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JRoldan on works created with patron turned artist, Christian Pandolfino

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REVIEW

Sudanese Art upholds a legacy of standing up to military regimes

The Malta

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ANN DINGLI

Art in *Life and Death* – A Legacy of Patronage



JRoldan and Christian Pandolfino in the London studio

Ann Dingli interviews JRoldan – a London-based visual artist who worked for over a decade with Christian Pandolfino – an art lover and patron who was killed in Malta earlier this summer.

It was only in the nineteenth century that the modern role of the artist as autonomous genius gained ground. Before that, artists were overwhelmingly beholden to their patrons – the relationship between creator and benefactor propelling themes in art history that would permanently shape the world's visual heritage.

>> *Interview, pg. 19*

MARIA GALEA

OPINION

Cultural Catastrophe

“Artists, art professionals, exhibition spaces and galleries in Malta are some of the most severely impacted in the current COVID-19 crisis. While our arts sector is known for its growing talent, its ecology is fragile at the best of times.”

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Detail of illustration by Te fit-Tazza for the Many Faces of The Mill collection of the Gabriel Caruana Foundation. >> pg.05



- * | **SPOTLIGHT** Joseph Fountain keeps memories alive – aside from being a cousin to Fountain, Chris Pandolfino was a brother, sister, father, mother, mentor, child, collaborator, and eternal best friend
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As summer turns to autumn, and communities all over Europe face a second wave of a virus that has dominated 2020, questions around the future of art world and cultural enterprise feel more significant than ever. In Malta, artists and art institutions are at the precipice of an unknown future – one that is filled with far more questions than answers. Will independent artists be able to carry on working without financial aid? When will it be viable for galleries to function normally again, if ever? With limitations on social experiences, how will art's subject-matter change and adapt to remain relevant and impactful to its audiences?

After years of efforts working towards propelling the local contemporary arts scene forward, lack of funding and deep ambiguity around the destiny of physical art spaces feels like a heavy shadow that is slow to shift. Yet, despite these insecurities, art remains a constant touchpoint for humane experiences. It represents the highest form

of human expression, and therefore will not be extinguished easily. Issue 12 celebrates that persistence, and the enduring relevance of the art world during a time of global uncertainty.

Perhaps most poignantly, this issue looks at the legacy of an art patron whose life was ended prematurely earlier this summer. Christian Pandolfino's fascinating relationship with the art world is explored in an interview between Ann Dingli and JRoldan – Pandolfino's long-time artistic collaborator. He is also remembered in a tribute article by Joseph Fountain, his cousin and friend. Prominent artist Isabelle Borg is also remembered ten years after her death, in an homage article by Lisa Gwen Andrews that outlines Borg's legacy and influence on the local art scene. Konrad Buhagiar contemplates the meaning and impact of love and locked doors, whilst Richard England returns to sketching as a meditative pastime.

Elsewhere, the issue looks at the art world's persistent reckoning with the global

pandemic and its effects on society. Erica Giusta questions the opportunity for a cultural and societal shift. Kenneth Zammit Tabona ponders the future of the theatre, and Michaela Moro speaks candidly in an interview about Malta's urban development being at a crucial crossroads. All this, as well as the usual news and events rundown, is covered in this latest issue – a reminder that art will always be a weapon of solace, even in the most challenging of times.

We will be back with another issue of Artpaper in December 2020; until then if you would like to get in touch regarding editorial or advertising, contact us by email on info@artpaper.press, or call (+356) 9929 2488. You can follow Artpaper on Instagram and Facebook.

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After Party, Nadur, 1995, Amelia Troubridge

Competition:

Go Figure!
by Bruce Eynaud

Can you guess the 3 artworks that make up this figure?

Send your answers by email to info@artpaper.press by 31 October 2020, with 'Competition' as the subject, for a chance to win:

First Prize: A month-pass to all Heritage Malta sites

Second Prize: €20 voucher from VeeGeeBee Art Shop

Winners from previous issue:

(1) **Michela Pia Camilleri** has won a month's pass to all Heritage Malta sites and (2) **Christina Darmanin** has won a €20 voucher from VeeGeeBee Art Shop



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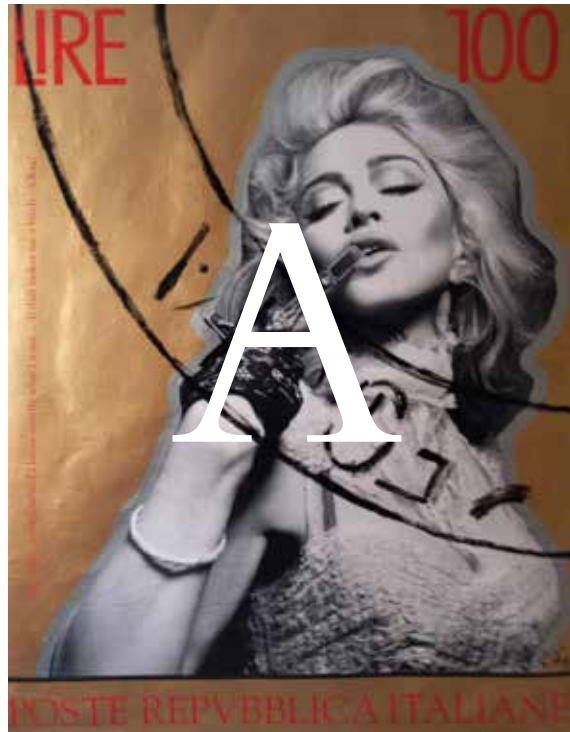
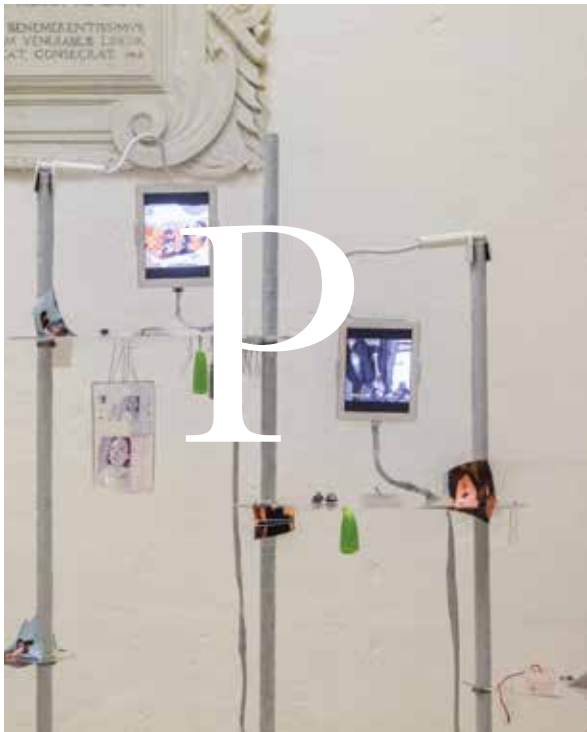
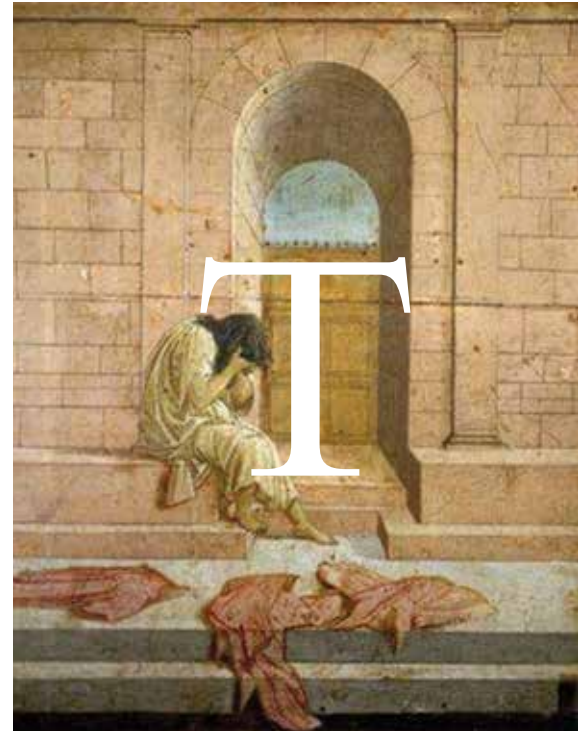
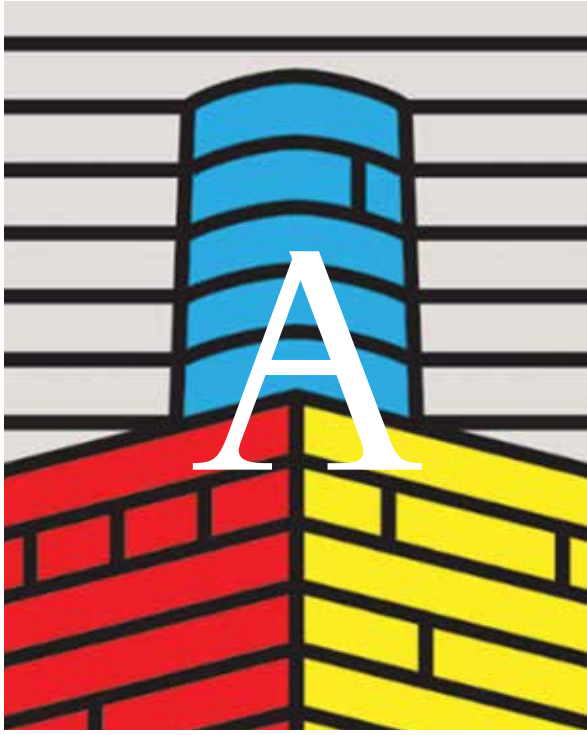
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The Malta
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+ Art News / *On the Scene*
October - December '20

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+ ON *the* SCENE.

"Perhaps one of the roles of the artist is to think for society. They think in ways few of us can. Artists don't only think in languages, they think with all their senses"
Joanna Delia

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REVIEWS

01

Discussing Art on Campus FM



The Sacred in Art is a one-hour radio programme covering everything that falls under the category of sacred art, which manifests in different forms. Experts in History of Art will give information about artists and commissions in churches within the context and period they were created. The programme will also discuss Modern and

contemporary art, as well as the subject of iconography and symbolism in Holy images. Sacred music will also feature in the programme, highlighting composers and their work related to liturgy and rituals. Follow the programme live on Campus FM on Mondays at 5.30pm and Wednesdays at noon.

02

Celebrating The Mill - Art, Culture and Crafts Centre

Last March, the Gabriel Caruana Foundation launched a call for illustrators for *The Many Faces of the Mill* collection, celebrating The Mill's 30th anniversary as an art, culture and crafts centre. The illustrators and artists selected include Ed Dingli, Joyce Camilleri, Luke Caruana, MaltaType (Matthew Demarco), textpresso, Noura Abdel, Steffi Venturi, Steven Scicluna, Te Fit-Tazza and Zack Ritchie. Each have reinterpreted The Mill using different techniques and approaches, giving individual pieces their own unique contemporary aesthetic. Ten illustrations have been selected and are being presented as limited-edition prints. The illustrations are printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Ultra Smooth fine art paper through a collaboration with Ilab Photo, a Maltese company specialising in photographic and fine art printing. This initiative is also a means to support creative practitioners and the organisation during the Covid-19 pandemic. The limited-edition prints, together with a small selection of Gabriel Caruana's works on paper, are being made available on the gabrielcaruanafoundation.org/shop. Follow the Gabriel Caruana Foundation on Facebook, Instagram and gabrielcaruanafoundation.org or get in touch on outreach@gabrielcaruanafoundation.org.



Illustration by Ed Dingli for the Many Faces of the Mill collection for The Gabriel Caruana Foundation

03

Artemisia

"I will show Your Illustrious Lordship what a woman can do"



In 17th-century Europe, at a time when women artists were not easily accepted, Artemisia Gentileschi was exceptional. She challenged conventions and defied expectations to become a successful artist and one of the greatest storytellers of her time. Artemisia painted subjects that were traditionally the preserve of male artists and for the male gaze; transforming meek maidservants into courageous conspirators and victims into survivors.

In this first major exhibition of Artemisia's work in the UK, showing until the 24th of January, visitors will be able to see her best-known paintings, including two versions of her iconic and viscerally violent *Judith beheading Holofernes*; as well as her self portraits, heroines from history and the Bible, and recently discovered personal letters, seen in the UK for the first time. Follow in Artemisia's footsteps from Rome to Florence, Venice, Naples and London. Hear her voice from her letters, and see the world through her eyes. www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Image: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)*, about 1638-9. Oil on canvas, 98.6 x 75.2 cm, Royal Collection Trust / HM The Queen (405551). Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019

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FAITH.

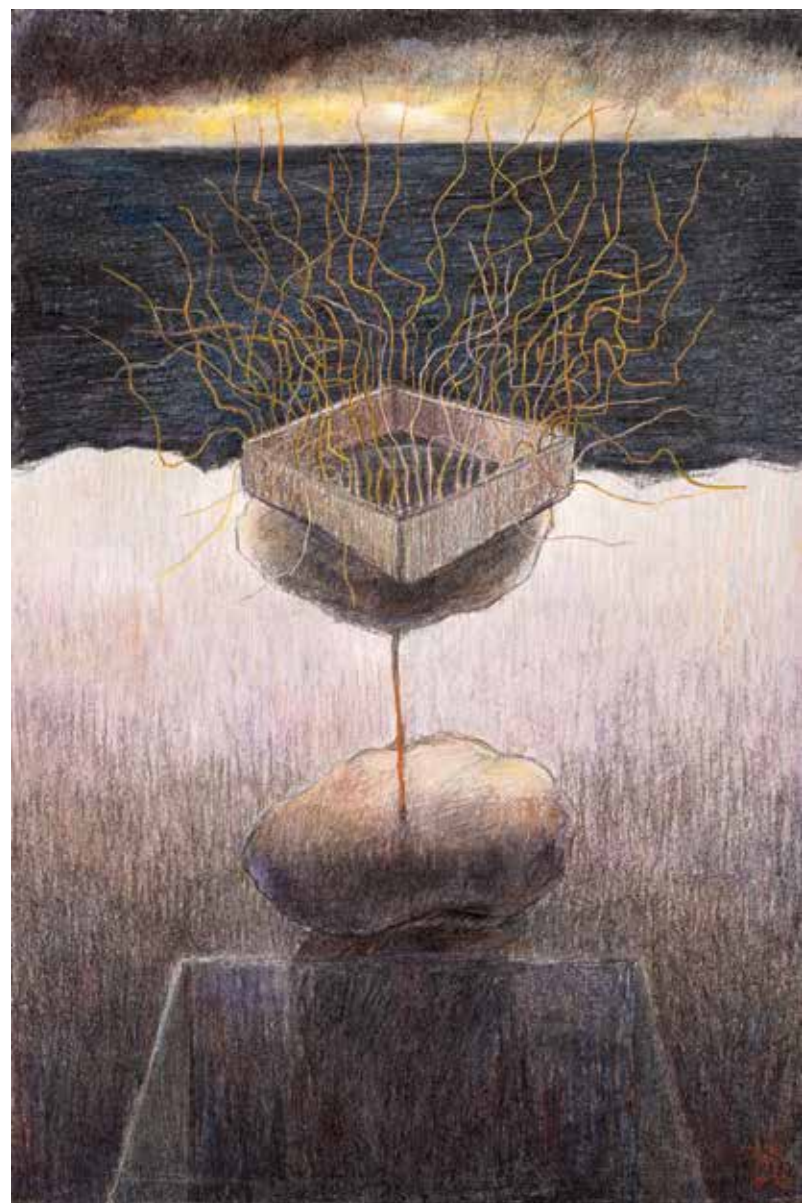
Faith – a much broader concept than the small word might suggest. For the individual, for instance, it can signify one's belief system, inherited or otherwise. However, we choose to think about faith, in today's globalised world, the options that any individual meets are many. The primary questions are: how do you keep up with the pace of the rapid changes that may be presented by the world around us? And what are the consequences if we don't? Taking the underlying themes of tradition, family, religion and politics, Faith is an exhibition comprised of a unique photographic archive taken over the past 27 years by the English-Maltese photographer Amelia Troubridge. Shot through analogue photography and combining reportage with portraiture, the work represents a timeline of significant socio-political moments in the history of the Maltese Islands from 1993 to the present.

Faith will run from the 11 December 2020 until 31 January 2021 at Spazju Kreattiv, St James Cavalier, Castille Place, Valletta.



Looking into the Birdhouse, Nadur, 1995, Amelia Troubridge

MALTA



Rising Truth

The Goldfinch

An exhibition of drawings discuss corruption and moral corrosion

'What do you think the artist is? An imbecile who only has eyes if he's a painter, or ears if he's a musician... On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way... No, painting is not made to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defence against the enemy'. Picasso in an Interview with Simone Tery, 1945.

The Goldfinch is an exhibition of drawings by Joseph Farrugia, showing a collection of works executed over the past three years. Angered by the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, and Malta's corrupt political climate, Farrugia's The Goldfinch is a call to arms against the indifference, institutional collapse, and moral corrosion that plagues Malta.

The exhibition is organised in support of the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation. Open until the 25th of October at Splendid, 74 Strait Street, Valletta. The exhibition is open from Monday to Friday: 12:30-14:30; 16.30 - 19:30 and Saturday and Sunday 10:00- 13:30; 16.30 - 19.30.



The Free and The Dead

KENNETH ZAMMIT TABONA is Artistic Director of the Valletta International Baroque Festival and of Malta's Teatru Manoel. He is also one of Malta's best-known visual artists and illustrators.



MALTA

KENNETH ZAMMIT TABONA

BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

Confessions of a frustrated Artist and Artistic Director

Never in my life did I ever imagine that the world would be plunged into a crisis on this scale. I'm sure I'm not alone.

Since March, we have existed in a surreal world – many of us barricaded in our homes, wondering when it would be safe to resume our former life. The days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months and we are told that they may turn into years.

The pandemic is capricious and unpredictable. It strikes inexplicably, killing some, maiming others and affecting others asymptotically.

As we all know after seven months of rumours and spurious theories, one of the most affected areas of our lives has been the arts. As Artistic Director of the Manoel Theatre, our national theatre, the plans and events that had been meticulously put into place years earlier had to be scrapped, and as soon as the last chorus of Rossini's *Otello* faded last March the theatre closed and our summer programme was postponed or cancelled. We replaced these performances with online streams of our past productions and have planned 'Covid-friendly' performances that can happen with or without an audience from October until December, which will also be streamed.

We had a call for applications and the response was very encouraging; I was highly impressed with the imaginative projects for Covid-friendly performances that were proposed. These will be spaced out between October and April.

We hope to open our doors with a recital by soprano Nicola Said singing Samuel Barber's nostalgic Knoxville, two romantic songs; *Nursery Rhymes* by Arthur Bliss and the magnificent *Seven Early Songs* by Alban Berg. Nicola will be accompanied by pianist Christine Zerafa, and for the Barber, a quartet: on first violin, Nadine Galea; second violin, Stefan Calleja; clarinet, Godfrey Mifsud; and Desirée Quintano on cello. The commission for transcription for this unusual combination was given to composer Reuben Pace. The concert should be wonderful and will open the season on the 23rd of October.

The most painful decisions involved in our programme recalibration concerned the January Baroque Festival and the March opera.

The programme for the festival is worked on from two years prior, and the 2021 festival programme was publicised during this year's festival, when Coronavirus – for all we knew – was still a rumour. We contacted all the 300 plus artists in April and told them all that there stood a very real possibility that the festival in its usual form would not be feasible and gave them alternative dates in January 2022. Thankfully, they all accepted. Covid permitting we will replace the 2021 festival with a smaller more manageable Covid friendly one, with or without an audience, which will have to be socially distanced.

The opera was not so simple. We had planned to stage Richard Strauss's only chamber opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, at the end of February. All arrangements had been made; conductor, director etc. Auditions had been held and the cast completed. The risk however proved to be too great, and we decided to postpone the event to March 2022. This would have represented the first Strauss opera performed in Malta, in German with Maltese and English surtitles. Covid permitting we will stage Purcell's delightful but poignant *Dido and Aeneas* in February instead.

Another first that was scuppered was the opera *Pelopida* by Maltese composer Geronimo Abos, which was meant to happen at the beginning of September. Again, this would have been the first time that a baroque opera by a Maltese composer would have been staged at the Manoel. A terrible pity as this opera, which was commissioned by Teatro Argentina in Rome in 1747, has not been performed in its entirety in living memory. This opera has been tentatively postponed to September 2021.

Where plays are concerned, we have some wonderful fare in the pipeline; de Filippo's *Napoli Milionaria*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and the perennial favourite, *Zeza tal-Flagship*, should be given a new lease of life and charm a new generation with the foibles of our ancestors.

Meanwhile we find ourselves between the Homeric monsters wondering how we can navigate the treacherous Covid waters in future. We cannot close down. That would be the death knell of art and culture. We must make the theatre as reassuringly safe as possible, taking all the necessary precautions. We must contribute to engaging artists, both local and foreign, to create art. And whether or not we have an audience, the creative arts must continue to be supported.

This is our *raison d'être*.

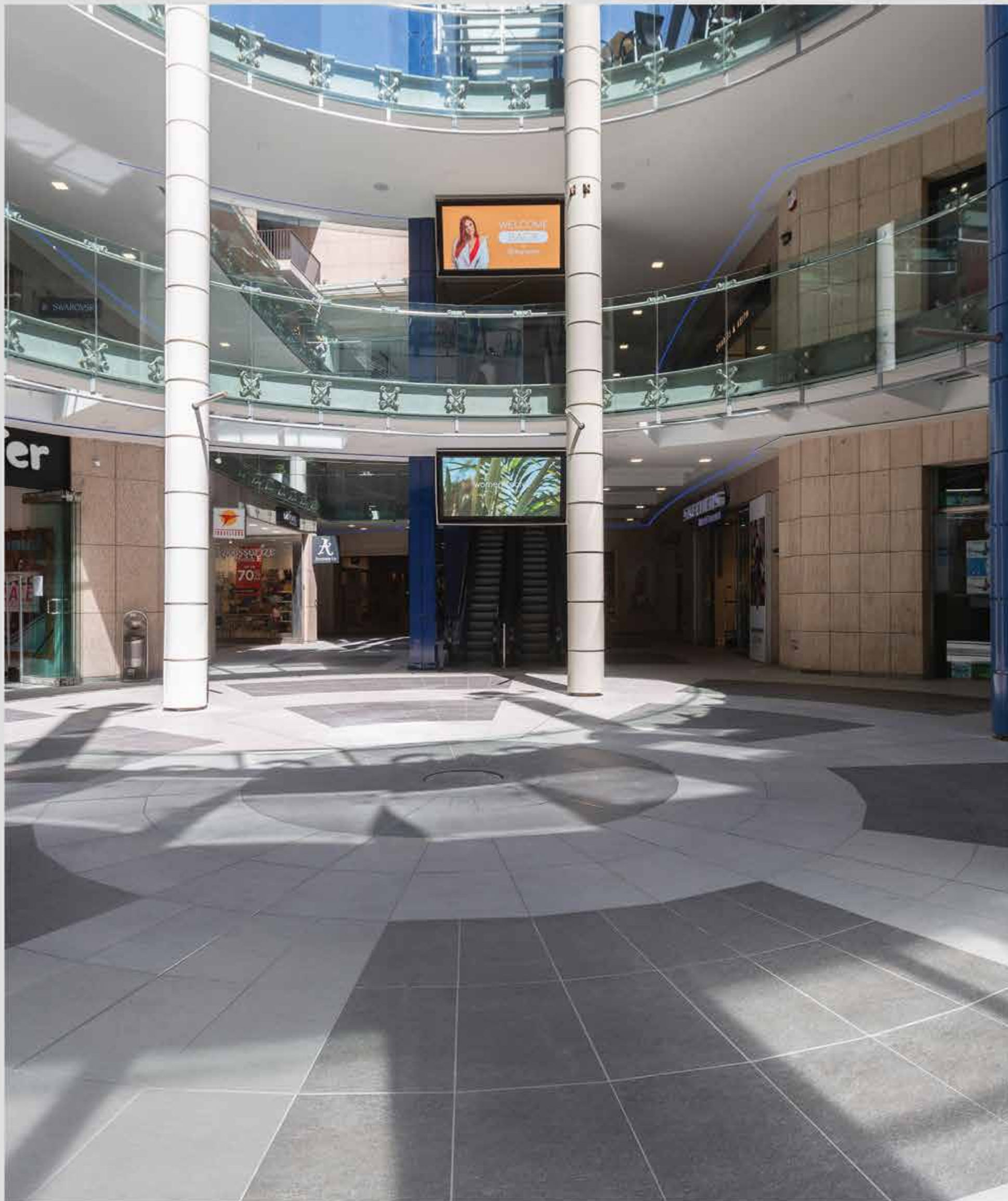
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MARTA OBIOLS FORNELL

Out of Time

An exhibition by Vince Briffa took place at Art Hall Gozo until last week, with a collection of works on paper and mixed-media paintings selected from the last ten years of the artist's studio production, including work produced during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"Once when 'Care' was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took a piece and began to shape it. While she was thinking about what she had made, Jupiter came by. 'Care' asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, Jupiter forbade this and demanded that it be given his name instead. While 'Care' and Jupiter were arguing, Earth (Tellus) arose, and desired that her name be conferred upon the creature, since she had offered it part of her body. They asked Saturn to be the judge. And Saturn gave them the following decision, which seemed to be just: "Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you should receive that spirit at death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since 'Care' first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called 'homo,' for it is made out of humus (earth)."

This ancient Latin myth of Cura that Heidegger cites in *Being and Time* to describe the Dasein's Being as care is what came to mind when I first saw the work



of Vince Briffa. I see Vince Briffa's paintings as a reflection of the human condition, namely beings thrown into the world made out of putrid matter that shall return there. In his paintings one can see decomposing corpses, bones, lost spirits, etc. What once was in the hands of 'Care' now lays in the realms of the Earth and, who knows, maybe the remains of the soul are called back to Jupiter. The point is that his paintings are vivid thoughts of the mystery of birth and death and, in his own way, it looks like these two extremes become fraternal partners. One cannot really know what is arising and what is decaying.

Vince Briffa's exhibition "Out of Time" attracted lots of visitors and has triggered different reactions. I have to say that I was surprised to hear so often "How beautiful!". What is so beautiful? That we are born to die? That his paintings focus on the dark side and there are no flowers so to say? I appreciate his paintings because they are intriguing and thought provoking, even terrible one could say. What's the problem? Doesn't sound good? Why should it? Of course, no doubt, as we all say, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

COMIC

Artoon by Bruce Micallef Eynaud



"This is my latest work: 'Manhattan, Destroyed'."

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U K

Tate and National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) cut ties with Anthony D'Offay following misconduct allegations

Anthony d'Offay at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.
Image by FearfulSkills - Flickr



> In a joint statement issued with Anthony D'Offay, Tate has announced an agreement to end its relationship with the retired British art dealer, collector and curator. Tate will be returning over 200 works of art to D'Offay following accusations of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour reported in 2018. D'Offay has denied the allegations, which date back to 1997. Aside from the returned works, Tate has confirmed that the Artist Rooms Collection – which is jointly owned by Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland – will not be affected by these changes. The National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) have confirmed similar action, with a spokeswoman outlining that an agreement with D'Offay had been reached, and that “works of art currently on loan to NGS from Mr D'Offay will be returned”. The Tate – which comprises four major art museums located in London, Liverpool and St Ives – will remove any public signage attached to D'Offay's name, including the walls of Turbine Hall.

U S A

Royal Opera House to sell David Hockney portrait in a bid to raise funds amidst pandemic crisis

The Royal Opera House, home of the Royal Ballet and one of the world's leading opera venues, has announced its intention to sell David Hockney's portrait of its former chief executive, Sir David Webster. Webster was chief executive between 1945 and 1970, playing a significant role in the establishment of both the Royal Ballet and Royal Opera companies. The portrait is set to be auctioned at Christie's in October and is predicted to fetch bids of up to £18 million. The Royal Opera House's current chief executive, Alex Beard, described the decision to sell as a “tough call”, but pointed to its necessity for the survival of the UK's biggest arts employer. Painted to commemorate Webster's retirement following his twenty-five-year term, he is depicted sitting in Hockney's studio, seated on a Mies van der Rohe chair across a glass table. Christie's describes the work as a portrait that “unites Hockney's flair for human observation with his lifelong passion for opera”. In 2018, David Hockney became the most expensive living artist when his *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972) was sold at Christie's for \$80 million.



Royal Opera House. Image by Dave Rutt - Flickr

ONLINE



Virtual Online Museum of Art (VOMA) Image Courtesy of VOMA

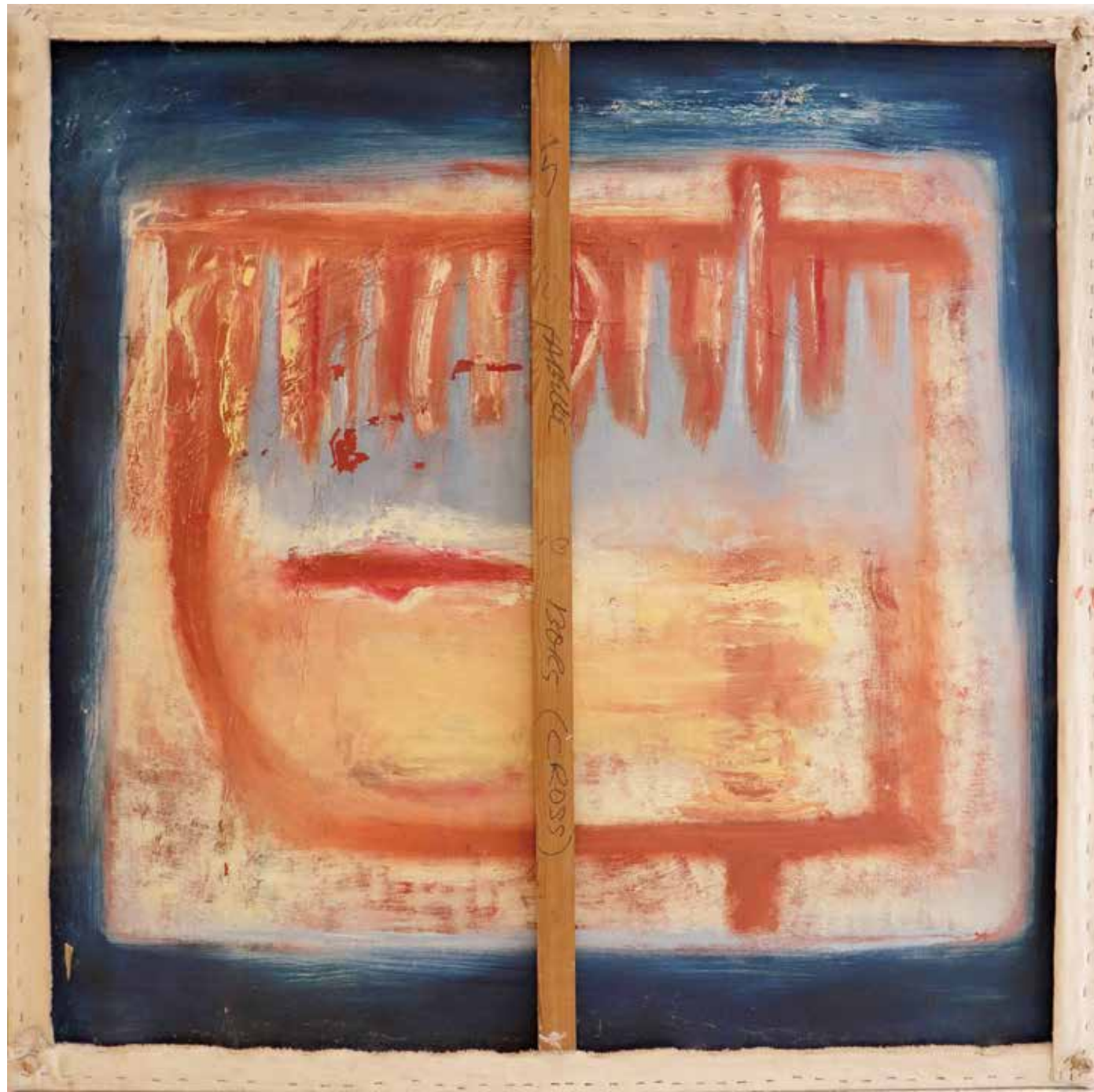
The Virtual Online Museum of Art or VOMA has opened as the world's first virtual museum. VOMA promises viewers an online experience of art entirely navigable through digital devices. The museum is set to present exhibitions featuring seminal works on loan from major global institutions around the world. The brainchild of artist Stuart Semple, VOMA has been built by an international team of architects, CGI designers, gaming experts and curators. Curator and contemporary art specialist Lee Cavaliere will occupy the position of VOMA Director. Cavaliere has described VOMA as “a new platform to hear the stories and histories of artists from across the world. Without the limitations of a physical location, access to a museum is possible to anyone with an internet connection”. The museum lists a number of core aims, each outlining values against which the online space will operate. These include ‘Anti-Nationalism’, ‘Telling Truth to History’ and ‘Exploring and Celebrating Difference’, amongst others.

* Spotlight / Painting / Isabelle Borg
October - December '20

MALTA

LISA GWEN ANDREWS

Knowing Isabelle



v.2 (Back Side) Cairo 1 - Desert Heat, Oil and mixed media on canvas, 152cm x 152cm, 1992; Exhibited in Sol, at St James Cavalier, Valletta, Malta 2001



Portrait of Isabelle Borg in front of *Beara Peninsula*, Oil and mixed media on canvas, 90cm x 123cm, 2002; Exhibited in Paintings of the Last Eighteen Years at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Malta 2002.

As I sit at my desk, intent on finding the perfect words and the most fitting introduction, I feel resigned. Because there is / are none. No words suffice or do justice to the woman whom I had the pleasure of calling a friend, and, in many respects, also a mentor.

Isabelle was Isabelle. As anyone who had the pleasure of knowing her would immediately comprehend and attest to.

As my gaze veers towards the corner of the study, it rests upon Isabelle Borg's peacock chair, which has been 'mine' for over 13 years, yet which I still consider hers. It's 'funny' gifting a peacock chair to a friend; funny as in unusual, particular, yet also quite grand, as far as gifts are concerned. Yet the chair is a symbol and a reminder of Isabelle, who had been trying to dispose of as many items as possible that tended to collect dust in her Floriana home. Looking back, it seems like she was trying to buy time. Her pulmonary fibrosis was

an intensely debilitating disease, yet I had never fully realised or even understood the extent to which it affected every part of her life and livelihood; she always wore a brave face; she always had a positive demeanour; she was nothing less than vibrant.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Isabelle will always be one of the (very) few women to deeply impact my life. Not just as a person, but also as an academic, as a creative, as a painter. As I close my eyes, all I can see are her long, black tresses, her knowing, cheeky smile, and a myriad of colour. Folds upon folds. Bold brush marks, within which she wove the narratives of her travels, of her nearest and dearest as well as her own. She had an unequivocal knack when it came to colour, irrespective of the subject. I've experienced abstract works of hers, seemingly created with a restricted monochromatic palette of two shades, and I've seen landscapes which contain every colour in the spectrum.

Her landscapes, especially those featuring Irish countryside, are still a means of connection for her former partner, Graham Cooper, who is based in Ireland and who confesses that "every day there is some visual reminder of Isabelle's Irish landscape art, sometimes it could be sight of an approaching shower falling from a heavy, rain laden line of clouds as in *Raining over Brandon Bay* (oil on gesso on canvas, 42cm x 62cm, 2000)." He also tells me, that, "at least once a month, as daylight fades to night, I'll look up and glimpse through a gap in passing clouds, the moon... that moon that Isabelle said would always be shining above us, no matter how far apart we might be."

A whole decade has elapsed since her passing. And the more time passes, the more I fear that her work is receding into memory. In these 10 years, there has been but a single exhibition featuring her work. No museum, or official body has yet seen fit to dedicate a retrospective, monograph, publication, talk or commemorative event to her life and work. Not even the Bank of Valletta, with their long line of retrospective

* Spotlight / Painting / Isabelle Borg
October - December '20

LISA GWEN ANDREWS holds a first degree in History of Art and a Masters in Cultural Heritage Management. She is a freelance curator and writer for art and design events.



MALTA




Nimby, Oil on canvas, diptych, 120cm x 160cm, 2008; Exhibited in Strange Cargo at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Malta 2008

shows, would make an exception and feature the work of an artist who has now passed.

Some four years back, I had brokered a collaboration between Graham Cooper, as well as the founder of ARTZ ID and former managing director of Iniala5 Gallery, Maria Galea, for Isabelle's work to be safeguarded and showcased, and for her legacy to remain alive. Maria organised the only exhibition, in 2017, since Isabelle's passing – a small yet significant exhibition which featured some of her more iconic works. Maria is now attempting to 'recreate' Isabelle's first exhibition, held in 1985 at the Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. It has been officially proposed to Heritage Malta for their prestigious Gran Salon, and may hopefully take place next year. In Maria's words: "[Isabelle] has left behind a legacy of works which transcend who she was and how she lived. Bold colours, familiar faces, powerful landscapes and connections to her Maltese heritage. Keeping her voice alive through her work, as well as the remembrance of her life, is a duty which I have taken upon myself.

Honouring a life taken too early – a life of an icon that Malta should embrace and look up to for generations to come."

Although I've always found difficulty in referring to Isabelle as a female artist, she understood, as I did, the need of emphasis on gender within the right contexts and with the right objectives. Such is the gap between males and females in the art world, that women still need to iterate their sex within the fields and environments in which they work, even though Isabelle's work was always strong enough to contend with any other artist's. It is high time that Isabelle Borg's work as well as her immense contribution to the story of art in Malta, be fully recognised and more importantly, showcased. She was an educator and an academic for many years; present and future generations need to have ways and means of studying and referencing her work. We allow too many things to perish and be forgotten. Isabelle Borg shouldn't be one of them. 



Pink Morning, Oil on canvas diptych, 130cm x 157cm, 1998



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Q Q & A / Journalism / Michela Moro
October - December '20

MALTA

Michela Moro

An accomplished journalist for international art, based in Milan and Malta – on interviewing established artists around the world such as Kapoor and Cattelan; Lockdown in Milan; living in Gozo, and watching it self-destruct; and the potential of Maltese art.

Please describe your job and where you have worked in relation to the arts.

I have always thought that culture is the best key to read the world, and that art is our window to the future. I was lucky enough to be able to translate all this into television programmes mainly related to the visual arts, architecture and design. For more than twenty years I have presented, written and produced for RAI various programmes related to these topics, resulting in a total of over 2,000 episodes of different broadcasts. For example I have produced and conducted reportages on the Venice Art and Architecture Biennales since the early 2000s.

I was one of the first Italian contemporary art bloggers. For a Brazilian cultural channel, I conducted a series of interviews with great international figures from Anish Kapoor to Christo. I write and have written for various publications, from Art Forum and the American Bible of Contemporary Art; to Sette, the weekly magazine of Corriere della Sera; and from Panorama to Il Giornale, and many others. I collaborate with the Giornale dell'Arte, writing about auctions and the art market, as well as curating the sections dedicated to the art market, contemporary art and exhibitions.

What do you enjoy the most and least about your job?

I love being in contact with artists, who always have interesting and unique perspectives, and who offer us a different approach to reality. I also have the opportunity to experience exceptional exhibitions – always with people of great intellectual quality. What I regret is that culture in society is not always taken into due consideration, I believe culture is food for the soul.

What would you say have been highlights from your career?

It is difficult to choose. Perhaps having convinced both Anselm Kiefer and Maurizio Cattelan, both very reticent and elusive, to appear on television for the first time in my programmes.



Michela Moro interviewing Anish Kapoor

How have you spent your time during Covid? And, what are you working on now?

I spent the lockdown at home in Milan, working, because newspapers continued to be published. However, it was strange to spend so much time with none of the usual responsibilities: we just had to wait. I was lucky because even if Lombardy has been very trying – everyone has lost dear friends – everyone in our family is fine. At the moment, I am preparing to resume work within the international art circuit, starting with Artissima, the contemporary art fair in Turin which is scheduled to take place at the beginning of November, if everything goes as to plan.

How did you find yourself living in Gozo?

In the 90s friends from Rome were the

owners of the Hotel Ta' Cenc. Since visiting Gozo for the first time with them, my husband and I have been enchanted by the pristine beauty of the place and the hotel – back then a real jewel designed by the Italian architect Busiri Vici. We returned to Gozo several times and eventually bought a house, where we have spent all our summers ever since.

What do you think about Gozo as a place to live? Has it progressed in terms of the arts? Have you met any like-minded people?

I love the diversity of Gozo, I spend a lot of time there even out of season. We have many Maltese friends and I consider Malta a second home; we also have a beautiful and adorable Maltese god-daughter. Unfortunately, I see Gozo and Malta regressing rather than progress-

ing. I don't think Gozo should remain a 'presepiju' for tourists, but these were places with enormous potential that were systematically ruined. I look at the street next to my house – a succession of anonymous apartment buildings – and I remember the charm of the old houses and the surprising views. The speed and determination with which the Maltese and Gozitan developers are destroying Malta and Gozo suggests the destructive fury of the temples of Bamiyan, with profit as a religion.

Soon there will be nothing left of the unique beauty of these islands. Nature has been trampled on, there is no real marine reserve in a sea that was better than the Caribbean. Public green space is limited to roundabouts, I wonder where the sense of beauty that over the centuries has made these places unique has gone to – my heart is bleeding in the face of disaster.

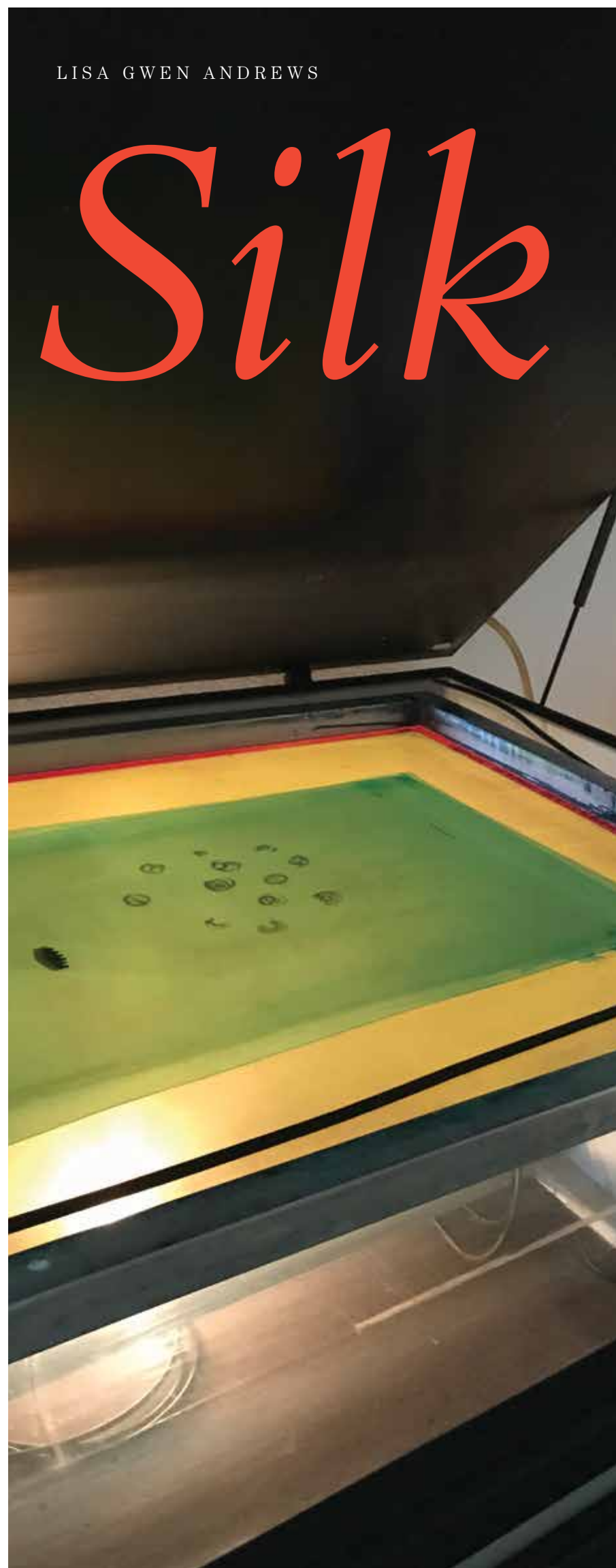
Do you think that Malta in general has any further potential as regards to the arts? What do you think Malta can do to better itself in terms of art and design events and culture in general?

The potential is there. There are young and knowledgeable passionate people, and recently some contemporary outfits have done a good job; I have high hopes for MICAS, which has already proved to be a pole of international attraction and a valid local meeting point, but it is certainly more difficult than in other places. Caravaggio, Mattia Preti and the Baroque are legacies that are difficult to overcome without the support of a system – including a scholastic one – which provides direction, and enjoys economical support; it takes time. It is similar to the Italian situation a few years ago. Furthermore, we need a network of collectors who support projects, which does not yet exist here. ●

www.michelamoro.com

Q Interview / Malta / Printmaking
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MALTA



Ready to expose



Alexandra Aquilina

There's a very unique feeling associated with the experiencing of art shows and exhibitions. It's a craving; a hunger; for our eyes and minds to devour and consume; it's a need of visual stimulus; of enrichment.

Online consumption of art is hardly rewarding. The physical connection, the dynamic of standing within a space, the confrontation with the intimate creations of others, has the ability to linger for far longer than the immensely over-saturated online offering can – generally one artwork at a time. Which is why we experience withdrawal symptoms, caused by the incessant barrage of postponed, if not cancelled events.

Having already written about the 'should have been' exhibitions, and subsequently, featured updates for some of the main visual art shows back on the calendar, I've drawn two such events together – one originally having been scheduled to be held at Desko, in Valletta, between the March-June period. Both exhibitions – CUBE: Manipulations, by Sarah Maria Scicluna, and another, collective show, Spread the Ink – focus entirely on silk screen printing. The exhibitions are otherwise unrelated, conceptually or curatorially.

The focus on printmaking over the past years begs some attention, especially where processes and techniques are concerned. The Out of Print exhibition, held at the ex-Ministry of Tourism (today MUZA), a decade or so ago, comes steadfastly to mind, as does the iMprint series of exhibitions, the last edition of which organised late last year. These initiatives are precursors; generating impetus for and about the medium.

The first exhibition, Spread the Ink, curated by Alexandra Aquilina, who is a creative in her own right, went on show, mid-September. Aquilina goes

into some detail to explain what she calls, a "love affair with screen printing", which began "around 10 years ago and completely by accident." During a self-led assignment at MCAST, she chose to research the gig poster scene, since she was in a band; "from there I fell down a rabbit hole... Screen printing was the perfect balance between commercial and fine art; it allowed for multiples but not too much that it became disposable, it was a medium in itself and not just a reproductive



Printing the first layer



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method, and it allowed for uniqueness with each and every copy where mistakes became part of the artwork, bringing it to life.”

Alexandra began to increasingly produce artistic works and prints on paper, most especially after being selected to show a series of work at Christine X Art Gallery in the 20x20 exhibit; she will be subsequently showing at Maxi/Mini Print in Berlin, later this year. “Out of a desire to acquire more skills from different artistic styles than my own, I began approaching friends, asking them if I could print their work. The idea quickly snowballed, and I applied for funding to create a full-scale exhibition”. The end result was an eclectic and colourful mix of techniques and styles. Spread the Ink, which took place mid-end of September, featured a selection of artistic works by 13 Maltese and Malta-based artists, illustrators, and photographers, recreated as limited-edition hand-pulled art prints.

CUBE: Manipulations, opening mid-October will be a solo show in which Sarah

Maria Scicluna addresses the “manipulations of the cube as a form, and its occupation of imaginary space. This form is explored in multiple ways, leading to different expressions of how these imaginary structures can exist, at times becoming something else entirely.”

Having always been interested in the concept of repetition has indeed spurred Scicluna’s choice of the printmaking medium as a process, as well as the subject she has chosen to represent. The work that Scicluna is presenting is “a series of hand-printed silk screens,” a process which allows for flat blocks of ink and clean lines, which constitute a core aesthetic of her work.

She relates how “all printmaking processes are very technical and time consuming”, it takes a considerable time to view the quality of the end product. And yet, “There is that moment of magic when you first get to see your finished print, after two weeks working on its preparation. The processes – being so technical – sometimes feel so far removed from the work itself” making



Test prints



Drying between colours

the moment of reveal so suspenseful that it verges on being addictive.

“Most people have an idea of what [silk screen printing] can produce”, this generally being associated with the printing of T-shirts, which makes sense given that it’s primarily an industrial technique. “However, from the 60s onwards, it found a place in the art world... It’s a highly technical discipline with a heavy reliance on equipment, hence most people end up shying away from it. However, there has been a steady rise in the DIY way to do it, which has been much more pronounced than for other printmaking disciplines.”

Having said that, Scicluna feels that silk screen printing is “still not ingrained in visual culture as much as other art disciplines”, despite it gaining popularity. She concludes by iterating that “technology allows us to continue to build on old traditions and evolve them even further”. 📍

Both exhibitions have been supported by Arts Council Malta’s, Project Support Grant.



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Q Interview / Patronage / Cover story
October - December '20

ANN DINGLI is an art and design writer with an MA in Design Criticism from the University of the Arts, London. She has worked as a freelance writer and content consultant for four years, writing remotely from London, New York and Malta since 2016. (anndingli.com)



MALTA

ANN DINGLI

Art in Life and Death

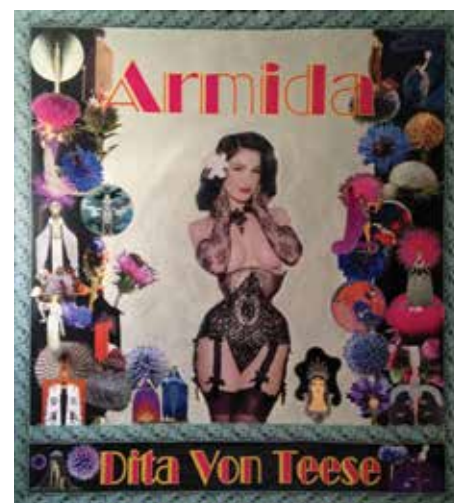
A Legacy of Patronage

Ann Dingli interviews Jhonny Roldan – known artistically as JRoldan – a London-based visual artist who worked for over a decade with Christian Pandolfino – an art lover and patron who was killed in Malta earlier this summer.

It was only in the nineteenth century that the modern role of the artist as autonomous genius gained ground. Before that, artists were overwhelmingly beholden to their patrons – the relationship between creator and benefactor propelling themes in art history that would permanently shape the world's visual heritage. Patrons wielded their social, political and religious standing through works of art, from the diorite princes of the Ancient East to the writhing gods and saints of Italy's Renaissance. Often a symbolic percolator for illicit behaviour – money laundering, sexual mania, and the lure of murderous violence – the whispering eroticism of mythological frescoes were as much passports to the identity of their sponsors as the throbbing carnality of the great Baroque canvases. Same stories, different eras.

Whether well or ill-intentioned, benefactors have always represented humanity's obsession with the romance that art permits and promises – a pull that eclipses class or education, but that invariably demands hefty financial resource. At points throughout history, relationships between what would today be classified as 'creatives' and 'clients' were strained, soured and at times ruinously fated. Yet at others, they saw the fruition of some of the most transcendental moments in history – a meeting of mind power that resulted in the alchemy of art's creation.

In 1990s' London, it was through social networks of likeminded individuals that a young Colombian artist met a retired doctor turned banker. Jhonny Roldan, a visual artist having rejected the formali-



ty of the Slade School of Art met Christian Pandolfino (or Bambi Pandolfino, as was his preferred art world pseudonym), who himself had cast off the trappings of a career in finance. What would follow was a relationship spanning over fifteen years. A bond in which the artist once again occupied a station of manufacture, translating grand ideas born and exchanged between him and his intellectual and financial partner into visual experiments.

Twenty-five years down the line, JRoldan is still making art in London. He creates work that has been described as relating to American abstract expressionism and the gestural abstraction of post-war Europe; but which over time has increasingly inducted the visions and mythology of contemporary pop culture – seemingly a stylistic hangover from his time spent with Pandolfino. Their relationship ended over four years ago; and as with many forceful bonds, concluded with dramatic swiftness. In summer 2020, Pandolfino was murdered in his home in Sliema, Malta in a rapid and fatal break-in.

"I met him through another friend," JRoldan recounts over a botchily connected video call from his studio-home in central London. He describes his conflicted relationship with the art world and community, admitting in one fell swoop his scorn for most conceptual art and his disinclination for public relations and selling his own work. "I like the craft involved in art – I hate PR, I hate sales, I'm definitely not a good salesman. But then again, I have met some good people. One of which was Chris. I met him about 25 years ago, and he started buying my art." >>

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>> Continued



JRoldan recounts his long history with Pandolfino, hopping with anecdotal vigour from one phase of their friendship and business partnership to another. Repeatedly, he characterises their time together as ‘intense’ – a whirlwind of conversation and creation that equally fuelled him and wore him down. Over the years, they developed a language for art together, sharing dialogue on trends and topics that sporadically consumed Pandolfino. Their love for art, literature and opera was the common thread that stitched through their friendship.

“We had endless conversations about endless topics,” JRoldan recalls, “from cinema to opera to artists and so on – we kind of clicked. It was amazing, and time flew by”. He describes the years they spent together with both clarity

and candour, refusing to level neither unmerited niceties nor unqualified criticisms towards Pandolfino.

“[Chris] was very eccentric. He would send me 30 emails in one day – it was a lot of work and could be quite exhausting. But somehow, I liked it. Because I was single and I had been single for a while – which he also was at the time – so the relationship kind of filled a void, of companionship or whatever. I was very young back then myself, but as Chris was growing, he started to give me ideas – why don’t you do this, why don’t you do that? And that’s how it all happened. So, it began with him buying my work – buying and giving to his friends or collecting for his house. But eventually it became a process where he would have an idea, he would ask me to execute, and then he would buy

it. And he would keep asking for work until, next thing I knew, six months would have passed, just like that.”

The results of their partnership remain largely inaccessible to a wide audience, save for his friends and family – the latter JRoldan describes as one of his mentor’s greatest loves. When asked if Pandolfino was moved to exhibit the fruits of their discussions and production, JRoldan indicates that he wasn’t. Pandolfino, as JRoldan describes it, was more consumed with the act of translation – of discussing his fiery ideas and having them laid out in two-dimension. “To me, I felt like I was an apprentice,” JRoldan explains, “like [Chris] was mentoring me. Chris had a lot of knowledge – he was very well read, and I think I am too. So, we had all these debates and it was quite fun.”

“But he got so intense at times. We would spend a year or two working on the same series. The last series we did was about migrants – and he would sometimes spend five hours straight talking about the issue. The intensity was... a lot! But, again, he was fun – although I did not agree with many of his views. When the issues and stories of migration began to blow up, he got very into it and we started creating these mural-sized works. You know, like six metres by two metres – gigantic. They were really cool, I think, very pop. Some could have been better – I could have retouched here and there – but I just needed to get the job done. They were very controversial, and they don’t necessarily express my own feelings. It was all to do with him. I was more of an executor.”



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It was at this point in their story that JRoldan expressed his desire for a recess – a break to gather his energy and restore his mental strength. He travelled to Japan for a month, and by the time he had returned him and Pandolfino had severed ties. Apart from a brief encounter in a London café years later, the next time JRoldan heard Pandolfino's name was in the shocking headlines connected with his death.

Their separation clearly marked a shifting moment in JRoldan's career – a calm beyond the giant storm of Pandolfino's frantic cerebral output. JRoldan's retelling of their estrangement speaks of both redemption and wistfulness; a genuine account of a man who has laboured and lost alongside another, whether by default or design. He expresses the strangeness of their bond with frankness; admitting that the peculiar way in which they worked is what made the art they made so bold and uncompromising.

"That's always the situation when you're working as two artists. For example, I'm good friends with Pierre et Gilles. And, you know, I felt like [mine and Chris' partnership] could be like that kind of situation. Like Gilbert and George. Because we were spending a lot, lot, lot of time together."

Post partnership, JRoldan's work settled back into his own style. "My own artistic position deals more with beauty. Chris is not the only person who passed away tragically in my life. I grew up with a lot of tragedy. Most of the people in my childhood don't exist anymore. For this reason, I could relate to the art we were making together, and at the beginning I used to draw a lot of guns and things. Now, I draw butterflies."

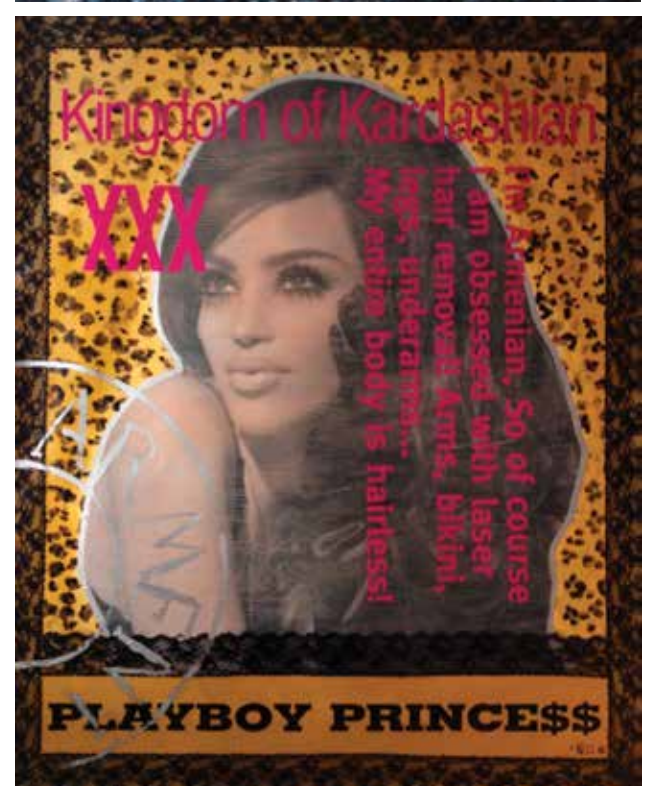
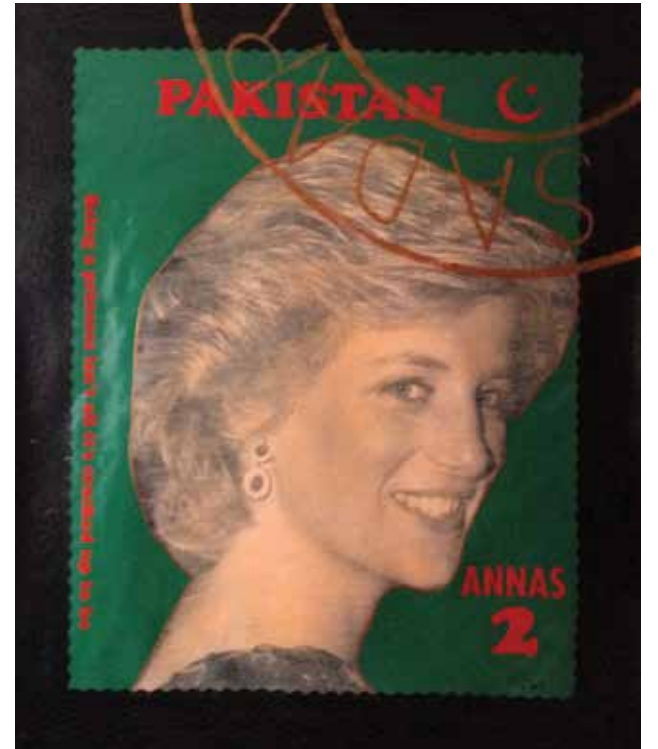
JRoldan's work and practice does appear less feverish than the older artworks, images of which

have been sent through messages and emails as a consequence to their captivity inside Pandolfino's home. JRoldan's process is laid bare in his frequent Instagram posts, many of which show him meticulously layering his work in careful detail to the background of opera music – an implicit reminder of his former partnership, and an echo of the stories shared between two minds propelled by the prospect of creating art.

JRoldan closes off his account discussing Pandolfino's creative energy and the volume of work that still exists as its tangible yield. "Deep down I know [Chris] would have loved to be some kind of famous artist. Give him a chance to be that – we have the material. There are hundreds of works – and they are not just little paintings. Using them in the right way could give him a legacy".

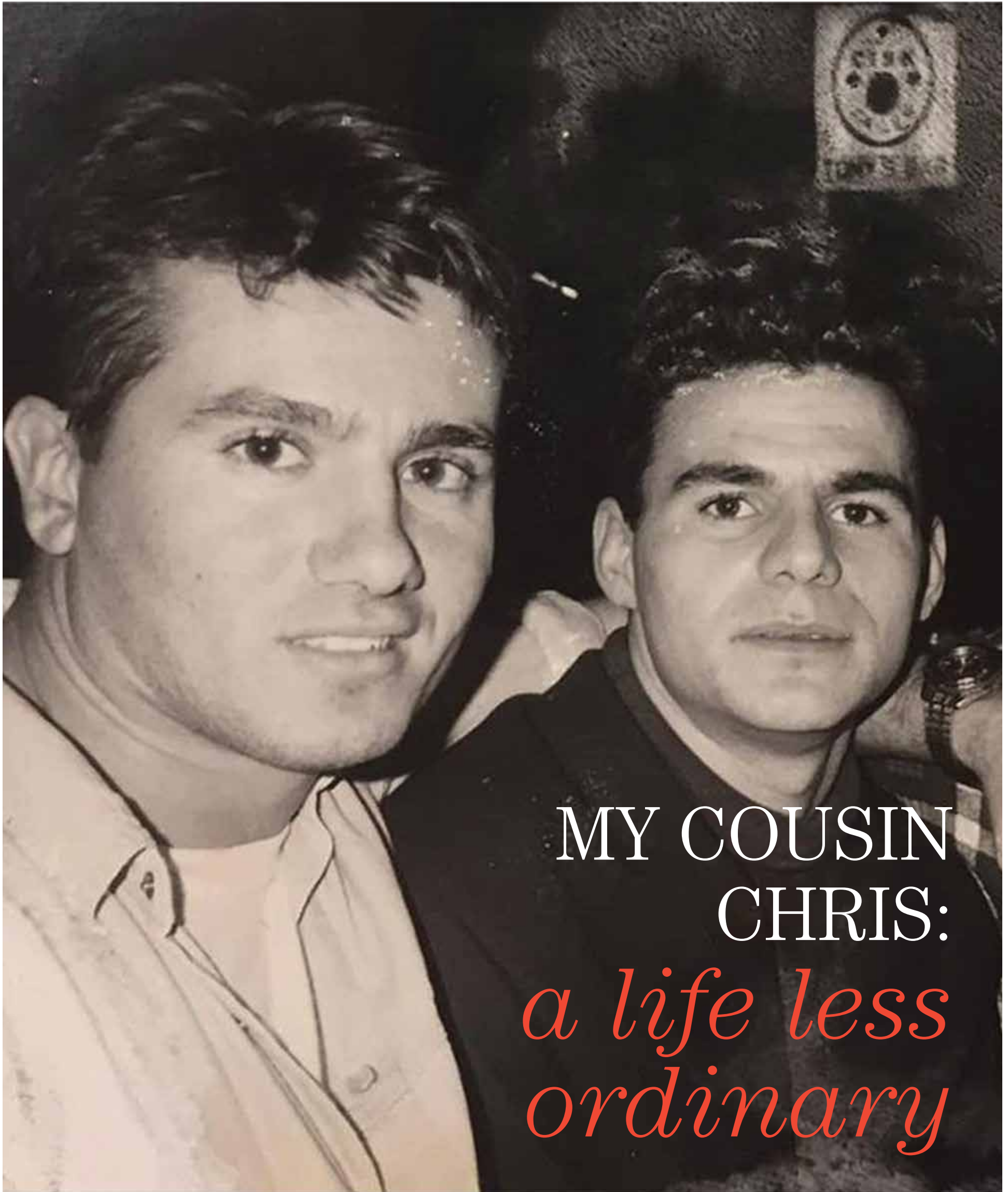
The destiny of JRoldan and Bambi Pandolfino's work remains to be seen. Yet as JRoldan carries on his work with the stamina of a more mature artist, the impact of his patron's influence seems to persist. Pandolfino is there in the opulent colours, the expansive dimensions, and the irreverent pop imagery that still stands as a backdrop to JRoldan's practice.

Meanwhile, the story of a man who by this account was fired by the power of art, still clings to the potential for relevance. As with the art world's vast history of patronage, the most valuable result begotten by deep artistic connection is the work itself. The threat of its dormancy is legitimate, with the justice of Pandolfino's death reasonably overshadowing any other conceivable priority. But the decades' worth of art that two men created together should be kept alive; because as history has demonstrated consistently, art is always stronger than death. **1**



* Spotlight / Remembrance / Christian Pandolfino
October - December '20

MALTA



MY COUSIN
CHRIS:
*a life less
ordinary*

* Spotlight / Remembrance / Christian Pandolfino
October - December '20

JOSEPH FOUNTAIN
After more than two decades
working in London and
Spain, Joe Fountain now
works as a freelance Creative
Consultant to local and
international clients.



MALTA



Christian and Joseph at the beach about 1986 before they moved to London

Two days after that heinous crime on Locker Street took place – when we were all still trying to digest what had just happened, and it all felt as if we were living a nightmare that at some point we would be woken up from – a friend sent me a promo teaser of Pedro Almodovar’s new short, *La Voz Humana*. In it, Tilda Swinton, in a voluminous red Balenciaga dome gown emerges from behind a screen and walks onto a sombre, industrial sound stage to sit on a solitary stool. Cut to a close up of her enigmatic face. Pale skin. Hair slightly bedraggled. Fifty-eight seconds of total perfection.

My thumb automatically went for the forward icon, and started to scroll down the list of recent Whatsapp messages looking for Bambi, the moniker my cousin Chris had been bestowed with by our dear friend Simon, one Monday morning after a big night out in London. It was at that moment that the cruel, harsh reality of what had happened hit me. For the first time since receiving the news of the terrible tragedy, I cried like I don’t think I’ve ever cried before.

Under normal circumstances, within seconds of receiving the message, Chris would call and we would discuss all that we saw up to the minutest of detail.

There would be squeals of delight, hyperbole and hyperventilation. We would go off on all sorts of tangents, tell and retell tales of adventures past, gossip and often bitch a little. The call could go on for hours, depending on our mood. Sometimes, it would be followed by another call. Alas, the circumstances on that day were not normal. And it breaks my heart into a million pieces to think that they will never be again.

Over the last few weeks, people who didn’t know him have asked me what Chris was like. At first, I found it very difficult to answer. Where do you start from when describing someone who has been there for such a huge part of your life? Someone who – apart from a cousin – has been a brother, a sister, a father, a mother, a mentor, a child, a collaborator, a best friend forever...

I’ve since found the perfect answer: Chris was my Auntie Mame – Patrick Dennis’ unforgettable, rule-breaking character, who takes in her orphaned ten-year old nephew and opens up a world that he would never have dreamt of. It replaces all the anger that I have inside me with a warm, peaceful feeling. And I know he would approve.

Like Auntie Mame, Chris was larger than life – extravagant, eccentric, hugely intelligent, creative, and with

the biggest heart you could possibly imagine. There really was never a dull moment. “Fly by the seat of your pants” was his motto, and he did so with ardent fervour. He had an eye and a love of all things beautiful and interesting, and wanted to know everything about everything. All anyone had to do was mention a topic, and he would tell you all there was to know about. If he didn’t know about it, he would learn whatever there was to learn in the shortest time possible. His was the most amazing mind I have ever encountered. Vastly knowledgeable in any subject, authoritative, but always inquisitive, ready to absorb. “You can never know enough,” he once told me. It is possibly the only tenet in life that I have ever adhered to.

From an early age, he set the bar high for us, members of his family. I can still remember when as children we would sit excitedly in front of the sofa where he would set up his puppet shows, which featured – amongst others – a tarted up Barbie doll as a soubrette called Sexy Woozie. He sang solo in the choir at Saint Gregory’s in Sliema, with what he himself described as “the voice of an angel”. (The story of when the choir mistress asked him if he had any relatives who could join the choir, hoping that the angelic voice was a family trait, is now part of Fountain/

Pandolfino family lore. Alas neither I, nor his beloved sister, Daniela, who he took with him to join the choir, could sing to save our lives. We were asked to mime instead. That was the beginning and the end of our choir days!). He used words that I’d never heard of. He listened to music that opened up a new world. In my early teens, he suggested I read Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* – which I now feel dreadful about for not having yet done.

There are so many memories, so many stories to tell. A lifetime of “jeweled elephants,” as we refer to stories that are embellished every time they are told (with reference to Armistead Maupin’s Gabriel Noone). For the past weeks, they have been playing in my head like movies. Too many to ever contemplate listing. And too special to ever forget.

At this point, it seems impossible to think how life will be without Chris – and Ivor, who had joined in on the adventure a few years ago, and fitted into our extended family like the proverbial silk glove. It is yet too early to get our heads around it. I miss them both desperately. And will continue to do so for the rest of my life. Life without them will never be the same. 📍



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KONRAD BUHAGIAR is a founding partner of Architecture Project and has been responsible for numerous restoration and rehabilitation works in historic buildings and urban sites. He has lectured in Malta and several countries abroad, published numerous historical articles and has been the Chairman of both the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee.



MALTA

KONRAD BUHAGIAR

On Love, Locks and Lockdown



Le Verrou (The Bolt), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1777)

It's Friday and the wind is picking up. I can hear its ominous whisper rising and falling through the louvres, filling my apartment with an aural presence – half whistle half whine. What's the weekend going to be like? Mindlessly, I pick up my mobile to check the weather forecast. The last vestiges of summer are being banded about by conflicting currents that course through the agitated air. Hot and cool streams will crash before long. I wait for it to happen.

At times like this, as I stare out at the horizon, preparing for a distant spectacle of fire and rain, I feel strangely unique. I sometimes wonder if, as Douglas Coupland observed, feeling unique is actually an indication of being unique. I'm not sure.

But then of course this introspective banter is hardly ever the issue of a sound and spirited social life. It is the kind of mental activity that is brought about by hours spent in isolation. During the recent lockdown, for example, as I sat writing and reading opposite the entrance to my flat, I noticed I found the sight of my locked front door quite disturbing. Never before have I had the opportunity to contemplate a closed door for so long, and, the more I stared at it during this period of obligatory confinement, the more I understood how it could play dangerously with the mind, giving birth to all manner of gloomy emotions. It is a symbol

of the divide between two worlds, two states of mind. Behind it, life carries on with its typical semblance of normality, growing gradually distant, impervious and inaccessible.

'I sleep but my heart is awake'. I love this superimposition of two states of mind that is described in the *Song of Songs*, in my opinion the most erotic poem of all time. The symbol of a locked door is often present in this supremely beautiful text. Take this passage for example:

'My beloved thrust his hand through the latch opening./ My heart pounded for him./ I rose up to open for my beloved./ My hands dripped with myrrh./ my fingers with liquid myrrh./ on the handles of the lock./ I opened to my beloved;/ but my beloved left; and had gone away./ My heart went out when he spoke./ I looked for him, but I didn't find him./ I called him, but he didn't answer./ The watchmen who go about the city found me./ They beat me./ They bruised me./ The keepers of the walls took my cloak away from me./ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem./ if you find my beloved,/ that you tell him that I am faint with love.'

I have an unfounded and superficial theory that Sandro Botticelli's painting *La Derelitta*, one of his last works, today conserved in the collection of Palazzo Rospigliosi in Rome, is a rendering of this beautiful image which the author of the biblical poem painted in

words. Mine is not a scholarly view or a researched one by any means. It is just an instinctive hunch. Based on biblical lines, historians have attributed the scene to an episode in the tragic story of Tamar. ('And the servant brought her out and locked the door behind her. And Tamar dusted her head with ashes, and tore the ucolorful clothes she had on herself, and laid her hands on her head and went on and on screaming'). Others suggest it depicts Mordecai from the *Book of Esther*. I, on the other hand, have always had the wish to place the painting and the poem side by side, and I am grateful to *Artpaper* for this opportunity to do so. Here they are together: the best literary and pictorial representation of 'saudade' I know.

The painting, like the text, is a very sad one. The entire space of the picture is dreamlike and brutally trapped by a blank stone wall that is articulated with low relief pilasters. It contains a single opening, a deep arch that frames a closed door. Only between the pointed ironwork of the door and the arc of the arch is a small patch of blue sky visible. What unlocks the mystery of the painting is perhaps one very small detail: the door has no latch or lock. The separation is complete and irreversible, as though the desolate figure, seated on a step near the wall, has been ruthlessly dispossessed by the world. Head bowed and face hidden behind locks of hair, hands convulsively clutching, a terrifying sense of despair saturates the picture, a hopeless understanding that no return is possible.

Hope is cruel but sometimes it has its longed-for rewards. Waiting in hope to gain the favour of the object of one's desire is painful, but the moment when that hope is unexpectedly realised must be counted among the most glorious experiences of a lifetime. So in order to banish the unhappy mood that Botticelli's small painting might have provoked, here is another painting I admire where a door has been depicted that has been shut, this time purposely, and where detachment from the outside world consciously chosen.

It is called *Le Verrou (The Bolt)* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1777), and is conserved in the Louvre. This too is a scene from another world, a fragment of life on a distant planet, happy and

strange at the same time, a portrayal of the rare gentleness of life that is too personal and forbidden to experience openly, like a young boy secretly reading a poem by Verlaine. It is one of Fragonard's 'galant' paintings, typical of the libertine mores of the period of the Enlightenment. It depicts the moment when, having reached the threshold of a bed chamber sumptuously decked out with rich curtains and cushions, a girl turns suddenly around and falls amorously into the arms of her future lover, while he, lustful in breeches and shirtsleeves and near-reaching his goal, extends his arm towards the bolt of the door, locking it to ensure that this delicious moment of sensual surrender is protracted as much as it possibly could. The light on the wall falls diagonally to emphasise the reach of the boy's arm and to focus the drama on the lock and the desire for voluntary isolation.

So here's the rub, as Hamlet might have said. In moments of intense joy or sorrow, the world, with its ordinary concerns and petty satisfactions, distances itself from us, as though disappearing behind a closed door. We are left alone with our individual fears and hopes and with no distractions, as in a lockdown. The answer, I guess, is blowing in the wind. But, to quote Coupland again, isn't it this that gives us a sense of our uniqueness and convinces us that we have a soul? 🍷



La Derelitta (The Outcast), Sandro Botticelli (1496)



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A Architecture / *Peripheral Space*

October - December '20

ERICA GIUSTA is Director of Innovation at architecture firm AP Valletta. She read for an MA in Architecture, and has a Post-Graduate Master from the Sole24Ore Business School in Milan. She contributes regularly to academic journals and international architecture magazines such as A10 New European Architecture and Il Giornale dell'Architettura.



MALTA

The periphery is not only a geographical location but a peripheral space in History and Culture.



From *textcatalogue* Instagram account – *textcatalogue* is a Maltese duo focusing on research projects on the field of deterritorialisation as an agency for architectural analysis, discussion and design.

ERICA GIUSTA

Should the periphery aim at becoming the new centre?

The fact that we live in a binary world, ruled by polar opposites for everything, is old news. The *real* news is that the post-pandemic scenario might offer a chance for breaking this binary system permanently.

Elementary distinctions between male and female, good and evil, local and foreign, black and white, right and wrong and so on, have shaped society ever since the rise of cartesian philosophy in the XVII century (some might argue even it was even earlier) and, in doing so, have become unquestioned and permanent values of contemporary society – to the extent that we have even transmitted them to algorithm-dominated machines. In actual fact, relentless efforts to promote integration and mediation between opposites are crucial for the refinement and development of ourselves and our culture, as so many recent events demonstrate.

The dichotomy surrounding centre and periphery belongs to this tradition of binary thinking; at global scale, it was the base of geographical, economic and political structures of all colonialist systems, where everything was determined

by its relationship with the centre, detaining absolute power. The fact that English language is one of the official languages of an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, at the border between Europe and Northern Africa, is perhaps one of the most tangible consequences of twentieth century adaptations to 'the centre'. Over the centuries, Malta metamorphosed from periphery and bastion of the Christian Catholic world into colonial outpost of the British empire, and most recently into young European nation, at border once again but with a chance of emancipation from the tyranny of the centre.

Just a couple of decades ago, this opportunity became more real than ever thanks to the digital revolution and its new hyper-efficient communication technologies: peripheries were re-imagined as new centres and Malta seemed to move a little closer to the continent, as a potential new centre in the so-called 'global village'. However, the perspective remained calibrated on the centre/periphery dichotomy, therefore still guided by and gravitating around the 'old centres'. No viable alternative to the original dichotomy took root un-

til the current health emergency that swept away all certainties hit: out of frantic necessity, like in a *coup d'état*, the domination of the centres was swiftly overthrown, and decentralisation adopted as *the* new model. At urban level, suddenly peripheries became safer environments, and, at both urban and global level, geographical location didn't matter any longer – or not as it used to.

During lockdown, when everyone was confined to their homes or their neighbourhoods, the question 'where are you?' was either totally irrelevant or referring to an online location. A whole new typology of centres materialised online, and the real marginal area became the realm of the offline. As predicted by Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium is the Message*, "Time ceased, space vanished. We now live in a global village [...] a simultaneous happening". The pandemic accelerated the process initiated by the digital revolution and suspended all notions of normality – the idea that anything less than a 40-hour working week with 3% unemployment rate is a social failure seems now almost archaic, opening up new possibilities for change.

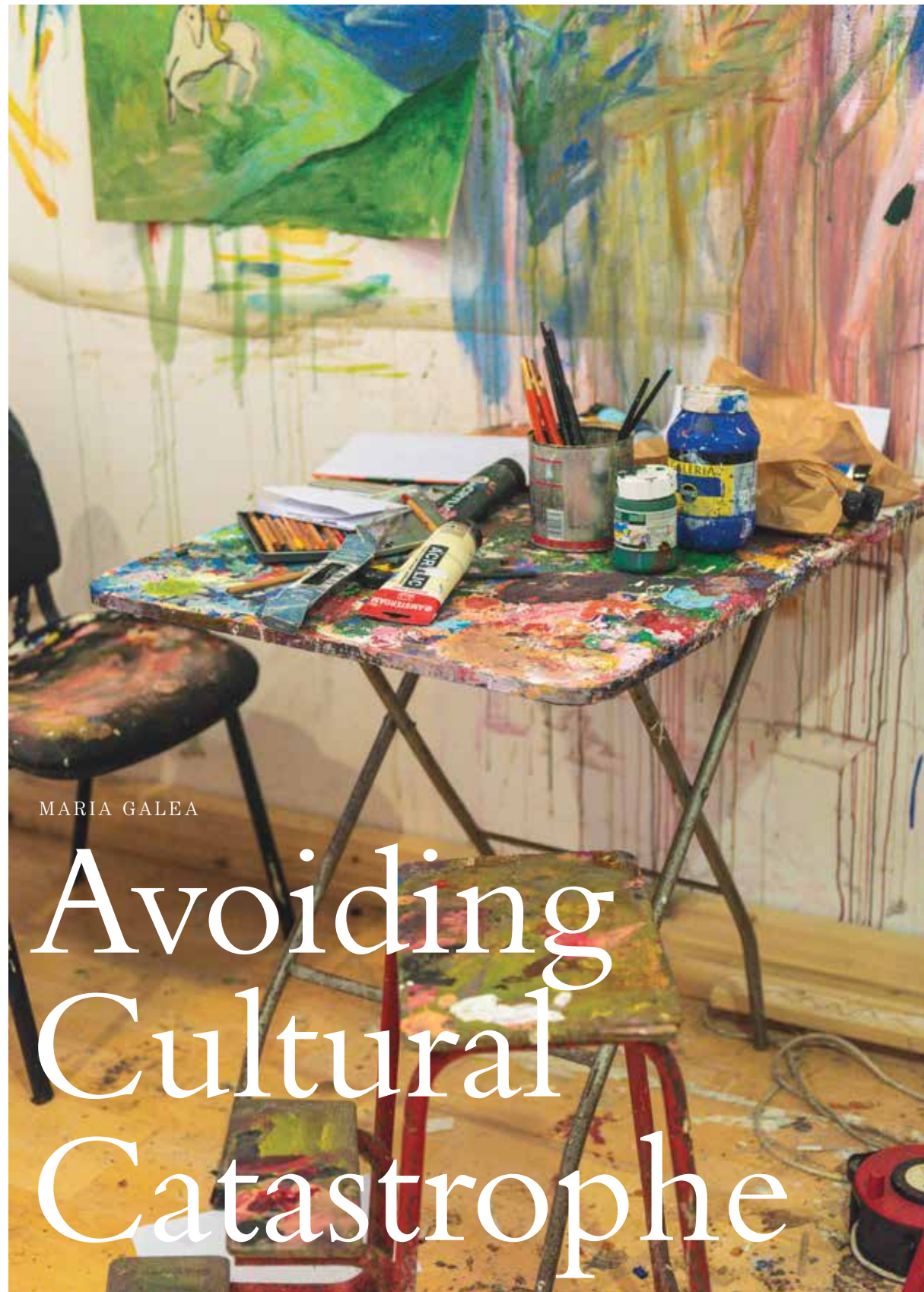
Certain pre-pandemic notions and conditions perhaps will be reinstated, but many will have undergone such deep transformations that they will reach the post-pandemic phase truly renovated. The current crisis offers the most tangible opportunity we have ever had in modern times to dismantle the hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery and to see any area become a new centre in a decentralised world. To decentralise also means to decolonise: to reject the tyranny of the centre, be it an urban area or a historically dominating influence, is in fact an act of decolonisation.

Political aspects of spatial thinking will play a crucial role in the present transitional phase. Malta, periphery since always, might find new and more successful ways of existing in between worlds and beyond the limits of pre-pandemic imagination, and emancipate itself from the centre/periphery dichotomy. In order to do so, binary thinking will have to be abandoned in favour of some more critical thinking – forgive the binarity of the consideration. **A**

MARIA GALEA is Creative Entrepreneur and Art Dealer; Chair for the Visual arts at Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA), Founder of Artz ID, and manages The Isabelle Borg Collection.



MALTA



MARIA GALEA

Avoiding Cultural Catastrophe

Photograph by Tarunima Sen Chandra at Gabriel Buttigieg studio

Set up in challenging times but for a longer mission, the newly established and growing Association – Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) – represents hundreds of artists, performers, art professionals and creative industries. The visual arts subcommittee formed by Maria Galea, Elyse Tonna, Lily Agius, Austin Camilleri, Norbert Attard, Sandro Debono and Margerita Pulè dive into the challenges and risks the community is facing, what is needed for it to survive, and above all, recovery.

Artists, art professionals, exhibition spaces and galleries in Malta are some of the most severely impacted in the current COVID-19 crisis. While our arts sector is known for its growing talent, its ecology is fragile at the best of times. The sector is highly dependent on the level of government funding – philanthropic, public, and private support are minimal. The current make-up of visual arts funding is almost 80 per cent institutional whilst the rest is earned income, sponsorships, along with a lot of goodwill and volunteerism.

There is an issue here of equality, lack of independent ecology, and I would argue, of appreciated value and respect. To make matters worse, many artists and arts workers supplement their income through projects that take a considerable amount of planning and research, leaving them stranded and not knowing when or if they will go ahead or not.

Internationally established artist Austin Camilleri, member of the visual arts subcommittee, says that his international projects have been either cancelled or postponed and that he is currently working on a series of long-overdue paintings, putting site-specific installations and projects on hold. It is not unusual for a visual artist to have months of drought, but it is the climate of uncertainty that frustrates most. He also noted that, from galleries' and fellow artists' experiences, sales have decreased drastically, and project/performance-based artists are being affected most. This will eventually affect the livelihood of full-time practitioners, especially those with families.

The sector moves from one project to the next with no safety net to draw upon. Covid-19 has only further uncovered its vulnerability.

Norbert Attard founder and director of Valletta Contemporary and Meta Foundation, describes how his gallery invests large sums of money each year to bring international artists to our shores. The calendar would be set well in advance and this year was almost entirely cancelled and shut down and will not open until next year.

Galleries and exhibition spaces have particularly suffered from not being able to hold opening nights, which are usually the time where momentum is geared towards sales. Whilst artists cut any possibility of income from the exhibition of their works or from their sale and resale. Also, month-long visibility opportunities for their repertoire that exhibitions normally bring is lost, worsening the impact on visual artists' already unsteady income. Workshops, installations, and community projects have yet again been cancelled or postponed.

Margerita Pulè stressed on the fact that, "an active, healthy and relevant arts sector is vital to the social and intellectual well-being of any society."

Elyse Tonna – cultural manager and curator – believes the pandemic has highlighted and further exposed the precarious situation and general attitude towards the cultural and creative sectors. Although these have experienced significant growth over the past ten



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years, there still seem to be substantial hurdles to overcome. The lack of incentives directed towards these sectors, as well as the slow-paced reaction and recognition that creatives are also contributors to our economy and more importantly our wellbeing, are just a couple of factors that reinforce the notion that the outlook towards the arts and culture should be improved. She recognises that despite this, “the sectors have shown incredible resilience through adaptation, development of innovated systems and more importantly, working together. The sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors is now more than ever highly dependent on the willingness and cooperation of all the contributors and all parts of the cultural ecosystem to come together, discuss, share resources and act.”

A survival plan is important; however, we strongly believe that a recovery plan is what will keep the sector going and aiming for the future. It is not all bad news, and it's important to recognise the resilience and adaptability of the arts sector at this time, too. This time has enabled the sector to turn our attention to online experiences, these forms of engagement will continue as another route of access to exhibitions, art education, disseminating collections and associated programming. However, innovation and digitalisation of the sector is not for everyone and takes a considerable amount of time, expertise, and financial aid.

Covid-19 has taken away far more than financial stability or cancelled plans,

it has affected the artists identity and productivity. For whoever is not aware of an artistic nature, creating is everything and goes beyond any material object.

Our so-called art industry has been in need of new policies to enable the ecology to grow sustainably for years. This now goes beyond being a need, it is probably the only solution. How can we encourage the private sector to be a collaborator in this industry? How is the government helping spaces to survive and encourage the growth of more space and creative industries? How will students study the arts if they have no jobs waiting for them once they finish their degrees? One needs to start off by having the sector well recognised as an industry. The importance and relevance of our sector has been undermined for too long, and this pandemic has continued to highlight the situation.

Adding to the dire situation, the economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis will deal unprecedented damage to the livelihood of Malta's visual arts scene. Many may be pushed to abandon their artistic occupation and opt for different economic sectors, whereas others may need to downgrade their artistic activity or businesses, with a subsequent damage to the number and diversity of works being produced, and the progress that has been created over the past 20 years. It is therefore necessary that policymakers at all levels do whatever it takes to avoid a cultural catastrophe. 📍

KENNETH ZAMMIT TABONA

When Does Art Become Kitsch and When Does Kitsch Become Art?

My first recollection, in fact my first realisation, that something was 'kitsch' without even knowing the word, was when I received the First Holy Communion pictures that were given out to commemorate the event. I don't know if they still exist, but I remember them as being awful; some even had lacy edges! Where is the line that separates kitsch from art? Is there one?

This is a question of individual taste, which is supported by one's education and background. But I find that not even this formula is fool proof. I have come to the conclusion that being able to recognise and appreciate art is an innate gift like having an ear for music. One either has it or one doesn't.

There are contemporary artists today who tongue-in-cheek explore kitsch as a challenge and present works that, to me, are simply painful. Is this being done purposely to wean hoi polloi off kitsch by rubbing their noses in it? If so, the ever-increasing amounts of kitsch we see at Christmastime simply shows that this theory doesn't work! People love kitsch; nodding Santas and plastic angels vie with miles and miles of tinsel and other decoration, which take first prize for stretching the imagination to its most bizarre limit. People obviously love it. It's everywhere.

But then who are we to sit in judgement like Rhadamanthus and dictate what people are to like and what they are not to?

Sometimes, when driving around, I come across an 18th century niche which has been restored to an inch of its life. Its patina obliterated and looking as if it came off a factory shelf a couple of hours ago. It's happening too often. I sometimes see houses, the bones of which are obviously a couple of centuries old, being transmogrified into wannabe High Ridge

villas – all squeaky clean and hi-tech. It makes me squirm.

But then I have to squirm in private, as one man's meat is another man's poison and what is hideously ugly to me is probably the epitome of good taste to my neighbour. He may think that my own personal sense of decor and art as 'fuddyduddey' and ugly.

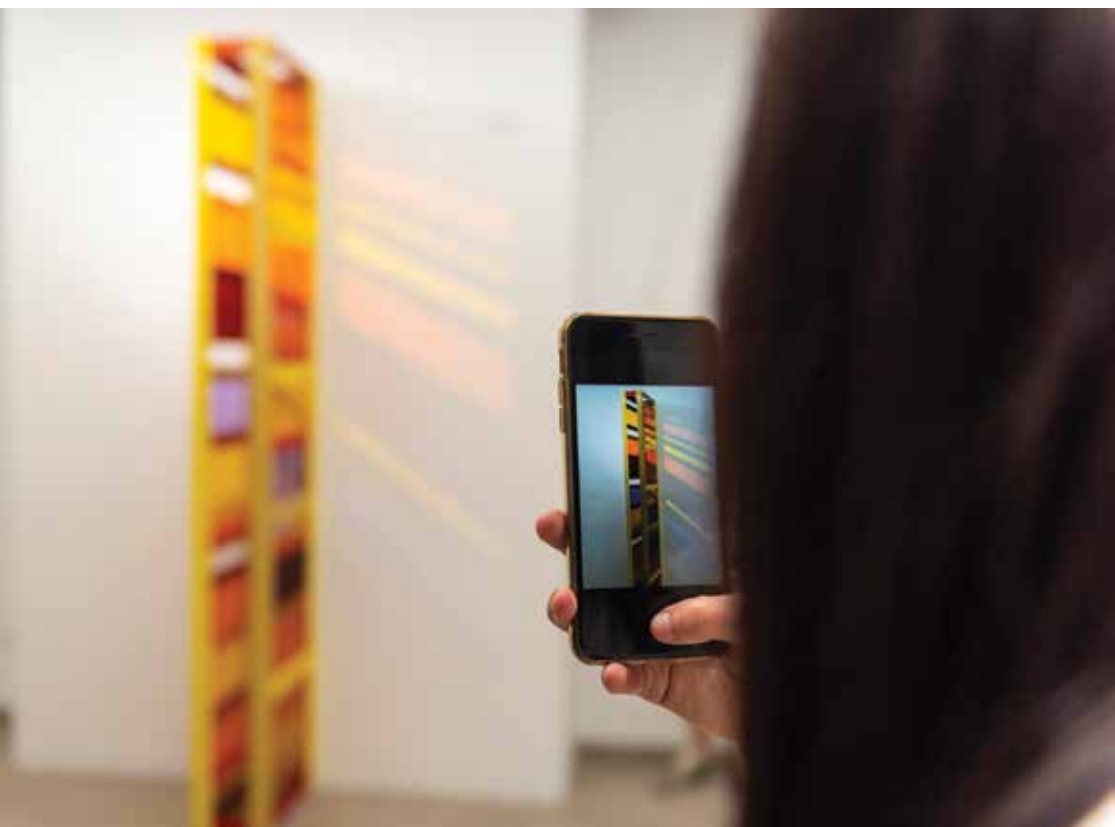
Which brings me back to religious art, because in Malta we are surrounded by it wherever we look. Do I prefer a 17th century primitive Madonna and Child over a soppy Bougreau type of painting of the same theme? Yes. Definitely. But why?

It's difficult to explain isn't it?

It's because one's perception of beauty varies so much that this might be a never-ending story. What I find dumbfounding in Malta is that, while for three centuries we had the most amazing art treasures being amassed before our eyes, and that the nucleus of our artistic DNA was formed while the aristocratic and princely Order ruled us, we have, inexplicably, degenerated into kitsch.

I sometimes have to close my eyes in utter horror when I enter a church – usually 17th century – and am confronted by the most kitsch accretions that are meant to exhort and revive our faith. My particular unfavourite is the poster of Christ of Divine Mercy with a spray of multicoloured sprays issuing from his chest as if the Red Arrows had just flown out of it! Maybe Sister Faustina was on acid at the time, but I simply can't understand how or why mercy – whether divine or not – should be iconographically interpreted like this. It's beyond comprehension.

I know what you're thinking. Why hasn't Kenneth mentioned Jeff Koons? I left him to the end as Koons is so important in this argument about taste. Koons makes art out of kitsch and in consequence shows kitsch up for what it really is! But what is it? You tell me. 📍



Photograph by Tarunima Sen Chandra at Valletta Contemporary

MALTA

JOANNA DELIA



Barriera 2, by Alessio Cuschieri, exhibited in *Aghthi Kbir Alla*, St. James Cavalier, 2020. Photo: Rachel Micallef Somerville

Hungry for art ?

Let's think outside the virus.

Did we kill the arts? Or rather, has art succumbed to the pandemic? If one Googles 'is art dead?', one will find articles with that title written in every month, in every year since the birth of online publishing. So, seeing that *Homo sapiens*' highest achievement continues to die and be magically resurrected, I don't think it is able to be properly murdered by a spiky ball of viral material.

It is said that art never comes from happiness – which probably means art historians and critics are never happy and can never be, hence the ridiculous number of 'art is dead' articles. Perhaps we can also agree that, seemingly and supposedly, the more oppressive life becomes for the artist, the more art she produces. So, is Covid-19 going to save the arts? Or will it signify the death

of an era? Will it continue to bury the struggling artist, or will it filter out the talent from the ego? And how can we direct society to make sure we have the best outcome?

Take literature for instance. Writers have been complaining for decades about the lack of book sales. I myself was thinking – should I write this? Is anyone reading? Was anyone reading before Covid? My friends don't even read this. Let alone the general public. And when they do, they read the heavily edited material, the stuff the publishers want content writers to write. To fill the pages. To attract advertisers.

Then Covid happened. Did people read much before? No. They are probably reading less now, although book sales did allegedly increase during lockdown. Audio book sales are on the rise, although I can't get this newfound

habit of dismissing the written word. I myself have often sent my pieces to friends before sending to print, only to find out months later they didn't read my stuff. And the rest of the genres we call 'art' are the same. They suffer from the growing malaise of attention deficit disorder that is severely afflicting modern society. Their work is lost in a sea of attention grabbing, advertiser-monitored flashes of colour and noise. Their efforts diluted and filtered by the big money special effects. Their intentions and passions nullified too often.

But perhaps, even though during this period of forced social distancing and event restriction, most consumers probably played more background music at home (seeing as they couldn't go to bars, cafes and clubs and festivals) and people possibly looked at the stuff they chose to hang on their walls more (because they didn't go to restaurants

with commercial art hanging on their walls, and they certainly didn't go to galleries), and they still thought art was useless. In fact, during lockdown, a meme was circulated citing a poll which identified artists as the least essential professionals.

Least essential. Useless. Or perhaps people consider art a useless luxury? The people who think art is an unaffordable useless luxury are most probably the ones who will listen to music all the time, watch Netflix, hang prints on the wall without bothering to know the name of the original artist, and order fake designer items on Alibaba. Perhaps the role of the artist is simply not communicated well. And if the majority are unaware of your existence these days, you might as well not exist.

But 'It's like our future has gone': visual artists facing existential threat post Covid-19'; says a headline on *The Guardian* discussing Australian arts in focus. "Artists tend to be solitary creatures anyhow – so in that sense working has not changed much". It claims. Time will tell if artists produce more or not. But how many artists can continue to produce if they can't physically afford to?

Although some online art sales have doubled, locally in terms of exposure and sales it is as though artists have but vanished; like they have lost their raison d'être. Or returned to square one. Back to the days when they first came out of art school or the conservatory, or the day they quit their full time job to embark on trying to be an artist full time. The collective energy of the live orchestra has been missing for too long, and although my life personally was made more precious by the many hours of double bass practice happening in one of the rooms of my house, I can't imagine national orchestra employees or dance company members' being very inspired after all these months of solitude.

I often ask myself these days if this is life, is it worth preserving?

Small galleries, which is all we have here were already struggling. The wealthy cannot travel, and the efforts of the passionate promoters of the often too-hard-to-figure contemporary works have been thrown back into deep abysses.

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JOANNA DELIA is a medical doctor who specialises in cosmetic medicine. She is also a cultural consumer and art collector who tirelessly supports local contemporary art and culture.



MALTA

But, if we struggle to understand the deep hibernation contemporary art seems to be in, we cannot just criticise the consumer. We must criticise the complacent artist too. So even if the virus will certainly not kill art, has it inflicted the artist?

The art that survives is the one which best represents the time in which it was produced. You switch on Netflix and you find no one with a face mask on. We must be patient, obviously. I have heard that there is hardly a single recently pitched upcoming newly produced film, theatre piece or performance piece which does not involve some form of mask wearing.

What are artists trying to do? I want to make a case for something with everything I write. I believe artists want to do just that, no matter their medium. They are not simply producing work merely to be productive and mark their territory. If this is the case, then in this Covid infested year we should be looking forward to some incredible material.

And in the meantime, can all art go virtual? No. How can it? I myself never thought I would miss the energy of a room full of people this much. And in my hunger for art, I did find some morsels.

ŻfinMalta Malta's national dance company produced *Ahna*, a dance film, choreographed by Paolo Mangiola, directed by award-winning director and filmmaker, James Vernon, and performed by the company dancers. The work, distributed mainly via social media, evoked a feeling of togetherness, set in a Maltese Quarry. James Vernon with Sergio Laferla also created

a short film showing Sergio voguing on a typical Maltese roofscape. It was for me a mix of nostalgia, truth, beauty and activism.

I fell in love with the work of Alessio Cuschieri, especially his pieces in *Agħti Kbir Alla*, a show at Spazju Kreattiv cut short by the lockdown, which explored themes such as over-development and the cult-like attitudes of the construction industry in Malta. Alessio worked on some incredible commissions in between furthering his studies in the period and delivered beyond expectations.

Blitz, directed by Alexandra Pace with the valuable curaturship skills of Sara Dolfi Agostini turned all virtual – hosting events such as Laure Prouvost's online exhibition *The Eye of The Storm* and offering for sale Nico Vascellari's flag *#InDarkTimesWeMustDream-WithOpenEyes* – very fitting works for the times.

These little tastes of the product of the artist's mind kept me going through this dark time.

I once asked my father 'what were they thinking?', in response to something that my country had done. He replied, 'why did you assume they were thinking?'

Perhaps one of the roles of the artist is to think for society. They think in ways few of us can. Artists don't only think in languages, they think with all their senses or perhaps transcribe what they're thinking in a way which other senses can perceive.

I feel when a society does not respect its artists it is refusing the thought



Ahna, choreographed by Paolo Mangiola, Artistic Director of ŻfinMalta, and directed by filmmaker, James Vernon. Photo: Julia Boikova.

process. It is refusing to see, hear and feel the combined reactions to complex thought. It is refusing to think.

And feel.

How are we going to kickstart all this back on? We must first understand that we need art. Even the smallest, least educated of us crave art. But we must also be willing to support its creation.

And while the British government put out an advert which seemed to suggest that artists, dancers and performers should be re-trained to work in other, perhaps more useful professions such as the allusive 'tech' industries, Arts Council Malta set up its Transition Arts Task Force to mitigate current circumstances by establishing camaraderie networks and knowledge-sharing, as new realities emerge in which artistic practices can develop.

Why didn't we have more commissions for public sculpture and more open air public performances? Is it because they draw too many crowds? Or did we just oversee the role of artists?

If there was a time to valorise art and culture, it would be now. If there was a time for the state to pay for art, it would be now. If the authorities wanted to boost morale, they would push for art to be streamed on national broadcasting channels. They would want to showcase all the contemporary culture that has been funded in recent years. They should do their best to reignite faith in their long-term vision if there is one. They would strive to counteract all the psychologically draining issues surrounding society right now with beauty. With art. 🎨

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KONRAD BUHAGIAR

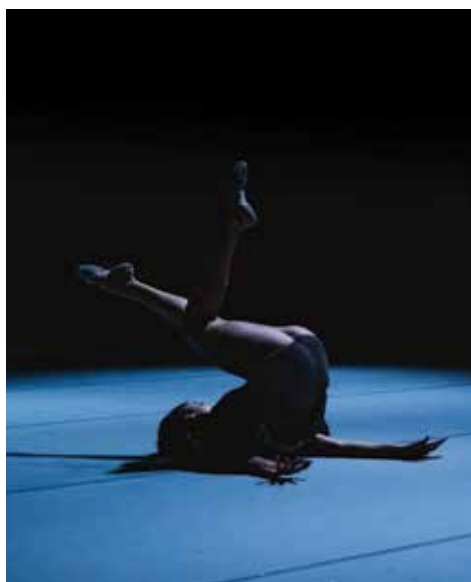
Learning from Harari

ZfinMalta's soul-searching study of Noah Yuval Harari's *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*.
Choreographed by ŻfinMalta's Artistic Director, Paolo Mangiola.

In a world deluged by irrelevant information, clarity is power". Thus starts Harari's latest foray into the labyrinthine truth that hides behind the fiction of our 21st century lives. His project is bound to remain frustrated. Like the 16th century anatomist's search for the sanctuary of the soul, seated somewhere in the hummus of the human body, he is trapped in a quicksand of the unpredictable and ever-shifting forces of nature. Power is corrupting, clarity comes and goes, information – as relevant as it can be – is always misleading, and the menace of a deluge hangs heavily on our future as global warming reaches a point of no return. The declaration of his defeat is contained in his choice of words for the opening sentence.

That said, there lies an incredible wealth of symbolism contained in that first sentence. It conjures up images of Fritz Lang's depiction of the supremacy of automation and the super-race, wartime footage of the Fuhrer, erect and arm outstretched above a marching sea of human bodies, oceans of personal data manipulated to determine artificially our destiny, and monumental sheets of ice plunging into hostile waters. Moments of clarity and moments of darkness alternate like the glimmering light of a primitive projection. Movement is relentless, wave upon wave crashing forward in the storm that catches the outspread wings of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History. His head is turned nostalgically towards the ruins of the past, but he is propelled uncontrollably forward by the storm. That storm is called Progress.

ŻfinMalta, together with Luke Azzopardi (costumes) and Kane Cali' (set), has



Photos by Neil Grech

dipped into the treasure trove of visual material that this insightful book offers up to us as gifts to help us understand our possible futures. The rhythm of the performance is dictated by that of the book, with its twenty-one-partite structure and its alternating violent and visionary themes, which are expressively articulated by the at-once darkly melodic, psychedelic and dystopian music creat-

ed for the piece by Veronique Vella.

Paolo Mangiola's work is a dancerly interrogation of the questions posed by the author, through his practice as a choreographer. "The idea was to create a work which is 'episodic', like watching a series, or browsing the internet. I also wanted the pace of the work to reflect the structure and rhythm of the book. I

love the way Yuval Noah Harari gets us to think about the big topics – climate change, AI, immigration – and I wanted to challenge myself, the dancers, and our collaborators, to 'translate' these questions into dance, ultimately creating a parallel platform for the thinking the book provides".

The project is an ambitious one that is grounded naturally and unpretentiously by the dancers who are unconstrained and lithe but rigorous. The energy that brings them together or separates them, as if guided by swarm intelligence that is the foundation of AI, expertly represents the vitality of life itself. Movement is implacable. Ruins and fragments provide a transient backdrop, meaningfully assembled and falling apart in turn. Gods come and go, and Love makes an appearance through Aristophanes' theory of halves, beautifully and skilfully rendered by the dancers.

"And we had better understand our minds before the algorithms make our minds up for us". Harari's last sentence is, perhaps, the most perplexing one – the one that spells out the book's failure to give us clarity. It begs the ultimate, and obvious, question: if we understand fully the operation of our minds, as the author recommends, will that not entail the loss of free will? Sorry, guys, but your soul just died! This is what the creators of algorithms will soon be telling us, as Tom Wolfe aptly pointed out in his eponymous essay (2000).

ŻfinMalta's performance is a soul-searching exercise that, like the experiments of the Renaissance anatomist, does not arrive at any tangible conclusion. But unlike the book, with all its fascinating information, insights and predictions, that's what gives it a soul. 🍷

The project is an ambitious one that is grounded naturally and unpretentiously by the dancers who are unconstrained and lithe but rigorous.



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A REGULAR MEET-UP FOR INFORMATION, NETWORKING AND MATCHMAKING WITH AND FOR THE ARTS COMMUNITY



A MONTHLY MAILSHOT TO UPDATE THE SUBSCRIBED MEMBERS WITH THE LATEST NEWS AT ARTS COUNCIL MALTA



6 Opinion / Architecture / Italy
October - December '20

RICHARD ENGLAND is an architect, poet, artist and the author of several books on art and architecture. His buildings have earned him numerous international prizes and awards.

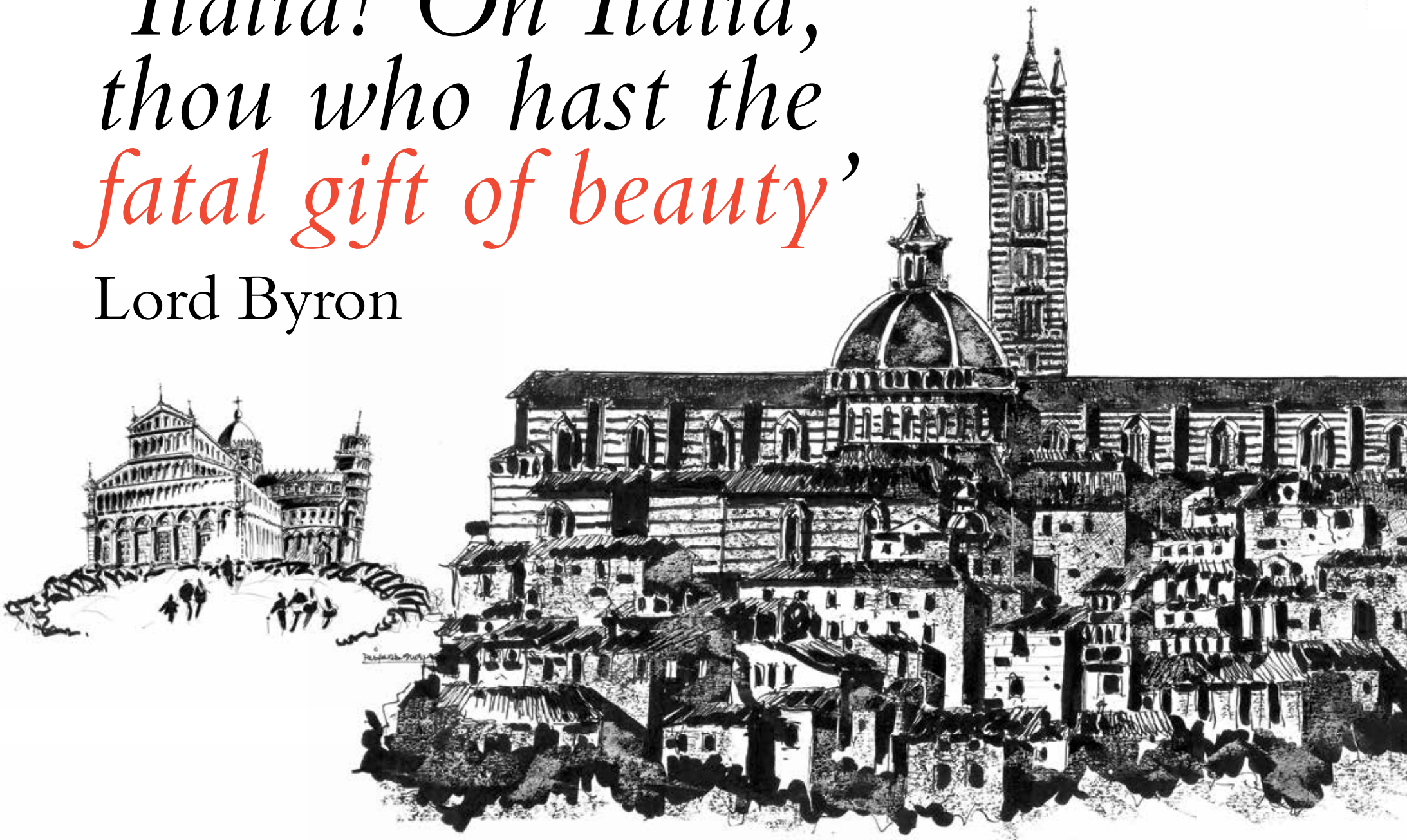


ITALY

RICHARD ENGLAND

'Italia! Oh Italia, thou who hast the fatal gift of beauty'

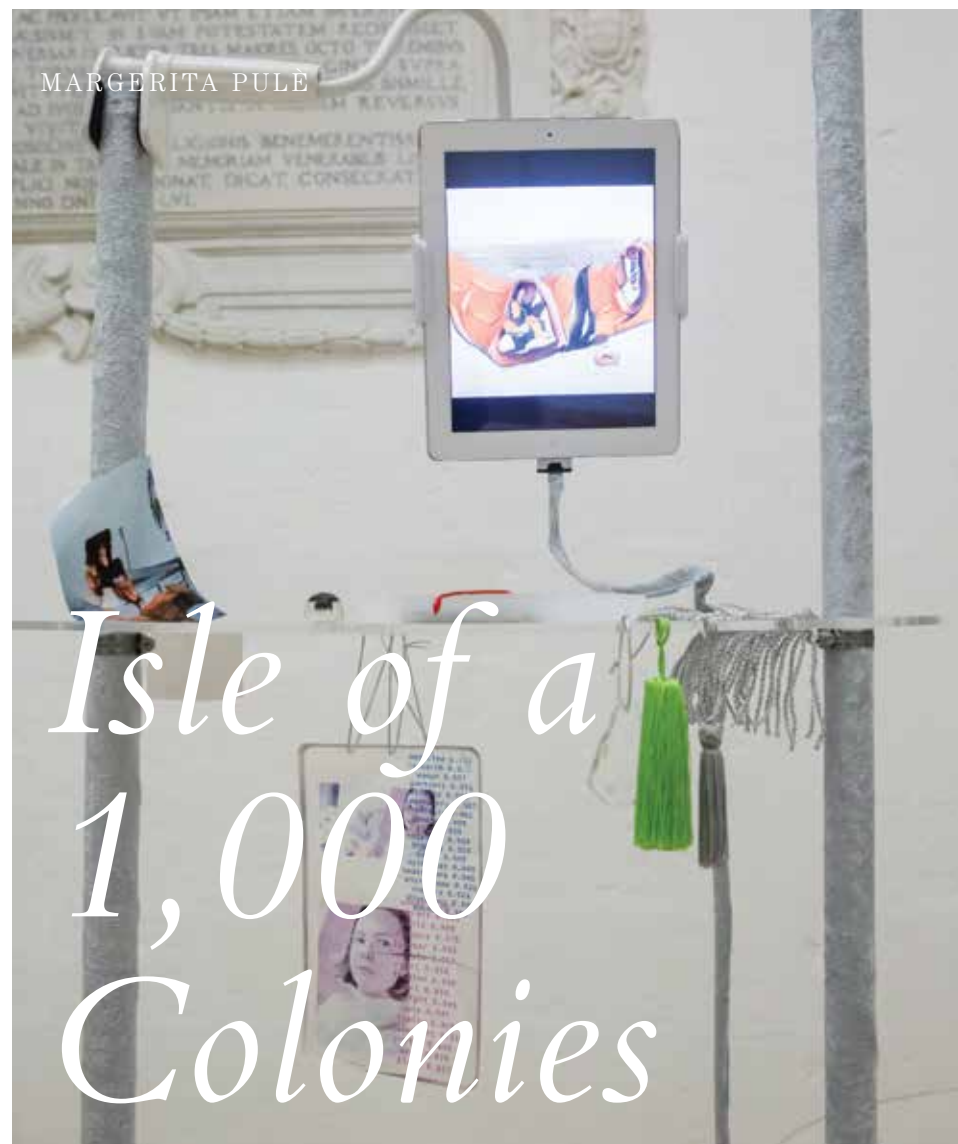
Lord Byron



The Covid-19 lockdown manifested a yearning desire to travel back to Italy and indulge in one of my favourite pastimes – sketching its marvelous historical townscapes. With the impossibility of achieving this in concrete terms, the alternative was to revisit its wonders through my old sketch books of previous visits. Working from home, I found time to rework these on-the-spot renderings into more finished drawings. Drawing depends on one's seeing skills and the capability of analysing the essentiality of what one sees. One absorbs the whole, but documents the essence. What you draw remains with you, for what you document is not so much what you see but what you know. Italy, the land 'the creator made of the designs of Michelangelo', offers perhaps the world's richest array of magical buildings. To travel to this land and appreciate its beauty remains one of the most enriching and ecstatic experiences. In these drawings I have attempted to recall and freeze past instants of my rapture and ecstasy, as a documentation of my admiration for a country that I hold particularly closely to my heart. ●

* Exhibition / Upcoming / Vienna
October - December '20

A U S T R I A



Letta Shtohryn, "woman", "holding" detail (2020). steel, plastic, epoxy, printed image, wax, electronics, tablets, threads, fabric. photo courtesy of the artist. Photo: Elisa von Brockdorff.

Isle of a 1,000 Colonies

Debatable Land(s) is a year-long project presenting a reflection on the sporadic, and sometimes oblique nature of human action and global events, and on the power of historic narratives and common recollection. As she works on the project with colleagues – Greta Muscat Azzopardi, Maren Richter and Klaus Schafner – Margerita Pulè reflects on some of the project's open-ended research topics. In particular, the diverse forms of coloniality in Malta and the artists who seek to challenge them.

As the world grapples with a pandemic that has thrown a stark light on entrenched inequalities alongside a backdrop of conspiracy theories and tipping-point elections, artists continue to contribute to debates on colonial histories and power dynamics. Here in Malta too, we have been faced with our own (not so) hidden flaws and paradoxes. Malta, the country that arguably invited the coloniser in, and watched while it stayed for tea, is now struggling to extricate itself from a Stockholm-syndrome of its own making.

The Black Lives Matter movement spread across the world, and we went

through our own soul-searching moments; for a few short moments at least, the possibility of tumbling the formidable Queen Victoria from Republic Square entered the public consciousness. Coloniality, a perversely benign phenomenon in Malta, dragged us into its slipstream; we now found ourselves unsure if the presentation of an apparently unexceptional Maltese fossil to an heir to the English throne should cause indignation or not.

Local art institutions are ill-equipped to address this fall-out, being too close to the hand that feeds them, and are reluctant to dismantle their master's house. Thus, artists must pick up their own tools and try to make sense of events,

past, present and future. The (physically) small work *Is it easier to get an honest reply from her or win the lottery?* (2020) by Keit Bonnici riffed on this debate, sending a carefully made postcard to Queen Victoria's descendant, the current Queen Elizabeth II, to ask her personal opinion – how did she feel about the debate surrounding the statue of her great-great-great-grandmother?

The word coloniality can of course be endowed with a broader meaning, away from the industries and pastimes of empires. Anibal Quijano's 'coloniality of power' describes the structures of dominance, oppression, and hegemony in modern times. Keit Bonnici has form in challenging authority – in a ballsy art-gesture in 2019, he jauntily wheeled a purpose-made stool up Merchant Street, propped it up against the controversially-appropriated area in front of the Valletta Market, opened a thermos flask, and chatted with bemused customers while drinking his coffee.

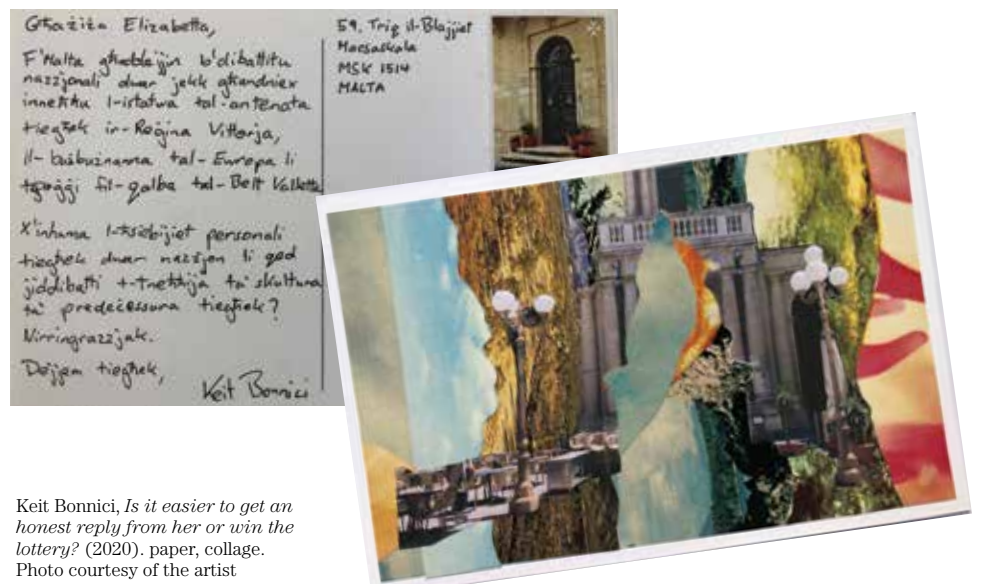
This work was powerful in its simplicity, perhaps because the most apparent form of displacement of power comes with that of land, privatisation of already scarce public space, and abuse of planning laws are manifestations of this. Kristina Borg, who works with the relationships between the personal and the public, created a richly layered and sensitive work with curator Maren Richter in the project *No Man's Land* in 2018. The work took a dialogical form, with the artist holding conversations with residents of the Grand Harbour area, but also inviting small audiences on a number of boat trips looking inwards from the sea onto ambiguous areas along the harbours' shorelines, to observe how these have been appropriated by commercial, industrial and defensive interests.

Questioning the use of public space can also take the form of longer-term projects. Anyone who attended one of Fragmenta Malta's events between 2013 and 2018 will appreciate its gentle take-overs of unloved or remote spaces, symbolically freeing in turn an abandoned hotel, a wasteland, a heritage sight, a beach through installations and site-specific works by numerous artists.

Recently commissioned official public artworks have been less successful, both in curation, conception and implementation. Pjazza Kastilja, for example, has been left bereft of its former dignity, and is not home to a hodgepodge of unlikely monumental bedfellows. Meanwhile, a more elegant ode to the Maltese Republic by Austin Camilleri, which was selected following a public call, and destined for a site in the lower part of Valletta, remained unrealised.

Working alongside institutions, Gozitan artist Victor Agius contested another version of self-colonisation with his installation *Hagarna* (2019). His practice brings him close to his native soil – literally – as he uses local clay, stone and other natural elements as his raw materials. *Hagarna* – in the form of a giant boulder cloven in two – is meant to be walked through in a re-experiencing and re-appropriation of our own land.

Re-seeing history as something that belongs to us, rather than to those in command can also serve to distance a society from its colonised mentality. The organisation Magna Żmien challenges hegemonic histories of Malta by giving importance to 'everyday' people, and their family chronicles. Making analogue home-recording and photos accessible to their owners and to the public can be seen as a radical act of decolonising in itself.



Keit Bonnici, *Is it easier to get an honest reply from her or win the lottery?* (2020). paper, collage. Photo courtesy of the artist

* Exhibition / Upcoming / Vienna
October - December '20

MARGERITA PULÈ
is an artist, writer and curator,
with a Master's Degree in Fine
Arts, and founder of Unfinished
Art Space. Her practice and
research are concerned with
the contradictions of politics
and social realities.



A U S T R I A

There are, of course, other forms of coloniality that we are barely conscious of – too many for this article; if you're looking for it, coloniality exists in all sorts of places. Letta Shtohryn's "woman", "holding" (2020) is a feminist work; at its heart it uncovers our vulnerability in the face of algorithms that have inherited the biases of their programmers. Women's bodies are no strangers to dominance; Charlene Galea's prolific photographic practice gives women the power and autonomy to engage actively with their own portrayal, freeing them from the coloniality of social media and public approval.

Power linked with sex has a part to play too. Charlie Cauchi's *Scheherazade* (2019) was built around a world where violence and coercion are inextricably linked with sex and entertainment – money and history bearing down, quite literally, on women's bodies.

I could go on. However, there is a lacuna in all this which is worth mentioning; very few artists address issues of race and racism in Malta and even fewer go beyond focusing on the acceptance of recently-arrived migrants. This, perhaps, will change in a generation or two, as Malta's population itself becomes more diverse, and blackness ceases to be equated with foreignness or recent migration.

For now, if we interpret all forms of coercion or inequality as forms of coloniality, decolonising our surroundings and behaviours will take a fundamental shift in our thinking. Perhaps artists can help us do this, not only symbolically and aesthetically, but also on in long-term practical and political terms. 📍

Debatable Land(s) is an experimental spatial installation, and the first chapter of a year-long project dealing with mechanisms of space ap-



Charlene Galea, *Island Girls* (2020). Photo courtesy of the artist.

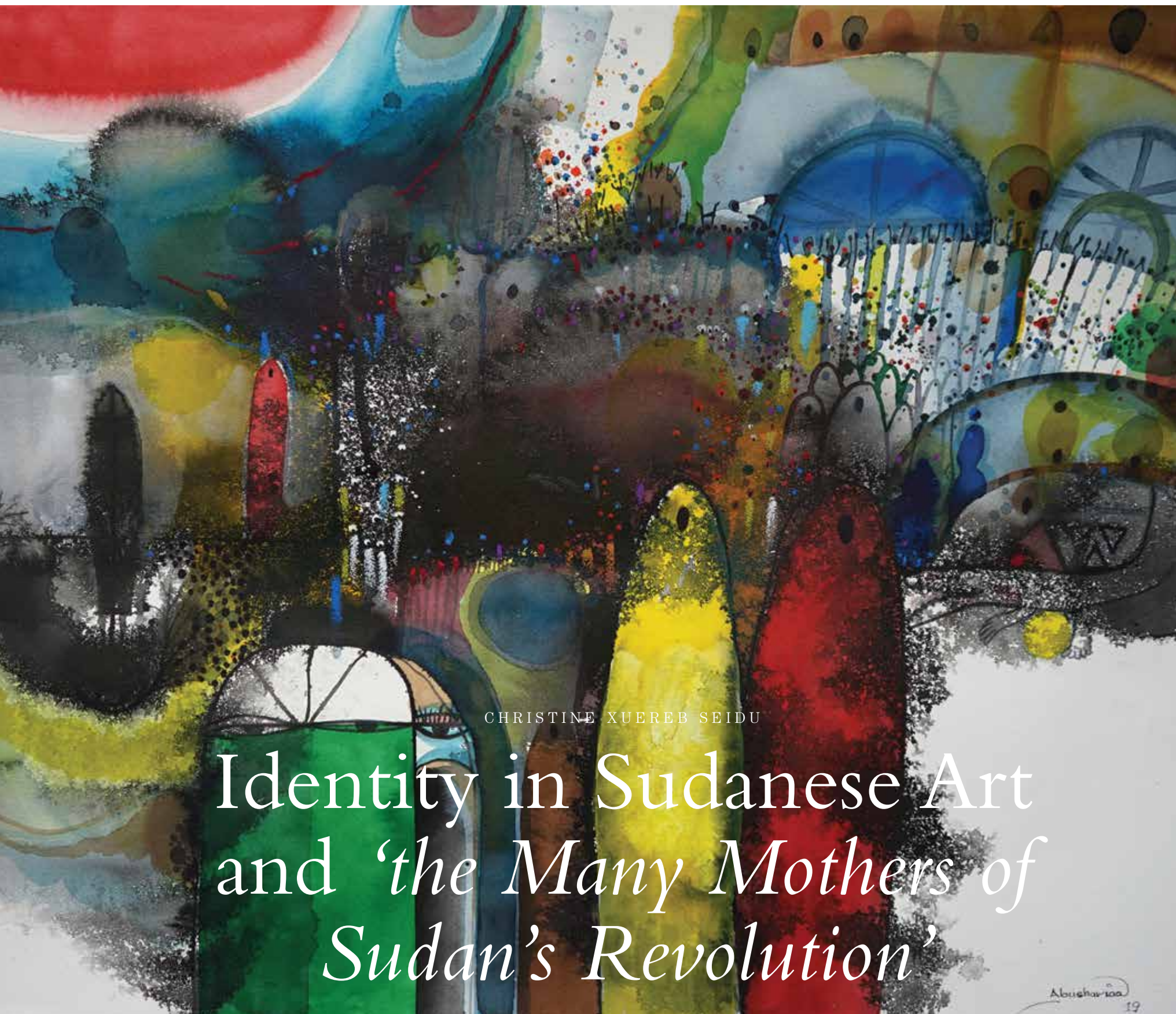
propriation and their historical and current deviations, employing Malta as an artistic case-study. The first iteration of the project is presented in Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, from 29 October – 27 November 2020. Participating artists are Mohamed Ali 'Dali' Agrebi, Keit Bonnici, Antoine Cassar, Charlie Cauchi, Charlene Galea, Roxman Gatt, Jimmy Grima,

Bettina Hutschek, Magna Žmien, Letta Shtohryn, Guy Woueté, Chakib Zidi, and Tobias Zielony. *Debatable Land(s)* is a project by Grammar of Urgencies Collective in collaboration with Margerita Pulè/Unfinished Art Space and Greta Muscat-Azzopardi, and part of the *Fleeting Territories* series. The project is supported by Arts Council Malta. www.wuk.at.

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CHRISTINE XUEREB SEIDU

Identity in Sudanese Art and 'the Many Mothers of Sudan's Revolution'

Abushariaa Ahmed, *Sudan 06-19 #1*, 2019 (Ink on paper, 58 x 70 cm). Photo: Courtesy of Afriart Gallery

Three decades under the dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, which saw no economic growth, led to spontaneous protests and, eventually, to a large and peaceful uprising resulting in al-Bashir's removal from power in April 2019. The transition was riotous and saw hundreds killed, injured or raped. Artists, who were suppressed under Bashir's rule leaving them jailed, banned or exiled, were now holding power and at the heart of this uprising – with music concerts, painting of murals throughout Khartoum, and more, calling for a much needed change and paying homage to the victims of the June 3rd crackdown.

Through visual art in activism, today's generation of artists are upholding a legacy of standing up to military regimes, similarly to the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. One such artist is Alaa Satir, who became the face

of the resistance by empowering women and highlighting their role in the revolution, especially since women have long been part of the country's struggle for peace and justice. Gallery manager and curator at Afriart Gallery in Uganda, Michelle Mlati, told me that the "emergence of activism is largely present in iconic female figures, such as the Kandake (the Nubian Queen) of Meroe, who employed a military strategy to prevent Alexander the Great from conquering Nubian lands in 332 B.C."

For artists like Alaa Satir, Galal Yousif, Assil Diab and many others, taking to the street and painting was a way to break away from the fear, document the change and remind whoever governs next what they are fighting for. Many do not believe the revolution should end with just the instalment of a civilian government, but measures like art being integrated into the basic education system, for example.

☆ Review / Africa / Sudan
October - December '20

CHRISTINE XUEREB SEIDU
founded Christine X Art Gallery
in 2004 after a university degree
in Art History and Anthropology.
She has returned to Malta after a
year in Ghana where she explored
African art and culture.



SUDAN

It was only in 1964 that the Khartoum School became a university with a BA degree, with teachers who had left Sudan to study art in London – either at the Slade School of Fine Art, at Central St Martins or at the Royal College of Art. These included Ibrahim El-Salahi, Kamala Ishaq, Amir Nour, Magdoub Rabbah, Mohammed Abdallah, El Nigoumi, Ahmad Shibrain and Taj Ahmad. Together they set up training which would have artists leaving the school with their own expressions of African and Islamic identity. But in the 1970s, another round of artists received overseas scholarships following their first degrees at Khartoum university. The group, which includes Abdallah Bashir (Bola), Hassan Musa (residing in France), Rashid Diab and Mohammed Omer Bushara, came out strong in the contemporary African art scene. Bola and Musa accused the early generation of Khartoum school artists of elitism and ethnocentrism, instead of being more proactive in response to the aesthetic demands of modernity and contemporaneity.

It was only El-Salahi, regarded as a 'visionary modernist', who responded to the critiques through correspondence with Musa, as well as engaging in dialogue with younger Sudanese artists on issues related to identity, art and



Abushariaa Ahmed, *Sudan 06-19 #7*, 2019 (Ink on paper, 58 x 70 cm)
Photo: Courtesy of Afriart Gallery

criticism in Sudan. It is no surprise that he is recognised as one of the most important artists to emerge out of Sudan, even successfully showing a retrospective of his work at Tate Modern in 2013. Hussein Shariffe, who just like El-Salahi studied at the Slade, and Salah Elmur, are another two artists who received international acclaim. But many are the artists who today are reaching different

markets worldwide through international African art fairs and African art galleries like the Afriart gallery, the Circle Art Gallery and many others. These include artists: Abdallah Mohammed ElTayeb, Abdel Basit El Khatim, Abushariaa Ahmed, Amel Bashir, Amna Elhassan, Ashraf Monim, Bakri Bilal, Elamin Osman, Elhassan Elmountasir, Eltayeb Dawelbait, Fathi Hassan, Hazim Al Hus-

sein, Hussein Halfawi, Hussein Salim, Issam Hafiez, Khalid Abdel Rahman, Miska Mohammed, Mohammed Abdella Otaybi. Mohammed Morda, Mohammed Omar Khalil, Mutaz Elemam and Laila Mukhtar Adam.

Afriart Gallery will be hosting a show titled *Sudanese Art: Before, During and After the 2019 Revolution*, from the 5th to the 18th November 2020, which is part of FNB Art Joburg online art fair, broadcasting from Johannesburg, South Africa. The show will be exhibiting the artworks of the three Sudanese artists – Abushariaa Ahmed, Amna Elhassan and Khalid Abdel Rahman. In the series *Sudan 06-19*, which was made during the revolution, Abushariaa focuses on the role of women in the Sudan revolution, which reached its peak around June 2019. Women who led powerful protest chants fuelling the revolution that ousted President Omar al-Bashir, like Alaa Salah, came to symbolise the fundamental role women played on the front lines of pro-democracy protests, outnumbering the men present. His ink drawings refer to them as 'the many mothers of Sudan's Revolution', a strong collective effort of Sudanese women that date back to the iconic female figure of activism, the Nubian Queen Kandake of Meroe. ●



Amna Elhassan, *Hair & Love 2*, 2019, Printmaking (Stamps on paper, 11.5 x 13cm)
Photo: Courtesy of Afriart Gallery



Abushariaa Ahmed, *Sudan 06-19 #12*, 2019 (Ink on paper, 58 x 70 cm)
Photo: Courtesy of Afriart Gallery

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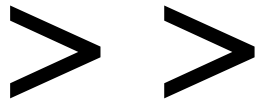
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Photo: Kris Micallef
Design: Lorraine Lewis



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Localist / Listings / Malta

October - December '20

LOCALIST



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GALEA'S ART STUDIO

Galea's Art Studio was established in 1920 by Chev. Joseph Galea and today it is run by Pierre, Eddie and Heather. Apart from the studio which sells prints and artist materials they have also opened an art café on Strait St which provides a space for events such as poetry readings, drawing clubs and good coffee, and a third venue used for art lessons, drawing classes and creative workshops.

*Art Studio, 70 South Street, Valletta.
Art Gallery, 221 Strait Street, Valletta
M: 9943 8965
E: creativestore1920@gmail.com
W: www.galeasart.com.mt*

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*Bellavista Street, San Gwann
T: 2138 5584
E: art@vgb.com.mt
W: www.vgbart.com.mt*

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Founded in 2004, Chris Briffa Architects' work is renowned for its distinctive and contemporary approach to context,

with a strong emphasis on detail and craftsmanship. In their quest to create sense of place, projects include various hospitality missions - such as the Reef Guesthouse in Bahrain and the local Valletta Vintage - places where many have recounted a timeless experience.

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MODEL is curated by architects Simon Grech and Alan Galea who seek to challenge and question existing working models in the creative and construction industry today, where no boundaries exist between art, science, business and technology, by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to design both within the MODEL office structure and through relationships with other talented individuals, continuously embracing the complexity of design today.

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*M: 7961 9391
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W: www.tomvanmalderen.com*

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MATT THOMPSON

Matt is a photographer based between Malta and London, with a love of photographing people. Passionate about what he does, you can trust Matt will work with imagination, creativity, and integrity on every private or commercial commission.

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E: email on mail@matthompson.co.uk
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To be listed here on the Localist email info@artpaper.press or call 9929 2488.

***** Spotlight / Events / Global
October - December '20



EXHIBITIONS +
ART FAIR

A selection of art events from around the world

10.20-12.20

Events until February 2021



02.10.20
Until 28 February 2021

WARHOL. THE AMERICAN DREAM FACTORY

Following two major Warhol shows in New York and London in recent years, this exhibition will offer a comprehensive overview of the career Andy Warhol as a multi-faceted, historically influential artist. The exhibition will include some of Warhol's most famous, loaned from large global museums and leading private collections. Rare documents connected to Warhol's work will also be exhibited in the show for the first time. The exhibition will chronicle forty years of American history through the work of Warhol – one of the most impactful artists of the 20th century.

La Boverie
Parc de la Boverie, Liège, Wallonia, 4020, Belgium
www.laboverie.com

Image: Warhol. The American Dream Factory, courtesy of La Boverie



06.10.20
Until January 2021

ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS SUMMER EXHIBITION 2020

Over 200 years ago, the Royal Academy of Arts annual Summer Exhibition was founded in an attempt to support artists and architects through the showcase of their work – bringing the art of the moment to the public in an immediate and impactful way. The Summer Exhibition has since been an annual fixture on the summer calendar of all art lovers. Due to Covid restrictions earlier in the year, the Summer Exhibition will fall in winter for the first time in history. The show will include a vast collection of works by both household names and emerging artists. This year's event includes new works by Tracey Emin, Rebecca Horn, Anselm Kiefer, Julian Schnabel, Gillian Wearing and Ai Weiwei.

The Royal Academy of Arts
6 Burlington Gardens, London, W1S 3ET
www.royalacademy.org.uk

Image: Installation view of the Summer Exhibition 2020 (6 October 2020 – 3 January 2021) at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts / David Parry



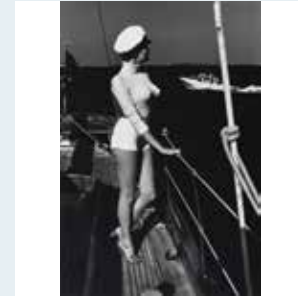
16.10.20
Until 15 November 2020

FRITZ IST AMERIKANISCH

Maltese artist Ryan Falzon will exhibit a selection of works in Germany, under the title Fritz ist Amerikanisch. The exhibition title relates to a large 2mx2m centrepiece by Falzon that will be part of the collection on show. The show will address the complex history connecting West Berlin, USA and the Baader Meinhof group, touching on themes related to the unification of Berlin and 'turbulent events driven and directed by the Americans, keeping in mind the Cold War and the dynamics of power in West Berlin'. The selection of artworks to be shown in Berlin were previously exhibited in Malta under the name We Lost the War, in January 2017 at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta.

Okk Raum 29
Prinzenalle 29, 13359, Berlin
www.kritische-kunst.org

Image: Ex Raver Now A Cop, one of the works to go on display in Fritz ist Amerikanisch at Okk Raum 29, Berlin. Source: Ryan Falzon / Facebook



16.10.20
Until 8 January 2021

HELMUT NEWTON: HIGH GLOSS

To commemorate the occasion of Helmut Newton's 100th birthday on 31 October 2020, Hamiltons Gallery in Mayfair, London is showcasing a rare collection of Newton's 'ferrotyped' prints from the 1970s. The exhibition will feature a selection of Newton's most recognisable photographs, including *Elsa Peretti*, *Rue Aubriot* and *Woman Examining Man*. In conjunction with the exhibition and to celebrate the centenary, the gallery will be publishing a limited-edition book with illustrations of each photograph, accompanied by essays by renowned photography specialist Philippe Garner and Vaslios Zatsis of The Irving Penn Foundation.

Hamiltons Gallery
13 Carlos Place, London, W1K 2EU
www.hamiltonsgallery.com

Image: Winnie on Deck, Off the Coast of Cannes, 1975, Helmut Newton © The Helmut Newton Estate, Courtesy Maconochie Photography



28.10.20
Until 01 November 2020

THE AFFORDABLE ART FAIR AMSTERDAM

The Affordable Art Fair is back for a special 2020 Dutch Edition in Amsterdam. The fair's venue, De Kromhouthal, sited on the Northern banks of the IJ will showcase thousands of affordable artworks, all priced at €7,500 or under. The fair will display its usual mix of contemporary artists, each represented by local and national galleries. Established in 1999, The Affordable Art Fair holds fairs in 10 cities around the world including London, New York, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Hamburg, Brussels, Singapore, Milan, Stockholm and Melbourne with each fair showcasing a wide array of affordable artworks by both established and emerging artists.

De Kromhouthal, Gedempt Hamerkanaal 231, 1021 KP Amsterdam, The Netherlands
www.affordableartfair.com

Image: © Affordable Art Fair via Kallaway PR, showing installation at previous fairs



29.10.20
Until 7 February 2021

ABOUT TIME – FASHION AND DURATION

During the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 150th year, the Met Costume Institute will host a 2020 exhibition tracing a century and a half of fashion — from 1870 to the present — along with narrative timeline. The show will explore how 'clothes generate temporal associations that conflate past, present, and future'. The exhibition will also position Virginia Woolf as a so-called ghost narrator. The garments on display will all be black, in a bid to emphasise developments in silhouette throughout fashion history. The end of the show will switch from dark to light, with a culminating white dress from Viktor & Rolf's spring/summer 2020 haute couture collection, constructed from upcycled swatches in a patchwork design.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 5th Ave, New York, NY 10028, United States
www.metmuseum.org

Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Source: Flickr

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*** Spotlight / Events / Malta**
October - December '20

**VISUAL ART
EXHIBITIONS**

A selection of curated events in Malta + Gozo

10.20-12.20



09.10.20
Until 23 October 2020

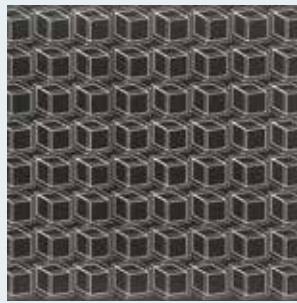
EFFLORESCENCE

Taking on the tradition of still life painting, the latest collection by Selina Scerri explores the simple vase of flowers in a contemporary idiom. Using found images and real flowers as references, Scerri presents larger than life floral bouquets, exploring different materials and floral representations through painting. The artworks on show are intended to resemble windows to the world's soul, seemingly having a contemporary and profound need to connect back with nature. Magical and dreamy, the viewer is invited to crave the natural habitat that is often lacking in our cosmopolitan life.

Where: 111 Art Gallery, 38/40, Garden Street, Gzira
Weds, Thurs, Fri, 6 - 8pm and Saturday 9.30 - 1.30pm & 3 - 5.30pm;
Sunday 9.30am-12pm.

<https://www.artsy.net/show/111-art-gallery-efflorescence>

Image: Selina Scerri, Flowers, 2019, Acrylics, Spray and Resin on Canvas, 150 x 120cm



14.10.20
until 28 October 2020

**CUBE:
MANIPULATIONS**

Sarah Maria Scicluna will be exhibiting a body of work at a solo exhibition, addressing manipulations of the cube as a form and their occupation of imaginary space. Scicluna's interest in the cube started out due to the recognition of it being the only regular hexahedron, thus making it somewhat special in comparison to other forms. The works are a series of hand printed silk screen prints. This type of printmaking process allows for flat blocks of ink and clean lines, which are of centre focus of the work.

Where: DESKO, St Lucy Street, Valletta
Tuesday to Friday: 11am-2pm, 4pm-7pm and Saturdays: 11am-3pm

www.sarahmariascicluna.com

Image: Cube by Sara Scicluna



16.10.20
Until 31 October 2020

**20 X 20 ART
ON PAPER**

In January 2020, an international artist call was sent out for artists to submit images of artworks sized 20x20cm for selection. 50 artists were selected and the exhibition, which was meant to have been held in the first two weeks of May, was held online instead. The unsold artworks, together with replacements to those sold, will be exhibited live, framed. The artworks range from photography, drawings, illustrations, collage, original prints, paintings etc on paper, bringing many artists from different backgrounds together in one space.

Where: Christine X Art Gallery, Sliema.
Monday- Saturday 10am-1pm & 4-7pm or by appointment

www.christinexart.com

Image: Courtesy of the gallery



23.10.20
Until 20 December 2020

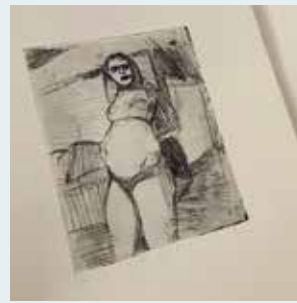
**THE COLOUR
PROJECT**

November / December 2020 sees two exhibitions by four artists – 23 October - 14 November 2020: Margrith Zuberbuhler, a Swiss artist specialising in the creation of unique totems, and abstract paintings by Rudy Buhler. 18 November - 20 December 2020: Jo Dounis, artist/designer with her own style of abstracts, with German artist/designer Jacob von Sternberg in an exhibition titled Crossing Borders – United in Colours. Rudy Buhler Art specialises in abstract paintings and sculptures.

Where: Rudy Buhler Art - The Colour Project, Quayside Court, 58 Triq Is-Salini, Marsaskala.
Weds - Sat 10am - 1pm & 4.30pm - 8.30pm or by appointment

www.rudybuhler.art

Image: Courtesy of the gallery



06.11.20
Until 28 November 2020

PAPERWORKS

The Paperworks gallery, a new section separate to the Christine X Art gallery, is all about promoting the art of draftsmanship, printmaking and darkroom printing. This exhibition opens a carefully curated selection of drawings, etchings, lithographs, silver gelatin prints and contemporary art on paper by talented Malta-based artists, including artists Vince Briffa, Gabriel Buttigieg, Joyce Camilleri, David Pisani, Zvezdan Reljic, Olaug Vethal and many more.

Where: Paperworks Gallery at Christine X Art Gallery, Sliema.
Monday- Saturday 10am-1pm & 4-7pm or by appointment

www.paperworksmalta.com

Image: Courtesy of the gallery



19.11.20
Until 12 December 2020

**FRENCH
CONNECTION**

In collaboration with The Alliance Francaise in Malta, Lily Agius Gallery presents a collective exhibition by four French artists – Pascal Buclon, Bertrand Peyrot, Cyril Sancereau, and Julien Vinet, using different mediums: photography, acrylic on canvas, oxidised metal and ink on paper.

Where: Lily Agius Gallery, 54 Cathedral Street, Sliema.

Tuesday – Saturday 10 - 2pm & Tues, Weds & Thurs 3-6pm and by appointment.

www.lilyagiusgallery.com

Image: Destruction of the Myth by Pascal Buclon, Acrylic on linen canvas, 81 x 100cm

03.12.20 Until 23 December 2020

SERENITY & UPHEAVAL

Serenity & Upheaval is an exhibition of paintings by the contemporary artist Catherine Cavallo. According to the artist, this exhibition represents the pockets of serenity that are to be found amidst all life's upheavals. Her love of the outdoors is evident in her land and seascapes, while her fascination with the human form produces powerful and evocative figurative compositions.

Where: Malta Society of Arts, Palazzo de La Salle, Republic Street, Valletta.
Monday – Friday 10am - 5pm, and Saturday 10am to 1pm

www.catherinecavallo.com

Image: Pastizzi at Crystal Palace by Catherine Cavallo, oil on canvas, 150cm 120cm





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