

art exhibition

 **APS** bank

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APS Bank Centre, Birkirkara



GILBERT CALLEJA | JENI CARUANA | MARIO SAMMUT | CHARMAINE ZAMMIT

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

This year's exhibition brings to a close a three-year programme which brought together twelve Maltese artists. From time to time, individual artists approach APS Bank for financial support to present their works or to attend conferences abroad. While such personal requests continue to be considered, on their own merits, it was thought to be perhaps more intellectually stimulating and equitable, from the perspective of providing opportunities especially to upcoming artists, if collective exhibitions, inspired by specific themes, were to be held. Such a form of support can present works that focus on particular themes and unite the talents of a wide array of artists.

This was the insight that led to this three-year initiative, which was repeated contemporaneously in photography. In fact, in parallel with the Art Exhibition, there are three photographic competitions – with themes 'Green', 'Movement' and 'Contrast' – which produced an annual output of forty works exhibited in the Spring in Malta and in the Summer in Gozo and twelve of which were reproduced in the annual Bank's calendar.

Such occasions provide APS Bank with the possibility of collaboration with a variety of organisations and individuals. While the Bank provides the financial resources and, at times the logistics, for such activities to be held in various cultural sectors spanning Heritage, Music, Literature and the Visual Arts, many others are given space where they can demonstrate their innate talents effectively and professionally. For APS Bank, this collaboration has an intrinsic

value of its own. It emanates from the underlying philosophy that inspires and guides the Bank's spectrum of operations, both in the financial sector and in all other areas in which it involves itself.

This year's exhibition is once again enhanced by a souvenir programme that includes two articles. One, penned by Dr Louis Lagana, curator, reflects on Archetypal Collectivism in Figurative Art and relates this phenomenon to the works represented in this collection. Ms Romina Delia writes about the theme of 'Identity, Community and the Human Body', and illustrates the current trends in art with examples from the international and local contexts. In this way, the programme will achieve a dual objective: describe the works exhibited and the artists' inspirations that gave them birth; and locate such creations in a wider, human context referring to the relationship between society and the artist. In a small way, we aim to contribute to the formation of viewers who enjoy being challenged by artists and 'thought-provoking' works of art in addition to viewing paintings, ceramics or sculptures as simply the product of accomplished craftsmen.



E. P. Delia
Chairman

ARCHETYPAL COLLECTIVISM IN FIGURATIVE ART

The use of archetypal images in art and their contribution to the individuation process provide an important structure to assess the complex study of artists' relationship to their work. The work becomes like a dream that emerges from the unconscious. The artist creates archetypal images that surface from the threshold of the unconscious into consciousness. While these archetypal images in many works of art look mainly conventional, they could also be highly personal. They extend beyond the mere representation of a historical image.

Although the personal element tends to be more of concern to the viewer, it is rather the collective quality that appears to be central. "Jung contends that the personality of the artist as a person is not applicable to the person as an artist" (Mayo, 1995). We have to look at the artist not as a human being but as a person related to his work. "Great artists show in their art a much more 'collective' psychology than personal, otherwise, art would not have broad appeal" (ibid.,88). Every individual can use art to bring forward messages from one's own personal unconscious.

Artists show their ability to directly express their creative powers through the unconscious. So the vital role of the artist is to help us see the messages that emanate from the collective unconscious. As Carl Jung put it: "In this way the work of the artist meets the psychic needs of the society in which he lives, and therefore means more than his personal fate, whether he is aware of it or not. Being essentially the instrument of his work, he is subordinate to it, and we have no right to expect him to interpret it for us. He has done his utmost by giving it form, and must leave the interpretation to others and to the future" (Jung, 1967).

It is not easy to interpret the meaning of works of art. We need to realise that a work of art acts upon us as it acted upon the artist.

In this third collective art exhibition organised by APS Bank, the main concept of all the works is related to the archetypal image of the human being. There is a sense of collectivism in this art show which addresses social and cultural spheres of

human life. Jeni Caruana, Gilbert Calleja, Mario Sammut and Charmaine Zammit all come from different artistic backgrounds and they explored issues related to identity, humanity, the existential quest, the 'Otherness' and the 'Self'.

Jeni Caruana is fascinated by people in general, but in particular by the human form. In this exhibition she presents paintings of figures and their relation to space. In her dancers or musicians the artist focuses on the physical control and their relationship to each moment in time. For many years Caruana studied figure drawing and painting from various perspectives: static models, moving figures, performers in dance and theatre, musicians and all sorts of performances on stage. The study of the figures enabled her to generate a mental snapshot of the form in space, and make the images appear as they were captured by the eyes. Her knowledge of anatomy and her painting technique override all other concerns and drive her to create perfect images of the body. In this collection of paintings and drawings the artist succeeds to incorporate the empty space around the figures as a field of existence. The works are narratives of the past and the present joys of life.

Today there is a wider definition of artistic primitivism. "Interest in the creative process is more important than form" (Rhodes,1994) and that is what makes the 'primitive' distinguishable in contemporary art. In the works of Gilbert Calleja we see this at work in his recent explorations of the human body. The painting of masses of flesh and shapeless bodies are his preference. Strong brushstrokes and layers of paint with a restricted palette is a primary element of his work, yet it does not predominate or become an easy tool. Calleja searches into a 'primitive' aesthetic form of the body, at times showing "a spectral 'rotting space', a place where the poetic body dissolves into alchemical inconsistency" (Farrugia, 2011). It is a body deformed which turns into an absence of the body: a ghostly image. His 'figurative' imagery, which incorporates unidentified fragments of the human body, is an unconscious exploration of human identity as a cultural and mediated construct.



Henry Moore (1898-1986) Reclining Figure

Mario Sammut's figurative sculptures are about mankind. In recent years he started to explore thematically the effects of globalisation on humankind. His works are voices of humanity; individual and communal captivations of figurative narratives. The artist peeps deeply into contemporary society and discovers a myriad of problems that we come across every day. Personal problems related to relationships, different concepts about gender, racism and the existential state of society. All this is expressed with minimal and simplified forms of the human body. Yet they all convey a meaning to the viewers. The famous British sculptor Henry Moore once stated: "In the human figure one can express more completely one's feelings about the world than in any other way" (Neumann, 1985). The ceramic sculptures of Mario Sammut are exactly the expression of his feelings about the world and what is happening to the human form.

The concept of the 'Otherness' is vividly expressed in the works by Charmaine Zammit. It seems that the concept of 'otherness' divides human beings into two groups: those whose identity is valued and accepted as a norm, and those who are seen as different and discriminatory. Consciousness collates the two groups. Therefore, as Zammit stated "once one realizes the identity of belonging to 'human beings', there is no 'otherness'...there is just the 'Self' - the Universal Self" (Zammit, 2013). In her paintings the artist symbolically uses a range of archetypal figures like the hero, the trickster, the maiden and the complexities of the anima and animus. Her philosophy in her artworks deals with a revisioning of

a contemporary form of mythmaking, which reflects our conscious response to ourselves and the mysteries and wonders of our existence.

Overall, this exhibition is a visual narrative of the body politic, a primary subject matter which is still important in local contemporary art. The collective stance is found primarily in our awareness of the unconscious of the archetypal dimension of a limited universe. We think we exist separate from one another, a contemporary construct generated by our own divine, creative imagination with which we have become entranced. The artist's individuality is significant and its subjectivity has been reinforced. The unconscious process in the collective psyche of humanity is being re-enacted in many ways in the art of today.

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IDENTITY,
COMMUNITY AND THE
REPRESENTATION
OF THE HUMAN BODY.

Romina Della

“COGITO, ERGO SUM”

"I have convinced myself that there is nothing in the world — no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Doesn't it follow that I don't exist? No, surely I must exist if it's me who is convinced of something. But there is a deceiver, supremely powerful and cunning whose aim is to see that I am always deceived. But surely I exist, if I am deceived. Let him deceive me all he can, he will never make it the case that I am nothing while I think that I am something. Thus having fully weighed every consideration, I must finally conclude that the statement "I am, I exist" must be true whenever I state it or mentally consider it". (Descartes, 1641)

The explosion of scientific discovery and humanist insight and the rise of individual self-consciousness during the Renaissance and the Baroque marked the beginning of our modern era. Rene Descartes, in his *Meditations* of 1641 realised there was one thing he could not doubt: that he himself existed. This conclusion, in turn, was based on his experience of himself as a conscious being hence, "Cogito, ergo sum" and "Sum res cogitans". This sense of self is critical to our status as persons and so is the representation of the self and of others.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke (1690) famously identified the self with memory. Whereas Descartes had found the self in the immediate conscious experience of thinking ("I think, therefore I am"), Locke found identity in the extension of consciousness backward in time. In Locke's view, a person's identity extends to whatever of his or her past he or she can remember. Consequently, past experiences, thoughts, or actions that the person does not remember are not part of his identity. For Locke, identity and self-hood have nothing to do with continuity of the body, or even continuity of mind. Selfhood consists entirely in continuity of memory. A person who remembers nothing of his or her past literally has no identity.

David Hume, in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 1740), generally affirmed the connection between identity and memory, adding that the role of memory is to permit us to comprehend the causal relations among events. This ability, however, enables us to extend our identity beyond those acts and experiences that we can personally remember, so that our self-narrative also includes events that we know must have happened, given what we do remember - whether they actually happened or not. Thus, while Locke's view of the self-as-memory is based on our ability to reproduce our experiences from memory, Hume's is based as well on our ability to reconstruct our experiences in memory.

Human evolution and the depiction of the body

Humans are highly social animals - and the perception of self and others is of obvious importance to the survival of the species. Human bodies convey much information that is highly relevant to social life and survival. Not only recognition, but observation, imitation and interpretation are essential to the representation of self to others. It follows that one of the most important functions of vision in humans is the provision of information about identity, actions and mental states. In a hostile environment, social cohesiveness would have been essential to the survival of early humans. For example, group cohesion would have made individuals less vulnerable to attack from outsiders and predatory animals, and improved chances of finding food. The need for positive social interaction in human evolution is thus imperative for understanding the importance of the human form and human features in the brain, and subsequently the management of social information resulting in artefactual activity. Humphrey (1986) considers social interaction, rather than tool use as of primary importance in human evolution.

Humans are conscious, curious beings with the ability to communicate thoughts verbally and visually. They can modify the environment and leave imprints on the world, creating grand architecture, monuments, mausoleums and museums. They are spiritual beings, capable of asking questions, of representing perceptions of the world, of collecting objects from the past to preserve their memory and display them in order to try to understand who they are and where they come from.

While museums store and display collections of objects containing memories and identities, the human body is also a container of memories and experiences. Specialised neural structures for the visual processing of human bodies and their parts have developed because of the great importance of those aspects of humans in social life and communication. Since time immemorial and throughout the world, humans were preoccupied with depicting the body and its parts, and portraying them in certain ways. Abstraction by the brain is reflected in the characteristics of representation in art whereby aspects of the ever-changing visual world are simplified. Along the years this fascination of the human body never ceased.

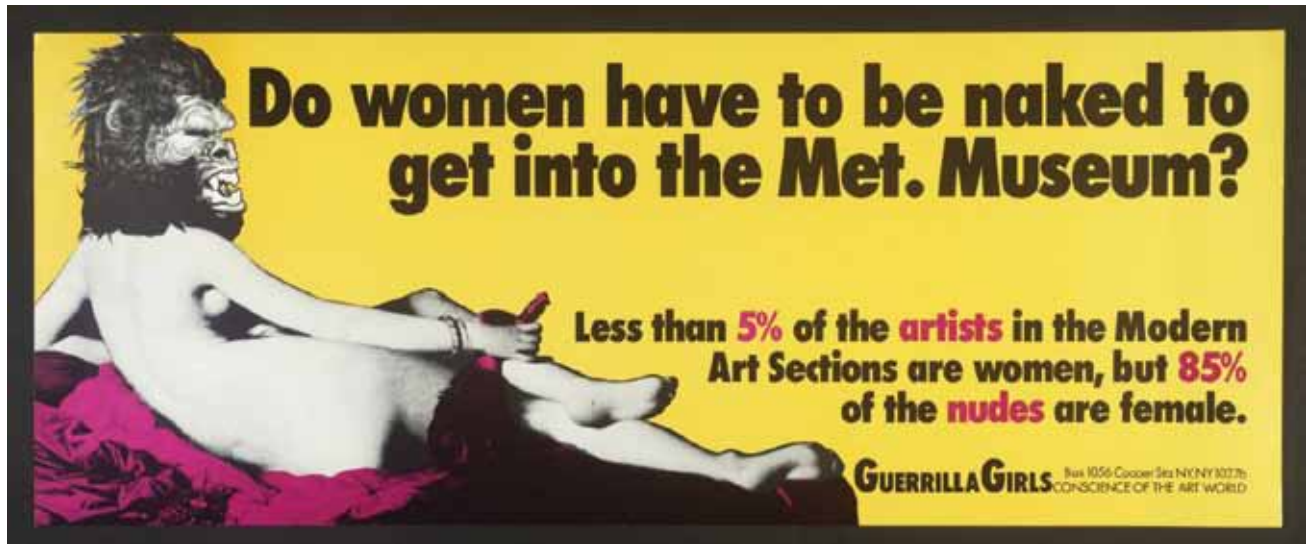
The body and identity in contemporary art

Since the 1960's and 1970's, many artists have abandoned the modernist notion of self-expression for a concept of identity that involves an exploration of the dynamics between self and society. With a new critical eye developed through the lenses of, for example, feminism, civil-rights, the sexual revolution, and globalisation, they examine identity as a socially constructed representation of self. Often their art not only describes this condition in contemporary culture, but also tries to formulate strategies to break out of these confining representations of self. Many of the representational strategies come out of recent philosophies in cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and psychology. Artists use these critical tools to negotiate new representations of self. Many artists started exploring their own backgrounds, and came to understand identity not as a confining social "label," but as a flexible, mobile, and open-ended questioning of the self.

The civil rights movement in the US in the late 1950's and early 1960's, for example, were using non-violent protest methods (based on the actions of Ghandi in India) to highlight and protest the racial segregation of public areas, such as sit-ins or 'freedom rides' on segregated transport. In the mid-60's, after the nuclear

Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy, anti-war protests against the Vietnam War were also in full force, and art took its place in protest. For example Yoko Ono and John Lennon's "Bed Peace 1969" was a bed-in, a variation of the sit-in. Both protest and artistic statement against war, the pair sat in bed for world peace. Other artists associated with "Fluxus" often took their actions into the street, aiming to break down the barriers between art and life, and bring the revolution to the everyday. Allan Kaprow, a pioneer in establishing the concepts of performance art, helped to develop the "Environment" and "Happening" in the 1960's. In the years that followed, artists and film-makers like Andy Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe and musicians such as David Bowie continued to break down these barriers.

Women protested in mass marches throughout the 1970's, on social issues such as equal pay and the objectification of women. Female artists, traditionally under-represented in the male-dominated art world began to use performance, and often their bodies, to make work that directly engaged with the roles of women in society and social issues in general. For example the "Guerilla Girls" in New York, in the 1980's (a group of anonymous female artists, wearing gorilla masks to conceal their identity) started posting up posters in the streets devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world, with the mission of bringing gender and racial inequality within the fine arts to light.



"Guerilla Girls" Poster



Sculpture by Zarko Baseski, exhibited at the "Wiċċ imb'Wiċċ images of the self" exhibition, curated by Austin Camilleri at St. James Cavalier, Valletta in 2011

The Maltese context

In Malta, in the past few years, a development has also become noticeable as a few contemporary artists have also emerged, producing conceptual "anthropologised art"; exploring, observing and questioning Maltese culture, society, identity, religion and politics. Artist and art educator Raphael Vella has written extensively on this subject. He was one of the founders of the Maltese contemporary artist group START whose members explored the subject of identity and "Malteseness" as well as the influences of religion and politics in "Maltese" art on several occasions.

Another member of the art group START, Vince Briffa, has explored the body in several of his works. For example, in 1999 he exhibited his work "Hermes" at the 48th edition of the Venice Biennale exploring the theme "dust you are and dust you will return"- and the finite nature of one's own lifetime. The work was suspended between movement and stasis, the living and the dead. In 2002/3 he exhibited the multi-media installation "Amen-Nemmen" at the Johanniterkirche in Feldkirch as part of the town's annual festival, also reflecting Briffa's interest in humans and their intimate stories, making strong references to the confessional. In 2007 he exhibited "Body of Glass – After Caravaggio" at the Auberge d'Italie in Valletta, curated by Keith Sciberras. Briffa in this work embodied the ambiguous fusion of the materiality of flesh as cultural object with that of the human body as instrument of communication. He focused on highlighting the phenomenological distinction between the body we own - as the body of experience and the body we are - as the subject of experience. In 2009 he exhibited "Heterotopia" at Gallery No. 68 in Valletta as part of the Malta Arts Festival exhibition "The Life Model - Between Nude and Naked", curated by Patrick Fenech. The exhibition focused on a variety of approaches of the female form but also featured male nudity in its aim to encourage public debate and push the boundaries of the acceptable through visual art.

In the exhibition "Wiċċ imb'Wiċċ - images of the self," Austin Camilleri, another founding member of the group START, curated a collective exhibition held for the Malta Arts Festival at St. James Cavalier in 2011, where themes on the concept of self-portraiture were explored. The exhibition brought together a total of ten Maltese and foreign artists with the aim of depicting self-representations that raised questions of identity within social, historical and gender-related contexts. Works of local artists were exhibited next to those of guest artists, such as the work "Something's Wrong" by the well known British artist Tracey Emin, and the hyper realist sculpture by Macedonian artist Zarko Baseski.

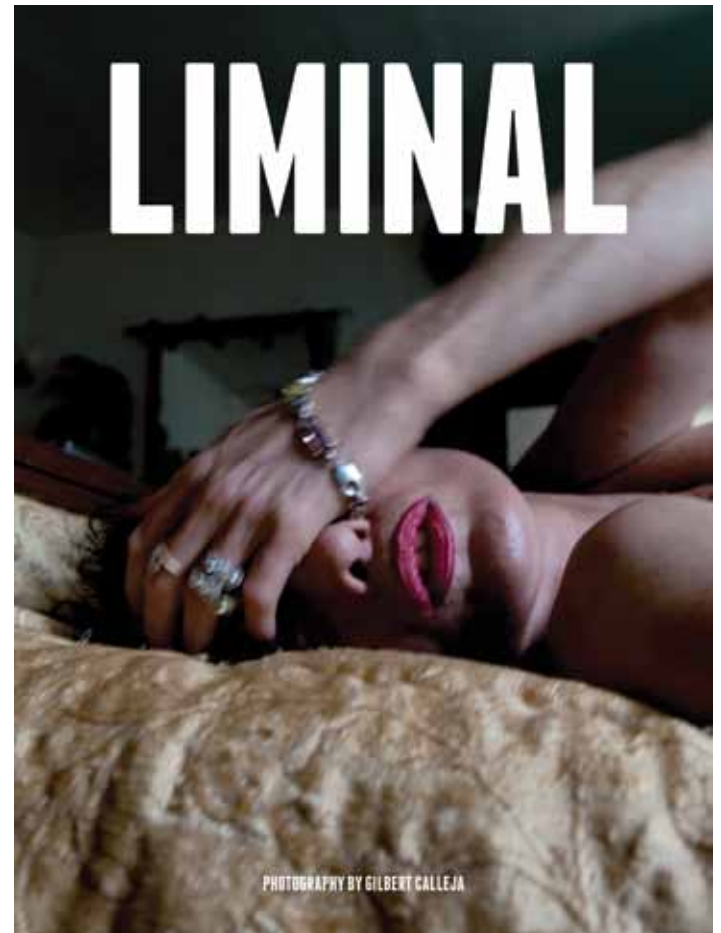
More recently, the project "Milkshake," which was held at St. James Cavalier, co-ordinated by Gilbert Calleja and supported by the Malta Arts Fund, explored the queer body and the Maltese, focusing on the way the body is seen, shown, flaunted, hidden or concealed, aiming to dismantle taboos. The project has been described as a celebration of local diversity. Gilbert Calleja has been working with Maltese subcultures and people at the margins of society and he recently published "Liminal," a book exposing the transgender community, which is in a way a continuation of his previous work documenting local people. In a recent interview with Teodor Rejjic, published in Malta Today on Wednesday 10 July, Calleja said that he wanted to "look at these people as human beings - full stop." He said that he wanted "to document and present a fair and honest view" and that "it's easy to fall for clichés and stereotypes and lose sight of reality..."

Conclusion

The rise of new media, the growing awareness of diversity, globalisation, the influence of theory, and interactions with everyday visual culture have resulted in an art world with dramatically expanded boundaries. The examples I mentioned above are just a few of Maltese contemporary artists exploring the theme of identity in the representation of the human body. There are many more artists based in Malta, which I have not mentioned here, who have also explored this theme in recent years. However, unfortunately their work is still not well represented locally and the history of contemporary art in Malta still remains largely unwritten and unpublished. Malta also still lacks a National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, thus making it hard for the local public to know what is being produced locally, and what has been produced in the contemporary art scene in the last two centuries.

Most contemporary conceptual artists explore the human condition through their art, in a quest to raise awareness and to try to find answers to fundamental questions such as "who are we? where do

we come from? ...and where do we go from here?" and they share this with the public, in thought provoking ways, encouraging its audiences to think about themselves, their identity, their community.. their past, present and future.



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GILBERT CALLEJA



The symbolical element of Gilbert Calleja's work became the means to explore the unlimited power of the unconscious mind. These figurative archetypal visions of the artist are profound raw expressions of what exists beyond the human form.



Title: Untitled 008
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 59.4cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



Gilbert Calleja (b. 1978) graduated in drawing and painting from the Malta School of Arts and holds a BA (Hons) in Art from the University of Malta and a 'Licence' and 'Maitrise d'Arts Plastiques' (Fine Arts) from the University of Paris, Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne. His studies in art eventually led him to photography and as a student he had shown his works at the Cite Universitaire de Paris.

BIO

Gilbert
Calleja



Calleja's works were featured in a number of local and foreign magazines and newspapers such as the Newsweek Russia, the Guardian and the Ottar magazine (Swedish queer publication). He also participated in a number of exhibitions including *Relocation: Six Emerging artists*, A BOV exhibition, Santa Venera, *Caochangai Photospring*, a photography festival in Beijing, China, *Malta and the European Journey*, Collective Photo-journalists' Exhibition for the inauguration of Dar l'Ewropa, Valletta, *Rencontres de la Photographie d'Artes*, European Photographic identities, Arles & Paris, France, and *'Reportage'*, a solo documentary photography exhibition at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, Valletta.

Currently Gilbert Calleja is coordinating an ongoing project entitled *Milkshake*. The project brought together a group of Maltese contemporary visual artists and authors in collaboration with the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) to explore the 'queer body' in a local context.

His most recent publication is *Liminal*, a photographic journey into the lives of transgender people in Malta. Steering clear of sensationalism, he presents his subjects in their domestic and social environments with a clear-eyed, objective approach. This is a continuation of his earlier investigations in photography when he started his research about Maltese subcultures and the people living at the margins of society.

Calleja taught Art at Savio College, Dingli and at the Art and Design Institute of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. He is currently employed as an assistant lecturer in the Art Department at the Junior College of the University of Malta, Msida.

Title: Untitled 003
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 29.7cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Untitled 004
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 29.7cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



Gilbert Calleja explores modernist inspired subjects within a contemporary context. He experiments with a multilayering of glazes of bold and subtle colour combinations and gestural line work to create figurative paintings. This does not always look as the traditional figurative works we are used to see. At first glimpse his paintings appear to be organic, biomorphic forms or flat, multifaceted geometries of chunks of flesh being transformed into abstracted interpretations of the negative spaces between limbs and torsos appropriated from a variety of sources.

The subject Calleja is presenting in the selection of works for this exhibition is about the "presence of the body being there but which is still somehow evasive."¹ The paintings represent the idea of absence or a ghost image of the body which is not clearly and quickly identified. The artist explores this thematic approach through the recurring tension between figuration and abstraction. The primitivistic approach is found in the simplification methods employed by the artist and in the image which is marked as its invisible part.

We understand that the 'primitive' in its various forms influenced modern and contemporary artists in many ways. Today there is a wider definition of artistic primitivism. Artists like Gilbert Calleja are fascinated by primitivism not as a formal borrowing from 'primitive' visual forms but rather about the affinity and inherent values of primitivism.

The symbolical element of Gilbert Calleja's work became the means to explore the unlimited power of the unconscious mind. These figurative archetypal visions of the artist are profound raw expressions of what exists beyond the human form. Artists like Calleja transform the distortions and anxieties of this world, perceived by the unconscious, into shocking works of art. I recall the famous words by Jungian psychoanalyst Erich Neumann who describes the psychic torment of the world as follows:

As our daytime world is devoured by the Terrible Mother, torn to pieces in the bloody rituals that are our wars, demonic, magical, and elemental irrationality invades us. The stream of the libido flows inward, from the crumbling canon into the unconscious, and activates its latent images of past and future.²

Artists from the mid-twentieth century onwards started to seek a primeval element, so that they would be able to re-create symbolic imagery that explained the chaotic conditions that humans were and are still facing. Today in contemporary painting we find a strange mixture, a unity of world and psyche, in which fragments of landscapes, cubes, circles, forms, colours, parts of human figures, organic and inorganic components, curves, tatters of dreams, memories, deconcretised objects, and concretised symbols seem to float in a strange continuum.³

Title: Untitled 006
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 29.7cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Untitled 005
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 59.4cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Untitled 007
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 29.7cm x 42cm
Signed: 2013



In the work *Untitled 008* Calleja shows us a painting of a figure together with other figures in the background. Although the shape of the figures are somehow recognisable the artist's intention is not the iconic aspect of the figures which prevail but rather the idea of the figures. We know that the 'icon' is a suitable form of representation because it represents a concept rather than an image just as the way Plato made use of the figure. Though here the figure is still understood as a copy of the form which Plato advocates within the functioning of the intelligible world, what Plato deprecates is not the figure, but a different type of representation that Deleuze introduces as the 'simulacrum'.⁴

The figures that Calleja explores (See *Untitled 003*, *Untitled 005*) in his paintings are not the copies of the real but rather a Deleuzian type of figures. The artist has

no figures to represent or a story to narrate but rather undo figuration as part of the process of creating a series of operations and transformations of the 'body' in painting. First it is done through abstraction of the Form (see paintings *Untitled 004*, *Untitled 006*, *Untitled 007*). The second aspect is different. It does not lead to abstract art but to a non-figurative form of art. Here one must keep in mind that there is a difference between Figure and Figuration although a painting of a figure can still be figurative. Confusing the two would be to misunderstand the 'essence' of the Figure which is sensation.⁵

Calleja projects to us an aesthetic experience of the discovery of new imagery in contemporary art to our empathetic responses to images in general, and to works of visual art which have not yet been aptly represented.

1 - CALLEJA, Gilbert, personal communication with the artist, 14.07.2013.

2 - NEUMANN, Erich, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, 1971, p. 118.

3 - *Ibid.*, p.119.

4 - A common definition of the simulacrum is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy. It stands on its own as a copy without a model. See DELEUZE, Gilles, "Plato and the Simulacrum" in *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester. New York: Columbia University Press, p.259., 1990.

5 - See DELEUZE, Gilles, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Daniel W. Smith, transl. London: Continuum, 2003.

JENI CARUANA



In her art Jeni Caruana explores the physical, visual and conceptual boundaries of the images we find in the real world. She always wants to convey something meaningful and allows the viewers to gain completely new experiences of her art and further appreciate the unique beauty and diversity of life.



Title: Mother Earth; Creativity
Medium: Acrylic on paper
Dimensions: 80cm x 120cm
Signed: 2013



In the Maltese artistic scene Jeni Caruana is well known as a main exponent for her remarkable watercolour studies of landscapes, figures and themes inspired by nature. Her imaginative and tasteful works have highly decorative and complicated compositions of sceneries, almost alive with refined brush strokes, taken from the Maltese environs. The effect of clouds in the sky is a solid proof of her strong artistic talent and colourfulness. For a very long time she also worked and exhibited her works in personal and collective art shows related to Prehistoric Malta.

Caruana studied art in England at Uxbridge, Hull and Harrow before settling in Malta in 1978. Since then she had 14 solo exhibitions of her works and participated in numerous joint, group and collective art shows in Malta and abroad. Her paintings now hang in many public and private collections in many countries and places, including the head offices of both major banks in Malta, the British High Commission and the American Ambassador's Residence in Malta.

Caruana's works cover a wide range of subjects and media, from landscapes to jazz musicians, sand to ceramics, watercolour to wooden sculptures, always on a path of adventure and discovery. One of her favourite subjects, the Prehistoric Temples of Malta is and have been the source of inspiration for many paintings and sculptures which resulted in several exhibitions. Another of her regularly visited themes is the annual Malta Arts Festival and the Malta Jazz Festival, where she paints dancers and musicians live.

The artist has been teaching drawing and watercolour techniques since 1995. Her teaching methods concentrate on exercises and practical techniques to encourage strong drawing and sharp contrasts of tone and colour, giving the student confidence and freedom to discover their own individual path.

Jeni Caruana represented Malta in Norway, USA, Sardinia, Libya, Italy and UK and most of her work is mainly executed in water based media: watercolours, gouache and acrylics, and rely heavily on drawing skills.

www.jenicaruana.com/dance-and-movement



BIO

Jeni
Caruana

Title: Jazz Vibrations
Medium: Acrylic on paper
Dimensions: 80cm x 110cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Jazz Collage
Medium: Acrylic on paper
Dimensions: 80cm x 120cm
Signed: 2013



The human body has always been of central importance for Jeni Caruana's development of her artistic journey. She produced a variety of nude studies in different mediums, which enabled her to achieve intriguing opportunities for expression. We see for example that the study of the human body also emerges spontaneously in the series of jazz paintings produced every year at the Malta Jazz Festivals held in Valletta. This year the artist created another body of work depicting various musicians performing at this high-calibre music event. For this exhibition the artist chose two works from this collection *Jazz Collage* and *Jazz Vibrations*. In the first work Caruana shows a collage of different musicians performing during their concert. It is a highly colourful painting which expresses the various emotions and expressions of jazz players. The artist managed to capture the movement and the improvisational elements, and the beauty of sound transformed into colour. The technique she used in the other painting somehow creates a feeling of vibration achieved through the use of vertical mirror-like striped blinds. The result is a type of a

distorted image of the figures which adds to the abstract qualities of the composition. In her large painting entitled *Mother Earth; Creativity*, Caruana conceptualises the representation of humans and the reverence to Mother Earth. This painting transcends a sort of creative spiritual force. For the artist it is a painting which "represents the urge of creativity, to stir up all the elements we have at our fingertips; earth, wind, fire and air as physical elements and filter them through our human senses and talents, endlessly creating anew out of the pregnant chaos."¹¹ Caruana continues to argue that "we, as artists, become channels for this tremendous power which runs or sometimes ruins our lives."¹² The symbolical face of Mother Earth is seen emerging into the light from the chaotic matter of the universe. The abstract part of the work which is made with gestural brushstrokes and splashes of layered colours contrasts deeply with the serenity on the face of the female figure. The Earth signifies the embodiment of knowledge, truth and the pouring of creativity to humanity.

Title: Set of Ballet Dancers
Medium: Water colour & conte
Dimensions: 80cm x 110cm
Signed: 2013



Dance was always the muse for many artists. It is poetry in motion and emotions transformed into form and exists both in space and time. In Modern Art we find artists and photographers who used dancers for their subject matter. To mention just a few great artists in modern art history like Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Mark Chagall (1887-1985) Louis Kronberg (1872-1965) and the most famous of all for ballet dancers Edgar Degas (1834-1917). All of them painted dancers throughout their entire artistic career. Degas, one of the founders of Impressionism, is identified with the subject of the dance and over half of his works depict dancers. Here in Malta, Jeni Caruana is also synonymous with painting dancers. She loves the moving figure and was always inspired by dancers of any style. In this exhibition she presents three sets of studies of various ballet poses. Caruana spends hours of analysis driven by an acute way of seeing and working on sketches to achieve elegance and simplicity of dancing

figures. These works are executed in watercolour and conté crayon, painted live in a dance studio. Each sketch is created from a different viewpoint creating dramatic effects. With just a few colourful, vibrant strokes of lines in watercolour, the artist manages to express the echo of the motion of the figures and a sense of intimacy and drama of the dancers. The artist is so enthralled with the beauty of the movement of dancers that she feels it is an important part of her repertoire. "Dancers fascinate me; trying to capture not only their movement but also the space they move through is an endless source of inspiration to me."³

In her art Jeni Caruana explores the physical, visual and conceptual boundaries of the images we find in the real world. She always wants to convey something meaningful and allows the viewers to gain completely new experiences of her art and further appreciate the unique beauty and diversity of life.



Jeni Caruana



Jeni Caruana



Jeni Caruana

1. CARUANA, Jeni, personal communication with the artist, 03/08/2013.
2. Ibid.
3. www.jenicaruana.com/dance-and-movement

MARIO SAMMUT

“

The focus of Mario Sammut's works is always stressed on solitary figures or in groups. The form of his sculpture itself is the great achievement of his art and it would seem that some other material could be found that would express his desired forms more easily.

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Title: Seated Pregnant Figure
Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C
Dimensions: (H) 56cm x (L) 30cm x (W) 35cm
Signed: 2013



BIO

Mario
Sammut

Mario Sammut was born in Malta in 1955. From an early age he attended lessons in drawing and painting by Antoine Camilleri and Esprit Barthelet, two of Malta's leading artists. Later he attended classes in ceramics, under the guidance of veteran ceramist Gabriel Caruana.

Most of his sculptures depict the human figure which he developed in portraying in his particular style, devoid of detail and with minimal features. From 1989 onwards, Sammut took part in various collective ceramic exhibitions and since then his ceramic works have been exhibited in Malta, Cyprus, Frankfurt and in Sicily.

In recent years, Mario Sammut participated in many collective exhibitions and he was influential in co-organising the Malta-Cyprus Ceramics Exhibitions series which is put up annually alternating its venue between Malta and Larnaca. In September 2010 he was selected to exhibit his ceramics in the Bornholm European Ceramics Context 2010, in Denmark. For this exhibition, two ceramists from each country of the European Community were selected to participate.

In 2011, three of his sculptures were submitted for the Public Art in Gozo Competition and they were short listed among the winners. In 2012, he was

commissioned by the Ministry for Gozo, to work on one of the selected works. The 2.5metre bronze sculpture was entitled 'Embracing Dancers' and was placed near Xewkija, on the road from Mgarr Harbour to Rabat in Gozo.

Sammut's ceramics are hand-built and he uses slabs to create sculptural forms which have a harmonious balance of texture, shape and line. His major source of inspiration and influence on his work is the Neolithic artefacts found on the island of Malta which depict the goddess of fertility with its oversized hips. The artist utilises the exaggerated proportions of the statuettes and elongates the rest of the upper body to create an elegant pose in his female forms. His ceramic sculptures are mostly based on human form, and are mainly burnished, and enhanced with colouring oxides instead of utilising glazes. This leaves a deep dark sheen on the surface of the sculptures. When he makes use of glazes, this is often in a monochromatic way so as not to interfere with the visual aesthetics of the form. The minimalist approach and lack of details convey a sense of anonymity where the viewers are left to adapt the representation to their imagination.

His ceramic works can be found in private collections in Malta, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Belgium, Canada, Turkey, Cyprus and also in the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts of Malta.

Title: Confrontation
Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C
Dimensions: (H) 44cm x (L) 50cm x (W) 27cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Dancing Couples
Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C
Dimensions: (H) 58cm x (L) 57cm x (W) 19cm
Signed: 2013



In his famous writing about the human figure, the most famous British sculptor, Henry Moore once stated: "In the human figure one can express more completely one's feelings about the world than in any other way." I think that the ceramic sculpture of Mario Sammut is exactly the expression of his feelings about the world and what is happening in today's world and beyond us through the human form.

In this selection of sculptures Sammut is presenting six free-standing sculptures. Thematically these works address aspects of our own past, our present reality and human conditions and relationships. As I stated in the text of the exhibition catalogue, Mario Sammut's ceramic sculptures are derived from two different sources: the inspiration from our Prehistoric heritage mainly the images of the Great Goddess and the archetypal images that emerge from the unconscious of the artist.¹

His *Seated Pregnant Figure*, is a good example of how the artist expresses the beauty of the female form in the most sublime way and how to visualise *life* at its highest glory, that is that of depicting a pregnant woman. We know that Mario Sammut uses the female figure in a variety of guises especially in a primitivistic

manner. As we know primitivism in visual arts is attributed to the formal direct borrowings from primitive art and a shared creative 'impulse' in the 'primitive' and 'modern' works. Some of his works carry this primitivistic tendency which is clearly seen in the simplicity and vitality of primitive works. The artist made use of 'primitive' symbols that are found in Maltese prehistoric art not just simply as formal borrowings but also to "gain access to what are considered to be more fundamental modes of thinking and seeing."²

We also notice that in this collection of works Mario Sammut addresses contemporary issues of society, like the problems that we come across every day, human activities and identity. For example in his *Confrontation* sculpture, we see political confrontation, clash of ideologies or submissiveness to other powers. Contrasting this work we find the *Three Friends* sculpture emphasising good communication and unity. Other group figurative sculptures like *Dancing Couples* and *Tribe* represent the joys of life, forms of emotional expression, social interaction, spiritual communication of a social group, collective identity and shared cultures.

Title: Momentum
Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C
Dimensions: (H) 45cm x (L) 45cm x (W) 15cm
Signed: 2013



30

The focus of Mario Sammut's works is always stressed on solitary figures or in groups. The form of his sculpture itself is the great achievement of his art and it would seem that some other material could be found that would express his desired forms more easily. But we understand the fragility of fired clay and therefore appreciate more the delicate process to give birth to a work of art. All the works by Sammut take place in a gas-fired kiln which he himself built. He uses monochromatic glazes and oxides to achieve better emphasis on the linear hand built forms of his figures. In recent years he has also cast his sculptures in bronze.

Perhaps one of the finest pieces in this exhibition is the work called *Momentum*. The composition is unusual and the figures are constructed and based on the

form of the circle which symbolises life. The circle becomes an instinctual form for the artist and so it is expressed without any premeditated manner during the process of creation. The 'Circle' is a universal symbol which mostly reflects the whole psyche of the human being. Sammut's circle is seen spinning to the right (clockwise) – moving towards consciousness.⁹ This work also illuminates us on the unifying dynamism of humanity.

During these last years, Sammut achieved excellent results with his experimentation in ceramic sculpture. His ongoing development of his innovative creativity and modernist style of representing the human figure will surely reap further fruit and success in ceramic art.

Title: Tribe

Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C

Dimensions: (H) 56cm x (L) 30cm x (W) 33cm

Signed: 2013



Title: Three Friends

Medium: Fired Clay 1260°C

Dimensions: (H) 44cm x (L) 30cm x (W) 33cm

Signed: 2013



1. LAGANÀ, Louis, Exhibition Catalogue text: *Humanity in Forms*, personal ceramic art exhibition by Mario Sammut, The National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, 1 April-6 May 2011.

2. RHODES, Colin, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 1994, pp.7-8.

3. JUNG, C.G., *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 1959, p. 320.

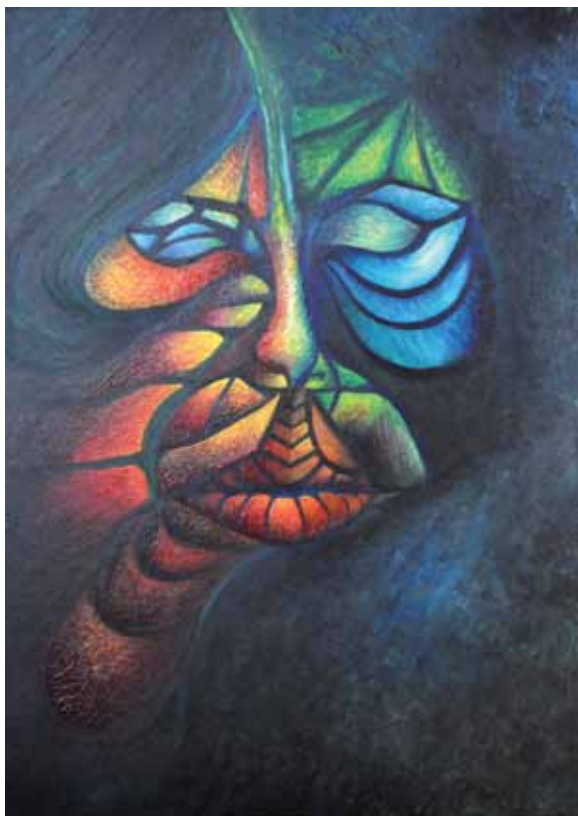
CHARMAINE
ZAMMIT

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Zammit, like the Swiss painter Peter Birkhäuser, derives her inspiration mostly from fantasies and dreams. In fact such paintings serve as a bridge between the conscious 'ego' and the unconscious.

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Title: Consciousness
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 35cm x 50cm
Signed: 2013



BIO

Charmaine
Zammit

Born in 1978, Charmaine Zammit is a visual artist who received her art education at secondary level, at the School of Art in Valetta and at the University of Malta where she obtained both her Bachelors' and Masters' Degree in Art Education. Currently Charmaine is a Head of Department of Art Education, a role which encourages her to work passionately to raise more awareness about the essence of art education towards a holistic education.

Ever since Charmaine was a child, she always felt the need to experiment, draw, paint and create. She thought and still thinks that such artistic instinct belongs to everyone, however some people give up or are somehow not encouraged enough to express themselves through the arts. Since she considers herself a life-long art student, she never stops learning through observing life and experimenting with different media to be able to choose the right vehicle for expressing her ideas. As can be noticed, the artworks inspired by the theme of 'Otherness', are not bound to one particular style, because each artwork was approached according to the mood captured during the moment of creation. Thus the artworks range from semi-abstracts, to expressionism and surrealism reflecting Charmaine's temperament during each artwork's expression. Charmaine considers the artwork's creative process as magic... an illusion that somehow transcends her into other realities, similar to music, which

makes her forget about herself when she is completely absorbed in the artwork.

Although Charmaine aims to communicate her Art to the viewers, she avoids creating Art to meet the viewers' expectations. The driving force behind creating Art stems from a strong inner need to communicate her imagination and emotions, in much the same way that an opinion verbally expressed can sometimes be agreed with or not. When viewers ask her to explain her artworks, she finds it difficult to explain for the simple reason that she finds it hard to express in words what she instantly expresses on canvas. Hence, she often asks them to interpret her work from their own point of view, through questions like 'what is the artwork saying to you?', 'how do you feel when you look at the artwork', 'what can you see?'

At first some viewers are afraid to make comments, on fearing that they do not have enough art knowledge but after a while, they start discussing about certain aspects of life and emotions evoked through the artworks. There are times when Charmaine intentionally stays behind the viewers, to eavesdrop their feedback while they are busy discussing stuff which catch their attention or somehow affect them while looking at her artworks. She finds such thought provoking discussions give her much more satisfaction than having viewers judging her artworks as 'beautiful' or her skills as 'excellent'.

Title: Connected Souls
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 30cm x 40cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Other Mindset
Medium: Mixed Media
Dimensions: 60cm x 80cm
Signed: 2013



Since the end of postmodernism we are witnessing the abandonment of aesthetic hierarchies and embracing a myriad of new ideologies and theories. Today more than before art is turning away from the outer world and artists are experiencing and expressing themselves in an inward mode and offer a positive attitude to the psyche. The conflict with the real world and the inner world started to be sensed by materialism. Humans put the value of materialism and gave importance on material possessions as a way of defining, constructing, and maintaining one's self-concept. Materialism stressed the outer world over the inner world, emphasising one's relationship to others through ownership and possession. The decadence of all this came with the discontent with materialism and a good number of artists have been seeking an alternative way to express themselves. Artists like Charmaine Zammit selected their figures from real-life individuals and urge the viewers to decipher their own inner worlds. In fact the artist uses her own image, many times her self portrait and expresses symbolically her thoughts, dreams, fantasies and inner world.

In her work *Consciousness*, the artist presents a phantasmagorical face expressing a sort of a terrifying face which confounds us and makes us think and therefore brings us to 'consciousness'. Zammit, like the Swiss painter Peter Birkhäuser, derives her inspiration mostly from fantasies and dreams. In fact such paintings serve as a bridge between the *conscious* 'ego' and the unconscious. Therefore, such "images resemble less and less the shapes of the external world."¹ They are at times very frightening and mysterious which symbolically transcend the mundane.

Another work which Zammit is showing in this exhibition is not easy to apprehend. It is called *Auras*. In this painting the artist is trying to convey a message of empowerment. She is invoking the whole human energy. It is a painting about the relationship between awareness and energy. The rippling effects in the painting is about that resonance of cosmic energy. The energy wave-forms spiralling from the figure are like waves in the ocean. They appear for an instant and then disappear in the void of the universe. But they are the background, which is 'awareness'. The female human-energy-being symbolises how this energy can suddenly step forth into a living expression that allows the awareness to be manifested in the human expression of itself. This reflects its own nature in the form of a human being offering 'energy' in a joyful celebration. This painting allows the viewers a context that explains the majestic and mysterious beauty of human energy and life.

Title: Auras
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 60cm x 80cm
Signed: 2013



Title: Judging Others
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 50cm x 70cm
Signed: 2013



Title: *Rebellious Souls*
Medium: Acrylics
Dimensions: 30cm x 40cm
Signed: 2013

In her painting *Other Mindset*, the artist painted ghost-like figures of a bride dressed in white and another moving figure in front, presumably the same figure leaping or swiftly drifting into the air. The scene looks eerie with the red sky and strong dark background with barren land which suggests a feeling of melancholy and grief. Is the figure trying to escape from reality? It seems that it looks like a leap into another dimension or there is a change in life. In fact the artist argues that this painting is about some women who choose to passively follow the same pattern chosen by other women of their generations, perhaps some women choose the comfort zone to be in line with society's expectations, even at the expense of neglecting their own mindset and this leads to disappointment later on in their life. This painting is about "Other women choose to break free from the patterns of society's expectations and follow their own mindset, once they recognise their purpose in life."²

Typical of Zammit is the use of her portrait in her paintings. We see this in her work entitled *Judging Others*. It is a significant painting which explains judgement in all the human aspects. The classical and allegorical figure holding the symbol of the sword and scale represent 'Justice'. The symbol of presence and power is found in the male figures of the body-building athletes. Each body-builder is coloured in a different colour, red, blue and yellow and stands in a different pose typical of the pose used in body-building. Strangely their faces are painted like the Māori face designs used in what is called *ta moko*. It is an art form which in recent times has been revived as an important art among Māori. It is an expression of cultural pride and integrity. The painting strongly shows the diversity of humans and the politics of identity. This is also felt in two other paintings called *Rebellious Souls* and *Connected Souls* which are two different polarities of humans; divergence which brings frustration and discontent contrary to unity and peace. Unfortunately, diversity sometimes brings with it conflicts and disagreement amongst humans, thus creating this paradox about humanity.

I believe that Charmaine Zammit is a social critic artist who in her art expresses fundamental issues of contemporary life by using personal irony, myth and dreams.

1. BIRKHÄUSER, Peter, *Light From Darkness - The Paintings of Peter Birkhäuser*, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1991, p.14.
2. ZAMMIT, Charmaine, personal correspondence with the artist, 01/08/2013.

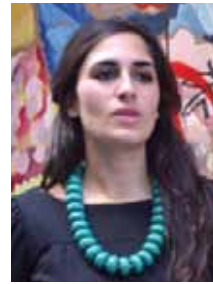


CURATOR



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

CONTRIBUTOR



Romina Delia is currently a full time PhD student in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester in England. She has a Masters and a BA (Hons) in History of Art from the University of Malta and also studied Art History at the Università di Verona in Italy. Ms. Delia worked as a researcher at the Malta National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta and at the Malta Maritime Museum in Birgu. She also had the opportunity to work at the 1st Biennale of Contemporary Art in Brussels in 2008/2009 and has worked on several EU funded research projects.



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