

Contemporary Art Education in Gozo

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Since prehistory, Art has played an important role in the social, cultural, and above all, in the religious life of Gozo. One can see man's cultural development on the Island in his architectural and artistic manifestations.

The Ġgantija phase (c. 3600-3000 BC) represents an important turning point in the cultural evolution of prehistoric man in both Malta and Gozo. The role of the prehistoric artist in the development of that socio-religious scenario can only be guessed. It is quite possible that the artist was the leader himself of this religion-centred society.

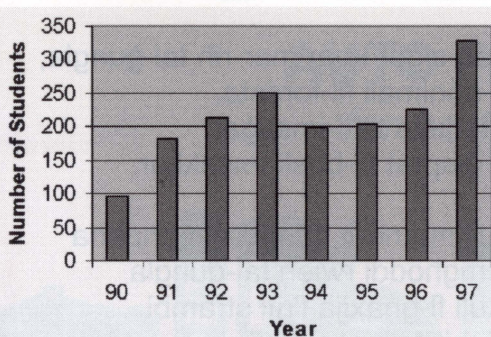
make out the type of art education one could find in seventeenth century Malta. Most of these paintings, which were executed by bottega assistants under the direction of the master, give us a good picture of the role played by assistants who frequented the workshop of a Baroque master for tutorship.

One of the first actions taken by the British administration, after assisting the Maltese against the French, was to reconstitute the University of Studies. A Faculty of Drawing was set up with Michele Busuttil (c.1750-1828) as the first Professor of Drawing. Busuttil is the first known artist whose Gozitan origins are securely documented. His sons, Luigi and Clemente, who were also painters, left important works on the island. The latter ran for some time a school of drawing in Rabat. This is probably the first sign of formal art teaching in the Island.

Today, art education in Gozo should be functioning entirely within the state schools, which can be springboards from where pupils, from their early age can encounter the expressive and creative work of art.

The expressive arts play an important role in the education of all pupils. They encourage the exploration of values, foster imagination and creativity, develop practical and perceptual skills, and promote intellectual and aesthetic development. They promote distinctive ways of understanding self, developing

**Attendance at
Wistin Camilleri School of Fine Arts**



Throughout the last four centuries the island of Gozo welcomed to its shores the best painters active in Malta, including Maltese artists such as Stefano Erardi (1630-1716), Gian Nicola Buhagiar (1698-1752), Francesco Vincenzo Zahra (1710-1773), Giuseppe Cali (1846-1930), and Giuseppe Briffa (1901-

1988). In addition, the island possesses a number of significant works of art commissioned from foreign artists, such as Mattia Preti (1613-1699), Giuseppe d'Arena (c.1633-1719), and the great Counter-Reformation artist from Urbino, Federico Barocci (c.1535-1612).

When studying the Gozitan works related to artists like Mattia Preti, one can

individual abilities and provide personal satisfaction and enjoyment. They also enable pupils to shape, make sense of, and express personal experience. The expressive arts promote an understanding of the importance of personal fitness and good health, a sense of physical, mental and emotional well-being, and opportunities to experience emotion and responsibility.

Art in the early years of schooling in Gozo

In order to study this particular level, investigations were carried out in seven state primary schools and in one of the island's church schools. Several research methods, including interviewing were used. In fact, sixty-three primary teachers were interviewed on art education.

A lot of art activity is going on in Gozitan kindergarten classes. For a three- or four-year old child, art is very important from both technical and emotional point of view. They use pencils, wax crayons, coloured pencils, poster colour, chalk and white-board markers. Finger-paint, used for all sorts of doodles and hand marks, is used to create a sort of Body Art, where one's body is used as the primary medium of expression. Young Gozitan students are also being introduced to a variety of modelling material. Pupils are also allowed to use different types of paper for stencilling, texture rubbings, string painting, collage, and a multitude of printing activities including fruit and vegetable printing.

However, 86 % of the kindergarten assistants interviewed are not satisfied with the funds available for buying resources, tools and materials. Space for Art activities is very limited. Only one primary school has a room which can be used by the pupils for art activities. These limitations, together with the total absence of peripatetic art teachers, are severely hindering Art education at Primary level. The majority of the teachers interviewed think that primary education in Gozo is concentrating mostly on the knowledge and understanding of academic subjects such as Mathematics, English and Maltese. On the other hand, this 1997 study reveals that Art education is given the least importance in our primary schools. This is seriously hindering the children's development of observational and technical skills, which should take place between the age of 5 and 10.

Art at secondary and post-secondary level

In Gozo's secondary schools, teachers do their best to correct and rehabilitate this situation by trying to make their pupils experiment with the techniques and ideas they should have experienced during their primary education. Strangely enough, one of the secondary schools for boys in Gozo does not offer Art as an option. This means that a considerable percentage of male students in Gozo cannot opt for Art

during their secondary education and therefore cannot be prepared for Art at O-Level standard. Logically this problem has repercussions on male students who take Art in their post-secondary studies. This situation remains unchanged in 1999.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of pupils who opted for Art at secondary and post-secondary level. Between 1995 and 1997, there was an increase in the number of female students who opted for Art at Form 3. In the scholastic year 1995/96, 9.4% of the whole Form 3 female population attending the Junior Lyceum opted for Art. During the scholastic year 1996/97, 17.6% of the same category opted for Art. This increase was also felt during the two scholastic years at the girls' secondary school where the proportion of students taking Art at Form 4, increased from 20.6% to 29 %. When comparing these statistics with the boys' option, one notices that in contrast, there was a decrease in the number of boys taking Art at Form 3 (Junior Lyceum), and at Form 4 (Secondary School) in the scholastic years 1995/95 and 1996/97. The number of male students taking this option fell from 27% to 24.4% in this time.

When we come to Art education at the post-secondary level, one finds that the number of students taking Art at A- and Intermediate-Level increased during the past few years. Art options at Sir Michaelangelo Refalo Centre for Further Studies, which offers the only formal art course at this level on the Island, increased as seen in table below.

Number of Students per Scholastic Year:

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Advanced Level	5	8	7
Intermediate Level	4	4	7
Total	9	12	14

Table: Students opting for Art at Advanced-Level and Intermediate-Level

The role of the Gozo School of Art

The Gozo School of Art, now renamed *Wistin Camilleri School of Fine Arts*, was opened in 1990. The figure shows how the student population attending this school, which forms part of the Adult Education Programme, rapidly increased in the years after its opening.

In conclusion, my 1997 research emphasised the importance of Art education at the primary level where it is practically non-existent. I still believe that it is here that reforms and changes should be carried out. Until then, it will be almost impossible to improve contemporary Art education in Gozo.