



Where are you from? Minn fejn int?

Photographic installation by Norbert Francis Attard



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Freedom Square, Valletta, Malta.

25th September 2008 - 8th January 2009.

An initiative of the European Parliament Office in Malta

In collaboration with St. James Centre for Creativity and the Valletta Local Council.

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Minn fejn int?

Where are you from?

The installation presents a photographic series of physiognomies from Malta both to highlight the complex history of the island as a central meeting place of populations throughout its long history, and to pose questions as to how a shared commonality is created.

The artist engages the viewer with the question of identity and the complex relationship between physiognomy and culture, exploring the notion of diversity and our assumptions of “who we are” and “where we are from”.

The aim is to subvert common notions in the island about ‘typical physiognomies’ – for, as his photographs show, there is perhaps no such thing...



A matter of identity

Anyone walking into our capital city will, for the coming weeks, come face to face with a marvelous installation that completely changes the physiognomy of an otherwise bland and functional Freedom Square. The car park is alive with 50 colourful portraits that hide and reveal, at the same time, a unique and fascinating story. They give a vitality and energy to the space and transform it into an art gallery.

Titled *Minn Fejn Int? Where Are You From?* these portraits project and reflect the intercultural lifestyle that characterises contemporary Malta. These islands of ours, situated as they are bang in the middle of the historically-turbulent Mediterranean, have witnessed so many comings and goings. Some come to rape and plunder; others to civilise and build. No matter how short or long the stay, all comers left an indelible legacy to our history and identity.

Were it through an oppressive or a beneficial encounter, our constantly-evolving identity has absorbed myriad cultural fragments and transformed us in the way we live, speak, think, eat and look. As Maltese we emerge from a multitude of identities that have moulded us into a unique identity. The work of Norbert Attard, the installation mirrors the strength and power of art in a multifaceted way. The 50 individuals in the portraits reveal themselves through their physiognomy.

They give us a sample of Maltese people, illustrating that we are a multicultural breed while presenting unique stories about individuals who lead different lives and experience different realities in a culturally-diverse environment.

We are proud of our Maltese identity, an identity that stems from long years of strong cultural interactions with others. It is an identity that we cherish and nourish, even as we move through changes that might awaken apprehension and fear in some, as we move through a renaissance of our cultural heritage and patrimony that is so vast that we have only just started to comprehend its magnitude and value.

A heritage that necessitates an injection of lifeblood to restore and renovate, to maintain in all the glory it deserves. It is our cultural heritage that will be the foundation of our tourism industry. It will be a crucial factor in the economic performance of our country.

Ironically, the launch of Mr Attard's artistic exposè took place on the steps of the ruins of the Opera House, a venue that assumed a dignity and sad beauty of its own on a starlight evening with the shadows of the night muting its ugly edges. A space for the arts crying out to be regenerated.

Cristina Dolores

Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.



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ANTIQUES

MALTA

GVN 070

GVN 526

CBK 854



The Maltese are a Euro-Mediterranean nation *par excellence*. With roots in every corner of the Mediterranean and beyond our ethnic melting pot has been simmering for thousands of years. Distinct ingredients have been added every time a new power swept across the Mediterranean giving rise to an inter-cultural dialogue that was not always the voluntary and idealistic exchange that we are promoting in the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue.

Behind the Maltese strong sense of national identity lies a complex ethnic mix that the European Parliament Office in Valletta is celebrating with an artistic installation by Norbert Francis Attard with the collaboration of the St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity and the Valletta Local Council.

Where are you from? Minn fejn int? If you are Maltese the answer might surprise you. Wherever you're ancestors may be from the chances are that they came to Malta by boat. Yes, just like those...





In many cultures and societies it is often assumed that physiognomies classify and taxonomize. But do they really do so? Or is the assumption itself that is of interest? It is this play on identity through physiognomy that the artist wishes to explore: our assumed certainties and uncertainties in language and thought about what constitutes “us” and “them”. All of us make implicit assumptions in our perceptions of strangers about who they are or might be – assumptions that are sometimes supported by other signs when we observe more closely, such as through clothing, posture, mannerisms, ways of acting, etc. Sometimes we may be right, and sometimes we may be wrong. A single “sign” may throw us off-balance and confuse us. The artist has produced a collage of photographs to engage the viewer with the problem of identity/physiognomy/expectation/ assumption. But let us tease out the baggage of assumptions contained in physiognomies, and therefore implicitly in what the eye sees – or more precisely in how culture (that is our mental frameworks) imposes its classification on what we see. What is contained in physiognomies? Not just heredity (who we resemble – our parents or ancestors), but also expectations – expectations of sharing features, identity, and also (often unknown) histories. And in our contemporary world an intrusive guest imposes itself at our dinner table - sometimes frustratingly disturbing, at others reassuringly shambolic. That “guest” is Genetics: the study of human evolution and of human populations.

One of the “lessons” our guest teaches us is that human populations have been interacting throughout Man’s evolution. There are no discrete, hermetically sealed, self-reproducing human populations. It is culture and history that gives a people its specific “characteristics”. But that history also includes varied and complex genetic inputs from often surprising sources. The artist’s aim in this installation is to explore and pose questions about the complex relationship between physiognomic expectations of a culture and its genetic underpinnings. Attard has collected a whole series of physiognomies from the Mediterranean island of Malta both to highlight the complex history of the island as a central meeting place of populations throughout its long pre-colonial and colonial history, and to pose questions as to how a shared commonality is created. To begin with, his aim is to subvert common notions in the island about “typical physiognomies” – for, as his photographs show, there is perhaps no such thing. This inversion of the classificatory logic of a colonial physical anthropology through its intellectual offspring, biological anthropology and genetics, then leads to other questions. If a people or culture can display such varied physiognomies, which are themselves traces of a place’s history, how is unity achieved through the eyes that continually scan those physiognomies in their daily interactions? “Culture” is too general an answer. It explains everything and nothing, especially because genetics is itself part of culture – both because it “explains” and because it needs to be “explained”. So the artist wrestles with nominalism, and he suggests, echoing Derrida’s writings on difference (or more precisely *différance*), that difference is more than just socially produced. Rather, it ontologically makes the social world. Derrida suggests, contra Plato, that at the heart of existence is not “essence” but an operation of *différance*. There are no absolute identities; nothing is itself by virtue of its being. If that is accepted, then the notions of ‘presence’ and of ‘Being’ are themselves unstable concepts.



The answer to the question “Where are you from?” therefore is not one of place, or even of origins, but of pre-origins (if such a ‘thing’ were possible) – an almost unimaginable a-temporal a-topos – of difference, that is of deferral both temporal and locational. “From Difference, for my name is Difference” is thus the only logically and universally true answer by each one of the persons looking at us, and by us the viewers. Freud was thus perhaps “right” when he spoke about “the narcissism of minor differences”, for it is through such differences that we create our identities. But at what costs?

Paul Sant Cassia

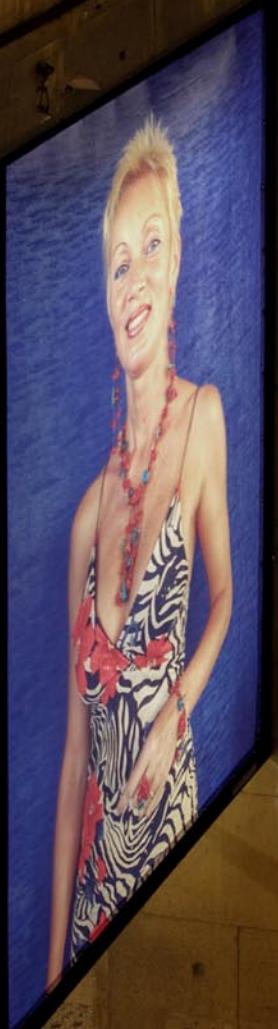
Anthropologist, Durham University, UK.





IL MILIEU S-SENA-T-ALBA





Advertisement for a restaurant or cafe, listing menu items and prices. The text is partially obscured and difficult to read.

Advertisement for a restaurant or cafe, listing menu items and prices. The text is partially obscured and difficult to read.

The first is to stress that the first condition for having fruitful intercultural dialogue is that there should be a strong sense of identity on the part of the people who are about to engage in dialogue. It's only by having a strong sense of identity that you could enter into dialogue with others who are different from you without feeling threatened but with full self-confidence which would enable enrichment to result from the dialogue.

Hopkins used to say that if a painter who had a real personality went into an art gallery and exposed himself to the influence of all the great painters whose works were displayed in the gallery he would come out enriched. He had no reason to fear absorbing the influence of others. If he started with a sufficient degree of self-knowledge and self-confidence, and obviously this is what is needed if you are to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, openly and confidently. You must have a sense of your identity and that is why the installation which we have today is a contribution to our participation in cross-cultural dialogue because it is enabling us to ascertain our own identity. As Julian said, and this is something about which we have deep questioning and that is a very healthy side, because there are only two things about national identity, an enormous problematic subject which I will mention now.

The first is that we shouldn't think of any identity especially national identity, as fixed and permanent. Now an identity is something in evolution, it is something which is constantly undergoing change so a contribution, a stimulus, to our changing is not an attack on our identity but it's something which will help us keep this identity alive, existing, because unless it's alive it won't exist. So we mustn't be afraid that because an identity is changing, that we are losing something. We could be losing something but we would also be gaining something. The important thing

is that the identity is dynamic because otherwise it would be dead, deaf to all existence.

The other thing which I wanted to say about identity is that it is very strongly conditioned by context. It is always context which establishes the meaning of anything and perhaps the reason which has made many consider Heidegger to be the greatest philosopher of our time is because he has insisted on this spot. Of course Heidegger comes to this question from a very metaphysical angle, that is he is studying what is the meaning of being, what is it to exist, and then in particular what is it to exist as a human being. What is human existence and of course the contrast between existence in general in an absolute sense which could only mean the existence of god or being in itself that's eternally free from time and space, while the characteristic of human existence is that it is determined spatially temporarily and those aren't really two things because we know from Einstein that time is the fourth dimension of space.

So in a sense, apart from the first aspect, interesting aspect of this exhibition is that it makes us dissociate physiognomy from identity and this relates to the first point which I was making because we tend to have a stereotyped fixed image of what it is to look Maltese, basically it is thought that that a Maltese should be a brunette and not a blonde which of course would exclude me from being Maltese and in fact I have had this experience all through my life, travelling abroad, people when they hear me speak English or they hear me speak Italian or even more when they hear me speak Maltese they start wondering where does he come from, and very few people are able to resist asking me where I come from and so I tell them guess, and never has anyone said I think you come from Malta, the most frequent answer is Holland but I have heard proposals from all sides of the world.

Now if I can also be a bit autobiographical, obviously when I saw this exhibition what came to my mind was some time when I was rector of the university where during a week, (I would have preferred my secretary Margaret Zammit had been here to tell you the story because she was obviously in the office outside mine), and a gentleman with a, what we would say was an absolutely Japanese look, the eyes the colour of the skin, came to see her and he told her can I see the rector, so my secretary said do you have an appointment and he said no I do not have an appointment and so she said, well then you can't see him and he told her but tell him that it's his cousin! Oh my secretary opened her eyes wide but the gentleman produced a card, the card was written in Japanese on one side but in the other side it was written in English and it said Edward Inglott, so she was a bit impressed, she came in and told me there's a gentleman that says he's my cousin and he gave me this card, I said oh of course he's my cousin I know him very well, I mean I knew that my great great uncle had an Italian girlfriend who jilted him so he wanted to commit suicide but he read in the times educational supplement that there was a vacant post of professor of English at Sophia university in Tokyo and he thought well that was almost the equivalent of committing suicide and so he went there and well he married a Japanese. I was told that he never learnt Japanese well and she never learnt English or Maltese or any other language well but somehow they managed to converse in a language which only the two of them understood. I mean this was told to me by his sons and daughters who often came to Malta and they all looked perfectly Japanese we would say but they were genuinely my cousins but the following week, a lady, a young lady came to the office and she was coloured, she had curly hair but it was well, the colour my hair used to be, what we call ginger hair, but very African looking and this lady told her can I see the rector and my secretary said

do you have an appointment and she said no and so she said well you can't see him so she said but give him this card, and this card said Shantal Inglott and my secretary was even more puzzled and she told him tell him I'm his cousin and if he doesn't remember who I am tell him that her husband was the first person who had failed the law examination in Oxford for 400 years or something like that so she came in and I told her of course I remember who she is, her mother was Biancha Inglott and I told her exactly how she was related to me and in fact she had married somebody from Sierra Leone her mother had married someone from Sierra Leone and she was the daughter.

So I understand what this exhibition is showing perfectly well and I have always said no true Maltese is a pure Maltese because it's the characteristic of our country. We have always welcomed sailors from all over the world and well you know what sailors do in ports and harbours and that's the result. I mean if I look at my own name. Well I mean, Seracino is obviously of Italian origin but refers to 'sarracance' that is to the moors and my Inglott is an English name it means 'little English man' actually 'anglo' with an 'ott' I won't tell you how they came to Malta, my mother's surname is Kalamatta which is obviously of Greek origin, and my other grandmother is Borg which is obviously a Semitic name. So this is the Maltese identity and I think this is a very important thing to maintain. I think our identity has never been something special, rather the something special about our identity is that we are eclectic, that we are able to move equally at home in different cultures, that our main role has been that of middle man, of brokers, of interpreters, of people who can move from one culture to another and this is a very distinctive and valuable identity and role to have in the world.

I won't develop this subject more although I could easily show it. Is there a characteristic of Maltese baroque? This is a question which has often been asked and in fact, there aren't any distinctive characteristics of Maltese baroque except that in Maltese baroque we have the whole variety of baroque styles from the Portuguese to the Austrian in space and the whole variety of baroque throughout its development from its beginnings, the beginning of the 17th century till its end, in our case we even go beyond, in the middle of the 18th century. You can find all those elements here in Malta and that is what constitutes a very distinctive feature and makes Maltese baroque have a particular identity. I think that if you go all over the various dimensions of what constitutes identity you will tend to find that this is the characteristic. So I think that the exercise which has been carried out here is really hitting the nail on the head in the way of a search for the Maltese identity.

But I want to say something before ending on the second point which was hinted at by Julian which is where he spoke about how the exhibition changed from something just for the gate to something for the whole square, because as I said right at the beginning what has made Hiedeger the most famous philosopher of our time is that he has stressed that the characteristic of being a human being, of human existence, is that it is an existence which is located in space time. And I think what the exercise which Norbert has carried out here is an exercise of this kind. if it is space which defines us, many of us have been very worried because somebody who comes in through the city gate is expecting to find an emblem of Maltese identity. I mean that's what he expects, come again at what is obviously a point of an access which goes straight down to St. Elmo. This is obviously a defining expression and many of us are dismayed that what somebody who enters the gates is getting as the





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emblem of our identity something like our coat of arms, something like what a coat of arms was to a knight in the days of chivalry and what he gets is this particular space.

What Norbert has done with this installation, he completely changes the way in which the context defines us. I mean if somebody comes in now and has this space filled with the installation then what he is seeing is what I have been describing, that is... perhaps the most perfect and complex statement of what Maltese identity is like and in fact even just looking at this space from this place for me was a very exciting experience. I had never seen it empty like this but the emptiness is amply compensated for by the images placed on the side which are conveying precisely this message. So, he is both giving value to this space as that which defines us, that which defines the human beings who occupy were active in this space and at the same time he is redeeming the space by making it, by turning it from something which we usually regard as very negative to something extremely positive which is precisely the function of art. To transform, what is in this case, worse than everyday ordinary, something which is actually ugly, into something which is exhilarating and which makes you rejoice in being human.

Peter Serracino Inglott
Opening speech on 25th September 2008.





Text on a dark poster, likely a menu or list of items, with some small illustrations.

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PARKING



Louise Zammit

They want to be accepted

Yet your mocking makes them stear

by Adrienne Zerafa Simler

Cultural Differences do not exist to cause conflict, instead they are a way of enhancing our unity, exploring different REALITIES and therefore INCREASE OUR POWER of Knowledge.

LUCA CARVANA

One Person in this world may change the way a whole country thinks about that person's origin.

Nader El-Nakkhal

Nuri rispett, rištaqsi

u nemmen
f' kultura okra.

Adriana Schimone



Aldith Gauzi

Kultuadd għandu jithalla
jgħixil-kultura tiegħu.

Marich Mula.

La Cosa più spave ntasa
era la Lingua

Riccardo
Evangelista

I think that the
key to integrate with
people from different
cultures is to relate to
them normally and not to
point out the differences

by Zach Muscat

Għandi bżonn iċ-ċwievet
li jifethu dawn il-bibien,
that reveal you to me and
me to you.

I need the keys
to open these doors,
li jesponu lili lilek
u lilek lili.

... the same wall
seperates us,
u l-istess hajt
jgħaqqadna...

Karl Cassar

Comunication
is the Bridge
that joins hearts

Sarah Cannataci

Kultura Wajda : HAJJA MOWTONA
Hafna KULTURI : ĠAWSALLA

Sara Bondin
Christine Pittard

Changing an attitude is a step
closer to the intercultural society.

Lino El-Nakkhal

Malta, between Europe and Africa,
an ideal Foundation for a bridge of
Understanding.

Daniel Farrugia

WORDS FOR DIALOGUE

Throughout its development, this project has aimed to create dialogue and exchange amongst youth from different communities who live and study in Malta, to increase their awareness, and to stimulate them to produce a reflection on what intercultural dialogue is to them in their everyday life. The final part of the project involves conveying these thoughts to a wider audience. Starting from late spring and continuing through summer, a series of workshops were organised for youths, aged 13-21. These youths hailing from different communities in Malta were stimulated to reflect on what intercultural dialogue means to them, and they were invited to express their feelings and ideas about this crucial theme in a creative way. They have produced their own personal expression, in the form of brief poetry or other forms of writing, drawing upon their reflections and experience.



Words for Dialogue is curated by *Atelier culture projects* as part of the 1001 Actions for Dialogue; an initiative of the Anna Lindh Foundation.





Norbert Francis Attard

Norbert Francis Attard started as a self-taught painter and graphic artist (1965-1996) before turning to installation art in 1997. His present practice employs several disciplines including architecture, sculpture, video and photography to explore his major interests in places and their memories.

Born in Malta in 1951 and working in the sister island of Gozo, Attard blurs the boundaries of these disciplines both to incorporate the irreducible physicality of sites, but also to uncover and explore the sedimented layers of memory. Memory is both a product of place (and indeed is often inscribed in 'things') and social interaction (i.e. evoked implicitly in discourses), as well as a generative process (i.e. continuously redefined). Attard therefore explores the multilayered levels of meaning created with this triangulation through the displacement of signs and symbols to pose unsettling tensions between places, memories, and their representations. The relationship of his work to place and memory of site is fundamental, as is also his attempt to create balance and harmony through inter-relatedness of contradictory themes. He believes that no location is neutral, and that our sense of place is always shaped by past histories and contemporary ideologies.

He graduated in Architecture from the University of Malta in 1977, practicing the profession as architect for twenty years until 1996. Immediately after his University studies he lived in Germany in 1978 / 1979 working with the firm 'Licht in Raum', directed by Johannes Dinnebier, one of Germany's pioneers in light design.

Norbert Francis Attard has created many site-specific installations in several countries and has participated in many collective international exhibitions in the UK, Austria, Italy, Spain, Germany, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Greece, South Korea, Australia, USA, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Cuba, Taiwan and China.

He has also participated in several Biennials and Triennials, including the 2nd Liverpool Biennial, 8th Havana Biennale, 5th Bienal Vento Sul, Brazil, 2nd Bienal de Canarias, Canary Islands, 25th Alexandria Biennial, Egypt, and in the 3rd Echigo Tsumari Triennale, Japan, amongst others. Attard represented Malta in the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999.

He is a founding member of stART (2002), a group of Maltese contemporary artists; a committee member of the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts (2002-2005) and director of GOZOcontemporary (2001), an art space, offering self-directed residencies to international and local artists, on the island of Gozo.





An initiative of the European Parliament Office in Malta. In collaboration with St. James Centre for Creativity and the Valletta Local Council. Supported by Vodafone Malta Ltd., HSBC, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

