. He argues that ornamentation is useless and pointless and only inferior people use ornament in their dress, makeup, and tattoos. He also mentions that everyone who has a tattoo is a criminal in factual terms. Abela made an Ornament out of

Loos' name and tattooed it on the skin of a man. Permanently adorning his body with the name representing the rejection of tattoos and ornaments, with ink that Loos associated with criminals and the degenerate.



Tattoo by Adrian Abela

### *The Interview*

- 1. What inspired you to make a piece about Adolf Loos? Would you consider it a parody of his views?**

To begin with, Adolf Loos was an Austrian/Czechoslovak architect who lived in the 19th century. He is most famous for his essay, *Ornament and Crime*, in which he claims that Ornament is useless and pointless in the Modern age and only inferior people use ornament in their dress, makeup, and tattoos. He also mentions that anyone who has a tattoo is a criminal in factual terms. His work is still studied today and I believe it is still valid. I think the act of tattooing an ornamented version of his name materialised the two things he hates most. The intention was not to make a parody, but to create an antithetical situation.

- 2. Adolf Loos was a modernist who believed that simplicity and practicality were key to human endeavours. He believed that practices such as ornamentation are a waste of time. What would your response to this claim be?**

As I mentioned, the act of making this intervention created space for questioning, something that should be done more often. The act was timed shortly following an incident in which two youngsters who were summoned to court for starting a fight were asked by the judge to read out loud what the matching tattoos on their neck read. The act of ornamenting one's body does not stop there; ornament contains meaning, references and narratives and the act of carrying these permanent adornments opposes the idea that Ornament is a waste of time.

- 3. What do you believe are general themes in your work? Why do you use these themes?**

I do not think that I work with recurrent themes but rather images and materials that interest me in particular periods of time. For instance, I really liked how Napalm looked as a material and what historical baggage it carried, so I constructed a story around it to be able to use it to make sculptures. Currently, I am working with fireworks and shredded paper that is thrown in religious celebrations in Malta to tell a completely different story from its original purpose. The common thread is that the work functions to change the perception of the original material or imagery.

**4. Do you actively attempt to teach lessons to the public through your work?**

I do not actively attempt to teach lessons but I actively engage with the public in the production of the work. MY attempt is to make the public a participant and not simply a final viewer, because I believe art functions to create change. In most projects, I seek to change, in one way or another, the life of the person I am collaborating with. In the case of the tattoo, this person will carry the work with him - he is the living artwork in that people will question him about it. On another note, I am currently collaborating with scientists who are researching the causes of aging in an institute in Holland and it was extremely interesting to see how my interpretation of their scientific work has changed the way they perceive their research.

**5. Do you believe that art has a social or political role to play?**

I think true art has a social and/or political role to play whether directly or indirectly, whether in the time of its production or in the future. I do not like to wait for people to go see something in a gallery, especially in Malta where there is very little interaction. I try to the best of my ability to interact with the viewer in their own 'habitat'.

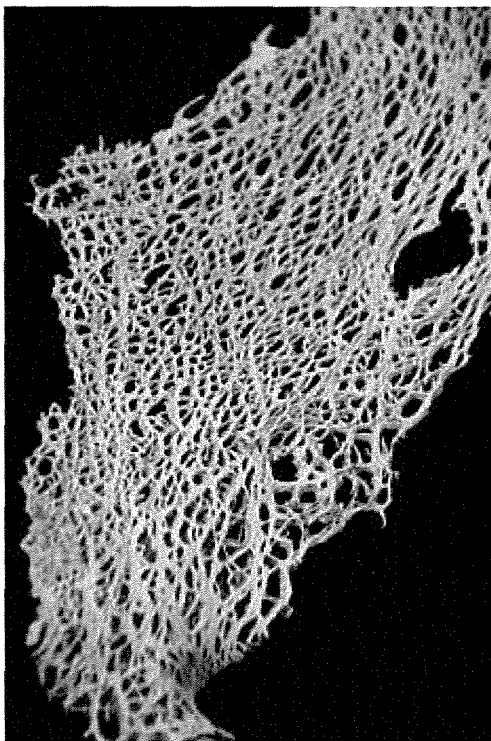
**6. What do you consider the function of art, and its role in human life, to be?**

I believe art will have a greater role in the future, particularly in secular societies, because art is also meant to transmit beauty and

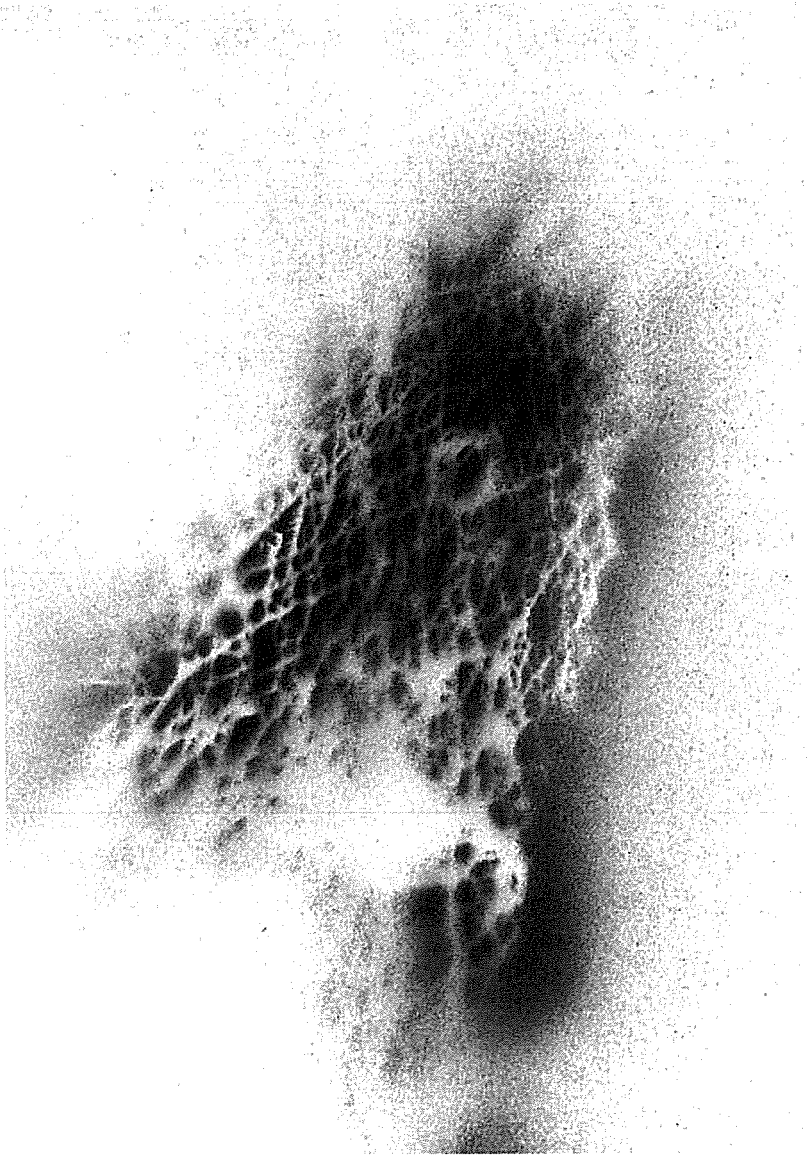
stand in between the man and questions yet unanswered. True art is by humans but is also transcendent of the individual human. I hope that makes some sense.

### **7. What would you consider your greatest inspirations?**

There is no one greatest inspiration but many great inspirations. Inspiration is that which excites the body and the mind, and I have a lot of those things, from the fractal forms in prickly pears to the paradoxes of the Mediterranean Sea. They are the catalyst; I try to make the reagents.



Art Piece by Adrian Abela



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