

# Arts Council Malta reveals artists for 'Homo Melitensis: An Incomplete Inventory in 19 Chapters'

Published on Tuesday 28 February 2017

The names of the artists chosen to show in the Malta National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017 have been announced.



JOE SACCO | KARINE ROUGIER | ROXMAN GATT | TERESA SCIBERRAS |  
DARREN TANTI | AARON BEZZINA | DAVID PISANI | PIA BORG |  
AUSTIN CAMILLERI | JOHN PAUL AZZOPARDI | GILBERT CALLEJA |  
ADRIAN ABELA | MAURICE TANTI BURLO (NALIZPELRA)

13 MAY - 26 NOVEMBER 2017  
MALTA PAVILION, ARTIGLIERIE IN THE ARSENALE, VENICE

The artist-curators Raphael Vella and Bettina Hutschek have selected artists of Maltese origin or based in Malta for their conceptual exhibition: *Homo Melitensis: An incomplete inventory in 19 chapters*. By bringing together a collective of artists who work across a variety of mediums, they will present a playful, poetic compilation of unique artefacts that interpret and define the imaginative spirit of the Maltese identity: language, politics, history, myths, religion and gender.

2017 marks the official return of a Malta Pavilion to the Venice Biennale – the oldest and most prestigious event in the international visual art calendar – for the first time in 17 years. To celebrate this occasion and create an unparalleled experience, the curators have drawn on Maltese art from the past and present, juxtaposing historic items with contemporary. This overview will include works by artists based in Malta, works by artists from the Maltese diaspora (chosen from submissions following an Open Call), folk artefacts, works from private and national collections, other artefacts and images that come from different sources, like journalism, national and private collections and popular culture.

The artists included in the show offer a diverse array of styles, mediums and topics, with contributions from: Joe Sacco, Karine Rougier, Roxman Gatt, Teresa Sciberras, Darren Tanti, Aaron Bezzina, David Pisani, Pia Borg, Austin Camilleri, John Paul Azzopardi, Gilbert Calleja, Adrian Abela, and the late satirical cartoonist Maurice Tanti Burlo (known as Nalizpelra).

Joe Sacco will be the most familiar to international audiences, while Maurice Tanti Burlò's satirical and often controversial newspaper cartoons provokes debate. Though 'Nalizpelra' passed away in 2014 the selection of his work remains relevant, while Sacco's text and image works hold particular power in the current climate of world politics.

David Pisani is an established photographer, best known for urban reportage and documenting of architecture. Highlights of his black and white street photography will complement Gilbert Calleja's colourful, sensitive portraits of transgender individuals and sexual identity. Maltese identity and mythology is at the core of the work by award-winning filmmaker Pia Borg, while Adrian Abela explores the fireworks which form part of the rituals held during Maltese feasts in his selected video.

The practice of ritual and Catholic prayer are examined by Austin Camilleri through his provocative sculpture; Aaron Bezzina addresses religious symbolism via the media of bronze and wood, while the re-purposing of remnants of death form the basis for John Paul Azzopardi's fossilized sculpture to arresting effect.

The formality of painting is not overlooked and traditions of Maltese society, culture and beliefs are represented metaphorically in Darren Tanti's portraiture. Teresa Sciberras presents hybrid structures and enclosures, representative of Malta's capital city Valletta and in contrast, Karine Rougier's surrealist paintings and collages transform folklore and crafts to dazzling effect. Roxman Gatt's controversial works call into question certain aspects of Maltese identity which are normally taken for granted.

The exhibition will be designed in collaboration with an architectural team led by Tom Van Malderen (Architecture Project). A transmedia storyworld developed in collaboration with Stefan Kolgen will augment *Homo Melitensis* by creating an interactive and expanding online fictional space that communicates with, yet also transcends, the physical exhibition space in Venice. The Malta Pavilion has been commissioned by the Arts Council Malta as part of an incentive to showcase Maltese arts internationally.

Malta's presence at the prestigious international art exhibition in Venice marks the start of a major international programme of cultural activity, whose capital city, Valletta, will be the European Capital of Culture 2018. Participation in the 2017 Venice Biennale also takes place concurrently with the Maltese presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2017.

The Malta Pavilion will be located at the Artiglierie in the Arsenale Area in Venice, and will be open from 13th May and 26th November 2017.

Curators Bettina Hutschek and Raphael Vella say:

“After a long process of talking to artists or visiting them in their studios, we were thrilled to make a selection of a good number of contemporary art works, whilst simultaneously highlighting critical dialogues with other aspects of contemporary Maltese culture, memory and faith. We also believe that art reflects current social and political climates so, in view of the global political situation, our playful questioning of national identity through artefacts and artworks can give our pavilion a global, rather than exclusively Maltese, significance.”

*For UK & international media enquiries, images and interview requests please contact: Emma Pettit or Ilona Cheshire at Margaret\_ on +44 (0) 207 739 8203*

[emma@margaretlondon.com](mailto:emma@margaretlondon.com) / [ilona@margaretlondon.com](mailto:ilona@margaretlondon.com) /

<http://www.margaretlondon.com/>

For Malta media enquiries, please contact: Sandra Borg, Communication Executive, Arts Council Malta: +356 2339 7026 [sandra.a.borg@artscouncilmalta.org](mailto:sandra.a.borg@artscouncilmalta.org)

*Image Credits:*

- Extract from 'The Unwanted 48' by Joe Sacco

- 'Circumscribed 3' by Teresa Sciberras

## ARTS COUNCIL MALTA

The Malta Pavilion is being commissioned by Arts Council Malta, in collaboration with MUŻA under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, Culture and Local Government. It will also form part of the Cultural programme of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2017. The project will also bridge with the contemporary art programme of Valletta as European Capital of Culture in 2018. The Biennale is one of 70 actions being implemented as part of Strategy2020, Arts Council Malta's five-year strategy for the cultural and creative sectors.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES:

### **Aaron Bezzina**

Aaron Bezzina (b.1991) earned a BA (Hons) in Fine Arts at the MCAST Institute of Art & Design in 2014 and completed an MFA in Digital Arts at the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, University of Malta in 2016. Bezzina has been exhibiting work both locally and overseas for the past five years. In 2015 he was awarded a residency by the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg. During the summer of 2016 he undertook a traineeship with the cultural association for the arts - Nuova Icona in Venice, Italy. Although Bezzina's works tend to incline towards the sculptural, he is also interested in other media, which encourage meaning-making and further associative actions.

### **Adrian Abela**

Adrian Abela (b.1989) studied Architecture in Malta and Milan and currently lives and studies in Los Angeles. He works mainly through drawing, painting, sculpture, performance and video. His projects lead from an interest in a particular material or

narrative into an attempt at understanding the human condition and surroundings. The conception and execution of his projects often involves outsider individuals; he uses architecture-derived approaches to create informed work and establish relationships that challenge people's perspective of the artistic subject. Abela is currently working on public art projects in Malta and internationally. Along with several solo exhibitions in Malta, he has participated in exhibitions in Europe, Asia and the US.

### **Austin Camilleri**

Austin Camilleri (b. 1972) is a curator and artist working simultaneously and non-hierarchically in painting, installation, drawing, video and sculpture. His work has been widely exhibited in solo and group shows in Europe, the Americas, North Africa and Asia and he has represented Malta in major shows winning awards. His process-driven interest led him to establish 356 as well as being a founding member of StArt, Fundazzjoni Klula and ISTRA Foundation and create interdisciplinary events often working with authors, composers, actors and choreographers, together or separately. He is also a visiting lecturer at the Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta and has designed sets for opera and theatre. Camilleri lives in Gozo and works between Malta and Italy.

### **Darren Tanti**

Darren Tanti (b.1987) is an artist renowned for his technically accomplished and thematically loaded paintings. His focus is hyper-reality and the integration of the digital into explorative painting techniques. In 2013 Darren was awarded a Masters of Fine Arts in Digital Arts with distinction from the Department of Digital Arts (MaKS) of the University of Malta. Presently, Darren is a senior lecturer of Fine Art at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts. Some of the projects Darren has participated in are the 15th edition of the 'Biennial of young artists from

Europe and Mediterranean' held in Thessaloniki in 2011 and 'Time, Space, Existence' at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2014, through AP.

### **David Pisani**

David Pisani (b.1965) is a photographer and exhibiting artist. He is mostly known for his architecture and urban reportage, although his most important work focuses on the human body, the erotic nature of places and things, sexuality and death. He is the author of an extensive personal photographic essay on Valletta titled 'Vanishing Valletta' which in 2000 was included in the permanent collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Vanishing Valletta was also published as a monograph in 2007. He has also produced a photographic essay on the city of Dubai entitled 'Future City' which was commissioned by Emirates Airlines for their corporate art collection. His most recent work includes two photographic essays on Cyprus and the city of Kyoto in Japan. He is a fanatical darkroom printer with more than 25 years experience in commercial and fine art printing.

### **Gilbert Calleja**

Gilbert Calleja (b.1978) says: "Photographic documentaries based on years of immersion and a lengthy process of familiarisation with my subjects have characterised most of the work I have produced in these past 12 years. A sense of intimacy and affinity with the subject matter distinguishes my work and this is due to my slow lengthy process of engagement with the individuals and communities I photograph. Long-term immersion and perseverance allows me to develop relationships that subsequently grant me access to the private lives of people with whom I am collaborating to produce my documentary. My personal projects have included working with Maltese fishermen, transgender people, a priest's pastoral work and the boxing sub-culture."

## **Joe Sacco**

Joe Sacco (b.1960) is a cartoonist and journalist specialising in political themes. Born in Malta, he moved with his family to Melbourne and spent his childhood in Los Angeles, after which he studied journalism at the University of Oregon. Sacco frequently chronicles his travels in works that have become well known in the field of comics journalism, like *Palestine* (1996), *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo* (2003), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009). He has won several awards for his graphic work, including the American Book Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Ridenhour Book Prize.

## **John Paul Azzopardi**

John Paul Azzopardi's (b.1978) artistic expression struggles with the quest for an aesthetic he deems manifest in the variegated philosophical topos of the contemporary ethos. His work explores the dialectic that results from the tension of confronting the organic with the synthetic. Utilising his materials as a synecdoche he creates forms orchestrating an array of texts ranging from the ancient (both Western as well as Eastern) to the contemporary philosophical idiom, the mythological and social critique. By means of this bricolage mixed medium, existential symbolic expressions are voiced and used to expose and articulate the covert psychological structures and the dominant phenomenological tensions. He was born in East London, studied philosophy at the University of Malta, and currently lives and works in Malta.

## **Karine Rougier**

Karine Rougier (b.1982) says: "I was born in Malta to a Maltese mother and French father. We left [Malta] during my childhood for the Ivory Coast but then spent each summer on the island in our grandmother's house, in Malta. Every single wall of the house was covered with our grandfather's paintings, Guido Calì, and from his grandfather, Giuseppe Calì. The studio was

on the top floor, I used to love spending time there observing studies, notebooks and unfinished paintings. This space was full of an amazing energy. For me Malta is the island of Mediterranean treasures. In my work various cultures co-exist, and I feel that it's a kind of heritage from my native island, cultural sedimentation is the breeding ground of my pictorial vocabulary.”

### **Maurice Tanti Burlò aka Nalizpelra**

Maurice Tanti Burlò (1936-2014) received his art education at the School of Art (Valletta, Malta), St. Michael's Teachers' Training College (St. Julians, Malta), and Bretton Hall College of Art, Drama and Music (University of Leeds, UK), during which years he experimented with most styles, using a varied range of media and techniques. In 1977, angered by the local political intransigence he began his first attempts at political cartooning, which were published in The Sunday Times of Malta and The Times of Malta under the pseudonyms Nalizpelra and MTB. It was here that his artistic path split in two, running parallel and merging time and time again. Tanti Burlò would continue his cartooning career up to his final days (2014).

### **Pia Borg**

Artist and filmmaker Pia Borg's (b.1977, Australia) films and installations use 16mm and 35mm photography, archive, and animation to investigate historical events and imagined futures. She was recently named as one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film in Filmmaker magazine. She is the recipient of numerous prizes including the Golden Leopard for best international short (Locarno Film Festival 2014) for the experimental documentary *Abandoned Goods*. In the same year, she completed one third of the triptych film *Through the Hawthorn* - awarded the Grand Prix at the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film as well as Jury Prizes in Krakow, Annecy &

Fantoche. Her film/ installation *Crystal World* (2013) was awarded Best Experimental Film at the Melbourne International Film Festival and *Palimpsest* (2009) was the recipient of the 1st Prize at the Oriel Davies Open Exhibition. Her first film *Footnote* (2004) was nominated for an Australian Academy award. Her films have been in the official selection of the Cannes Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, SXSW and Experimenta among others.

### **Roxman Gatt**

Roxman Gatt (b. 1989, Mosta, Malta) lives and works in London. She is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work encompasses, text, painting, 3D, video, sound, photography, installation and performance. Roxman received a B.A. in Graphic Design (illustration pathway) from Central Saint Martins. In the first two years, the work was mainly narrative-driven, made of text and drawing. However, in the last year, Roxman's work found more expressivity when using time-based media. Text was still the main source for developing work. Soon after her B.A, Roxman moved on to study Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art.

Through performance and moving image, Roxman's research explores sexuality, identity, women within popular and low culture contexts. Mundane aesthetics and the internet become both a tool and a trigger for her work. Roxman has been awarded the Chris Garnham Prize (2015) as well as the Magnum Showcase Online Photography Award (2013). Her most recent exhibitions are Bloomberg New Contemporaries, ICA, London, Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Bluecoat Liverpool and Show 2015, Royal College of Art, London.

## **Teresa Sciberras**

Teresa Sciberras (b.1979) is a visual artist working mainly in painting, drawing and collage. She was born in Ibadan, Nigeria, and studied at the University of Malta, Santa Reparata International School of Art in Florence and Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen. Previous exhibitions include Hortus Conclusus (with Fragmenta Malta, 2016); Good Walls Make Good Neighbours (Valletta International Visual Arts Festival, 2015); Little White Lies (The National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, 2012); A New Generation (Malta Contemporary Art Foundation, 2010); the Biennale des Jeunes Createurs d'Europe et de la Mediterranee (Skopje, 2009); Research: RSA Awards in Focus (The Royal Scottish Academy, 2009) and New Contemporaries (The Royal Scottish Academy, 2008). She currently lives and works in Malta and teaches at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts and at the University of Malta.

## ARTIST CURATORS' BIOGRAPHIES:

**Bettina Hutschek** is a visual artist, filmmaker and curator who lives and works between Malta and Berlin. After studying Art History and Philosophy (BA) in Florence and Augsburg, she received her MA from Universität der Künste (UdK) Berlin and her MFA in Fine Arts from HGB Leipzig. She trained and worked in Art Mediation and spent one year as Visiting Scholar at the Department of Performance Studies at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Bettina's work has been exhibited internationally; since 2013, she is also founder and director of FRAGMENTA Malta, a project to organize pop-up exhibitions in the public space of the Maltese islands.

**Raphael Vella** is an artist, curator and educator who has exhibited his work internationally and has been active as a curator since 2002, working with emerging and established

artists in institutional as well as alternative settings both locally and internationally. He studied art in Malta and completed his PhD in Fine Arts at the University of the Arts London in 2006. He has initiated several artistic and educational projects in Malta, including the Valletta International Visual Arts festival (VIVA), the Curatorial School organised by the Valletta 2018 Foundation and *Divergent Thinkers* organised by the youth agency Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ.

MALTA PAVILION COMMISSIONER: Arts Council Malta

MALTA PAVILION PARTNERS:

- Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
- 2017 Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- The Valletta 2018 Foundation
- Heritage Malta
- Architecture Project
- Investment Project.

The Malta Pavilion is supported by:

- Malta Motorways of the Sea Limited
- Grimaldi
- Bank of Valletta
- The Malta Embassy in Rome
- Mr Francis Sultana.