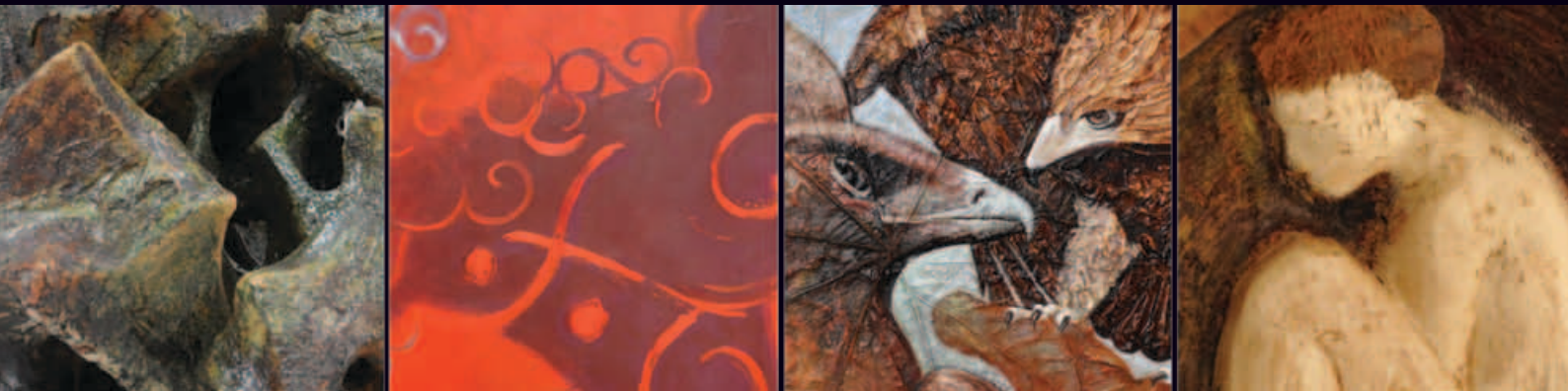


art exhibition

 **APS** bank

2012

APS Bank Centre, Birkirkara



VALERIO SCHEMBRI | ANNA GRIMA | CHARLES CASSAR | RAYMOND AZZOPARDI

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

This is the second exhibition in a three-year project that aims to bring together the talents of twelve Maltese artists. It combines experience enriched through steadfastness of ideal and experimentation in various media, with the zeal of the upcoming generation that seeks to express its views of the world and humanity in its own figurative idiom. The project itself represents one element in a wider array of initiatives that span the rich tapestry of Malta's heritage in literature, music, photography, painting and sculpture in their diverse forms.

APS Bank considers the support it gives to creative artists to be an integral part of its existence. It sees such activity as an expression of the ideals its founders had in the arts as an instrument of human fulfilment. It tries to interpret such support not by directly involving itself in distinct projects but by collaborating with different individuals or entities which have at heart the development of a particular cultural field. The Bank is satisfied with the results obtained to date.

This year, this multilateral collaboration has given birth to four new musical compositions, selected by an international panel, from a number of submissions made by Maltese composers, works which will be premiered

in the series of Annual Concerts organised by the Bank. It also saw the works of talented Maltese photographers submitted for a theme entitled 'Movement', which photographs will be exhibited in Malta and Gozo next year and twelve of them will be published in the Bank's calendar for 2013.

Regarding this exhibition, we thought of enhancing the contents of this programme by incorporating two articles, one presenting a brief history of ceramics in Malta written by the curator himself, Dr Louis Lagana, and the second one written by Ms Christine Porter Lofaro, an art teacher and practicing artist about Studio Art Practice, a Multilayered Resource. Added to the notes on the four artists present, this programme would be more than a 'souvenir' of the occasion; it becomes a useful educational medium on the subject. It builds up into a knowledge pool on this artistic area. APS Bank will be distributing it in both printed and digital formats to facilitate the diffusion of information.



E. P. Delia
Chairman

APS COLLECTIVE ART EXHIBITION 2012

CERAMIC ART IN MALTA

The history of Ceramics dates back to about 12,000 years and it is one of the oldest art forms in human history. Ceramic Art in Malta takes us back before the era of the prehistoric cultures. Clay was the first material which ancient humans used to produce their pots to carry water and food. From clay, they also made statuettes and objects of ritual to honour their gods. When we look at our ancient heritage we come across Malta's rich and great variations of prehistoric pottery. We find interesting symbolical motifs on various pots, and probably the most symbolical aspect is that of the great number of figurines made in terracotta which show the non-conventional renderings of the human figure expressed in a variety of stylised statuettes.



Clay has been always used as a medium precisely for what makes it so attractive to artists. It has fascinating characteristics: the smell, the look, the feel of its granular texture and pliability. Clay is a material which responds to manipulation and with clay ceramic artists bring a work to life and symbolically give it a sense of permanence. The possibility for creative work in ceramics is boundless and contemporary artists seek to celebrate the diversity and richness of human existence.

It is not easy to trace the development of ceramic art in Malta because there is limited information of how pottery was introduced in the daily life of the early Maltese inhabitants. Through the quantity of pottery fragments, oil lamps and amphorae found during excavations of Phoenician and Punic sites one can value the importance of this art form in the island's history.

Some scholars maintain that between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries the Order of the Knights of Malta used to order their ceramics from Caltagirone in Sicily. Most of the ceramic pieces were decorated vases mostly used for medical purposes. During this period, ceramics was used for utilitarian and decorative reasons.



The history of modern and contemporary ceramics in Malta dates back to the 1950's. Ġanni Bonnici was the first ceramic sculptor to introduce the art of ceramics in Malta. One can rightly confirm that Bonnici was the first ceramic art teacher in Malta when he started ceramic classes at St. Joseph Secondary

Technical School in Pawla in 1959. He was the one to set up the ceramic studios at the same school. Later, Gabriel Caruana continued to teach ceramic sculpture to Maltese students. Bonnici was also the sculptor to exhibit ceramic sculpture for the first time in Malta at the Malta Trade Fair Art Exhibition. Unfortunately at that time no catalogues were published for the occasion. This was in the 1950's.

Artists like Esprit Barthet, Antoine Camilleri, Frank Portelli and many other well-known artists of the period took part in this exhibition.

In this exhibition, Bonnici showed a head which he executed many years before when he used to work in the small factory of an Italian family during his art studies in Italy. The glazes he used were not like those used today but were made with 'reflessi metallici', a technique he learned and acquired from the members of the Italian family at the small ceramic factory. Today this work is found in a private collection in Malta.

Over the last three decades the narrowing gap between the traditional realms of fine art and craft has resulted in a shift in perception of what ceramics can be and can mean. All areas of ceramic practice have been revitalized and the creative possibilities that artists enticed by the plastic and tactile qualities of clay have influenced ceramists of all backgrounds. Ceramic artists of the second and third generation like Joseph Casha, Paul Haber, Neville Ferry and Sina Farrugia Micallef continued to contribute to the development of contemporary ceramic art on the islands.

Eight years ago, Sina Farrugia Micallef came out with the idea of holding a joint exhibition with Cypriot artists. The collaboration of organising a collective ceramics exhibition alternating each year in the two countries continued with the initiative of Charles Sammut and Mario Sammut, together with two members of the Cyprus Ceramists and Potters Association, Vassos Demetriou and Efthymios Symeou. Today we can say that some of our finest potters and ceramic artists rank well on the international ceramic art scene.

It is impossible to mention all ceramic artists who are currently contributing to Malta's art scene but it is worth mentioning some leading names who are still seeking to create innovative artworks to enrich Maltese art.

Charles Sammut's name is synonymous with monumental ceramic sculpture. He is a leading name in contemporary ceramics and works enthusiastically in his unique Buskett studio. Sammut had a pivotal role in organising the Malta-Cyprus Ceramic art Exhibitions of these last eight years. His inspiration is derived from the natural habitat and he has a passion for plant and animal life and a dedicated commitment to conservation issues. His environmental ceramic sculpture is designed to be installed in situ, outdoors or in enclosed public places.

Another name in ceramic art in Malta is Mario Sammut. His work is mainly figurative and one could notice the primitivistic approach which the artist strongly manifests in some of his figures with ample hips that resemble the Neolithic figurines found in Malta. Sammut also co-organised the Malta-Cyprus Ceramics Exhibition which became an important event in the two countries. We will be seeing the work of this artist in the APS Art Exhibition in 2013.

George Muscat who was also tutored by Gabriel Caruana, is a talented ceramic sculptor. He specialises in various ceramic techniques especially raku. His ceramic sculptures are the synthesis of his emotions materialised in space and have great symbolic content. His abstract pieces convey an array of emotions to the viewers: joy, happiness, sadness, fear, pain and other human conditions. Today Muscat teaches ceramic art to many students who take this art form seriously.

An artist of British nationality is Zell Osbourne who settled in Malta in the eighties and since then she exhibited regularly in many collective exhibitions on the islands. She also had solo art shows and organises workshops at her pottery-art studio. Her inspiration is derived by marine and microscopic life, natural formations in sand and rock, African art, and arms and armoury. The artist uses a unique and interesting type of glazes which give the effect of bone-like and metal textures.

An important name in ceramic art is Paul Vella Critien. He studied ceramics under Anni Bonnici and Gabriel Caruana and his work is expressed with various ceramic techniques made with vibrant coloured glazes. The artist worked on many monumental pieces and his popularity continued to emerge strongly with the controversial sculpture found in Luqa.

In his ceramic sculpture, Antoine Paul Camilleri, the son of the famous artist Antoine Camilleri focuses on figurative work that express in an original way themes like memory, the family, gender roles, spirituality and personal identity. His figures show the physical experiences of life, sensuality and the emotional and psychological reverberations of the Self.

Kenneth Grima and Joseph Agius are of the younger generation of ceramic artists and their work shows their intriguing facets of life. One is attracted by the repulsion of opposing forces, while the other one is inspired by the vicissitudes of life.

A cheerful character who specialises in porcelain work is Raymond Abela. He creates collections of interesting figurines representing Maltese identity and life, human conditions and the joyful qualities of existence.

Today one can discover many female artists who choose ceramics as the major expression in their art. Some also successfully acquired academic distinctions in ceramic studies in foreign institutions. For example Sue Mifsud recently concluded her Bachelor's degree in Ceramic Art. Her ceramics are very unique especially her 'paintings on clay'. Actually every single colour is fired at a high temperature to obtain that subtlety and one could also notice her signature style expressed with bands of colours and superimposition of glazes to achieve such appealing effects.

Unfortunately in recent years Malta lost two great ceramic artists, Neville Ferry and Julie Apap. Neville Ferry was one of Malta's leading ceramists, who lived in England for more than sixteen years, after he returned to retire in Malta. His work was

drawn from themes based on Malta's Prehistoric past and symbolic representations of the unconscious. Julie Apap was a veteran leader in ceramics in our country. She also derived her inspiration from the Prehistoric temples and their artefacts. Her ceramic vessels and sculptures manifested a variety of symbols which included the beauty of the textures of the weathered limestone and rocks, the deep blue sea and the bright light of the sunshine.

Contemporary ceramics is a diverse one. We find ceramic sculptors, studio potters who produce domestic and industrial ware, architectural ceramists and ceramists who work with computer aided design. The art of ceramics is becoming more popular in Malta and it seems that in visual art practice, artists are using ceramic materials in new, unexpected ways and in different contexts. Today, the biggest challenge for artists, is to eliminate the common stigma that ceramics is only used as a utilitarian trade or artisan craft. Contemporary ceramic artists create work for a growing audience of collectors, work that is not bound by concepts of craft or function. In Malta and many other parts of Europe ceramics has become an important and suitable medium for many artists. They have succeeded in translating this medium from a venerable tradition into contemporary language. Some of these artists did not begin as ceramists, but have moved out of a desire to be different.

In these APS collective exhibitions, each year I introduced an artist who uses ceramics as a major artistic expression. Last year we had on show the ceramic works of the late veteran artist, Joseph Casha. This year we are introducing a freshly established ceramist, Valerio Schembri, who will be showing a selection of his latest experiments in clay and extraordinary ceramic forms fired with special glazes.

Studio Art Practice A Multilayered Resource

Christine Porter Lofaro

Throughout history artists have been performing in different places, in different contexts and under different conditions. Artists have worked independently or were commissioned works under a patronage. Financial support has ranged from nil to full sponsorships, affecting the materials and tools used and how these were manipulated. Opportunities given and the intensity of practical and theoretical knowledge have also differed throughout the years, as well as across different cultures. This multitude of factors has offered different contexts for studio practice. To this very day the environments in which works of art are produced continue to take on new forms.

Studios as Workspaces: What is their Relevance?

Learning more about the creative processes of artists is a key desideratum. How do artists make their creative choices? How do their working methods develop? How is their studio practice formed by the environment in which they live and work? Knowing more about artists' ways of working is in its own right a direct means of understanding a complex and multilayered process. Researchers accomplish this through invaluable interchange generally in the form of notes, journals, diaries and personal correspondence belonging to artists. One must not overlook the value of gathering knowledge through the actual work and the spaces in which these artists live. The current culture of preserving artists' workspaces gives the opportunity to reveal so much evidence surrounding their work and their personalities. This is becoming a common practice, such as in the case of the artist Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890), amongst others. Recently, a multidisciplinary research team led by the Van Gogh Museum, Shell and the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency has worked on a project to examine Van Gogh's studio practice. The aim of this research endeavour, which is still ongoing, is principally to deepen an understanding of the artist's working methods in the context of his times. It sheds light on the provenance of his works; his collaboration with other artists, if any; his acquisition of materials and supplies; and his aptitude and mastery in both theory and practical skills. As is in this case, understanding studio practice allows for a better understanding of what it has been like, or what it is like, to live and work in these sites. Studying physical studio spaces offers an insight into the distinct elements which make up the entire context for an artist's studio practice.

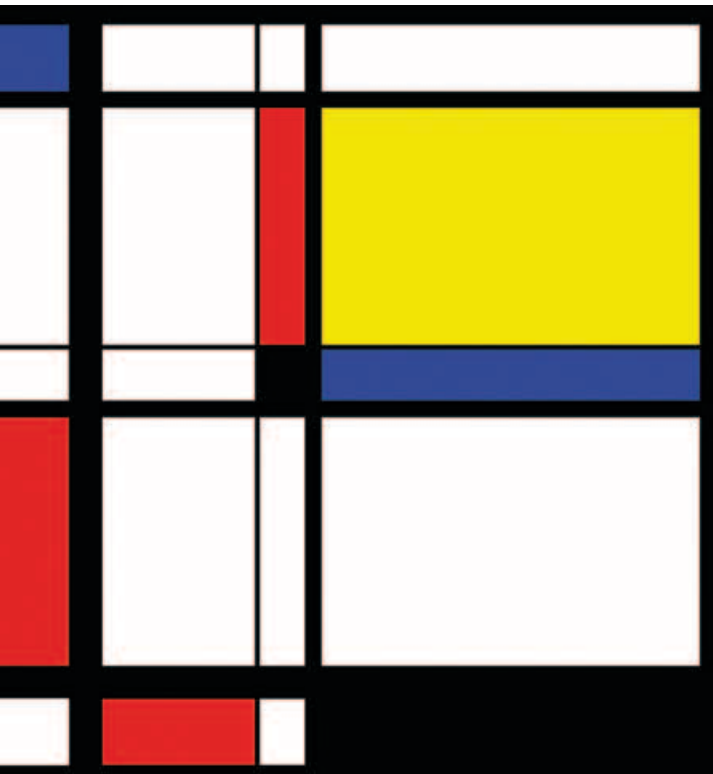
Similarly, there are numerous accounts of studies by researchers and Art historians who have focused on the notion of the studio space to interlace detailed accounts of artists' practice. Ellen G. Landau (2005), an Art historian, particularly researching the work of Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956) and his wife Lee Krasner (1908 – 1984), gives an account of what meaning it has to physically walk and experience being in the home and studio of the artists. She recounts her experience by stating

that, firsthand experience of Pollock and Krasner's home and studio allows extraordinary insight into the visceral role geography can play in stimulating creativity. For example, when I walked the short distance from house to studio in the early morning, hearing the staccato sounds and observing the natural motions in their weed-choked meadow, I finally understood why Krasner's suggested title 'Sounds in the Grass' characterises to perfection the charged intensity of so many of the canvases Pollock painted early on in his new environment (Landau, 2005, p. 30).

Similarly, Wanda M. Corn (2005), an American Art historian, talks about the studio of the artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 – 1986). Her description and account of O'Keeffe's studio offers an insight into how modernist artists have attached importance to 'place' and how this has affected their work. The physical environment which surrounded the artist while producing her work was part of what inspired her to relate to her particular painting style.

The minimalist decoration of her home at Abiquiu, her views, and her organic gardens reorder the relationship of the artist to nature. With O'Keeffe we feel close to Emerson and Thoreau, in that their home exudes a desire to live in peaceful coexistence with the land around it. It is not the wealth of accumulation but her Zen-like absences that impress us. Indeed, we marvel at the discipline she brought to her environment, refusing as she did to fill her spaces with man-made goods. Her environments also seem pointedly anti-consumer, though this, too, is cultural artifice. Simplicity and naturalness were religion in her household (Corn, 2005, p. 8).

These are but three representations of many studies which concede that examining studio spaces, from a lens of physical workspaces, reveals deep layered meanings about the artist under study as well as his/her practice.



The Artist as Researcher

Studio practice is as well attributed to having an affordance to produce knowledge. Through such practice artists gain experience and understanding about themselves and the world around them. Through the process of making art artists can find knowledge about the self or the outer world. This takes place through an interplay between content, material and context. Artists inquire into issues of everyday life and challenge existing perceptions through the realm of studio practice. Greame Sullivan outlines this when he states that, "...art practice needs to be seen as a valuable site for raising theoretically profound questions and exploring them using robust research methods...there is an extensive range of modalities and methods that can be used to yield critically grounded and individually transforming outcomes..." (Sullivan, 2010, p. 119). An example of suchlike ongoing dialogue staggering between the artist, his work and its context can be illustrated by the work of Piet Mondrian (1872 – 1944). The artist has particularly experimented with altering his Paris studio in an attempt to create the perfect space. This site was organised according to the same rules and principles which were applied in his painting. Mondrian's experiment enabled him to develop an intimate understanding of his practice, in a way that it almost appeared as if the artist was trying to live in his work. In essence, it enabled him to understand and articulate the fundamentals of his practice-based research.

Piet Mondrian has particularly experimented with altering his Paris studio in an attempt to create the perfect space.

Studio Practice in Malta

Artistic activity in Malta stretches back to Pre-Historic times and the archaeological remains found on the Island are compelling evidence of an early civilisation embedded in a culture of artistic expression. Throughout the years art in Malta has been shaped by external influences and contacts with other European countries, notably due to Malta's geographical position and a mixture of political dominance, spanning over many years. This stimulus may also be mirrored in the manner in which artists have worked and used their studio environment. As in other countries, studio practice in Malta has taken different shapes and forms.

Here, a deserving caesura, to turn our view on local artists in practice. The four established artists featuring in this publication willingly share some insights into their own studio practice. Drawing on their different methods and art forms (Charles Cassar and Anna Grima are painters, Raymond Azzopardi sculpts in wood, and Valerio Schembri is a ceramic sculptor) they conform to the idea of working independently. Nevertheless, occasional collaborative sessions with their peers together with having their works reviewed by colleagues seem favourable.

Charles Cassar portrays an artist in his studio as an individual who "will be himself, surrounded by his works, engulfed in his dreams and inspired to produce". Ideal physical attributes of art studios may differ from artist to artist, and in this case, adequate lighting and sufficient space for working purposes; storage; and display of works, score highest among these four artists. Yet, despite this, it is interesting to note that the four artists do not perceive physical space as a limiting factor for their artistic production. Anna Grima points out that rather than physical limitations, there are other abstract realities which may affect her work, "in today's pace one really has to persevere to allocate precious time to switch off and be creative".

An equally important factor is the accessibility of their studio, generally required to be part of their homes or close enough. Valerio Schembri describes his studio as "a spot where I have to visit at least two or three times a day when I am in Malta so that I am in constant contact with what is being produced". Very commonly, over a lifetime of an artist, a studio moves in sync with the artist's relocations. Interestingly, Anna Grima stipulates that the studio doesn't have to be anything particular,

"...it need not be anything special...it is what you bring to it and what is to be your focus and intent that will work for you...or not".

The four artists refuse to be tied down to their studio. Inspiring ideas can come to mind anytime and anywhere. The studio, or at times other physical spaces, is for them a vessel which sustains the development of their ideas. Then again, Ray Azzopardi and Anna Grima do feel that there are particular places which inspire their creativity. Being abroad, surrounded by architecture and open spaces as well as being in collective studios working with other artists are two examples.

Fully equipped studios with readily available supplies and fitting tools to work with may take precedence for some artists but for others it may be that they are able to work with whatever is available to them. Although the studio is the preferred working spot for some artists, others are actually ready to work anywhere. Ray Azzopardi welcomes new experiences of working in different places but in his studio he feels more at home, "I have all the tools I need, plus plenty of timber around me to choose from, which is important for me".

Conclusion

I cannot stress enough the fact that art, appertaining to a practice-based paradigm, yields a lot of valuable knowledge if it is explored in-situ, that is, in practice. Here I have highlighted a few of the many facets of studio practice in hope to shed light on the significance of this multilayered resource overarching disciplines such as Fine Art, History of Art, Art Education, and Anthropology amongst others.

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RAYMOND
AZZOPARDI

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Raymond Azzopardi who is a self-taught artist never attended any carving lessons but read about carving and sharpening tools which he considered a very important aspect in carving. After then he continued to one work on sculptures made with different kinds of wood.

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Title: Theatre
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 33cm x 20cm x 50cm (h)
Signed: 2012



Raymond Azzopardi, a self taught sculptor, was born in Hamrun in 1956. Azzopardi was interested in drawing at a very young age and used to draw in class during English and Maths lessons. As a boy he never had sculpture in mind but he kept drawing and painting. When he was about 8 years old he had the opportunity to visit the studio of the famous Maltese sculptor and painter, Joseph Kalleja who happened to be a great friend of his grandfather.

In the early 1980's Azzopardi became a member of an Art club "Nighnu Bi-Arti" where he met his first friends with the same interests. In 1985 he exhibited his first paintings with seven other members at the Museum of Fine Arts. The title of the exhibition was "Wirja bla Isem". During those years he became interested in wood carving and sculpture and because wood was always at hand he tried his first 30cm sculpture in Parana wood. Raymond Azzopardi who is a self-taught artist never attended any carving lessons but read about carving and sharpening tools which he considered a very important aspect in carving. After then he continued to work on sculptures made with different kinds of wood.

In the early 1990's the artist took part for the first time as a sculptor by participating in a collective art exhibition which was held at the Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta. It was curated by Mr. E.V. Borg. It was the most important exhibition during that period which encouraged him to pursue his artistic expression in sculpture. This was an art exhibition entitled "An Idiom in Wood" and was held at the Cathedral Museum in Mdina. Azzopardi was the youngest sculptor of the group and showed 8 works all made in mahogany. The artist is inspired by everyday life, the people he meets and the media. His most favourite subject is maternity. Azzopardi works on different shapes and textures. He believes that wood carving is a strong medium which will not die out as other crafts did. Wood carving provides the artist a great challenge to work on different themes.

BIO

RAYMOND
AZZOPARDI



Title: People
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 80cm x 23cm x 40cm (h)
Signed: 2012



In this exhibition Raymond Azzopardi is presenting six sculptures in wood. Although his works are mainly figurative, he draws inspiration by a variety of sources. The theme of dancing is central to this collection of wood sculpture. In his work Duo, the artist is showing a female and male ballet dancers. He captures with great intensity the body movements and expressions of the dance activity of the couple. The female dancer is holding a white cloth and her hands are raised ecstatically in the air. The aesthetic beauty of the work is found in the graceful curvilinear twist of the figures. This contributes to the movement of the composition of the sculpture.

In recent years, the artist has been using a new method of encrusting ribbons of 'tessera'-like pieces of natural coloured wood to give his sculptures more movement in his composition. This delicate stylisation is very original and now forms an integral part of his style. A good example of this elaborate method is found in Arabesque. Azzopardi successfully creates the graceful movement of a ballerina with the typical pointed hands and feet forming a diagonal body to attain a flowing composition.

Title: Duo
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 55cm x 20cm x 85cm (h)
Signed: 2011



An interesting work shown in this exhibition is entitled Child's Play, which depicts an adult holding a large piece of cloth and a child playing 'hide and seek' behind the sheet. This work demonstrates the skill of the sculptor to turn a block of wood into moving figures and flowing drapery effecting motion in space and dynamism of the conception.

In recent years Raymond Azzopardi started to experiment by applying paint and texture to his carved wooden figures and objects. Like in ancient Greek sculpture he uses paint to produce a more lively effect of the movement of the figures. In his work called 'Theatre' the artist reminds us of the ancient Greek tragedy or comedy expressed in the typical figure of an actor holding a mask to cover the face and dressed in a pinkish white robe. Three blocks of wood painted in red, yellow and blue form part of the composition. This piece symbolically dramatises the nature of human experience in the civilised world.

It seems that Azzopardi prefers the imaginary world of mythology. In another work in this collection, a low relief sculpture entitled 'Moods', the artist depicts a carved seated nude figure in a circular wood plaque. This work again reminds us of the

Greek low and high relief sculptures. The figure is also painted in white and the hair in reddish brown, while the background is done with a darker brown colour.

Perhaps the best work in Azzopardi's collection is 'People', an intriguing piece of sculpture composed with more than twelve figures. The figures made up of different gender are placed in a sort of a row with each figure showing a particular gesture or movement. One can see various characters from the man in a street gazing at passers-by to a photographer, a pregnant woman with a child, a woman with a pushchair, a young lad on a bicycle and an old lady with a hat. Each figure is painted in a different colour and has a distinctive characteristic. The sculptor's effort was to create different archetypal personalities that depict contemporary society.

I believe that Raymond Azzopardi has a desire to investigate the individual's personal history which affects identity, behaviours, and actions. His images of figures are symbols of specific notions of Western ideals and yet they are elements of fantasy created to show the past and the present, dreams and reality.

Title: Child's Play
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 50cm x 30cm x 50cm (h)
Signed: 2010



Reverse view



Title: Moods
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 40cm x 20cm x 50cm (h)
Signed: 2012



Title: Arabesque
Medium: Wood
Dimensions: 50cm x 20cm x 80cm (h)
Signed: 2012



CHARLES CASSAR

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In this series of paintings Charles Cassar is once again exploring the expressive powers and potential of painting. It is not the traditional way of painting which we know, that is, just colours on canvas but he works on sheets of wood with embossed, thick paint mixed with other materials to achieve a three-dimensional appearance.

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Title: Watchful Instinct
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 85cm x 103cm
Signed: 2012



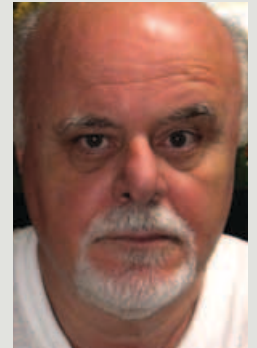
Charles Cassar is one of Malta's leading senior artists. He hails from Valletta but resides and works in Kappara. He was educated at the Lyceum, University of Malta and at the Malta School of Art. In 1964, he placed first in the scholarship exam and was awarded a four-year-government grant to further his artistic education abroad. He studied for two years at Croydon College of Art, Surrey, England and for another two years in Italy at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome where he graduated in 1967. He spent 43 years in the Education Department, where he served as a teacher, Assistant Head of school and as Head of School until he retired in 2005. For a number of years, Charles was a part-time Lecturer in Printmaking at the University of Malta and Lecturer at the School of Art.

During the late sixties he created awareness in graphic design and was a pioneer of computer generated art during the eighties. In 1983 he designed the set of four stamps marking the 'Commonwealth Day' and later served on the Stamp Design Advisory Board.

Charles Cassar works incessantly in his studio but travels a lot, visits museums and adores historical archaeological sites. He has nine one-man exhibitions to his credit and participates regularly in collective shows locally and abroad. His works are to be found in private collections worldwide. Cassar has works at the Museum of Fine Art in Valletta, il Museo d'Arte Moderna in Pistoia and La Pinacoteca d'Arte in Locri. Throughout his long artistic career, he has won various competitions, obtained prizes and recognitions from both local and foreign associations. In 2003 he represented Malta in the European Artist Exhibition which was held at the Italian Embassy in Washington DC. His last retrospective exhibition was held at the BOV Centre in Santa Venera in June and July 2009. Cassar's art is about painting nature's textures reflected in powerful representations of changing moods. He loves the sea, the rocks the land and vegetation and all the creatures which dwell in this mysterious human world. His work is an exploration of the self open to the manifested world of reality and life's journey.

BIO

Charles
Cassar



In this series of paintings Charles Cassar is once again exploring the expressive powers and potential of painting. It is not the traditional way of painting which we know, that is, just colours on canvas but he works on sheets of wood with embossed, thick paint mixed with other materials to achieve a three-dimensional appearance. The subject is the mythical and phantasmagorical representation of the world of animals. The artist uses animals as a metaphor for the Self. This reminds me of great modern artists and writers who used animals as symbols, like Joseph Beuys and Franz Kafka. But Cassar's pictorial language in painting is more realistic and easily apprehended by the viewers.

One of the paintings in this collection is a vibrant painting which is filled with strong emotions. It is made in various shapes and the colourful textures of the butterflies. Guardians of Transparency reflects the artist's concept of change: metamorphoses and the cycle of life. The Butterfly signifies change and freedom. Cassar is in a continuous search to liberate the self from the chains of human injustice and prejudice. He becomes the harbinger of prosperous and joyous times.

In his work 'Intimacy at a risk', Cassar uses symbolically the deer which represents the protection and instinctual energy. In the past, animals like the deer were very important for human beings, used as a source of food and also for sacrifices and rituals. In this painting one could see the images of deer in their expressive duality, that of protection and that of femininity. In Jungian psychology the animal motif is usually symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature. The archetypal deer teaches us the power of gentleness, keen observation and sensitivity. They are in tune with nature and considered as sacred carriers of peace. Unfortunately humans are losing these rich qualities of life which are indispensable for survival.

During our lives we come across unbalanced situations which lead us to act and take decisions in an effort to restore harmony. This is reflected in the painting called Harmony. Here we see the images of the wolf, the fox, the ram and the lamb living together in harmony without any sense of abhorrence. It is a 'positive' painting which mythologises our lives and conveys a message of peace and proves our real purpose and place in the world.



Title: Harmony
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 103cm x 85cm
Signed: 2012

Title: Sparks in the Air
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 103cm x 85cm
Signed: 2012

Title: Intimacy at Risk
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 103cm x 85cm
Signed: 2012



In recent years Cassar used the image of the symbol of the bird in many of his works. A very powerful painting in this exhibition is Sparks in the Air which represents eagles. The eagle is present across a range of beliefs or philosophies of many cultures. It is a symbol of spiritual protection and carries strength, courage, wisdom, illumination of spirit, healing and creation. The eagle has the gift to see hidden spiritual truths, rising above the material to see the spiritual. It also represents great power and balance, dignity and grace, all achieved through knowledge and hard work. Like in his other work called 'Watchful Instinct', Cassar uses another particular bird, the 'owl' as a symbol of wisdom and protection. Yet in other cultures this

peculiar bird meant death or a warning signifying a bad omen. I believe that in Cassar's interpretation the 'owl' conveys a positive message which symbolises universal wellbeing.

In most of these works, Cassar uses large dried leaves which are applied meticulously and directly on board. Then they are covered with paint to achieve chromatic effects and dynamic textures. Trees, vegetation, mountains, rocks and vast skies form part of his landscape. In his work 'In the Beginning', the artist is inspired by the origins of the universe; a thematic approach between the biblical and scientific knowledge of the Creation. He uses Michelangelo's 'Creation', as a basic design

with the typical pose of God outstretched finger pointing to Adam. The artist gave his own graphic interpretation of the figures by emphasizing more on the surrounding marine images, like the ever present shell form, microscopic sea creatures, strange fish shapes, precious coloured pebbles and algae. The creator is actually moulding marine vegetation to form Man. It is as though creation is taking place in the depths of the sea with penetrating light capturing the magnificence of the occasion. Actually, the artist is not interested in the idealisation and heroic aspects of the figures but rather in the metaphorical expression which is rendered through the dynamic interplay between science, myth and the reality we live in.

Title: In the Beginning Perhaps
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 142cm x 103cm
Signed: 2012



Title: Guardians of Transparency
Medium: Oils & impasto on board
Dimensions: 142cm x 103cm
Signed: 2012



ANNA GRIMA

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For many years Anna Grima's inspiration came from the ancient symbols found in Malta's Neolithic culture. She has great interest and enthusiasm in archaeology, astronomy and the cosmos which give her a sense of confidence to express her thoughts in her artwork. Although Grima is considered as a figurative artist, in recent years her work became more abstract, and more expressed with simplified rhythmic shapes.

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Title: The Holy of Holies
Medium: Mixed Media on paper
Dimensions: 60cm x 45cm
Signed: 1998



Anna Grima is a visual artist who has exhibited her art extensively in Malta and abroad. Her work navigates around the concept of 'time-space' relating to natural phenomena between earth and sky matter and spirit which include a philosophical and metaphysical discourse on thoughts and theories that access the dynamic creative impulse. Interdisciplinary practices as diverse as Painting and Drawing, Paper Sculpture and Woodcut Printing, Creative Writing/Illustration and Spatial /Landscape Design are combined in fine art contexts, exploring, defining, researching and converting the multiple considerations around the subject of life into a definite art form or framework.

Born in Malta in 1958, Grima studied art at the Malta School of Art and the Accademia di Belli Arte in Perugia, Italy. She continued to study painting and practised the ancient Japanese art of Gyotaku and had sailing expeditions in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (1984 – 1988). Her first invitation to exhibit her work was in 1982 when Norbert F. Attard and Denis Vella presented the exhibition 'Maltese Women Artists' at the Gallerija Fenici, Valletta. Her first solo exhibition was at Galerie Ripard, Fontainebleau, France, in 1984.

In 1995 she represented Malta in a collective exhibition at the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, celebrating the International Woman's Day. That same year she was the first woman artist in Malta to design a postage stamp for the Malta Post Office on the occasion of the United Nations International Woman's Conference in Beijing, China.

Recently, her works have formed part of international exhibitions and symposiums related to the study and interest in temple culture and sacred sites with a focus on sacred geometry and iconic representations of the sacred in relation to time, space and light, depicting symbols and concepts that echo her native ancestral heritage to resonate with universal truths and beliefs. Many of her paintings hang in private and public collections, and most recently two of her abstracts were chosen to represent Malta for the coming 5 years as part of the prestigious Summa Artis Collection at the Berlaymont building, Brussels.

BIO

Anna
Grima



Title: Echo of the Music of the Spheres
Medium: Acrylic on canvas
Dimensions: 320cm x 120cm
Signed: 2012

For many years Anna Grima's inspiration came from the ancient symbols found in Malta's Neolithic culture. She has great interest and enthusiasm in archaeology, astronomy and the cosmos which give her a sense of confidence to express her thoughts in her artwork. Although Grima is considered as a figurative artist, in recent years her work became more abstract, and more expressed with simplified rhythmic shapes. We notice that the spiral remains an important motif which she uses in many of her paintings. These spiral marks become part of her signature style in her works. Anna Grima uses the spirals to express a spiritual approach to art. She considers the spirals not just as a symbol used by the ancients to express the continuity of life but sees the spiral also as an archetypal symbol. Many of these ancient symbols emerge unconsciously and the artist expresses them without any preconceived meditation. Jungian artist, Susanne F. Fincher suggests: "To early peoples the spiral may have symbolised the pathway of the moon, the growth of plant life, or whirling dances of healing and incantation"(FINCHER, 1991). That is why perhaps, people call the paintings on the ceiling of the Hypogeum chambers: the 'Tree of Life'. Two good examples in this exhibition are her abstract works Mer-Ka-Ab-Ba and Ancient Prayers made with spirals and circles. In the first painting, Grima captures the essence of these universal motifs and transforms them into fluid icons of prehistoric mysticism. Thematically the significance of the first work is about the four aspects which relate to the four human elements that constitute the etheric self, a manifestation of the soul; four elements from which all spiritual beings were formed. They are rooted in the four letters of the Tetragrammaton (JUNG,1959). The other work, Ancient Prayers which is a quadtych, conceptually shows the process in consciousness that transformed us from the third-dimensional world.

In the diptych painting called Sound Vibration, we see a seated female nude with an interesting background taken from a prehistoric pot of the Saffieni phase. The artist is inspired by many sources including the cultic remnants found in the prehistoric shrines. The figure is a metaphor for beauty and is also an archetypal image of innocence and spirituality. Grima created a tranquil moment where rock, air and water unite. One could almost feel the sound of dripping water from the crevices of the cavernous ceiling of the Hypogeum. The reflections of the female figure in water contributes symbolically to the aspect of water as the mater and matrix of 'life'.

The painting Holy of Holies at the Hypogeum was done in situ in 1998 before the complete restoration of the underground sanctuary. Grima expresses the momentous feeling of what she was perceiving inside these sacred spaces. The artist felt a spiritual energy when working inside these temples. It is the psychic connection with the place. These were expressed in orange, purple and ochre colours which dominate the whole composition. Light is opaque in some places and transparent in others. Using her language of lines, forms and colour, the artist shares with us the experience to penetrate into the world of 'inner-earth'.

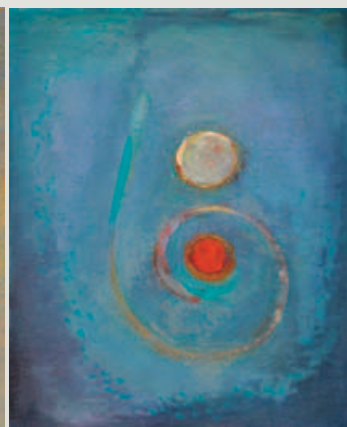
In recent years Anna Grima's work became more abstract and vibrant as we see in her diptych Echoes of the Music of the Spheres. The artist explores other realms of the unconscious; a kind of 'automatism'; when colours are applied on canvas deliberately and spontaneously in an unconscious manner until objects and images like spirals and circular motifs start to appear and the artist takes the conscious control of the final vision of the work. Yet her inspiration remains strongly derived by the images of Prehistoric Malta, the cyclical cycles of nature, ritual and symbolism and ancient spirituality.



Title: Sound Vibration
Medium: Acrylic on canvas
Dimensions: 160cm x 120 cm
Signed: 2010/12



Title: MER-KA-AB-BA
Medium: Mixed media on paper
Dimensions: 100cm x 150cm
Signed: 2012



Title: Ancient Prayers
Medium: Mixed media on paper
Dimensions: 25cm x 21cm
Signed: 2012

VALERIO
SCHEMBRI

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In these works Schembri successfully develops a paradox between two opposites. The borderline between 'being' and 'appearing' turns out to be unstable and uncertain in the interplay of revelations and concealments.

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Title: Abstract I
Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft
Crank – Sawdust Firing
Dimensions: 45cm x 30cm x 60cm (h)
Signed: 2011



BIO

Valerio
Schembri



Valerio Schembri (b.1969) who was brought up in Mosta (Malta) has strong ties with his native village where he spent days exploring the beauties of Wied il-Ghasel, (valley of honey).

He read architecture at the University of Malta (1988 – 1993), tutored in design amongst others by abstract painter Alfred Chirchop (b. 1933) and Architect Richard England (b. 1937). A few years later he set up his own practice: Valerio Schembri Project Workshop in 1997. Later Schembri obtained a Masters degree in Baroque Studies at the University of Malta (2000 – 2002) under the guidance of the architectural historian Prof. Dennis De Lucca (b. 1952), Philosophy Professor Rev. Peter Serracino Ingliott (1936 – 2012) and art historians Prof. Keith Sciberras (b. 1970) and Prof. Mario Buhagiar (b. 1945).

In 2003 Schembri had his first experience of artistic clay expression with ceramist Zell Osbourne (b. 1953). In 2005 he started attending lessons with George Muscat (b. 1962) and participated in throwing workshops with Kenneth Grima (b. 1971) in 2006. He has been under the constant guidance of Paul Haber (b. 1940) since 2007.

As a ceramist he participated in various local collective exhibitions including several editions of the prestigious Malta-Cyprus Collective Exhibition, in Malta and Larnaca, Cyprus. Schembri participated in the International

Ceramica Multiplex in Varazdin, Croatia in 2009 where he was also invited to deliver a lecture on his ceramic works. He has also been selected for participation in the 2012 edition. In 2010 the ceramist was awarded an honourable mention in the prestigious European Biennale for Ceramics in Mamer, Luxembourg. In 2011 Schembri also took part in the Sicily-Malta-Cyprus collective in Bagheria, Sicily. In 2012 he was selected among the finalists and exhibited in the 32nd Concors Internacional de Ceramica de l'Alcora which was held in Alcora, Spain.

Locally he won two honourable mentions and three runner-up awards in open competitions by The Malta Society of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce and was also runner up in the Sculpture Section of The Malta International Arts Biennale in 2007.

The two works that Schembri submitted for the Public Arts in Gozo 2011 competition were short listed among the winners. On commission by the Ministry for Gozo, one of these models is actually being reproduced full scale in Gozitan hardstone.

Valerio Schembri presently lives and works in Naxxar, Malta, where he runs his own architectural atelier and his ceramics studio. The artist's gallery is available online on www.valerioschembri.com.

Title: Abstract II

Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft Crank –
Naked Clay/Oxides

Dimensions: 45cm x 40cm x 100cm (h)

Signed: 2011

Throughout the ages artists were inspired by many sources. This latest collection of works by Valerio Schembri is the result of his fascination with the intellectual writings of two great writers, Iain Pears and Umberto Eco.

Iain Pears (b.1955) is an English art historian, novelist and journalist who wrote many deeply touching novels like his famous 'An Instance of the Fingerpost' and 'The Dream of Scipio'. In the former novel Pears dramatises the ways in which a Venetian medical student, a young man intent on proving his late father innocent of treason, a cryptographer and an archivist, can witness the same events yet remember them falsely. In the latter one the author, through a philosophical treatise, ingeniously interconnects the story of the lives of three men who were in Provence in France in three significant periods in history: Roman Empire times, the time of the Black Death in the Middle Ages and in Modern history, the time of World War II.

The idea of different versions of the same event and interconnected stories is significant of Schembri's starting point for these works. The development of this concept is clearly and strongly visually narrated in six abstract ceramic sculptures.

For example, in the first work Abstract No. 1, we see the work expressed like a 'dream', shaping its form emerging from one source, that is, a monolithic structure, light and smooth in texture. The absence of the rib-like shaped forms which are found in his early works are absent in the ceramist's recent works to give way to the various forms. An architect by profession, his earlier ceramic sculptures gave the impression of being all inspired by the concepts of place, ideology and space. With time the ceramist developed an idiom of bio-constructivism based on the observations of nature. Today however we see the construction of the form being cleaved and split, into other forms or versions all contributing to the overall aura of the work.



Title: Abstract III

Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft Crank –
Glazed Earthenware

Dimensions: 100cm x 50cm x 75cm (h)

Signed: 2012

Title: Abstract IV

Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft Crank –
Glazed Earthenware

Dimensions: 50cm x 40cm x 70cm (h)

Signed: 2012



In Abstract No. 2, the artist used oxides on naked clay to achieve a more colourful and a slightly smoother granular effect, producing a warm and tactile feeling, which is absent in the harsh textures of his earlier works.

Although in essence this is a further development on the concept of Abstract No 1, we notice the similarity in Pears' concept and versions of one event or interconnected stories at different points in time.

As stated earlier, Schembri is also inspired by the books of prolific writer, Umberto Eco (b. 1932). The author is renowned for his famous book 'The Name of the Rose' published in 1980. Eco narrates a story which took place in an abbey during the Middle Ages, through an old monk when he was much younger. The conceptual element of different points in time seems to have preoccupied Schembri to explore more the visual aspect of his investigation. This development continues in the third abstract sculpture, Abstract

No.3, where the artist separates and opens the structure to discover better the internal spaces of the work. The internal structures evolve in small labyrinthine tunnels or voids, producing a complicated and complex work.

The sculpture now becomes constitutive dialectic between inside and outside, between personal feeling and outside image. The sculpture becomes an investigation of the issue of how the visible face and the invisible spirit animating it, are related.

Title: Abstract V
Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft Crank –
Glazed Earthenware
Dimensions: 65cm x 45cm x 55cm (h)
Signed: 2012



Title: Abstract VI
Medium: Ceramics – Premium Craft
Crank – Underglaze
Dimensions: 40cm x 45cm x 75cm (h)
Signed: 2012



Metaphorically this symbolises life and a multifaceted society. On the lines of Luigi Pirandello in 'Il gioco delle parti' (The name of the Game, 1918) Schembri addresses the conflict between life and forms into its extreme consequences. Abstract No. 4 and Abstract No. 5 show a more developed shape of the structure, but the shell is now produced with a coarser material to create a sense of crudeness. In the latter work, more prominence is given to the structure, which then takes the centre stage in the final piece

Abstract No. 6, where the viewers will notice the dynamic tension between the outer and inner parts of the sculpture.

In these works Schembri successfully develops a paradox between two opposites. The borderline between 'being' and 'appearing' turns out to be unstable and uncertain in the interplay of revelations and concealments. Form becomes a cover to a living structure, a structure that cannot be recognised and does not have an identity

except through its cover. The cover translates the internal skeleton into an image. I believe that this is the most interesting aesthetic value of this series of ceramic sculpture he is presenting in this exhibition. It is an investigation of change, deconstruction and symbolic representation of time and motion in the sculptural form. The artist now is breaking free from the constraints of conventional depiction of ceramic sculpture and embarked on a new search of the multiplicity of time and its relationship to the sculptural form.

CURATOR



Dr. Louis Laganà is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art and Art History at the Junior College, and also lectures on *Art, Culture and Tourism* with the Institute For Tourism, Travel and Culture, University of Malta. He is also a practicing artist, art historian and critic and specialises in Modern and Contemporary Art. His papers were delivered in many conferences abroad and published in learned journals and newspapers.

CONTRIBUTOR



Christine Porter Lofaro is an Art teacher and practicing artist. She completed a Bachelor's degree in History of Art and a Master's degree in Creativity and Innovation at the University of Malta. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield (UK). Her research interests include learning spaces, creativity, and studio art practice as a tool for research.

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