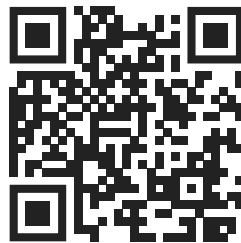


The Malta

artpaper. No:36



08

EXHIBITION

GABRIEL CARUANA

Celebrating the legacy of a pioneer of modern art in Malta

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ART AT THE HOTEL

A closer look at the works shaping a hotel's collection

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THE ONLY DISTANCE

Nigel Baldacchino on photography, attention and the space between images

Charlene Galea x PUNKS, Standard Procedure, 2026. Filmed at the National Library of Malta, Valletta. Image courtesy of PUNKS



Postcards from Below: The Malta Nobody Sends Home

"These are places tourists don't go. Places most Maltese don't think about. And that was the point."

At the Gwangju Biennale, five Maltese artists turn the postcard on its head, guiding viewers through Malta's hidden histories and contested landscapes in immersive 360° performances. From a women's archive and a family garage to a bombed chapel, the Freeport and a disappearing landscape, Joanna Delia explores the island beyond the brochure - and makes the case for bringing these works home.

>> Feature, page 20.



Debbie Caruana Dingli, Guardian Angel (detail)

"I tend to notice the underdog."

Debbie Caruana Dingli presents *Of Human Bondage*, a new body of monumental paintings that marks a departure from her familiar style. Curated by Andrew Borg Wirth, the exhibition brings overlooked and marginalised figures into focus, exploring hardship, humanity and the quiet dignity of endurance. The exhibition runs from 6 November until 3 January 2027 at Spazju Kreattiv.

>> Find out more on page 16.



TRACEY EMIN (b. 1963)

A Deeper Place, 2025

Lithograph on 400gsm Somerset paper
79.5 × 122 cm

Signed, numbered and dated by the artist.
Unframed.

POA



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Kemi
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Megan
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10 October 2026
– 31 January 2027
MICAS, Floriana

Malta's National
Contemporary Art Museum



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Looking Beyond the Familiar

Art has a way of changing how we see familiar places, inherited histories and people we might otherwise overlook. In this issue of *Artpaper*, we explore how contemporary art invites us to look again.

From the legacy of Gabriel Caruana, whose work championed art as a public, participatory experience, to Debbie Caruana Dingli's monumental portraits of the underdog, artists remind us that art is not simply something to observe, but something to encounter, question and feel.

At Romegas Hotel, *WAS / NOW* explores the Mediterranean's complex narratives of identity, power and memory, while MICAS presents three internationally recognised painters - Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Kemi Onabulé and Megan Rooney - offering fresh perspectives on place, memory and renewal.

Beyond Malta, five Maltese artists at the Gwangju Biennale use immersive technology to reveal stories hidden beneath the familiar postcard image of Malta. In Berlin, Joanna Delia reflects on the encounters and contradictions of Art Week.

These explorations also resonate with my own observations returning from London's Frieze Week, where art seemed to spill beyond conventional exhibition spaces and into unexpected encounters. From *The Light Eaters*, exploring perception and consciousness, to *Fair Play Art Fair*,

with its inaugural edition, offering artists a more accessible commercial model, and *Minor Attractions*, transforming hotel rooms into intimate exhibition spaces, I was reminded of how the ways art is presented can shape how it is experienced - and who gets to experience it.

We also explore photography and the spaces between images through Nigel Baldacchino's first photobook, *The Only Distance*.

Across these pages, one thread connects the stories: the importance of looking closer and questioning familiar narratives.

As Malta's contemporary art scene reaches wider international audiences, our commitment remains to discover compelling ideas, support artistic voices and connect artists, collectors and the wider cultural community.

Thank you for reading and for being part of this conversation.

Lily Agius

Lily Agius
Editor, *Artpaper*



Chris Levine's laser artwork *Higher Power* and the group exhibition *The Light Eaters* (presented by DoubleMoon at Town Hall by Bottaccio near King's Cross, London) featured a vertical beam of light piercing the night sky during Frieze Week. Photo by Lily Agius.

HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THIS ISSUE...



THE NEW PARABLE OF LAZARUS

Yana Fenech's first solo exhibition reinterprets the Biblical parable of Lazarus the Beggar through a contemporary, female-centred perspective, exploring virtue, memory and the human experience through a site-specific artwork.



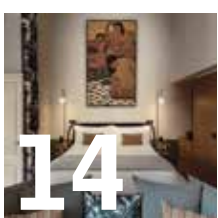
PUBLIC - PLAY - PRIVATE

A major exhibition revisiting Gabriel Caruana's lasting contribution to Maltese modern art, through works that brought colour, play, and creative encounter into public life.



A NEW LIFE FORCE AT MICAS

An exhibition bringing Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Kemi Onabulé and Megan Rooney to Malta for a major presentation of contemporary painting shaped by place, memory and renewal.



WAS / NOW

Inside Romegas Hotel's new contemporary art collection, where Maltese artists reimagine history, memory, and Mediterranean identity across a historic Valletta palazzo.



OF HUMAN BONDAGE

At Spazju Kreattiv, Debbie Caruana Dingli monumentalises the overlooked through paintings shaped by empathy, humour and Maltese life.



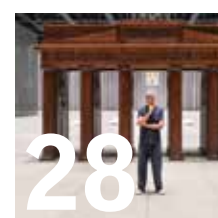
POSTCARDS FROM BELOW

Five Maltese artists use immersive VR to reveal the island beyond the postcard at the Gwangju Biennale.



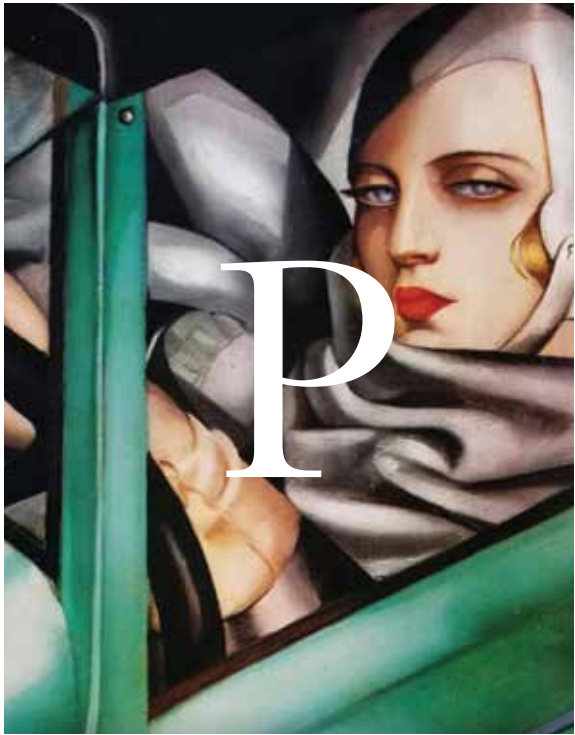
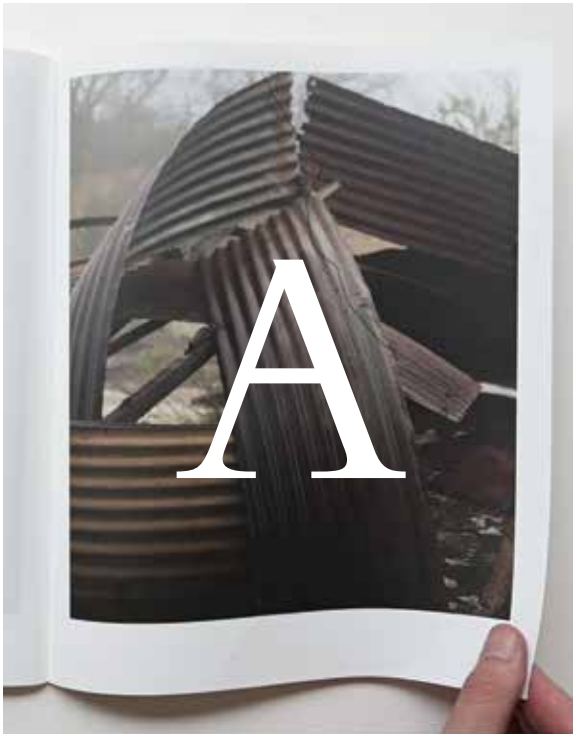
THE ONLY DISTANCE

Nigel Baldacchino's first photobook explores perception, attention and the intimate space between image and observer.



THE MORNING AFTER

Joanna Delia arrives in Berlin for Berlin Art Week after an Asian art-world marathon - and revisits the city of her teenage dream.



36
The Malta
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PUBLIC · PLAY · PRIVATE

GABRIEL CARUANA

09 OCT – 23 JAN

VP
gallery





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YOUR MOMENT STARTS HERE

The New Parable of Lazarus:

Solo exhibition by Yana Fenech explores the pursuit of virtue within the human experience

The *New Parable of Lazarus* is the first solo exhibition by artist Yana Fenech, taking place this November at Stilla San Lazzru in Bormla. The exhibition will take a new format, building a story about one work of art. Set inside a heritage building in Bormla, converted into an *albergo diffuso* style guest-house under the name *Stilla*, the event is built around narrating Fenech's creative process and the varied stages that brought her to her final composition. Bringing together figurative art, architectural space and personal memory, the exhibition will examine the making of one site-specific artwork through a collection of preparatory studies, larger canvases, and the central composition.

Informed by the Biblical story of Lazarus the Beggar, Fenech's central piece reinterprets a parabolic, moral narrative about the arduous pursuit of virtue through a contemporary, female-centred perspective. Drawing on Renaissance painting, personal archive, and remembered experiences, Fenech assembles a layered depiction of the human journey. Executed in pencil

on paper, the principal artwork occupies the vertical stairwell of *Stilla San Lazzru*, a restored historic townhouse. Its stacked scenes unfold alongside the building's winding staircase – building a dialogue between tiers of figures and the intuitive upward motion of the architecture.

Fenech is an artist and architectural designer whose practice is mainly figurative, exploring womanhood, memory and permeations of beauty. Her work has previously appeared in group exhibitions, including at R Gallery and Axis at The Butler's House. The exhibition will be accompanied by a limited-edition catalogue written by Ann Dingli, an independent architecture and culture writer, editor and curator whose work has appeared internationally in titles including *Domus*, *Wallpaper**, *FRAME*, *Monocle* and *Disegno*, among others. The catalogue will be hand-bound by Gabriel Zammit, a curator, writer and bookbinder who lectures in art theory and criticism at the University of Malta and has curated exhibitions at Valletta Contemporary and Spazju Kreattiv. ¹



Yana Fenech, *The New Parable of Lazarus*, pencil on paper

The event is hosted by *Stilla*, a hospitality initiative inspired by the Italian *albergo diffuso* model, which restores historic residences across Malta's Three Cities while integrating local art and cultural production into their everyday use. The exhibition will take place over 13–14 November 2026, with attendance by invitation. For more information you can email info@yanafenech.com

THE EARTH WILL SWALLOW AND SWALLOW

The *Earth Will Swallow and Swallow*, at Valletta Contemporary, builds on the themes explored in BEJN / In-Between, the Malta Pavilion at the 16th Gwangju Biennale.

While the earlier exhibition explored the intersections of cultures, languages, histories, and identities, this exhibition examines how encounters between cultures leave traces, shape perceptions, and transform experiences.

Reflecting on Malta's and Korea's relationships with the sea, the exhibition explores how land and water carry histories of movement, trade, borders, and cultural exchange. Through the work of artists from different cultural backgrounds, it considers how experiencing another place can reshape our understanding of its history and culture.

Taking its title from a poem by Maltese poet Jake Buttigieg, *The Earth Will Swallow*



and *Swallow* reimagines “swallowing” as the act of absorbing experiences and releasing them in new forms.

Commissioned by Arts Council Malta, BEJN / In-Between was presented at the 16th Gwangju Biennale with support from the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Visit Malta. ¹

The Earth Will Swallow and Swallow is curated by Moon Hyun Jeoung and runs from 29 October to 29 November 2026 at Valletta Contemporary, 15, 16 & 17 Triq

Lvant, Valletta. The opening reception takes place on Thursday 29 October, from 6pm to 9pm. Admission is free. The gallery is open Wednesday to Saturday, 2pm to 7pm, excluding public holidays. For enquiries, call +356 2124 1667, email info@vallettacontemporary.com, or visit www.vallettacontemporary.com.



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Gabriel Caruana

Public - Play - Private

Gabriel Caruana (1929–2018) was a firm believer that art is meant to be accessible to everyone and experienced through participation. Caruana created points of entry for public engagement in his works through material, colour, scale and, at times, humour. This belief sets the tone for the exhibition *Gabriel Caruana: Public - Play - Private*, which traces his commitment to bringing art into everyday life.

Caruana was a prolific artist whose ceramics, reliefs and public installations shaped modern art in Malta across six decades. His playful works are reminiscent of Malta's landscapes, colours, and aesthetics, reflecting his desire for art to be accessible to the public. Public installations by Caruana are found in Malta, Austria, and Italy.

The exhibition traces the connection between art and everyday life through sculptural totems, mixed-media painting, archival material, and photography, revealing an artist for whom the studio was never enough. Caruana carried his practice far beyond its walls and into village squares, Carnival parades, gardens, hotels, industrial sites, and schools, treating public space not as a backdrop for art, but as its natural home. Play, material,

and accessibility sit at the centre of this impulse — art made to be touched, encountered, and lived with, rather than simply observed.

From these shared, often unruly spaces, the exhibition follows Caruana's journey inward, toward a more introspective and reflective body of work. In doing so, it invites the viewer to sit with a quieter question: what does it mean to sustain

openness in a world where communal spaces are increasingly privatised, contested, and transformed?

Public - Play - Private will be showcased between 9th October 2026 and 23rd January 2027 and is the second in a series of exhibitions by the VP Gallery celebrating the Maltese modern art period, following Emvin Cremona's *The Glass Collage* in 2025. As a gallery rooted in Malta, it is vital for the VP Gallery to spotlight those artists who worked concurrently, or sometimes in dialogue with, Victor Pasmore, while celebrating their contribution to the country's modern art legacy. As always, collaboration remains an important part of the gallery's curatorial process, and the exhibition is accompanied by a soundscape by Chris Galea, responding directly to the curatorial note. This exhibition is in collaboration with Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti and the Gabriel Caruana Foundation.

Taking its cue from the three words of the exhibition's title, the illustrated catalogue explores Gabriel Caruana's practice as it continually moved between the studio and the street, the personal and the collective, art and object, the particular and the everyday.

Rather than simply documenting the exhibition, the catalogue invites us to look again at Caruana's unruly, restless, and profoundly human vision. Guided by the reflective essays of his daughter Raffaella Zammit, with Giuliana Fenech, Andrew Darmanin and Ella Fleri Soler, it continues to examine Caruana's fascination with public space, accessibility, the imaginative possibilities of play, and the intimate, socially and culturally engaged world from which his work emerged. Archival photographs, documentary material, and a wide selection of works currently on display at the Victor Pasmore Gallery further reveal the extraordinary range of an artist who transformed streets, schools, gardens, Carnival routes, and public spaces into arenas for encounter.

VP Gallery's opening hours are Mondays to Thursdays between 10am and 5pm (last entry at 4pm), Fridays between 10am and 7pm (last entry at 6pm), Saturdays between 10am and 3pm (last entry at 2pm). Tickets can be purchased at the door. The VP Gallery is located at APS House, 275, St Paul Street, Valletta.



Gabriel Caruana and Victor Pasmore. Photo courtesy of the Gabriel and Mary Rose Archive

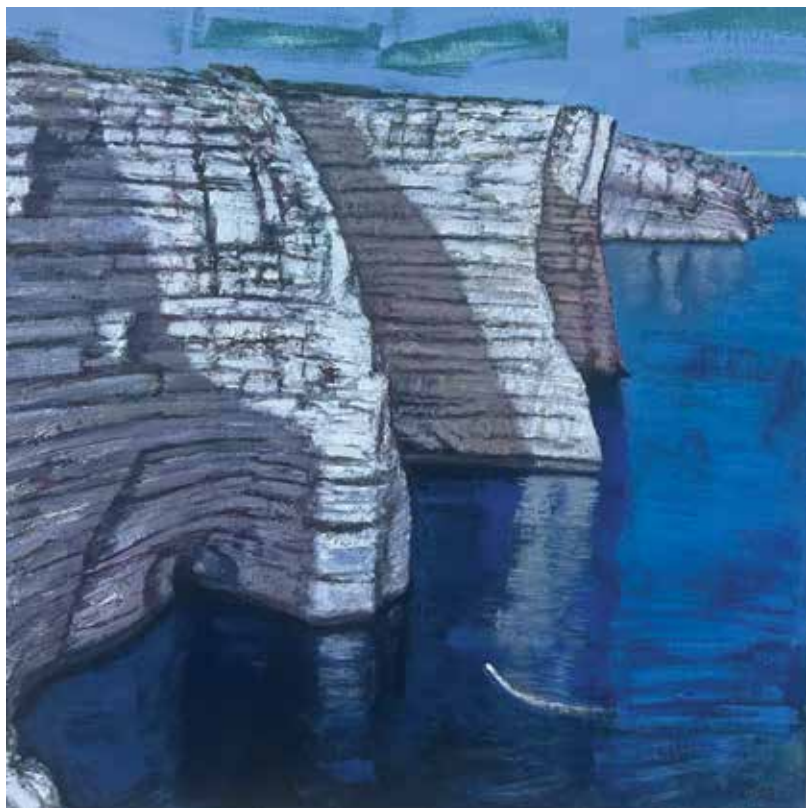
+ News / Exhibition / Julian Calabrese

GL RECLAMATIONS WAREHOUSE presents *LANDSCAPE / EVOLVING*

A collection of paintings by Julian Calabrese

Julian Calabrese's practice is deeply immersed in the Maltese rural landscape. His paintings explore the human experience, perception and intervention, responding to a landscape in constant change, never repeating, yet cyclical in nature.

Bold, expressive gestures sit alongside softer, delicate detail. Contrasting tones and textures, warped structures and playful colours give the paintings their distinctive visual character, creating a dialogue between energy and restraint.



LANDSCAPE / EVOLVING reflects a relationship with a place that is never entirely fixed. Ultimately, the paintings invite one to be present, experience the nature of evolution, sense the passage of time and celebrate what is and what will be, within.

The exhibition takes place at GL Reclamations Warehouse, specialists in mid-century furniture and all forms of wood reclamation, recognised for its discerning eye and diligent craftsmanship. This fresh concept showcases original paintings alongside collectable furniture, hand-finished

by skilled restorers. The collaboration offers a meeting point between authentic artistic expression and the art of restoration. **4**

Venue: GL Reclamations Warehouse, Naxxar, Malta

Exhibition dates: 12 December 2026 – 12 January 2027

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MICAS'S *A NEW LIFE FORCE* SPOTLIGHTS A NEW GENERATION OF PAINTERS

Featuring new works by Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Kemi Onabulé and Megan Rooney, and curated by Edith Devaney, Artistic Director of MICAS



Nathanaëlle Herbelin, *Fuite Rose* (2026). Photo by Objets Pointus. ADAGP, 2026 © Nathanaëlle Herbelin

The autumn season sees Malta International Contemporary Art Space opening a formidable display of contemporary art with *A New Life Force*, a major new exhibition that brings together three painters each gaining international recognition: Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Kemi Onabulé and Megan Rooney.

With the conclusion of its exhibition of monumental canvases by Californian

artist Reggie Burrows Hodges, whose first European solo exhibition was hosted at MICAS earlier this year, Malta's contemporary art museum now turns its attention to three women painters whose visual languages are shaped by diverse cultural backgrounds.

"As with Reggie Burrows Hodges's stay in Malta, where he created works informed by his extended time on the island, for *A New Life Force* each artist has created work that draws inspiration from Malta's culture, history and geography," says

curator Edith Devaney, Artistic Director of MICAS. "It is an exhibition that reflects the museum's commitment to supporting artists at pivotal moments in their careers while fostering new international dialogues around modern and contemporary art."

A New Life Force offers a compelling insight into a generation of artists who are redefining contemporary painting today. "All three demonstrate a determined focus on their singular modes of expression while maintaining

a deep connection to, and engagement with, the history of art," Devaney adds. "They each share a distinct commitment to painting and to exploring the possibilities of the medium. Individually, each possesses enormous creative energy – and we look forward to seeing this unfold across the walls of MICAS."

Based in Paris, French-Israeli artist Nathanaëlle Herbelin (b.1989) is celebrated for her atmospheric figuration which combines intimacy, memory and psychological depth.



Megan Rooney, *All the lives* (2026). Photo by Eva Herzog. Courtesy of the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery



Kemi Onabulé, *Low Moon* (2026). Photo by Anna Arca



Nathanaëlle Herbelin. Photo by Milena Villalon

Drawing upon the poetic sensibility of post-Impressionist artists such as Les Nabis, as well as Ferdinand Hodler and, later, Martin Wong, her paintings invite close, contemplative viewing.

Herbelin's works at MICAS respond directly to the dramatic architecture of the lower-ground gallery, which is divided into two distinct spaces. In the expansive hall located 18m below the museum's floating roof, she will present larger figurative paintings flooded with light and space; while a more intimate section will feature smaller, abstracted works. The paintings are deeply imbued with spiritual dimensions, influenced by the devotional *ex voto* artefacts found in historic buildings and churches across Malta.



Kemi Onabulé. Photo by Max Bainbridge

Occupying the central gallery space, London-based painter Kemi Onabulé (b.1995) draws upon her Greek, English and Nigerian heritage to explore humanity's relationship with landscape, ecology and collective memory. Her paintings often depict figures inhabiting dreamlike environments poised between harmony and uncertainty, evoking both ancient histories and speculative futures.

As part of her research visits to Malta, Onabulé was struck by the island's

vitality and the visible traces of its combative past. The intensity of the landscape, flora and colour palette all informed a powerful new body of work for the exhibition, many of which mark her largest canvases to date.

Canadian artist Megan Rooney (b.1985), who lives and works in London, is known for a multidisciplinary practice encompassing painting, installation and performance. Her paintings emerge through accumulations of gesture and colour, built up and sanded back in a physically demanding process that gives her works a vivid sense of movement and intensity.

During her time in Malta, Rooney became especially attuned to the changing qualities of natural light within the MICAS galleries, inspired by the luminosity of the architecture. Working on a larger scale than her usual canvases, she has created a series of vibrant new paintings whose layered surfaces are alive with colour, atmosphere and fleeting intimations of nature, filling the floating walls of the ground-floor gallery.

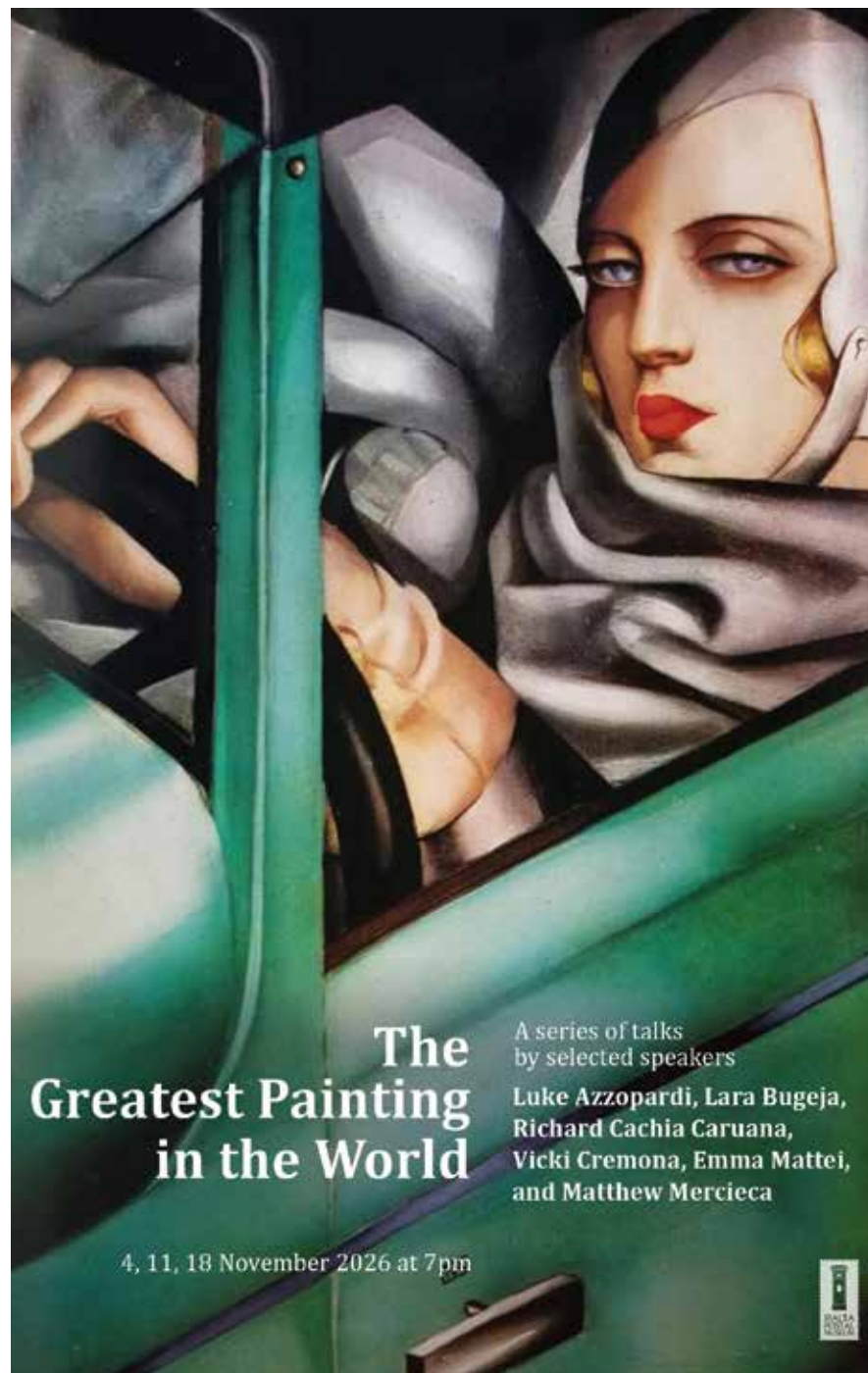
Together, the three artists in *A New Life Force* demonstrate the enduring vitality and transformative possibilities of painting today. Through deeply personal yet resonant approaches to colour and place, memory and human experience, the exhibition offers a timely reflection on contemporary painting as a site of experimentation, emotion and renewal.

The exhibition runs from 10 October until 31 January 2027 and is accompanied by the catalogue *A New Life Force*, published by global art specialists Skira and on sale only at the MICAS Gift Shop, featuring all the artists' works and interviews with them, and a new essay by Edith Devaney. ¹



Megan Rooney. Photo by Camilla Greenwell

The Greatest Painting in the World



The Greatest Painting in the World

A series of talks by selected speakers

Luke Azzopardi, Lara Bugeja, Richard Cachia Caruana, Vicki Cremona, Emma Mattei, and Matthew Mercieca

4, 11, 18 November 2026 at 7pm

The Malta Postal Museum & Arts Hub will host *The Greatest Painting in the World*, a three-part lecture series taking place on 4, 11 and 18 November at 7pm.

Exploring works from the Renaissance to contemporary Italy, the series will feature six speakers, with two lectures held each evening. Luke Azzopardi, Lara Bugeja, Richard Cachia Caruana, Vicki Cremona, Emma Mattei and Matthew Mercieca will each discuss the painting they consider to be the greatest in the world, offering personal insight into the works that have moved and inspired them.

The lectures will be held in the museum's Cremona Gallery and are open to the public. Seating is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis. ²

For further information, call 2596 1750.

GHADAJJAR GHAJNEJJA: EBBS AND FLOWS

A solo exhibition by Miriam Galea



Elements float before me, in a flow of pale blue shot with waves of fluo pink, blending seamlessly, making it hard to make out the borders between them.

Our eyes dance from one side to the other, rising and falling as if with the ebb of a mild wave, a liquid reverie, asking us: where does one begin and the other end? What are the edges of things? Does anything define us?

Following the books Ors and Ġewwieni/Innards, Miriam Galea ventures into a spatial dimension in the gallery, with a recent body of more formal work that tests the limits of nothingness, tracing

barely visible, diluted brushstrokes before they evaporate into thin air. Exploring the distinction between absence and presence, and questioning their very definition leads the artist to reduce to the essential. This involves a contrast between ambiguity and definition, contrasting gestures in the freedom and movement of water and the petrification brought about by analysing it. Chasing a trace, like a spirit, is also a process of rendering the invisible visible. The work remains open to a quiet tension between presence and absence, between what takes form and what threatens to disappear.

There is an attempt to contain the

uncontainable, while embracing water's resistance to fixed form, definition, and in turn, visibility as traditionally understood. Water, both transparent and fluid, invisible and ephemeral, becomes at once material and metaphor; its liquidity passes from the formal language of the work to the carnal in themes of motherhood and the female body, and outward into the instability and transience of contemporary "liquid lives" as seen by philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, appearing more figuratively as isolated figures seeking connection as they roam around barren landscapes.

Miriam Galea's solo exhibition *Għadajjar Għajnejja: Ebbs and Flows* runs from 22 October to 12 November, opening on 22 October at 7pm with a performance by Ruth Borg at 8pm, supported by Arts Council Malta and sponsored by the Farsons Foundation. Side events include an exhibition tour and *X Marta Marta* book event featuring Aphroconfuso and Loranne Vella on 1 November at 6pm, followed by the catalogue launch and finissage, with a discussion with Raphael Vella, on 11 November at 7pm. ¹

(UN)EXPRESSED

Shanice Farrugia's debut solo exhibition, *(UN)EXPRESSED*, brings together self-portraits developed over two years, exploring emotional restraint, suppressed feeling and quiet endurance.

Working across drawing and painting, Farrugia examines what lies beneath the composed exterior we learn, or are expected, to maintain. Although we experience both joy and distress, we may feel more comfortable sharing the positive, carrying an emotional burden in silence. The works question how this silence is learned through upbringing. Self-portraiture gives these experiences a visible and personal form.

"Like many people, I grew up with the understanding that being strong meant suppressing difficult emotions and carrying on," Farrugia says. "Through these works, I began to question that understanding. What happens to the emotions we learn not to show?"

Emotional restraint becomes embodied in tired eyes, flushed skin, tension and stillness. Some feelings persist, shaping how we carry ourselves and experience everyday life. Faces are cropped, fragmented, submerged or partially concealed, creating a tension between revelation and withholding. Through these choices, Farrugia considers the difficulty of expressing what we feel while protecting what remains private.



While You Are Still Here

The warmth of kraft paper and the depth of burgundy backgrounds contribute to the works' intimacy. These burgundy tones recall flesh and bruising, reinforcing the vulnerability of the portraits. The slow process of

drawing and painting gives Farrugia time to sit with these feelings and begin to understand them.

The work is also informed by her father's long-term illness and by anticipatory grief: the fear and sadness of potentially losing someone while they are still here. Traditionally associated with death, the recurring raven gives physical form to Farrugia's fear of loss. It becomes a witness to the uneasy space between hope and fear, presence and absence.

Yet these works extend beyond autobiography, inviting viewers to recognise experiences they may carry themselves. Without seeking to resolve these feelings, *(UN)EXPRESSED* explores how emotions are held back yet remain visible in our expressions. Farrugia hopes that this honesty can help viewers feel less alone and encourage more open conversations about emotional well-being. The exhibition questions the association of strength with silence, suggesting that acknowledging vulnerability can itself be a form of strength. ²

(UN)EXPRESSED, curated by Melanie Erixon, opens on Friday, 16 October, at 7.30pm at Il-Kamra ta' Fuq, Church Square, Mqabba, and continues until 8 November 2026.

Less Dominant Narratives Emerge Around Centuries-Old Coastal Watchtowers

Elyse Tonna's long-term curatorial project *Beyond What Drifts Us Apart* continues during October 2026, leaning ever-more into the project's ephemeral nature with a focus on the area around two coastal defense towers which have collapsed over centuries.

This year's chosen site invites an intense examination of Tal-Qortin, Marsalforn on the island of Gozo – a littoral site that is also multi-faceted, encompassing agricultural plots used for grazing, private fields, a nearby scrapyard and a recreational zone on a rehabilitated landfill site.

At Tal-Qortin, the absence of a standing tower structure becomes the curator and artists' point of departure; the collapsed towers and their uncertain footprints foreground questions of territorial marking, land reprogramming and the afterlives of defence, communication and waste. Post-anthropocentric perspectives frame the project's

approach, prioritising climate justice, bio-cultural diversity and the dismantling of human-centred perspectives in favour of coexistence.

Guided by ecological thinking and a decolonial mindset, *Beyond What Drifts Us Apart* continually reconsiders inherited legacies of these landscapes,

focusing on the interplay between the visible and invisible, the natural and de-/constructed. It addresses concepts related to extractive capitalism, contested land use, identity and environmental degradation, asking how past infrastructures underpin today's ecological instability.



Tal-Qortin, Marsalforn. Photo by Cezary Zakrzewski for Unfinished Art Space

In 2026, the project residency invites artists Julian Micallef (MT), Martina Georgina (MT), Bettina Hutschek (DE), Sébastien Schnyder (CH) to investigate how the site's transformations affect both material conditions and collective memory and how non-human systems respond to engineered ground and reconfigured terrain.

Beyond What Drifts Us Apart is produced by Unfinished Art Space, and is part of the Magic Carpets Platform, co-financed by the European Union and in Malta by the NGO Co-Financing Fund managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector. 

Learn more on www.unfinishedartspace.org

Beyond What Drifts Us Apart
5 October – 1 November 2026

Location: Marsalforn, Gozo

Residency curated by Elyse Tonna

Artists: Julian Micallef, Martina Georgina, Bettina Hutschek, Sébastien Schnyder



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A new art collection in Valletta brings artists into conversation with architecture, memory and the inherited narratives of the Mediterranean.

WORDS BY MARIE ART ADVISORY | PHOTOS BY BRIAN GRECH



Wioletta Kulewska, *The Simian King*, Fresco painting

WAS / NOW: Art, Architecture and the Stories We Inherit

Within the walls of Valletta's Romegas Hotel, history survives through architecture, fragments and inherited narratives - through what is documented, remembered and imagined. It is within this space between historical record and interpretation that the hotel's contemporary art collection has taken shape.

Developed over four years under the curatorial direction of Maria Galea, through MARIE Art Advisory, the collection was conceived as an integral part of the building's identity, in dialogue with its architecture and interiors by Camilleri Paris Mode.

Bringing together more than fifty works by over twenty-three Maltese and Malta-based artists, the collection spans painting, photography, sculpture, ceramics, fresco, prints and neon. Its significance, however, lies not in scale but in the relationship between art, architecture and history.

The curatorial proposition, *WAS / NOW*, explores the dialogue between inherited histories and contemporary interpretation. Mathurin Romegas - the knight, commander and corsair whose legacy is entwined with Malta's military past - provides a point of departure, rather than a subject to be illustrated.

"The intention was never to illustrate history," Galea explains. "It was to use history as a material." Through contemporary art, the collection questions who constructs historical narratives, what survives and how the past might be understood differently today.



Maria Galea, in front of
Jade Zammit
Don't Look Them In The Eye
Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas

Curating permanence through a building

The architecture of Romegas shaped both the placement of the works and the collection's narrative. Moving from the lower levels through the reception, courtyard, restaurant, staircases and rooms, visitors encounter themes of secrecy, memory, power and vulnerability. There is no prescribed route: unlike a gallery, a hotel invites unexpected encounters with art in everyday life.

Some works respond directly to the building. Kane Cali's *Loose Lips Sink Ships* developed from an unusual architectural arch whose uncertain function suggested the possibility of a concealed passageway. From this



Matthew Attard, *Follow The Ship(s) - Detail #8*
Lightbox (perspex, LED lights)

Paul Scerri, *Ged Maj Mun*

At Romegas, established figures appear alongside younger artists, new commissions coexist with existing works, and different generations and media contribute to a shared conversation.

fragment of speculation, Cali created a work concerned with secrecy, whispers and clandestine histories.

Wioletta Kulewska Akyel's *The Simian King*, executed using traditional fresco techniques, becomes physically embedded in the building's plaster. Drawing on the Romegas narrative, maritime references and the figure of his monkey, the artist imagines a story involving the Ottoman princess, Mihrimah Sultan. Christian and Muslim histories, often framed through conflict, meet instead through speculation and longing.

Nico Conti's *Threads of Porcelain* reinterprets Maltese lace through 3D-printed porcelain, bringing

traditional craft into dialogue with digital fabrication. The work raises a central question within the collection: what does it mean to preserve a tradition?

Paul Scerri's *Ged Maj Mun* approaches Romegas through contradiction rather than triumph. Referencing the corsair's reputation and a shipwreck he survived alongside his monkey, the sculpture shifts attention towards fragility, companionship and the uneasy coexistence of violence and tenderness.

Jade Zammit explores landscapes shaped by colonial histories and the movement of people and ideas, while Vince Briffa's neon work *Beneath Moonlit Walls, The Wolf's Spirit Sleeps* transforms Romegas's epithet, the Wolf

of the Sea, into something spectral. Rather than depicting the man, it considers his lingering presence and the way history inhabits a place long after its protagonists have disappeared.

Building a collection, not furnishing a hotel

There is a fundamental difference between selecting art to complement an interior and building a collection with an intellectual position. The former may rely on visual harmony; the latter requires dialogue, contrast and continuity.

At Romegas, established figures appear alongside younger artists, new commissions coexist with existing works, and different generations and media

contribute to a shared conversation. The collection seeks not simply to confirm established reputations, but to support artistic production and create opportunities for discovery.

This approach also raises questions about private patronage. Hospitality can use art as a signifier of sophistication, but it can also contribute meaningfully to cultural production by commissioning work and supporting local artists.

"The opportunity was to think beyond purchasing artworks and to ask what it means to build a collection with artists," Galea explains. "Commissioning creates dialogue. It asks an artist to respond, but it also requires the patron to accept uncertainty."

What remains

After four years working on the project, one of the most rewarding moments for Galea is seeing the collection begin to function independently of its curator. A guest may encounter a fresco without knowing its history, remember a sculpture while forgetting its historical reference, or notice a work only after passing it several times.

This freedom of interpretation is central to *WAS / NOW*. The collection does not seek to establish a definitive reading of a building, a man or a history. Instead, it leaves room for visitors to form their own connections.

We inherit buildings, objects, myths, conflicts and versions of history, but not an obligation to understand them in the same way. Between inheritance and interpretation lies the space in which contemporary art begins. ⁴

Read full feature online
www.artpaper.press/feature

Rebecca Bonaci, *Genna tal-Art*, Acrylic on canvasJohn Paul Azzopardi, *Study Of A Harpo-lyre*, Bone

SERA GALEA

A First Look at Debbie Caruana Dingli's Upcoming Solo Exhibition at Spazju Kreattiv 'Of Human Bondage'



Debbie Caruana Dingli's studio with *Henpecked Husbands* in the foreground

Of *Human Bondage*, Debbie Caruana Dingli's forthcoming solo exhibition at Spazju Kreattiv in Valletta, scheduled to run from 6 November to 3 January 2027, presents nine new large-scale paintings highlighting the underdog - the overlooked and marginalised - and paints them as monumental. Figures who would ordinarily be rendered small, or not rendered at all, are given the physical space to be seen and celebrated.

Upon seeing the initial works, what struck me most, alongside the level of detail and a much darker colour palette than Caruana Dingli usually adopts, was the scale. Every artwork created for this exhibition shares the same monumental size. It is intriguing how this grand scale contrasts with her subject: the underdog. By painting the underdog on such a scale, she places a direct spotlight on these figures, highlighting their circumstance and, at times, celebrating their resolve.

Caruana Dingli has been a prominent presence in the Maltese art scene for forty years, and her practice has long centred on the experience of being human. This new body of work, curated by Andrew Borg Wirth, marks a departure from the style she has been recognised for, for over four decades: the colours are darker than her usual register, the mood more solemn. Each presented figure is shadowed by a guardian



SERA GALEA is an independent visual designer, curator, and lecturer at the University of Malta's Department of Media & Communications, within the Faculty of Media & Knowledge Sciences. She also forms part of the creative direction team within the office of the Archbishop's Delegate for Culture.



Debbie Caruana Dingli in her studio with *Madonna tat-Triq* in the foreground

angel; not idealised, Adonis-like figures, but more humane companions, created to accompany the particular subject each one watches over. The illumination surrounding most of the depicted guardian angels gives the works a somewhat sacred presence.

Borg Wirth, when writing about the project, highlights how the underdogs “are rarely venerated for the resolve with which they transcend their position; instead, they are defined by what they are subjected to, rather than the spirit with which they endure.” Caruana

Dingli doesn’t disregard hardship; she introduces the guardian angel, standing beside each figure, not to erase what the subject is enduring, but to insist that enduring is itself worth reverence. In this body of work, hardship does not define the subject. As she puts it, simply:

“I tend to notice the underdog.”

Caruana Dingli has long returned to William Somerset Maugham, particularly as she is drawn to his habit of making the case for those rarely depicted or celebrated. This alignment >>

⚙ Feature / Exhibition / Debbie Caruana Dingli

>> Continued



Girls Who Find Shitty Boyfriends

is no coincidence. Caruana Dingli's connection to Somerset Maugham began at a young age, and his words and characters have long influenced her practice. "He will very much look at a person in the background and write about their lives." That same instinct now informs this body of work: the unsung figures others might overlook immediately capture Caruana Dingli's attention.

Alongside the nine large-scale paintings, Caruana Dingli is also presenting a series of monoprints showcasing some of Maugham's characters across his novels. She has read his books countless times, and the abundance of monoprints which will be presented in this upcoming exhibition bears that out: each one reflects a close attention to what makes his characters who they are, such as the 'Italian Countess,' who is presented in the series of monoprints and, on closer reading, is neither Italian nor a countess.

While Maugham's perspective and characters heavily influence Caruana Dingli's approach, her main subjects remain distinctly local. As she puts it, "I can't paint anything but Maltese people." Works like *The Golden Hour*, a reflection on prayer which raises poignant questions about spirituality,

and *Girls Who Find Shitty Boyfriends* hold difficult circumstances at arm's length through humour. The abbozzo of *Madonna tat-Triq* addresses Malta's pressures caused by overcrowding, using that same humour to make an uncomfortable social truth bearable enough to face. Humour, for Caruana

Dingli, isn't relief from the work; it just comes automatically. "Maybe humour can somehow draw an audience to a subject that I find significant enough to want to put out there", she explains.

Caruana Dingli's compassion, held together by wit, is what gives this series its particular tone, even as it can be perceived to be darker than her earlier work. It echoes Maugham's own conviction, from *The Summing Up* (1938), that goodness is often found in "persons who by common standards would be relentlessly condemned." Caruana Dingli's nine works make the same argument in paint: that empathy and dignity need not be reserved for those of scale or status; they can simply be given to whoever is looked at closely enough. 🐾

Of Human Bondage, Debbie Caruana Dingli's solo exhibition, curated by Andrew Borg Wirth, is on at Spazju Kreattiv from 6 November to 3 January 2027.



Debbie Caruana Dingli holding one of her dogs named Oli in front of the painting *Henpecked Husbands*

**RUMI BRINGS POETRY,
SOUNDS, CRAFT BEER
AND RUM TOGETHER IN
THE HEART OF VALLETTA.**

Since 2023, it has been home to Poetry from the Future, a monthly platform curated by Punks Collective, giving contemporary poets a space to perform, connect and build community - making Rumi a meeting point for both nightlife and the spoken word.

Rūmī

7, Strait Street, Valletta, Malta

**ROOTZ BRINGS ITALIAN WINE,
STREET FOOD, LIVE MUSIC AND
ECLECTIC SOUNDS TOGETHER
IN THE HEART OF VALLETTA.**

Since 2017, Rootz is the original Italian osteria and vineria where conviviality, live music and exceptional Italian street food meet. Known for its warm atmosphere and eclectic jazz nights and eclectic sounds, it has become a beloved gathering place for people looking for authentic flavour, good wine and memorable evenings in Valletta.



11, Strait Street, Valletta, Malta

DR JOANNA DELIA

Postcards from Below

Five artists, one headset, and the Malta nobody sends home – at the Gwangju Biennale

Look Malta up online. Go on... you know what you'll get. Blue water, honey-coloured stone, a sunset over the bastions, a beach that's somehow smaller than in the photo. One of the smallest nations in the world - and we sell ourselves like a postcard.

Then there's the Baroque. Glorious, yes - but everyone writes about the Baroque. I won't.

What I want to talk about is the other thing. The thing the brochures leave out.

Malta's contemporary art scene is extraordinary. I say that as someone who has spent years collecting it, living with it, chasing it into studios and garages and half-finished buildings - and I say it without hesitation. We have artists here doing work that is sharp, brave, strange, urgent... and almost nobody outside the island knows.

Part of that is size. Being small is charming on a postcard. In practice it's a kind of oppression - a ceiling you keep hitting. Small market, small audience, small budgets, a world that assumes an island this size can't possibly have that much to say. So the work stays local. It

gets made, shown for three weeks, and folded away.

But here's the thing about a small place with a very long, very intense history - invaded, ruled, bombed, converted, rebuilt, sold - it doesn't produce small art. All that pressure has to come out somewhere. It comes out in our contemporary artists. And making it visible - getting it seen beyond our own shores - has become, quite simply, my mission.

Which is why what I found in a basement in Gwangju mattered so much to me.

DOWN THE STAIRS

This year Malta had its first-ever presence at the Gwangju Biennale - and what a debut. Upstairs, Norbert Francis Attard's installations hit hard - political, unflinching, speaking about Gaza at a moment when too many prefer silence. PONKS built a poetry temple - words given a place to be entered, not just read. Serious work, and work I deeply respect.

But the pavilion had another heart, and you had to go looking for it.

Down the stairs. Into the basement. Into a small dark room - and then one more step, the one most visitors didn't take... putting on the headset.

Inside were postcards. Postcards from Malta - and a few from Korea too, but it's the Maltese ones I'm writing about. PORTAL is a single work conceptualised and directed by PONKS with seven invited artists, developed as part of the public programme of BEJN / IN-BETWEEN, the Malta Pavilion at the 16th Gwangju Biennale, commissioned by Arts Council Malta.



Not the postcard you know. No Blue Grotto. No Popeye Village. Instead - a garage. A freeport. A bombed-out chapel. The National Library after hours. A landscape you'd only find if someone who loves it took you there.

These are places tourists don't go.

Places most Maltese don't think about. And that was the point.

I know these artists - personally, some for years. I've followed their work, sat in their openings, argued with them over late drinks. And standing in a dark basement thousands of kilometres from home, headset on, seeing my island through their eyes... I'll admit it - it got to me.

WHY VR, I ASK?

A word on the medium, because I think it's exactly why this room was underestimated.

VR asks something of you. Time.



Charlene Galea x PONKS, *Standard Procedure*, 2026. 360-degree video, 5 mins 12 seconds. Filmed at the National Library of Malta, Valletta. Image courtesy of PONKS

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.



Martina Georgina x PONKS, *DAD 001*, 2026. 360-degree video, 5 mins 25 seconds. Filmed in the artist's father's garage, San Ġwann. Image courtesy of PONKS

MARTINA GEORGINA – DAD 001

A garage. A Fiat 130 - her grandfather's, then her father's, polished to a mirror and believed to be the only one left on the island. The number plate says it all: DAD 001.

Martina circles the car the way she grew up circling her father's world - from the outside. Never quite in. She shifts between roles - guest, intruder, heir, observer - negotiating where her body can be, where her voice is allowed. The car is desire, power, projection... a whole emotional language that men in her life spoke to machines rather than to each other.

On the garage walls, a recording of a drive she once took with her father in that same car. Alongside it, her own archive footage of Hal Far - the drag races, the drifting, the smoke and the noise - a Maltese masculinity expressed through speed, risk and rebellion. A world her father introduced her to.

Then - the cut.

Stillness becomes speed, and suddenly you're inside a drifting car. In a headset, that moment hits the body before the brain catches up. The intimacy of the garage ruptures - and that's the point. What do you do with the version of masculinity you inherit... when you find yourself drawn to another one entirely? It's tender and it's loud. Very Maltese, in both directions.

ROMEO ROXMAN GATT – ELEVANI (ELEVATE ME)

The Saviour Gate Chapel in Kalkara. Bombed during the Second World War. Abandoned ever since. Now hemmed in by cranes and fresh concrete as Kalkara is polished, developed and sold - one more neighbourhood shaped by construction, real estate and overtourism. Romeo hangs there.

Angel. Demon. Topless priest. He moves between characters - guided, and interrupted, by the will of the trans gods. Suspended on a metal pole and pull-up structure, beneath a hole in the ceiling where the light pours in. Vulnerable. Open. Seen.

Anyone who knows Romeo's work knows it's usually physical - carrying bricks, pushing, force, even aggression. Behaviours coded as masculine, taken >>

Curiosity. A willingness to look slightly ridiculous in public with a plastic box strapped to your face. Plenty of people won't - they glance at the door, see the queue or the dark, and keep walking.

Their loss.

Because once you're in, there's no frame. No wall label at a polite distance. No safe spot from which to observe. You turn your head and the world turns with you - above, behind, under your feet. You're not looking at the work... you're standing inside it. In a performance piece, that changes everything. The body in front of you isn't an image. It's company.

For artists working through the body, through site, through memory - VR isn't a gimmick. It's the closest thing to taking someone by the hand and saying come, I'll show you.

"From the beginning, we wanted the technology to feel intuitive and

unobtrusive, particularly for visitors who may have little or no previous experience with VR," said Mark Anthony Sammut (Infinita). "We therefore developed the experience around natural hand interaction, removing the need for physical VR controllers and allowing visitors to simply use their hands to interact with the experience."

CHARLENE GALEA – STANDARD PROCEDURE

First, the National Library. Valletta. All that marble authority, all those archives - written, catalogued, classified and governed almost entirely by men. A building that decided, for centuries, whose words counted.

Into this walks Charlene... in a costume made of bras.

Donated bras, charity-shop underwear, lace, domestic fabric - every garment designed to support, shape and regulate the female body - stitched together into one dense, layered, heavy shell.

Seams exposed. Joints visible. Nothing smoothed or hidden. It's armour and it's a cage at the same time - an understructure turned inside out, an archive of other women's intimacy, wear and use.

For most of the performance it holds. Heavy. Contained. And her poem plays - teasingly, relentlessly - with the letter F. Every F-word you can think of... and a few you probably can't... spoken inside the one building where women's words were least welcome.

Then, near the end, the structure loosens. Pieces begin to fall.

It's quietly devastating. Charlene's body becomes the unwritten history - all the stories that never made it onto those shelves. And the question underneath it is simple: whose bodies, whose voices, get to leave a trace in official memory? In VR, you're in the reading room with her. You can't look away from the shelves... or from her.

☆ Review / *Gwangju Biennale / Malta Pavilion*

>> Continued



Romeo Roxman Gatt x PONKS, *EVELANI*, 2026. 360-degree video, 5 mins 4 seconds. Filmed in an abandoned 18th-century chapel in Kalkara. Image courtesy of PONKS

on deliberately. This is different. Not exertion - endurance. Stillness. Just hanging, vertical... holding on until he can't anymore.

Around him, billboards. Protest slogans dressed in the bright, confident grammar of global advertising - "Right wings are everywhere, but not in my church." Wings, angels, religious symbols, digital elements built with 3D artist Costas Kazantzis - all set to industrial textures and distant church bells sliding into strings, drum machines, trance.

It's a ruin full of futures. At a time when borders are tightening and trans rights are under threat almost everywhere, Romeo uses the wreckage - of a church, of capitalism, of certainty - as a place to imagine something else. Not tidy progress. A refusal. A walking away from what's already collapsing.

Of all the postcards, this is the one I'd most like to post to certain people.

KEIT BONNICI – PSYCHOKINETIC ECONOMIES – MILL-BAHH GHAL IDI

The Malta Freeport. Almost everything you eat, wear and plug in on this island arrived here - floated across the sea in anonymous steel boxes. The photographer and writer Allan Sekula called the sea "the forgotten space." The port is where the forgotten space docks. Keit brings three port workers into

the yard - Marilyn Latayan, Anvesh Dunna and Salvatore Grixti, each from a different department - among the cranes and carriers that move containers in their endless, flattening, machine choreography. Logistics as ballet, with no dancers.

And then he gives the workers psychic powers.

They conjure psychokinesis. Human

bodies against mammoth machinery. Will against abstraction. It's playful and strange - and underneath, quietly furious. Because behind every box there's a chain of hands nobody sees, a transnational history of labour and capital, hidden by design.

Standing in the yard in 360°, the scale is overwhelming. You feel how small a person is there. Which makes the gesture - three workers, raising

their hands against all that steel - feel enormous. The work leaves you with the questions the supply chain is built to make us forget: from where? how? who? to whom?

TARA & FELIX – TWO BIRDS AND A STONE

And then... breath.

Two contemporary dancers in the Maltese landscape - not using it as a backdrop, but feeling it, carrying it, remembering it. They wander, repeat, respond. A gesture starts as a reaction to a texture, a distance, a rhythm - and through repetition becomes something lighter. A fragment. A trace. A bit of childhood... running, weaving, gathering.

The work begins with a question that hit me hard, standing in Korea: what happens when a place is remembered rather than lived in?

This is the piece that uses VR most generously. You choose where to look. You choose who to follow. You're far from Malta - and yet placed inside it - bringing your own memories into the encounter. And the landscape itself feels like an archive - layered, old, and fragile. What looks permanent is disappearing. You feel it.

It's a love letter, really. To the bits of the island that are still beautiful... while they still are.



Keit Bonnici x PONKS, *Psychokinetic Economies – Mill-baħh Għal Idi*, 2026. 360-degree video, 4 mins 15 seconds. Filmed at Malta Freeport. Image courtesy of PONKS

WHAT WE CHOOSE TO SEND

Five postcards, then. None of them pretty in the brochure sense. All of them honest.

And here's what stayed with me on the flight home. When Maltese contemporary artists are handed the job of representing Malta to the world - this is what they choose. A library that excluded women. A garage full of inherited masculinity. A bombed chapel drowning in development. A port built on invisible labour. A landscape slipping away.

That's not an attack on the island. It's love - the kind that tells the truth. It's also a mirror. Looking at what our artists decide to show tells us something about who we are right now - what hurts, what's at stake, what we're about to lose.

That's why this work can't stay in a basement in Gwangju.

If I have one regret, it's where these works lived - underground, in the dark, behind a headset. A vital part of the pavilion, and an easy one to miss. Plenty did. So, I'm pushing - lobbying, frankly - for the VR works to be shown

back home, where Maltese audiences can take the time to put the headset on and see themselves through their own artists' eyes.

We're small. We'll always be small. But our artists aren't... and it's long past time they were seen.

Bring it upstairs. Bring it home. 

PORTAL, conceptualised and directed by PONKS with seven invited artists, is presented in the Trans/portation room of the Malta Pavilion at the 16th Gwangju Biennale, BEJN /

In-Between. Conceived as a portal between Malta and Korea, it brings together seven 360-degree videos, five filmed in Malta and two in Korea, viewed on VR headsets. Together they form one bridge rather than separate pieces, resting on the idea that contemporary art and poetry are the same process: a need to react to what surrounds us. The Korean videos are Euljiro Lady by MORE (Euljiro 4, Seoul) and Cry on Cue: Performance in Cinema Gwangju by KIMON (Cinema Gwangju, Gwangju).

Concept and direction by PONKS. Invited artists: Charlene Galea, Romeo Roxman Gatt, Tara Dalli & Felix Deepen, Keit Bonnici, Martina Georgina (Malta); MORE, KIMON (Korea). VR programme developed by Infinita. Public programme supported by the Cultural Diplomacy Fund, managed by the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs.

PORTAL will be on display from 29 October until 29 November at Valletta Contemporary as a part of The Earth will Swallow and Swallow (see page 7 for more information)



Tara Dalli & Felix Deepen x PONKS, *Two Birds, One Stone*, 2026. 360-degree video, 5 mins 40 seconds. Filmed at Ta' Ġurdan Lighthouse, Ghasri. Image courtesy of PONKS

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Q Interview / *Photography* / *Nigel Baldacchino*

SOFIA BALDI PIGHI

THE ONLY DISTANCE

A conversation with Nigel Baldacchino



Nigel Baldacchino, *The Only Distance*, 2026. Photobook view. Courtesy of the artist

The *Only Distance* (2026) is the first photobook by Maltese photographer and architect Nigel Baldacchino. The 72-page book measures 24 × 29 cm, is printed entirely on 80gsm Offenbach Bible Paper and features sewn binding. It is housed in a rigid open box, with a special edition of 30 copies accompanied by a print and a booklet featuring a poem by Baldacchino. The book was printed by LONGO, an Italian printing and production house working across different printing processes, papers and bespoke solutions, with a particular focus on photography and high-end books.

The project took shape through Penumbra Foundation and Image Threads' Long Term Photobook Program in New York, which Baldacchino joined in 2023; he is now part of the programme as Program Assistant. Since its publication at Micamera in Milan on 26 September, *The Only Distance* has already circulated through a network of prominent photobook venues and festivals, including Photobook Mania (PHMuseum Days) in Bologna, with Leporello Books (Rome), Mutty Library & Gallery in Brescia, and Le Bal Gallery & Bookshop in Paris. The book will also be presented in Malta at Palazzo Falson.

Made predominantly in Malta, with two exceptions, the photographs do not set out to document the island. Instead, light, material, texture and the surrounding realities of the place enter the work without becoming its subject. What emerges is an investigation into distance, perception and the space between images.

The title *The Only Distance* points to a distance that is not simply physical, but felt – an inner relation between yourself and whatever you are photographing. You describe how moving closer reveals detail, while moving further away allows

SOFIA BALDI PIGHI is a curator and researcher working between Italy and Malta. She is a practice-based PhD candidate in Critical-Curatorial Practices of Contemporary Creation at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts in Turin. Her research investigates European borders, especially in the central Mediterranean, where artistic and civic practices of resistance contribute to new imaginaries of the sea. She was Artistic Director of Malta Biennale 2024 – Insulaphilia. In 2023 she joined the curatorial team of the first Italian Pavilion at the 14th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, and since 2023 has curated Una Boccata d'Arte, by Fondazione Elpis with Galleria Continua and Threes Production.



Photo by Marija Grech

the whole to come into view. You also connect this distance to the idea of “being seen” – of being recognised and taken in without judgement. How does being seen help you understand this distance?

Being seen, for me, has something to do with recognition without judgement. It is not simply about how close I am physically to something, but about whether I am close enough to really see it without losing the whole of it. If I move further away, I lose detail. If I move closer, I lose the perimeter, the context. There is a specific distance at which I can take something in as a whole.

It has to do with an emphasis on the part of our capacity for attention which is unmediated – holding on to the moment of experience before resolving it into decisions or judgements. I think the distance I am trying to find in the photographs works in a similar way: it allows me to remain in relation with a subject without imposing a judgement on it. I think the distance I am trying to find in the photographs works in a similar way: it allows me to remain in relation with a subject without imposing a judgement on it.

Until a few months ago, the book was titled *The Sea*, and almost all of the photographs were made in Malta. For someone living on an island, the sea is not simply a landscape or a subject: it is a constant presence, and perhaps also a constant reminder of distance – something that is always there, visible, yet extending beyond what can be reached or measured. In the book, I feel that the sea makes distance perceptible in a particular way. Does this relationship between the sea and distance resonate with the way you came to understand the book?

The sea is a big emblem for me, something I can confront. I can stand at the beach and look at it, and there is something about it that allows distance,

and the tension it brings, to stretch out freely & soothingly. It has no will of its own, but it can do completely contradictory things at the same time: its surface can be rough enough to kill, while deeper down it can be quiet, still and harmonious. It can push someone towards the shore and save them, or it can drown them. For me, there is something about this ambivalence that is important. The sea is an unjudging mass of matter. It can contain all these contradictory states without resolving them, and that is close to what I was trying to hold in the book.

The book began with something you could recognise before you could name it. You started by looking again at photographs you had already

made, sensing that they shared a particular charge, and described the process as trying to “flush something out”. Only later did you begin going out to photograph with that sensation in mind. What were you trying to sniff out – and what can photography make perceptible before language catches up with it?

I wanted to use photography to be specific about something – to fish something out, to explore it. Initially, I went back through photographs I had already made and noticed that they seemed to share a quality I recognised, even though I could not put it into words.

I spent almost two years sitting with that feeling, becoming more discerning

about its specificities. Only then did I start going out to photograph again, with that sensation in mind. I would come back with new images and put them into the original edit, replacing the existing photographs one by one until, eventually, none of the original images remained.

There was a point where I thought: if I could have this ingredient in all the images, perhaps I might learn something about it that I did not yet have words for. And I did. What I had been trying to find in the individual photograph loosened into something I was looking for in the sequence. Photography and editing gave me access to a way of thinking that language alone could not. >>



Nigel Baldacchino, *The Only Distance*, 2026. Photobook view. Courtesy of the artist

Q Interview / *Photography* / *Nigel Baldacchino*

>> Continued

The genealogy of the book also passes through a learning experience. You began working on *The Only Distance* in preparation for Penumbra’s Long Term Photobook Program, and through the programme entered an international photobook community that was largely unknown to you in Malta. You are now part of that same programme as Program Assistant. What does it mean to move from discovering this ecosystem as a student to helping others enter it – particularly from Malta, where you once did not know that this world existed?

The project actually started specifically for the course. I began working on it in 2022 in preparation for the Long Term Photobook Program, which I did in 2023. The course introduced me to a whole community of people I admired and looked up to. The photobook world is relatively small, and there was a real sense of belonging and of being surrounded by people thinking about photography in similar ways.

Coming from Malta, I had no idea that this ecosystem existed. Through Anne Immelé, with whom I had worked on “those eyes - these eyes - they fade”, and her deep knowledge about photobooks, and through starting to go to Paris Photo and Arles, I started getting an idea about it, and toying with my own projects. The course, then, coming soon after, just enabled everything else. Before 2021 essentially, I knew exhibitions, I made exhibitions, and that was the end of it. The course opened up further a completely different way of thinking about what a book could be and what it could do.

Now, as a Program Assistant, I can help other students navigate that process. For me, that is important: making this world visible, connecting people, and helping photographers from Malta understand that making a photobook is a relevant and viable venue for photography, which adds meaningful ways of expressing it.

But the work does not end with the photographer. A photobook also takes shape through the people, materials and decisions involved in bringing it into physical form. We asked LONGO to reflect on this process. What if the printer is not simply the last step in the production of a photobook, but one of the places where the work itself is created? How has your collaboration with Longo, particularly in the case of Nigel Baldacchino’s photobook, challenged or expanded your understanding of the printer’s role in relation to the photographer?

Working with Nigel on *The Only Distance* gives us a chance to speak from within the experience of making this book, and about what it means to be entrusted with a project. When a photographer places a project in our hands, they entrust us with a way of thinking. There is usually something at its centre that we have to learn to recognise. There is a particular quality of attention in our work, and in the way we commit ourselves to perceiving a project, that asks to be welcomed and preserved. We have to allow this to enter the way we imagine the book and, therefore, the way in which it is concretely realised.

We think every project has its own sound, its own air. In the case of *The Only Distance*, that sound was closely connected to distance, but also to the red colour that was always present during the printing process. From there, the book is built together: looking, talking, making, changing, looking again. We begin to think through the object – how it feels in the hand, how the images inhabit the page, how much the material reveals or holds back. The opacity of the paper, for example, became part of this thought, allowing the images to retain their own space while remaining part of the physical experience of the book.

For us, making a book means not simply translating an already completed idea into an object, but accompanying a thought as it finds its own material, tangible language. With Nigel, every choice was built together – including the sense of care and guardianship in the solidity of the cardboard set against the softness and fragility of the book and the gauze. And perhaps the most important thing is simply to remain genuinely close to the project and to listen carefully, so that when the book finally exists, it still retains the same air as the thought from which it began. ⁴



Nigel Baldacchino, *The Only Distance*, 2026. Photobook view. Courtesy of the artist



Nigel Baldacchino, *The Only Distance*, 2026. Photobook view. Courtesy of the artist

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JOANNA DELIA

THE MORNING AFTER [BERLIN]

Berlin Art Week 2026, reviewed

This year I overdosed on Asian megacities. Hong Kong. Tokyo. Seoul. Then Seoul and Gwangju again for the Biennale - and from there, no pause, no decompression, straight onto a plane to Berlin. Berlin. The city of my teenage dreams.

The city where, in the nineties, artists reinvented squatting - took over vast, abandoned buildings and turned them into studios, clubs, galleries, homes - and showed my generation what its belle époque could look like. The city that, for a while, looked set to take the crown from Paris once and for all. Then London tried to steal the spotlight. Then inflation and gentrification came for everyone, and one by one they all bowed down to capitalism.

And yet... Berlin is still there. If only its residents - and the rest of the world - would see it for what it is. A city in an S&M relationship with itself. A city that keeps repeating its own self-mutilation, wound after wound, wall after wall - and then, at dawn, as the clubs spill out and the light comes up grey over the Spree, allows itself to shine as the artwork it has always been.

That's the city I landed in for the fifteenth Berlin Art Week, 9 to 13 September. More than a hundred museums, galleries, collections and project spaces, all opening their doors at once. You cannot see it all. Nobody does. I didn't even try.

'NIGHT' AT THE NEUE NATIONALGALERIE

Let me get the confession out of the way. I get star-struck. I'm Maltese, I'm Mediterranean, I'm emotionally transparent - and I met Maurizio Cattelan.

NIGHT, at the Neue Nationalgalerie - his first major solo exhibition in Germany, and the exhibition accompanying his 2026 Preis der Nationalgalerie - did exactly what I hoped it would inside Mies van der Rohe's glass hall. Humour and bitter seriousness, side by side, neither cancelling the other out.

Pigeons on the ceiling - watching, judging, ready to make a mess of the whole thing. *All* - bodies laid out on the floor under marble



Maurizio Cattelan, Neue Nationalgalerie, 2026 © Neue Nationalgalerie – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz / David von Becker

shrouds, a quiet catastrophe carved in stone. A miniature Brandenburg Gate, the city's grand symbol shrunk down to size. And *Him* - Hitler, small, kneeling, praying, impossible to look at and impossible to look away from. To put that work in Berlin, of all places... that takes nerve.

That's what I love about Cattelan. Under the jokes there's an activist - someone willing to poke at the things a city would rather leave buried.

This is the man who taped a real banana to a wall, called it art, sold it - and got away with it. The artist who takes the piss out of the art world's absurdity while profiting handsomely



from it, and somehow makes you love him more for it.

And then there he was. We chatted - briefly, and I was certainly talking too fast (as always - it runs in the family). He signed his book for me. He signed my Artpaper piece, the one that mentions him. He signed one for Leila, my daughter. He signed one for Lily, for Artpaper. And he signed a souvenir passport - with my name, not his. Of course he did.

I keep thinking about that passport. In today's world, a passport is part pass, part shackle - the document that lets some of us through and keeps so many others out. Trust Cattelan to sell one, sign it in your name, and leave you holding the joke... and the question.

I'm not ashamed. Some days you're a critic. Some days you're a fan.

BITTERSWEET SYMPHONY - GALERIE IM SAALBAU

If Cattelan made me grin, this show floored me.

Eric Meier and Stefanie Moshhammer, at Galerie im Saalbau in Neukölln, came at the same subject - alcohol addiction - from opposite directions, and between them made one of the most intimate exhibitions I saw all week. An honest portrait of what it is to grow up beside someone who drinks, who uses, who disappears into it.

What hit me was the double vision. These are works that see their parents clearly - and forgive them, maybe. There's even a kind of gratitude in them, an acknowledgement that the chaos planted something. That the artist was born, partly, out of the storm.

So everything sits together. The depravity and the glamour. The beauty in exasperation. Children growing up far too soon, innocence lost in increments. The colour. The rare moments of clarity - and then the chaos again. The eye of the storm.

Moshhammer works through her own mother, in a coded, poetic language of images, objects and video. Meier photographed men in a residential home in Eisenhüttenstadt, many cast adrift after reunification, with a closeness that gives them back their dignity.

I loved it. It hit me. Hard. I'm still carrying it.

SEE / SAW - AOA;87

Madeleine Fenwick and Kane Calì opened *SEE / SAW* at AOA;87 on Sophienstraße, in collaboration with Malta's R Gallery - on the very first night of the week. A genuine Malta-Berlin co-production, and proof of how far the island's galleries now reach.

Kane's strongest works are industrial steel reliefs cast from newspaper photographs - images lifted from the *Guardian*, from CNN. Men sifting through what's left after an earthquake, a landslide, a bombing. In another, what looks like the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb. This is the desensitisation of the news feed, cast in steel - with edges sharp enough to cut your fingers if you dared caress them.

And you want to. That's the trick.

Think of a Monet - thick, buttery layers of paint, lilies, ponds. You want to touch it, to get closer, to somehow be inside it. And still, no matter how close you get, you never quite smell the water or feel the cool of the pond.

Kane's reliefs pull the same impulse in the opposite direction. Deep-piled steel spelling disaster and pain. You want to touch it - and you still cannot experience the devastation, any more than you can step into Monet's garden. That gap is the work. That's what scrolling past catastrophe every morning has done to us.

At the heart of the show was Madeleine's eponymous *SEE / SAW* - and it stopped me. A fulcrum. The precarious balance so many of us feel this planet, this society, is resting on right now. The teetering.

And underneath it, a memory every one of us carries. Well, the little ones like me. Being the little one in the playground - the lightest on the seesaw. Stuck up in the air, unable to come down, because the bully on the other end is heavier.

And then the frantic, brilliant mental work of it...

the maths, the physics, the creativity it takes to negotiate your way back down to safety.

That's the piece. That's us, now.

The show as a whole took balance as its subject - not instability, which it treated as a given, but the harder, quieter business of staying upright inside structures we didn't choose and can't leave. Each element holding because the others hold.

Kathrine Maj, R Gallery's gallerist, was there to see it land. Her partner in the gallery, Mark Sullivan, couldn't make it - and he was sorely missed. A night like this is his work too, and he deserves to hear it.

It was also gallerist Angie's last show at AOA;87, which gave the evening something bittersweet of its own. I'm as worried for Angie and her brilliant artists as I'm worried for Leila - my daughter - as in, not worried at all. Both carriers of the matriarchy flag. Both buttresses and bulldozers. The light will shine on. No doubt.

CENTRALIA - MOUNTAINS, ROSA-LUXEMBURG-PLATZ

At Mountains, Markus's gallery on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Nschotschi Haslinger presented *Centralia* - and it was strange in the best possible way.

Ceramic creatures with long, umbilical necks, somewhere between body, landscape and something entirely their own. Fragile and watchful at once, like small guardians of a territory we've forgotten we're standing on. Plants, animals, bodies and geology bleed into each other, and the familiar tips gently into the uncanny. >>



Stefanie Moshhammer, *Mother and I*, 1978, 2000 / 2023. Installation view. Courtesy of the artist.

☆ Review / *Berlin Art Week*

>> Continued



Madeleine Fenwick, *Future Conditional*, Engraved Brass Coated Aluminum Plates on Hinged Frame Mechanism. Exhibited at AOA;87

The title comes from Centralia, the almost-abandoned town in Pennsylvania where a coal seam has been burning underground since the 1960s - a fire nobody can put out. It's a perfect image for an Earth whose inner forces have slipped out of our control. And it doubles as a centre, a gathering point, a place where ecology, geology and myth meet.

Drawings, two videos and a performance with a tree-like wearable sculpture brought to life by performers completed it - sculpture, moving image and body sharing one breathing space.

ANDREAS BLANK IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT - UFERHALLEN

Some of the best moments of Art Week happen far from the openings.

Andreas Blank lives and works in the studio complex at Uferhallen in Wedding, where he showed during the Open Studios alongside Anne Jungjohann, Wolfgang Ganter and Ria Wank. Andreas carves the everyday - jam jars, boots, a crumpled sheet of paper - by hand from marble, alabaster and sandstone, giving the throwaway the permanence once reserved for saints and statesmen.

We sat on his little terrace, sipping prosecco, at a table he made himself - in the studio, from an oak felled on his family's land. There's something perfect about that. An artist who turns disposable things into monuments, eating at a table that

turned his family's tree into something to gather around.

His work comes back to Valletta Contemporary next year. Go.

A BIRD THAT CANNOT LAND - KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Then the Kyiv Biennial - nomadic by necessity, and spread through the whole of KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Mitte under the title *A Bird That Cannot Land*.

A biennial in exile, made of displacement, memory and the question of where home is when home is under fire.

One video has stayed with me. Children playing on the shell of what looked like a bombed-out plane. Climbing over it, in and out of it, stuffing it with what looked like shorn sheep's wool, soft white fleece packed into a broken machine of war.

It was play - real play, the kind children will make anywhere, out of anything. And it was unbearable. The softest thing in the world filling the hardest. A plane that will never fly again, a bird that cannot land, turned into a nest.

I stood there far longer than I meant to.

A PAUSE IN THE BIKINI

A tiny detour, and a lovely one. At Bikini Berlin, in Contemporary Showroom, showing flower paintings. A small, quiet pause in a very loud week.

MAHALLA — THE WILD HALF

And then MaHalla, the vast former AEG industrial complex out in Oberschöneweide - art by day, dancing by night, the way only Berlin manages.

An iron bedstead covered in candles, like the racks in Catholic cathedrals and Orthodox churches where you light one for someone and leave a wish behind. Performances - haunting, daunting, as always. Nudity that would be called vulgar back home, simply laid out here as it is, without apology.

Berlin pushing boundaries... because that's what Berlin does.

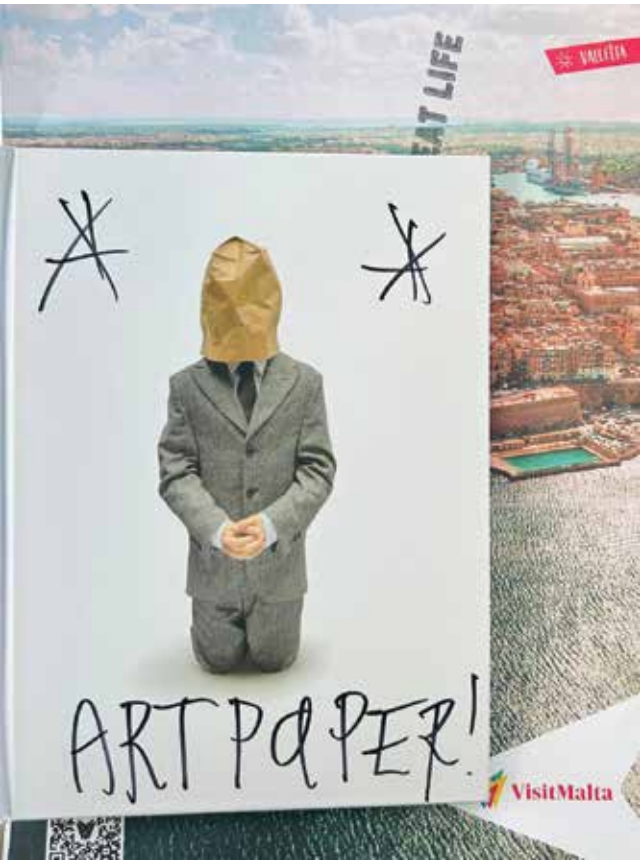
MAKING PEACE WITH THE CRUSH

Five days, more than a hundred participating museums, galleries, collections and project spaces, and I saw a fraction. That's fine. That's Berlin. You pick your openings, you walk between them, you accept that the best evening is the one where you make it to three.

I came home with a passport in my own name signed by a provocateur, a heavy heart from Neukölln, a seesaw I can't stop thinking about, the taste of prosecco on an oak table - and a renewed conviction that art still answers the world better than anything else we've got.

Berlin bled a little, partied a lot, and shone at dawn.

Art, not angst... again. 🇩🇪



Maurizio Cattelan writes "ARTPAPER" at his book signing at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin



The Berlin edition of Artpaper being read outside Neue Nationalgalerie during Berlin Art Week



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