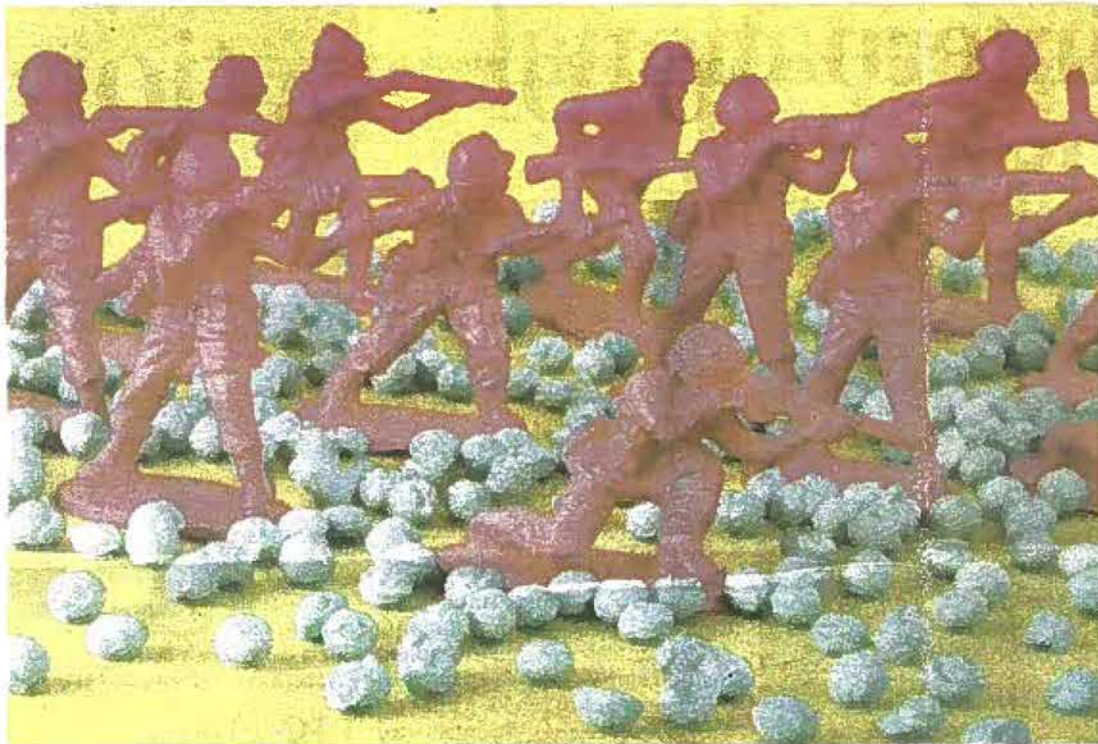


Art



Dulce et Decorum est (It Is Sweet And Good To Die For Your Country) by Elisa Von Brockdorff.

Prospectives please

Lisa Gwen Baldacchino

Emerging artists from Malta. It was high time a spotlight was placed on the younger generation of Maltese artists.

So when an exhibition titled *Relocation* - featuring six up-and-coming artists under the curatorship of Raphael Vella - is set up at none other than the Bank of Valletta's head office, it is time to stop and notice.

Earlier this year the Malta Contemporary Art Foundation hosted a group show titled *A New Generation*. Therefore, *Relocation* further reinstates the need and importance of giving space to the growing number of young artists who are injecting the local contemporary art scene with a new lease of life.

Until recently, BoV was associated with retrospective shows dedicated to some of Malta's greats. Yet BoV has extended its vision - first with in-house shows featuring paintings/photographs by members of staff - and now with a properly curated show dedicated to emerging talents.

Titled *Relocation*, this multimedia exhibition showcases the works of Gilbert Calleja, Patrick Mifsud, Emanuel Bonnici, Michael Xuereb, Elisa Von Brockdorff and Teresa Sciberras. And I think it is very fit that Dr Vella has taken on/been assigned this project and that he is propelling young Maltese artists forward and helping them find a place in the local art scene. Dr Vella, together with a select number of local artists, has been instrumental to the development and promotion of contemporary art in Malta. Besides being a well-versed visual artist, he is also a more than active educator, holding the position of art coordinator within the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta.

This exhibition highlights Malta's insularity. It highlights the ever-increasing needs and desires of our artists to relocate in order to further their studies; to experience first-hand the reality of another country's culture; to encounter a different kettle of fish and a melting pot of ideas; and, finally, to transcend it all and interpret it in a

language of their very own. The results of this physical and interpersonal journey are displayed in this exhibition.

The level and standards of the artworks on show are generally of a high standard, however, some of the artists' concepts come across clearer and stronger, while other concepts needed to be developed somewhat further. But I shan't dwell on this premise because, together, these six artists prove that one need not paint postcard pictures of the Grand Harbour or of the *luzzu* in order to make a valid contribution to Maltese art. Instead, one can collect holy pictures and paste them on a large cut-out map of Malta. Or else one can exert one's religious beliefs (or doubts) by building a statue of a Madonna out of Lego bricks. The simplest concepts are always the most effective, and this is very much the case with Mr Mifsud's and Mr Bonnici's work.

This show also sees Ms Von Brockdorff back to her colourful self. I had missed her carniva-

lesque contribution(s) in a recent show she participated in. Colour is who she is and she should always wear it proudly.

Although admittedly devoid of colour, two works by Mr Xuereb, titled *Plan (1)* and *Plan (5)* are quizzically appealing and dominate this artist's selection in this show. Slightly displaced, plan upon plan, layer upon layer metamorphose into an independent being not unlike an ice particle or a snowflake.

From snowflakes to tents: Mr Calleja has set up a "tent" in BoV's foyer in which he has hung a series of "interior" studies. He has a story to tell; one which he describes as a search for homeliness. His drawings/collages reveal snippets of a life that was or one that could be. Details, portions, angles, viewpoints; he keeps viewers guessing, and I suspect the viewers' uncertainty is mirrored in his own.

Ms Sciberras is one of the newcomers to the scene, yet she is highly active and this is her third



Collective Conscience by Emanuel Bonnici.

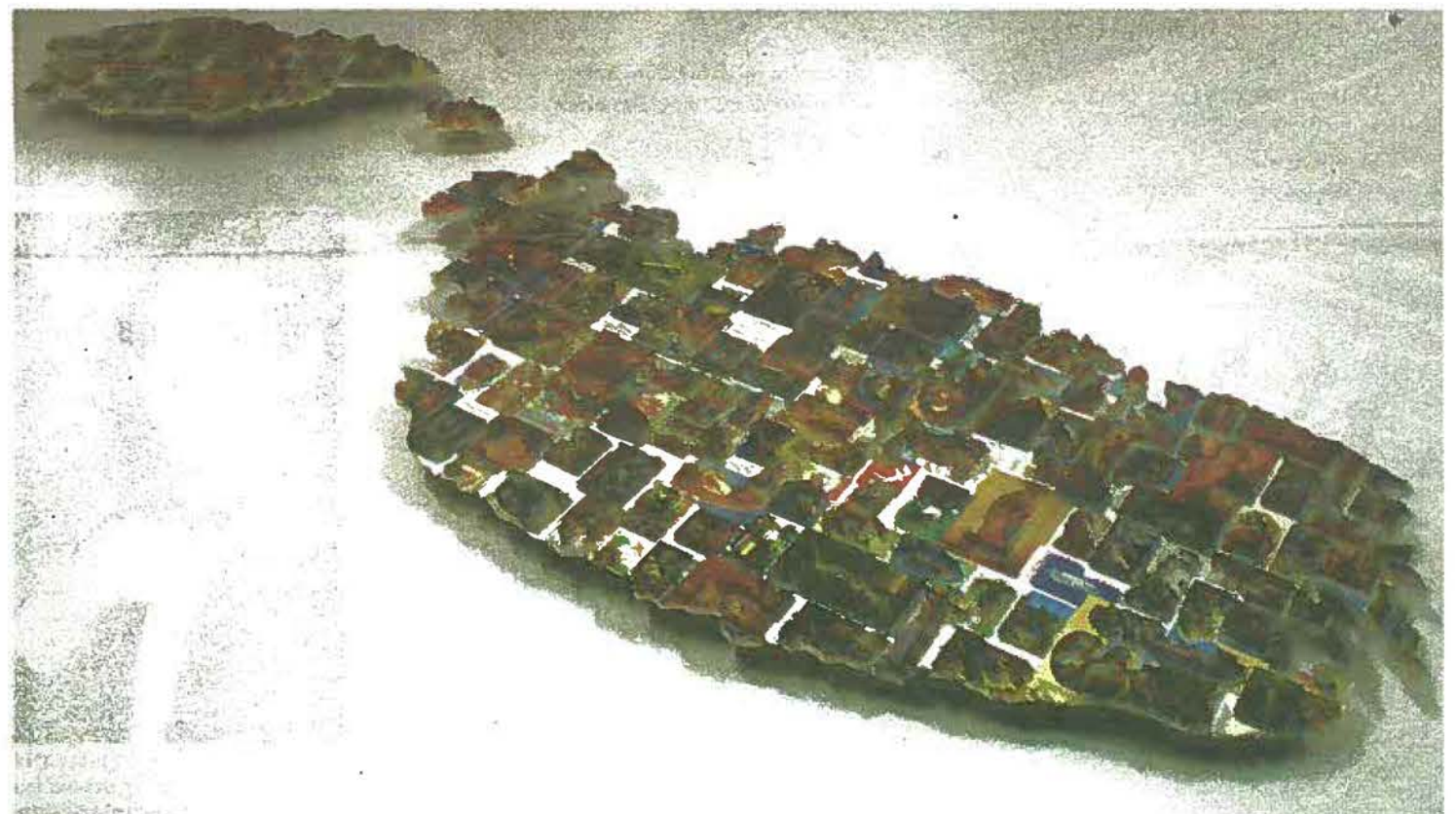
show this year. She has a philosophical mind and her concepts evolve in series. Her works might appear "quiet" but her *What Is A Box* series presents a strong personal commentary on the upheaval of relocation.

The space at BoV, although large enough to accommodate the work of six artists effortlessly, is nonetheless overpowering. Exhibition boards/panels have to be set up, which, as backdrops, don't do justice to the artworks; there are dead areas in the foyer - most especially towards the end of the hall - which fail to attract visitors. Also, apart from the audience attracted for the show's inauguration/opening, I'm not too sure that many people would venture to the BoV centre specifically to view art. Which is truly a pity, because each of the shows BoV has organised have been painstakingly researched and have gone a long way in creating an active awareness and appreciation of some of the pioneers of modern and contemporary art in Malta.

Just perhaps, BoV should consider investing in premises (or a proper space) to house events and temporary shows. The BoV Art Gallery: It has a nice ring to it. BPC, for example, set up an art gallery some two years ago and Middlesea Insurance has a good space (cut off from their offices) which is used for events/visual art shows. Just an idea I guess, but one which could go a long way in BoV's constant promotion of Maltese art and artists.

Ultimately, Maltese artists need the help, guidance and support of institutions such as BoV and people like Dr Vella. This initiative should help set a standard and precedent for future projects; it is truly a vote of confidence for the struggling artist striving to make art his profession.

■ *Relocation* is on show at Bank of Valletta's headquarters in Sta Venera. The exhibition is open until July 16. Opening times: weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.; Saturdays between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m.



Holyland by Patrick Mifsud.