

# BUILDING & BREAKING

— TERESA SCIBERRAS

*Apparently the first drawing I ever did was when I was two. It was of a semi-recognisable foetus in a placenta. I called it 'The Baby in Mummy's Tummy'. It got hung on the fridge.*

Many drawings, paintings and comic strips later, my parents decided to send me to private lessons, to the at the time relatively unknown Norwegian artist, the late and great Olaug Vethal. That was it. I'll never forget how intense the world always looked from the back seat of the car, on the way back from those two-hour long Saturday afternoon sessions of observation, experimentation and inspiration: everything was brighter, edgier, more exciting, more important. I knew what I wanted to do from the age of 12.

It took a while to get there though. Art was not considered a 'proper' subject, it wasn't even taught, back then, at the sixth form I attended. Then there was no art school, and studying abroad, back in the nineties, was just not feasible. So I read for a degree in English literature and language instead. It was the next best thing. Consequently, I resolutely left the whole 'art thing' behind, started teaching English in language schools, as one does, and prepared for a career in EFL.

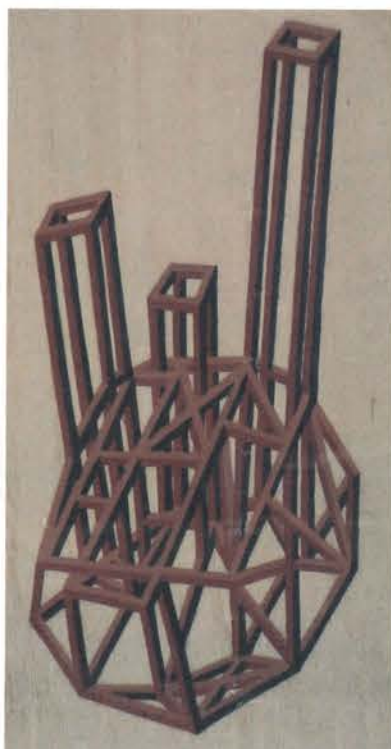
Or at least I tried to leave it behind. It didn't happen, it never has. It's always kept following me, chasing me. One day I was online, came across a small art school in Florence, applied, got accepted, left my job, broke up with my boyfriend of the time, and ran away. I didn't even stop to think.

Back on track, I spent a year there, working as a studio assistant / janitor / cleaner in order to be able to stay on for an extra semester. As soon as I returned to Malta I was determined to find another way out. Being half-Scottish, Scotland was my target, and specifically Aberdeen, my mother's home town. Gray's School of Art was known for the strength of its Painting Department. I got in and threw myself into it. I think I was their keenest student ever. I walked away with a clear idea of the joys, trials and tribulations being a full-time artist would involve, along with a first-class degree, a scholarship from the Royal Scottish Academy, and an invitation to participate in Scotland's first edition of 'New Contemporaries'.

I decided to come back to Malta. Luckily, my grandmother had a few rooms, one with a big window and north-facing light, which she was not using, and generously offered them to me as a studio. I was able to work. Between 2009 and 2010, I worked on the Young Artist's Biennale (BJCEM) in Skopje in August 2009; another show, the 'Awards in Focus' at the RSA in Edinburgh in September 2009; 'A New Generation' at MCA, St. James Cavalier in January 2010, 'Deception' at Lascaris Wharf, in February 2010 and 'Relocation', at the BOV Headquarters, in June 2010. In 2011, I was awarded a residency at a print workshop in Scotland, and had work selected for the European Parliament and the American Embassy. I have since spent the last few months researching, experimenting, and painting all day long, in preparation for a solo show in the Contemporary Hall at the Fine Arts Museum, Valletta.

This is where I am now - putting the finishing touches to a body of work I am calling "Little White Lies".

The starting point for the work was photographs taken on my daily walk from my home in Valletta to my studio in Hamrun. I have become really interested in details of the urban fabric, both permanent and temporary, especially in the context of Valletta being redefined. Features such as scaffolding, barriers, even festa decorations, which come and go, interact with more permanent or typical features such as bastions or balconies, but this interaction points to the constant activity of construction and demolition that belies permanence. The



process of building and breaking is a theme which I find myself coming back to again and again.

Using these images and ideas as a starting point, I have designed and depicted alternative, hybrid, speculative structures, with an ambiguous relationship to the real structures which inspire them, creating a series of paintings which are themselves a hybrid genre of portrait and still-life, landscape and cityscape.

I am drawing on a variety of influences, ranging from early renaissance altar-pieces, surrealism and classic computer game graphics, to the 1960s' conceptual architectural work of Superstudio and Archizoom, and Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. The work plays with the language of painting, and perceptions of perspective, dimension and scale. It explores the ideas of the architect's model, the manufacturer's mould and the child's toy, and questions the fictional versus the real, the miniature versus the gigantic, the internal versus the external, and the temporary versus the permanent.

In order to create a further dialogue around these ideas, I have asked Raphael Vella, Konrad Buhagiar, Gordon Calleja and Pierre Mejlak to contribute their own perspectives and interpretations from the fields of art, architecture, game theory and literature, respectively. Following a series of studio visits and discussions, they have produced texts to complement and interact with images of the paintings in a catalogue which will accompany the exhibition.

Little White Lies opens on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December and runs till the 15<sup>th</sup> January, at the National Museum of Fine Arts, South Street, Valletta.