

# Maltese minimalism

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When one thinks of the Maltese and their love of plastic flowers, badly-cast simpering gypsum statues with gilded curves and the ubiquitous 1980s crystal chandelier, the last word that one would associate with them is “minimalist”.

Indeed, so ingrained is excess in the national DNA that, despite Pinterest and Tumblr being readily available to virtually all of the population, ‘dream dresses’ remain covered in thousands of rhinestones and houses reign resplendent in shiny, satin cushions and gold swirled curtains.

Thus, when I was asked to an exhibition titled *Maltese Minimalism* – which formed part of Camilleri Paris Mode’s week dedicated to launching covetable items such as sound products by B&O in collaboration with Astral and new shades by Silent Gliss as a lead up to their 127th anniversary – I was more than a little intrigued by the thought of what I would be greeted with.

The capsule exhibition was divided into two parts, with one side of the room being dedicated to the photographic work of architect and photographer Julian Vassallo and the other holding pastel drawings by creative director Matthew Attard Navarro.

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Despite the fact that the casual observer might surmise that the two different media used by the artists had little in common with each other, there was profoundness yet simplicity in both artists’ work that made for a very interesting symbiosis.

Focusing on the body rather than the face of his subjects, Vassallo used the lithographic process to stunning effect and created a living, breathing collage of greys which were intense in their vivacity and complemented the starkness of Attard Navarro’s sharp outlines.

While Vassallo made his subjects look almost as if they were architectural installations within a landscape that had been specifically placed to fit in with all that was around them, Attard Navarro’s flat pieces stuck out of their empty backgrounds and animated the blankness behind.

Vassallo’s choice of anonymity gave the viewer the feeling of being a voyeur of sorts, while the minimalism of both leads to a

sense of otherness and of being invited to inhabit someone’s previously inaccessible world. While the visuals themselves were not minimalist, the motifs running through them, as well as the inherent elegance of both selections, evoke an elegant nostalgia if not a wistful air.

It is interesting to note that while the pieces themselves gave the viewer a sense of looking beyond a curtain, the subjects were very solid and very focused. Vassallo’s crisp photography portrays the human body in a quasi-tactile way, presenting neoclassical torsos in improbable settings. Attard Navarro’s

lines too were extremely solid and defined despite their being sketches, capturing transient yet fascinating moments.

In keeping with the exhibition’s theme, the works were put up against an ultra-minimalist background. Even the refreshments served on the night by LVB were designed to be as simple as possible.

*Maltese Minimalism* showed a very solid and decisive move away from the clichéd and pastiche work which can be very prevalent on our shores, a promising attempt at inspiring profoundness of thought beyond that which is obvious and apparent.

