

Art

The lingering spirit

Charlene Vella reviews the collective of works at *Duke of Edinburgh Room 36*.

New beginnings and new initiatives, such as salvaging or revisiting past things, are often a source of joy.

In the centuries-old Gozo Citadel, the once defensive castle of Gozo, an existing space has been revitalised. The venue comes as a surprise to those of us who were not aware of the existence of Sentinella Hall (which has served as a one-off exhibition hall in the past).

The venue is tucked away behind the cathedral church of Santa Maria, and consists of two rooms that were part of the prison complex of the castle. The larger room is roofed by diaphragm arches, while the smaller one originally housed the chapel. The stone altar is still there, although moved from its original location. It was certainly a happy idea to find a use for the space as an exhibition venue.

There is a mystic aura about the place, and the name chosen for the exhibition, *Duke of Edinburgh Room 36*, is intriguing. Curated by artist Austin Camilleri, the name is in memory of the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel which was, in the days that I cannot remember, Gozo's top hotel.

And the number 36 was used for the number of rooms the hotel housed. It has now been replaced by a modern shopping mall in Republic Street, Victoria.

There is, therefore, a lot of nostalgia that lingers throughout the exhibition. The 10 exhibiting artists are all young and it is good that they have been given a chance to show their work in this venue.



Untitled works by Mario Abela.

The absence of a unifying theme is compensated for by an air of curiosity and mystery

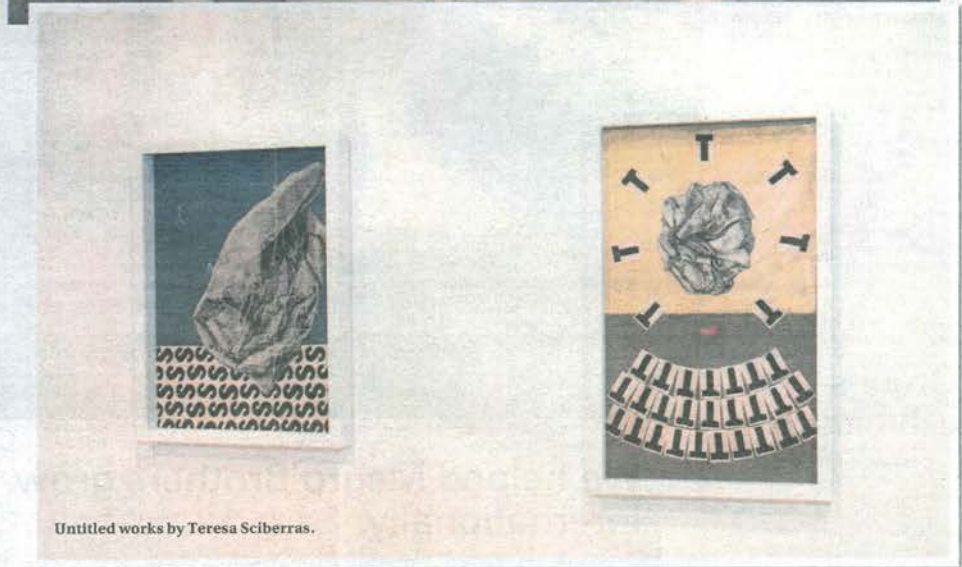
The absence of a unifying theme is compensated for by an air of curiosity and mystery and by an introspective aspect: looking at one's roots and identity.

Among the exhibits, one comes across a large white wall; newly erected, towards the end of the large room. This is Maxine Attard's *Immaterial, Material, Immaterial*. Its interest is the concept behind it, which is related to the excessive pomp of our islands' overtly baroque-iced places of worship. It is not just a blank wall. Attard's whole is, in addition, a drawing based on a similar concept, and which is connected to a series of drawings currently on show in another Gozitan gallery.

Justin Falzon and Jimmy Grima also exhibit drawings. Falzon is somebody I am closely keeping an eye out for. He is reluctant to show his work in exhibitions, but he is one who should be encouraged. His drawings reveal a great depth of emotion and good execution.

His reluctance to exhibit I can describe as a sign of modesty, which is admirable. Grima's drawings have meticulous detail and an other-worldly atmosphere that make them pleasing to the eye.

The most abstract of the exhibits is George Mario Attard's installation *Hiss* (a sound; a noise/to feel). It was also extremely fitting for the gale force winds that enlivened



Untitled works by Teresa Sciberras.

my experience on the day, because when you put the headphones on and press play, you are made to listen to howling winds and other sounds, which really make the space feel that more eerie, and successfully manage to play on your emotions.

Stimulating as usual are Teresa Sciberras's two charcoal and collage untitled works, which again reveal a good draughtsmanship and a vivid imagination that is dissimilar to anything being produced by artists of her generation.

Karen Caruana's manipulated prints are recognisable as part of a series, some of which have already previously been exhibited, albeit different. This left me with too little a taste of her work, and although interesting to look at, perhaps it can be taken a step further.

Ritzy Tacsum's new digital print *Vallotta* series 01 and 02 images stand out and

provide a vastly different aspect of photography, and of Valletta, than we are accustomed to seeing.

Mario Abela chose to deal with religion and consumerism. This is not a new theme, even in the local artistic context, and this in spite of the fact that there is something original to the way he is presenting his ideas.

While I appreciate Victor Agius's *Plusis* and his thinking outside the box, the result of the piece he produced leaves a bit to be desired.

Agius has attempted in this installation to bring nature into the gallery space by using rocks, paint and paper, and the residual imprint left by the natural stone.

Despite the revisiting aspect mentioned earlier, I do not believe that exhibiting the same works that were shown a year ago is advisable or acceptable. It is perhaps better

to not be part of something if you do not have something new to offer. Why is there a rush to exhibit? Showing your work should mean that you have something new to say.

Adrian Abela's concept centering on the number 8 and the octopus is interesting, although artistically, it is the main drawing that was most intriguing. Although it does fit in with this exhibition, this series is not new to the Maltese public.

In all honesty, I would have been happier to see the exhibits without having read some of the artists' biographies and artistic statements. In other cases, it was an enriching experience.

And clearly, your experience of some others will be enriched after having read the artist's statement.

The exhibition was enjoyable and worth visiting. Well done to all involved.