

ZEN GARDEN

Marble chippings, maltese limestone.

Blitz, Curated by Raphael Vella.

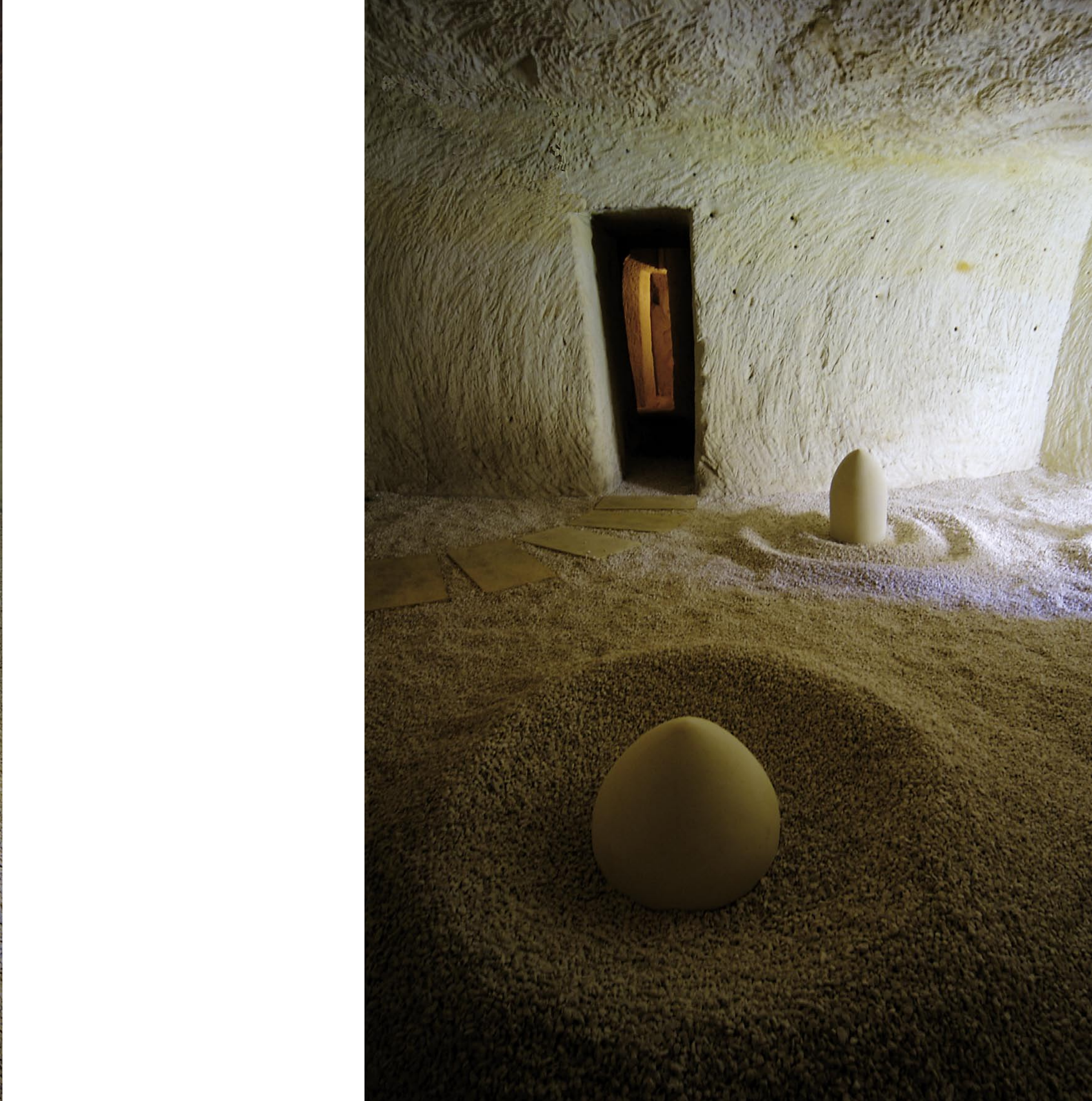
Organised by START, Malta, and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, Malta.

Malta at War Museum, Vittoriosa, Malta, 2005.



Stone carving by Joseph Galea, Xewkija, Gozo, Malta.

Marble chippings supplied and sponsored by Hallmann Vella Ltd., Malta.



Norbert Francis Attard's work often hinges on the idea that an encounter of opposites results in a fuller account of life and its predicaments. The opposites in Attard rarely clash with each other in a dissonance of forms and colour; rather they mingle with each other, each opposing force complementing the other's forms and ideas to form a new whole. There is in fact no 'opposition' as such but a harmony of opposites. This naturally brings to mind ancient Eastern philosophy, particularly the concepts of yin and yang with their unity of the polar attributes of tranquillity and restlessness, as well as the poetic expression of this duality in texts like the Tao Te Ching. Similarly, in Attard's work, one often finds this desire to avoid singular definitions of things. Zen Garden is a case in point. The traditional Japanese garden brought together shallow, barely perceptible raked patterns of white sand with a few perfectly placed, dark rocks or small boulders in highly suggestive, aesthetic arrangements. In Attard's Zen Garden, the natural rocks are eliminated and replaced with the smooth surface of 'bombs' made of Maltese limestone. This installation in a Maltese underground, cavernous shelter cut out of the island's rock during the Second World War to protect families living in the area bonds the horrors of war with their polar opposites, meditation and peace. It is somewhat unsettling for visitors to enter the space religiously and feel peaceful as they look at the soft yet dangerous pointed forms of three bombs sprouting from circular patterns in the sand on the ground. The garden – always symbolic of life and growth – here is transformed into a peaceful meditation on death and slaughter. At a superficial level, it may seem quite perplexing, an almost impenetrable metaphor, but on reflection (and 'reflection' is precisely what this Zen Garden urges us to do), we start to perceive Attard's idea about the absolute necessity of moulding enemy forces into symbols of unity.

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