

MIXED HUES ON THE PALETTE: REFLECTIONS OF THE DIASPORIC ARTIST PAINTING ACROSS TWO LANDSCAPES

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Manwel Cassar

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AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

I, Manwel Cassar, certify that the thesis 'Mixed Hues on the Palette: Reflections of the Diasporic Artist painting across two Landscapes', submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, is the work of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, and that this thesis, or any part of it, contains no material that has already been submitted, wholly or partly, for any academic degree or diploma at any university or institution.

Signed 

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ABSTRACT

Mixed Hues on the Palette: Reflections of the Diasporic Artist Painting Across Two Landscapes deals with the experiences of Maltese-Australian artists in diaspora that, willingly or otherwise, affects them in working across two different cultural landscapes. More specifically, the study explores: how does diasporic existence shape the artistic performance?

The research also delves into questions of identity such as: In what ways does the diasporic artist express or produce a self-portrait of a hybrid identity in and through his/her art. How does this performance forge new ethnicities in contemporary Australia?

In the artists' case, art is a key means by which they are able to negotiate identities. The study also shows that the selected artists engage with the issues of identity in ways that renegotiate, challenge and define the unique characteristics that make them who they are. The researcher was interested in the artists' perceptions of their own works and also finding out the effectiveness of particular art works by themselves without the need of their authors' own interpretation because art has its own visual language.

The study engaged critically with and expanded on a variety of aspects associated with the diaspora, including the physical living in a new setting and yet alive to remembrance, rendering mental and emotional existence in the past.

The researcher as a serious artist was also able to reflect on his own works and their relationship with the two cultural landscapes, as well as highlight his enduring struggles associated with making efforts to belong successfully to both. Shedding the original landscape is impracticable as it is engrained in one's psyche, nor is it possible not to undergo change. Thus the researcher's work harbours an underlying content encompassing complex emotions, personal lived narratives, metaphor and nostalgia.

In the end, the researcher-artist placed himself in similarity, and in contrast to the other Maltese-Australian artists, with the intention of producing a self-portrait of the diasporic artist.

One of the key findings of the research was that the artists affirm many of the views put forward by the social theorists whose diverse discourse has shaped this thesis, particularly around concepts such as hybridity, diaspora, nostalgia and global trends. These artistic workers mentally configure and emotionally attach themselves to two homes, one of origin, and one of new adoption, whether or not they are first or second generation, or have even returned to the 'original home'. Hence the artists in producing their paintings, sculptures and prints, conflated with insights from lived experience, and are always working across two cultural landscapes consciously or unconsciously. Finally, the works of the selected artists, contra to prevailing stereotypes, could not be categorised by simple references to 'Malteseness' or 'Australianess', but were grappling in diverse ways with the experience, both in form and content, of 'being at home' and 'not at home', simultaneously.

The starting point for critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and in “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

Antonio Gramsci

The intriguing feature of looking at other people’s photographs and photographs of other people is the experience of discovering something about oneself.

Nikos Papastergiadis

I am not a painter who has come to America to paint China. I am a painter from China who came to America to continue painting. Why paint? People need to paint and painting needs people.

Wen Yi Hou

Chapter One

SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

The title *Mixed Hues on the Palette* signifies a thoughtful consideration of problematic issues as well as harmonious narratives which relate to the existing or perceived dilemmas and difficulties, but also fulfilling congruities of the visual artists, and in this case Maltese-Australian artists, in the context of working across two different cultural landscapes. In this study the key concerns are: how does the diasporic existence shape the actuality of the artist's performance? Is expression enhanced or constrained because of circumstantial or voluntary displacement? Both types of incidence in fact apply to different persona.

With these questions in mind, the study investigated the ways, obvious or subtle, in which the "narratives of displacement," as Stuart Hall (cited in Terry 1994/1995,) terms them, are expressed using the contemporary palette. Some light is shed on the predicament of the "displaced" artist who is endlessly engaged in the inevitable struggle to forge a new "positionality." (Terry 1994/1995). The degree of conscious struggle varies from one artist to another. However, change as cultural hybridisation occurs is a tangible occurrence in every immigrant artist whose work is endowed with a quality which, in Niko Papastergiadis' (2010:48) words, is able "to provoke broader reflections over the questions of absence and presence:" in an acquired new location which Homi Bhabha defines as the "Third Space." (1996b)

As Hall (Terry 1994/1995) points out the self is an imagined identity that is always in a state of flux. Moving out from this view, this project focused on an exploration of the formation of the diasporic artist. In the struggle to exist in an adopted environment, artists share the awareness that they, like the general ethnic community to which they belong, cannot but be dispersed in a new life and subject to its influences no matter to which country they move. They in fact are no different to the historical eventuality forecast in the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible (Deut.28.25): "thou shalt be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the earth". In the formation of the diasporic artist, and in acknowledging new influences, this research

identified the expressions of verbal communication as well as traces in artworks that constantly retain colour of the past. Metaphorically, their brushes are not washed absolutely clean; neither is this desired since in painting technique traces of other colours into the main one is an enhancement. The Maltese-Australian artists studied in this thesis echo what Gilroy (1987:159) says in regard to Africans: “the ideologies and beliefs of new world blacks exhibit characteristically African conceptions of the relationship between art and life, the sacred and secular, the spiritual and the material. Traces of these African formulations remain, albeit in displaced and mediated forms, even in folk philosophies, religion and vernacular art of Great Britain.” This study of Maltese-Australian artists flowed onto the ‘painting of a self-portrait’ of the researcher as artist. This required an understanding of how the subject was positioned in relation to other Maltese-Australian artists.

More specifically, the research grappled with a number of questions that revolved around identity, including: How does the diasporic existence shape the actuality of the artist’s performance? In what ways does the diasporic artist express or produce a self-portrait of a hybrid identity in and through the artistic performance? What are the possibilities and limits of the artistic performance for forging new ethnicities in contemporary Australia?

The study engaged critically with and expanded on a variety of aspects associated with the diaspora, including the physical living in a new setting and yet alive to vivid remembrance rendering mental and emotional existence in the past. This is particularly relevant to the studied artists painting across two cultural landscapes. Another aspect deals with difference and the difficulties it creates in midst of ‘the other’, or conversely posing advantages through alternative identity, and affording interest in inclusion and exclusion as well as negotiation of ‘positionality’. This resolves as the necessitous hybridity which, as Papastergiadis (2013:43) points out “is not just metaphor for cultural negotiation, it is also a tool for examining the inequalities and exclusion that are established in the guise of cultural purity.” Moreover, Maltese-Australian artists agree that ultimately hybridity discourse needs to be set against universal experience. They uphold that “We need to reaffirm the political frameworks that promote diversity and uniformity, inclusivity over exclusivity, merit over privilege, dialogue over dogma.” (Papastergiadis (2013:57). Another aspect that particularly applies to Maltese-Australian artists is the comparison of cultural equality and divergence between themselves,

and the measure of artistic contemporaneity *vis-a-vis* production by artists in the host country. This then leads in the thought of degree of fitting into globalisation. Focussing on aspects such as these, and others discussed later, about the Maltese diaspora as well as about Maltese art and artists abroad, the thesis sheds light on the understanding that should take place from focussing on the 'performance' of Maltese-Australian artists.

Artists attitudinised generally in conformity with the consensus of writers' definition that they live their daily lives in an atmosphere of absorption of a new culture, not cutting sentimental ties with the 'original home'. They subscribe to Apinan Poshyananda's saying that "I should define the term 'diaspora' as the renaming of various communities of dispersion formerly known as ethnic and racial minorities, refugee and exile groups, and overseas communities...Loss of homeland and a yearning to return create a desire to reproduce inter-generationally a sense of identification and to find some aspects of common culture in the new environment." (Poshyananda 2004:184). Symbols of the lost homeland and of a link with a common culture were discernible in the artists' statements and in their work, though they had expressed their relationship with the original home and the 'new home' in a different way. In linking with the host's culture, Maltese-Australian artists assert that they did neither find it too difficult to 'assimilate', such action highlighted as a problem by Bodò (2013:1), nor do they in diaspora experience adverse influence on Maltese characteristics since they did not need to abandon them whilst acquiring the host's own. This is not to say that they did not have to strive in the process. Positiveness smoothened their efforts. So, they debate Bodò's idea that "diaspora entails a cumulatively disadvantageous situation with respect to the external characteristics and conditions that would be essential in the preservation of the characteristics of the individual and the group as well." (2013:2).

Common culture in the sense of similarity of behaviour and belief may raise the question of why is there a change at all, and why should there be a need of change when in one way of thinking difference is not so prominent. Yet, if mixing needs to occur, it should not be too difficult to mix with a new culture. As Peter Beilharz (1997:76) refers to Bernard Smith's thinking when he states: "While difference is fundamental, humans think through similarity. This is what makes us human anthropologically speaking." The question continues to be debated by Zygmunt Bauman (2001:135-136) who directly asks (and he says that there are

constant asks): “Is cultural pluralism a value in its own right; or does its value arise from the suggestion (and hope) that it may improve the quality of shared existence?” Bauman (2001:135-136) maintains that “the variety of findings increases the chance that fewer of the many human possibilities will be overlooked and remain untried. Each finding may benefit all explorers, whichever road they have themselves chosen. It does not mean that all findings are of equal value; but their true value may only be established through a long dialogue, in which all voices are allowed to be heard and bona fide, well-intentioned comparisons can be conducted. In other words, recognition of cultural variety is the beginning, not the end, of the matter; it is but a starting point for a long and perhaps tortuous, but in the end beneficial political process”.

In the researcher’s case, as an ‘immigrant artist’, he sought to identify aspects of cultural similarity with the host society, aiming at harmony of mutually benefitting existence. Cultural interests and pursuits and, indeed, the use of a common language, were directed towards, as Paul Willis (2000:ixx) expresses it, “individuals and groups bearing a felt responsibility for and wanting a hand in the making of the self a something more than a passive or unconscious acceptance of a historically/socially prescribed identity...” conscious that “We are condemned to a kind of eclecticism because of the very eclecticism and indissoluble combinations of the dissimilar in the increasingly complex ‘real’ world around us.” (2000:xx).

The artists chosen for this exercise were: Maree Azzopardi, Paul Borg, Percy Cartwright, Joe Engerer, Paul Saviour Gatt, Mark Gerada, Victor Grech and Marianne Vidal Potts. These artists have been chosen for the study of how they reacted to and acted on the cultural construction of meaning at their individual sites, their work, in the words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:25) “being as much a product of a language of true inwardness as that of pure surface, the work is both reflective and reflexive.”

Attention was given to the artists’ perspectives in terms of identity, memory and ‘nostalgia’ as well as engagement with aspects of life in Australia or what might be described as the hue of culture on their palette. Overall, the ‘conversations’ and observations revolved around the way in which cultural identity shaped and is continuing to be embodied in the artists’

‘performance’ in the diasporic context within the local Maltese and the host Australian societies. Society is contemplated in terms of a definition by Ryoko Nishii (2002:240): “I would like to tentatively answer what is meant by a ‘society’ which preserves social memory. It is a society in which people who share some understanding of a discourse about the meaning of social process interact with each other. But the society includes remembered ambiguity, which permits different memories to co-exist. It cannot be a substantiated entity that is fixed and static.”

Whilst there are several cultural traits which are shared unequally but consistently by all the artists studied, yet focus on individuality netted observations of particular application which are not *ipso facto* duplicated in others and so comparison does not yield beneficial results as much as contrast. Nikos Papastergiadis (2010:56) expressed this in the following terms: “There is never a singular form of cultural identity which acquires the benchmark status of stability and unity against which others can be judged.” Incongruity applies to all communities as differing units, and likewise to individual persons who consciously or not display outwardly or subtly their specificity. This research into artists’ standpoints and their art confirms the veracity of this statement.

Issues to do with hybridity arising from working across two different cultural landscapes were discussed with the interviewees. Articulation through the chance to talk about their artistic work in reference to the idea of being ‘here’ and ‘there’ concurrently was uneven. One reason was the unequal personal ability to verbalise in a theoretical mode. Nikos Papastergiadis (2003:158) once again does not find it difficult to articulate that “the contradictions, complexities and ambivalences within the subjectivity of the diasporic agent resist an easy binary classification. The question of belonging and attachment cannot be distinguished in absolute and exclusive categories.” Another reason is the belief that one’s art speaks sufficiently without the need of words; indeed, if words are necessary as additional elucidation, then the work is deemed unsuccessful because, as Papastergiadis (2003:96) also states: “There is no better way to generate identity, discuss identity and negotiate identity than as contemporary art has done for the last three-hundred years.”

In due discussion of the inevitability of forging 'new' identities arising from the experience of displacement, the artists admitted to consciousness of various degrees of 'nostalgia' and 'metaphor' lingering in their works, in changes of artistic style, and aims for future endeavours. Questions regarding consciousness, or otherwise of adoption of a new identity or affirmation of an 'old' positionality elicited some answers from discussion (Bhabha 1994a, Bhabha 1994b; see also Gunew 1994).

An aspect of identity was touched upon regarding language being a defining element of identity and identity bears on mental and behavioural attitudes that imprint upon performance, including in the diasporic situation. Responses to the influence of language on three artists' work are sampled in chapter 2.

The difficulty of keeping up with meaning necessitated persistence in following artists' perception of the fact of instability of meaning arising from changed circumstances and the passage of time. It also intensified examination of the artistic works themselves, retrospectively since the artists' arrival in Australia and noticing 'symptoms' intimating their future development. Endeavouring to elicit meaning, the researcher was informed by the thoughts of Stuart Hall (1997:9) when he points out that: "One soon discovers that meaning is not straightforward or transparent, and does not survive intact the passage through representation. It is a slippery customer, changing and shifting with context, usage and historical circumstances. It is therefore never finally fixed. It is always being negotiated and inflected, to resonate with new situations."

Emerging from the work of the artists, is observable the fact that, in part, painting is expressive of a particular culture, despite globalisation and universality. As Ang (2003:4) writes "The transnationalism of diaspora is actually pro-nationalist in its outlook, because no matter how global its reach, its imaginary orbit is demarcated ultimately by the closure effected by the category of the diasporic identity itself. In this sense, the politics of diaspora is exclusionary as much as it is inclusionary, just like that of the nation."

It is difficult to assess if painting satisfactorily translates its meaning to others of different cultures, paralleling the accepted opinion that the verbal written language of the 'Other',

especially poetry, does not usually translate equivalently into the language of others. In the researcher-artist's case, he has lived in Australia for fifty-seven years, almost three times as much as his origin in Malta, and hues on his palette have increased and mixed for, as Peter Beilharz (1997:31) comments on the philosophy of Bernard Smith: "art is never independent of its place, and it takes on the features of its locality as surely as it takes the features of its time. Through the broken image of the English tradition the contours of a new continent were visible, and those contours were to bend and distort the European vision to the ways of a new country, with a different environment and other ways of living." And again as Beilharz (1997:99) quotes Smith; "The Australian artist, we might say, is a migratory bird who owns not one home but two – the new world of Australia and the old world of Europe [or Asia more recently]. The attempt to live entirely in either world is for him a spiritual death, for he draws his strength and whatever wisdom he has from a kind of perpetual flight." The metaphor of 'spiritual death', I consider to be excessive, notwithstanding his feeling at home in the two continents. In the quotation, the reference to Australian artists is applicable to the researcher-artist from the vantage point of Maltese-Australian.

Methodology

The introduction provided some notes regarding the methods adopted to gather information useful to achieving the aims of this research. The methods involved are detailed in the following steps:

The first step: theoretical writers

The first step was to study theoretical writers, standard or less known, dealing with cultural identity, art and globalisation. The selected writers were chosen because they examined the subject of cultural life in diaspora either in a generalised way, or specifically of a particular culture, although over-lapping intentions are common.

As an approach, cultural opinions expressed by writers were kept in mind to assess the value of truisms, or at times dissensions vis-à-vis the 'life history' as much as the 'art history' of individual and of collective artists in diaspora. The research acknowledged the cultural

concerns, referred to by Bennett (1998:28), when he states “cultural studies is concerned with all those practices, institutions and systems of classification through which there are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competencies, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct”.

Some of the several writers studied are discussed and quoted in the segments of this thesis, headed as ‘Literature and Artist Practices relating to this Project’, ‘Nostalgia’, ‘Identity and Culture’, ‘Difference and Postmodernity’, and ‘The Local and the Global’. Summarily, all writers dealt with the complexity of issues paramount in the modern day existence of pluralist circumstances of individuals and societies within a globalised world. Two writers are referred to as examples illustrating modes of insightful analysis which showed ways to the researcher of approaching works and individuals chosen for discourses about their art. Nikos Papastergiadis is an example of a social critic who discusses both in the abstract the carryover of qualities upon change of domicile from one country to another, and in particular, rendering the abstract relevant in practical application. It is of particular interest to follow Papastergiadis’ approaches to specific exhibitions of artworks, discussing their new perspectives away from the academia, their new aesthetic categories as well as their limits as perceived by critics. Thus he critiqued the 1998 Sydney Biennale, (a festival) entitled *Every Day*. In this event he points out that critics applauded artists lifting daily life usages, action and objects, as sources of inspiration, but were reticent about the ‘anything and everything in any circumstance’ being presented as art. Papastergiadis also discusses, among other artists, the body of photographic work of Eugenia Raskopoulos entitled *With(out) Voice* held in 1998 which, he says, links the themes of typical Greekness and the measure of a migrant’s life. The photographs depict five images of *Kouroi* classical bodies of youth sculpted idealized, and five close-ups of the photographer’s grandmother’s tightly closed lips. Her grandmother fled Greece to Czechoslovakia, returned briefly, and then migrated to Australia. Papastergiadis refers to the contrast between the ancient standard beauty, symmetry and poise of youth with the lines and wrinkles which stand as marks to a unique history. He comments “The combination of the classical and the contemporary suggests that the ideals of culture are not only evident on the pedestals of classical art, but also found in the photographs of wrinkled experience.” (2010:54). His critiques exemplify approaches when confronted by unfamiliar stances in art production.

In terms of social investigation, Robert Hughes (1980) is another example which helped the researcher proceed meaningfully in viewing certain works, evaluating how their aesthetic presentation is allied to the prime role of clarifying meaning in line with the authors' lives. Right through his criticisms he is comprehensively in constant focus on specific works, figuring artists' intended achievements, comparing and contrasting contents and stylistic effects between artists in context of being themselves and, beyond this, of their overall contribution to the Australian, indeed the global art scene. Surveying Maltese-Australian artists, the researcher gained by recalling Hughes' belief in the indivisibility of living from the work of artists. His comments on Matisse are apt for this research, "In secular terms, there was everything to be learned from Matisse: he was the most important painter of the third quarter of the twentieth century, as Picasso had been of the second quarter, and Cézanne of the first. But there was something in his work that could not transplant across the Atlantic, into a different and more Puritan, while at the same time less measured and reasonable, society. That was his 'Mediterraneanness' the ease and sensuous completeness which was rooted in Matisse's own experience, education, and legacy as a Frenchman. It was not a matter of artistic style; it issued from a complete attitude towards life and how to live it..." (Hughes 1980:154). The researcher likewise was interested in the 'Malteseness', which in itself reflects 'Mediterraneaness', in the way of thinking, living and depicting in the selected artists.

Some examination of the writings on Maltese art and Maltese artists abroad was also carried out to study reactions to their work of specific pertinence to this research. For example, articles in the journal *The Maltese Herald*, the book *Maltese Achievers in Australia* by Professor Maurice Cauchi and interviews as Oral History by Barry York predominated. It was difficult to find writings which were not composed of brief descriptions of the overall themes of public exhibitions of artworks, expressions of pride in the knowledge that good art is produced by Maltese-Australians, and exhortations to the public to visit the galleries concerned. A benefit is that the writers invariably do not miss appreciating typical Maltese aspects shown in the works, thus through their exhortations suggesting that the general Maltese community relates to the artists, whilst artists have the advantage of ability of expression through their art.

The second step: interviews

The second stage of the research involved in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Malta and Australia, of eight Maltese-Australian artists living in Australia or formerly living here in Australia. Visual images of their work were examined. The focus of this action was to explore aspects of attitudes to diasporic experience, evolvement of productions from time of arrival amidst the 'Other' in Australia to current position, looking for exchange of cultural content and effects of numerous considerations which are discussed in general in the section *Literature and Artist Practices Related to this Project*.

Initially each artist was approached by telephone and an indication was given of what the project involved. The artists were asked whether they were agreeable to take part in the study. Unanimous acquiescence occurred, but later one artist declined giving the reason that he was only interested in monetary payment. A substitute artist was added to the list. Artists felt favoured that they were chosen and looked forward to being interviewed.

Having obtained approval of the Ethics Committee, appointments were made in due course and each artist was visited in her/his studio. Travel was involved to St. Albans and Westmeadows in Victoria, to Bass Hill, Greystanes, Camperdown, King Cross and Leura in New South Wales. Additionally, Gozo (Malta) was visited. Some artists, like Maree Azzopardi and Joseph Engerer were visited twice. The duration of every interview was no less than three hours, often longer. Interviews were conducted in English or in Maltese, as individuals preferred. Interviews were recorded on to tape and later transcribed.

In order to document, or as Pile and Thrift (1995) suggest, "map the subject/s" or trace the artists' representation of being 'in-between' the original home and the new one, photographic images of selected works were obtained to support statements of held cultural and artistic perspectives, and observations of works were noted. In some cases it was observed that artists consulted photographs, either initiated at the scene by themselves or reproduced in brochures and magazines by others. The reference to photographic images enhanced their memory, aiding authenticity to satisfy the artists' affinity with the location and to avoid disputation of

accuracy. Papastergiadis (2000:62) is right in saying that “photography is not just the most efficient technology for memory work, it is also the mirror which promises to reflect the secrets of the self.” The self, whether s/he admits it or not, is revealed in subjective attitudes exposed through conversation and in visual representation discernible by the viewer and at times even on cursory observation, at other times by application of an appraising approach. The conversations referred to were taped, transcribed and examined analytically. Trends were matched, if in conformity with observations made in the general literature, and contradistinction from this noted and an interpretative assessment applied (see Kellehear 1993). The focus was on the ways in which artists are involved in or resist what Hall (1996:447) refers to as a “process of ‘diaspora-ization’ which involves a strategy that is unsettling, recombination, hybridization and cut and mix.”

Interesting it was to observe the atmosphere in which works are created, but a conclusion could not be reached that the studio influenced the productions. Azzopardi, Grech and Gatt do not have a studio as such, but they are unhindered by working in the normal living space. It may be deduced that, since their work reflects their daily life, such an environment is appropriate. Also it was noticed that Grech and Gatt adorned their homes’ interiors with their works. The artists understandably stated that the works are a constant reminder of Malta and so reflect some of the emotions expressed during conversation. It was also interesting to see Azzopardi’s collection of traditional images of the Virgin Mary to which she referred in her interview.

Borg and Cartwright make use of fairly large studios attached to their homes. Until recently, Cartwright had a rented shop/studio where he worked and conducted art lessons. These two artists’ studios are amenable to the production of large scale works which finished works were seen. Engerer was visited twice, his studio being an allocation of a large room of his house. He works on more than one painting at the same time. His studio exudes an atmosphere of a ‘Dutch classical’ environment. Large bouquets of flowers are arranged near easels on which stand canvases which are being transformed into artistic reproductions of flower still life. Engerer also extracted from storage paintings of other subjects, such as the air-force defence of Malta at war, which he commented on as he showed them to the interviewer.

Gerada's entire house in Leura, in the Blue Mountains area of New South Wales, is virtually his studio. It was pleasurable to sit around a table close to a panoramic window and observe colourful parakeets which Gerada recognises, having given them individual names. In Gerada's case the quiet peaceful surroundings away from the hustle and bustle of large towns and cities are conducive to reflection and his moody, at times nostalgic, abstract paintings are laden with musings, often displaying remembrance or re-creation of Malta.

In Pott's case, the interview was conducted in a café, with the owners' consent, at Kings Cross. It was Potts' recommendation to save time and travel of the interviewer. It was nonetheless successful and a substantial measure of information and opinion was obtained.

During each visit to the artists, individual works were discussed and as much as possible related them to the aims of the research. Artists were encouraged to converse freely, but they were also steered towards topics posed in a number of questions prepared beforehand. The questions centred on the effect of working along the cultural landscape of the country of origin or of attachment to the origin of one's own parents in instances where the artists, like Azzopardi, Borg and Gerada were born in Australia, and on the cultural landscape, where they are currently living, or, in the case of Engerer where he lived prior to returning to Malta. Chapter 2 is explanatory of responses to the various aspects contributing to the main theme of absorption of two cultures of a diasporic existence.

Certain applicable practical criteria induced choices based on, inter alia, male and female participation, age, location where s/he lives and works, duration of time that the artists have been painting, scholastic or private tuition undergone or self-taught, where tuition occurred and under what teachers, variations in style, exhibiting experience, critical reports on exhibitions and competitions, occasions of (i) revisiting Malta (ii) returning to Malta to live temporarily for some years (iii) returning to Malta permanently; reasons for doing any of the above actions, family living in Malta or Australia and development of work since arrival in Australia.

The third step: transcription and analysis

The third step involved transcribing the taped interviews and analytically examining them, comparing and contrasting artists' stories as well as identifying trends. Trends, verbally elicited were matched, if in conformity, with observations made in the literature, and contradistinction from this was noted. Applying an interpretative approach, analysis was effected of the acquiescence with or dissidence from the often quoted maxim of Hall (1996b:447) concerning a process of diaspora-ization... [with] cut and mix.

Analysing the interviews, the researcher was able to comment on the degree of agreement by the artists on the same subject. It enabled the discovering how deeply ingrained is their identification with 'two homes'. It shed light on how strongly displacement is felt and what effect it consciously has on their work. It also elicited the contribution that attachment to Malta, which is unanimous, is making to their way of life and to the artistic production. The same applies to what degree is the effect on the second home that is physically inhabited. Observing the works again after developing the photographs, the transcribed interviews aided the study of the applicability of verbal statements to the works and identification was possible of the 'clearer' expression of ideas and feelings by the 'language' of the works.

The fourth step: emergence of self-portrait

The fourth action involved examining the researcher-artist (painter) from three angles: in the context of theoretical deliberations by social and cultural theorists, in productions comparison and contrast with a cross-section of works produced by other Maltese-Australian artists and in the emergence of a self-portrait with a key concern mapping the changing nature of the 'hybrid' self in own artwork.

Whilst working on this thesis, a considerable number of paintings and drawings were created, the choice being mainly landscapes, seascapes and street-scapes in Malta and in Australia. Paintings were executed in oils or watercolour, whilst drawings were done in pencil, ink or charcoal on different materials (giving varied textured results), canvas, boards, and miscellaneous kinds of papers, works small and large dimensionally. Sizes of paintings varied

from 18x24 centimetres to 167x336 centimetres, and canvas and boards were used. Works were created both *en plein air* and in the studio; size is one of the determining factors, but very importantly the 'feel' of the subject is obtained better working in front of the motif. Unfavourable weather conditions not infrequently posed problems to the artist in continuing to paint. No particular reason singles out the choice of medium of oil or watercolour used at the time. Changing the medium relieves any inclination of habitually leaning towards one approach. There was, however, a practical reason for working only in watercolour and drawing materials during two visits to Malta. Less equipment is necessary to be carried when working in this media. Works thus created are also easier and cheaper to be transported to Australia. Quicker drying time of the material on the job is another benefit.

While the research was proceeding with extensive study of literature and gathering backup material on the main theme through interviewing and collecting supporting documentation, the researcher as artist continued to work on producing a substantial number of artworks from which a selection culminated in a representative sizeable exhibition aiming at the artist 'performing' his self-portrait. The solo exhibition was held at the Cato Gallery of the Victorian Artists Society. Concurrent with this artistic production, a reflective thesis continued to be compiled, providing the theoretical combination in context of the creative works, expounding the researcher's own experience and insights mixed through the interviews and exchanges with other artists, and selected applicable theoretical material.

The researcher most commonly worked solo, but he gained valuable insights for the thesis by also painting outdoors in company of a Maltese artist and with artists from non-Maltese backgrounds in regular outings organised by the various art societies to which he subscribes: the Contemporary Artists Society, the Victorian Artists Society (of which he is a Councillor/Board member), the Brighton Artists Society, the Hawthorn Artists Society, the Glen Eira Artists Society, the Glen Eira-Cheltenham Artists Society and the Mixed Palette Group. He participated in mixed exhibitions of all the societies.

The resultant essence of this artist's work is symptomatic of his individual life in the inner world of attitudinal stance, which bears on the way he feels and thinks about living in the outside world. His work also encompasses evidence of a highly emotional response as

oneness with the actuality of subject matter which, in the exhibition presentation, is confined to scapes.

Paintings were done freely as 'inspiration' dictated, not deliberately to the themes contemplated in the thesis, but in due course they collectively indicated, through affinity with the subject matter, measures of nostalgia which though not devoid of it, is not based on sentimentality. They stem from their inner being capturing the emotions associated with simultaneity of 'at and not at home', backward and forward looking, excitement in front of the motif, aesthetic pleasure, and achievement or struggle to accomplish expression of 'oneself' through his visual statement evoking his kind of fauvism and expressionism. A number of artworks are referred to in Chapter 3, painting a Self-Portrait, elucidating on these aspects. Reproductions of some of these artworks created in Australia and in Malta are presented as accompaniment to discussion in the thesis.

Literature and artist practices relating to this project

Defining two approaches

In the study of selected literature, two key concepts expounded by scores of social theorists provide an overarching framework for an exploration of the issues raised. One concept is the normal debates on social situations relating to culture in societies and their customs, defined anthropologically in a general way. Writers chosen are concerned with meanings of behaviour, thinking, feeling and communication of members of society, especially of migrated communities. In his work Hall (1997:3) suggests: "It [culture] is what distinguishes the 'human' elements in social life from what is simply biologically driven. Its study underlines the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life."

Writings were also investigated that evaluated the thinking and the feeling and the effect of moving from one country to another, with degrees of attachments to 'two-homes', and with all the process that 'moving house' entails. This, for example, includes aspects of memories of the past which, as is attributed to Frederick Bartlett (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002:3). "Bartlett

maintained that human experience constantly and continuously reshapes recollection. After a variety of experiments on remembering a story, Bartlett concluded that what the test subjects remembered of the story was never reproductive. Rather, their recollections were strongly and evidently constructive or reconstructive and much was inferred from their own cultural and social environment". With this context in mind, and from a reading of selected literature, it is possible to highlight a number of other key concepts that have been central to the discussion on migration, identity and artistic representation of the self in transition.

Hybridity

A number of writers on the conditions of diaspora, dwell on what, by example, Zhu Hua (2008) points out regarding immigrants. She observes that: "New values and dynamics emerge from the processes of change and contact with other groups." Difference from the customary art forms, even if not totally comprehended, paradoxically steers attention to eye-opening unexpected meaning. The following three theoretical points on the concept of difference, offered by Stuart Hall (1997:236), apply equally to artists nurtured by and demonstrative of culture: "(1) 'Difference' matters because it is essential to meaning; without it meaning could not exist. (2) We need 'difference' because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'Other' [In this case the 'Other' is Malta or Australia]. (3) Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The making of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture."

Despite painstaking endeavour to represent reality as it has been experienced and is believed to exist, the artwork is never a true replica of the status quo. In my own work my aim is not verisimilitude, but I still wanted to satisfy my understanding abroad by taking with me copies of some reproductions in colour calendars of previous years to compare on sight with places in Malta in my two visits in 2010. Calendars and personal photos brought over from Malta perhaps when emigrating, or even taken years back when holidaying, are often sources of paintings by amateurs. It is not denied that there is room for them. However, observations on site shed light on discrepancies caused by a number of reasons, including environmental changes through new constructions, through altered usages and in some cases through

demolitions. Cauchi (2002:235) in his book *Worlds Apart* agrees with this observation: "Few are prepared to accept the crushing reality that with time, the old country has altered so irretrievably as to become another foreign country."

In any case, memory is rarely exceptional to such an extent as to be exact. Beilharz (1997:13) equates its success to a dependency on consciousness-processes depending on consciousness, therefore unlikely to be correct in the absolute. He says: "We create, but not *ex nihilo* not exactly as we please. We work in and through a plurality of traditions and imaginably the quality of the results of these processes depends upon the consciousness we have of these flows and not only upon our talents." Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (2002:5) remind us that de-contextualisation is not the occurrence of individuals only, but likewise experienced by groups. "Both individual remembering and social memory share this composite form of semantic organisation and sensory imagery. When an individual subject, or a group of people, recalls the past through social practices, however, the semantic representations and visual images in their memory become more conceptualised...the collective images and meanings constructed in social practices tend to be highly conceptualised, being increasingly de-contextualised from what has been experienced in the past.". Tanabe and Keyes rightly conclude that "consequently this conceptualisation of meaning and image naturally comes to provide material that is open to argument and contestation." (2002:5). Tanabe and Keyes also describe society as "society in which people who share some understanding of a discourse about the meaning of social processes interact with each other," and they reiterate "but the society includes remembered ambiguity, which permits different memories to co-exist. It cannot be a substantialised entity that is fixed and static." (2002:240). The truism of what Tanabe and Keyes state was affirmed when I observed the mentioned discrepancies in my 2010 Malta visits.

In Malta, viewing the work of artist Joe Engerer, and conversing with him and with several people who had lived in Australia for various durations, I observed that the memory of life 'over here' is coloured by particularity. It would be expected that generality would be more followed and, if not followed, may have some contribution towards incomplete settlement and eventual return to Malta. Additionally, life in Australia is in constant flux within an evolving young country, and hence memory is even less in accord with currency. It is

observed that this ambiguity duplicates the experience of imperfect memory of the original home when living away from it. Memory can be deceptive, fulfilling the statement of Paul Carter (2009:5) explaining differently to Tanabe and Keyes that “our thinking is a movement of the mind, but our forms of thought are static. Whether it is the outside world or the inner world, we write about it and draw it as if it were motionless.”

A parallel is drawn between some Maltese-Australian artists in so far as drawing/painting Malta whilst they inhabit Australia, and colonial English-Australian artists in the heyday of British imperialism in Australia. Repeatedly, commentators point out the marked influence of the British physical environment on early Australian art. The Maltese influence in some artists duplicates this point. Peter Beilharz (1997:29) commenting on Bernard Smith suggests:

So what was the story of Australian art per Smith? The white invaders of Australia brought much with them in material form, but they also brought a cultural repertoire; they brought with them not only a desire to dominate or a curiosity about the great south land, but they also brought something stronger, homesickness for the old. They carried a nostalgia of vision...Smith's concern was, therefore, directly with the reception of art... Why should Australian painting often resemble the English, and representations of Australia look like England? The answer was to be found in the fact that viewers and painters brought certain habits of vision with them, which endowed natural scenes with the forms and residues of memory, of the other: This is what Paul Nash meant by saying that “nature is what the artists of the day before yesterday made people believe in. This is to say that the early colonists saw Australian landscape with English eyes, that they endowed that landscape with the formal qualities of landscapes to which they were aesthetically accustomed in England. To put it in a blunter vernacular, the colonists could not see what was in front of their faces, so much did they live in the life of the mind; *but nobody can, or does, this was a common problem, not a unique one* (my italics).

Maltese-Australian art is seen as the carrier, to varying degrees, of the old influence, that is, it carries Malta to Australia. Malta to them related to its specific culture “that affirmed a coherent identity and differentiated way of life from that of others...with the capacity to map

out its mindset onto a specific place.” (Papastergiadis 2005:49). They soon realised that they could not ignore in their art the influence of their new country. Art sponges whatever influence from whatever area it is created and different hues mix. Robert Hughes allots the idea of art to the influence of society amongst which the artists perform, it is not inanimate creation standing on its own. In the case of the Maltese artist, the artist usually duplicates the nostalgic treatment of her/his subject matter simulating the feelings of the Maltese community, as well as those of the local current existence. He says:

No work of art is isolated like a chemical in a test-tube, and critics are not leaves of litmus paper which turn red with delight in immersion in art. A painting is more like an organism attached by nerves and muscles, however tenuous and atrophied, to the society, environment and climate of thought in which it is made. Art history and art criticism are steps in the same process: to place a painting in a social context is automatically to perform an act of criticism. (Hughes 1966:22).

Some artists find it difficult to think theoretically leading to analytical survey of their work. They go along with their work without much thinking about it, doing work habitually, so that universalization is not a conscious consideration and the familiar offers anchorage of satisfaction. They are as much unaware of the occurrence, as they are of risks taken, because not placing one's efforts into the big picture and not looking beyond what one is doing chances stagnation in naivety. Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:228) comments:

The resistance to theory, or to forms of theorising that end towards universalization and idealism constantly runs the risk of reinstituting naively naturalised theoretical concepts as alternatives to theory; as if a pure, self-evident, and pre-theoretical state of meaning can always be returned to, whenever immediate access to language is thwarted. Such concepts are often the result of a nostalgic desire for a return to 'normalcy' – a state of validated 'common sense' in which polarizing opinions and uncomplicated familiar forms of analysis, interpretation and communication can be made possible again. (See also Hall in Terry 1994/95)

The nostalgic desire to return to 'normalcy' is akin to an easiness felt in liking what one's own community likes, here referring to the nostalgic remembrance of past places and times, for, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001:1-2) says "community is a 'warm' place, a cosy and comfortable place." He speaks about it poetically as if; "It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day," and "In here, in the community, we can relax – we are safe, there are no dangers looming in the dark corners (to be sure, any 'corner' here is dark)" (2001:1-2).

People by their very existence in a community, by their use, by their necessitous adapting of the environment to their needs, are not static. They transform places and are themselves transformed, connection is made and change is accepted from them. There is an evolving continuum of contact, for as Beilharz (1997:168) in his study of Smith clarifies; "the image of forms ought not to be constructed as though it was exhaustive of the world; we form, and transform, but we also exist in other ways or upon other levels. And it is in these that we connect back to those endless generations that came before us. We will always remain creatures of the long past, as well as inhabitants of the new." It is not then, mere nostalgic recollection of the old home. Although Hughes (2001:152) was talking about a great artist, his statement is relevant to any emigrated artist with a haunting memory, "what lends Gauguin's Tahitian work its tension – the layering of cultural memory into ecstatic sight. A great artist's eye is never 'innocent'." Cultural memory tinged with similarity and difference, is subject to a point, to "become increasingly fragmented, multiple and changeable as they frequently involve different and often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions." (Petersen 2012:200). Furthermore, as Papastergidis (2005:55) asserts "By maintaining aspects of their original culture or through the process of adapting to the dominant culture, they presented a break with the earlier order and produced new cultural forms."

Commenting in recent times on issues of migration and culture, Homi K. Bhabha (1996a:62) upholds the concept of 'hybridization' which he sees as inevitable. He speaks of the peculiarity of culture's partial, even metonymic presence and affirms that "the discourse of minorities, spoken for and against in the multicultural wars, proposes a social subject

constituted through cultural hybridisation, the over-determination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling likeness and banal divergence.”

This is resonant in a Maltese proverb which, despite the individuality of art, nonetheless makes the point *Ma' min taghmilha, gheluq is-sena ssir bhalu*: Whoever you mix with, you will simulate by the year's end.

Notwithstanding this axiomatic pronouncement, binarism is likely, but even this is not always *fait accompli*. Nikos Papastergiadis (2003:158) induces serious thinking arising from his several deliberations on hybridity and from writers which he collated as editor of *Complex Entanglements*. Firstly, “the contradictions, complicities and ambivalences within the subjectivity of the diasporic agent resist an easy binary classification. The questions of belonging and attachment cannot be distinguished in absolute and exclusive categories. Anyone who has followed the work of Hall and Bhabha would have noted the dispersal and return of their effort to define and grasp the concepts of hybridity.”

Secondly, translation in the broad sense of understanding other cultures, is deemed problematic as a host country has not lived the guest's life. Ien Ang (2003:30) in the essay *Cultural Translation in a Globalised World* points out that the Japanese American theorist Naoki Sakai problematizes this limited notion of translation because it doesn't take account of the “mingling and cohabitation of plural language heritage in the community...What we need to emphasise is that we live in a world in which practices of translation – not just linguistic but, more generally, cultural translation – have become not only increasingly necessary but also an integral part of social life. In short, in contemporary multicultural society (the need for) translation is endless.”

Ang (2003:40) stresses this necessity, repeating; “In today's world, the ongoing search for cross-cultural discourse has become endemic and, above all, an ordinary part of everyday life. It is a way of life which we all need increasingly to adopt in an ever-shrinking world, a life marked simultaneously by insurmountable difference between cultures and an interminable drive to build bridges.”

By association of ideas, the mention of bridges brings to my mind the Special Broadcasting Service (1997) hour long documentary video entitled *A Bridge Between Two Islands*, referring to cultural exchange, through migration, between Malta and Australia. The documentary concerned the carryover of way of life traits and the cultural contributions made by groups and individuals, which had the effect of bridging gaps in understanding, and the importance to continue to do so. I gained from comparisons with other writers and artists working in both islands. It was of interest to see the workers in Malta displaying influences from Europe where Malta is situated in easy reach of surrounding countries, and instances of hybridity of workers in Australia, confirming the naturalness of others' cultural absorption, which is the theme of so many cultural writers.

Ang quotes Wolfgang Iser (1996:262) who expresses the view that:

A cross-cultural discourse distinguishes itself from assimilation, incorporation, and appropriation, as it organises an interchange between cultures in which the cultures concerned will not stay the same. A foreign culture is not just transported into a familiar one; Instead a mutual patterning and repatterning is affected by such a discourse.

Repatterning is not as smooth an operation as it may sound, rather its very laboursome proceeding is deemed to be serviceable, as indicated by Ang (2003:37): "The usefulness of the concept of hybridity, I suggest, is precisely in its uncomfortable ambivalence," having first reminded us that: "The concept (of hybridity) has often been popularised in terms of fusion, synthesis, the smooth integration of separate parts into a new, syncretic whole. This, however, is to overlook the friction and tension, the ambiguity and incommensurability, the contestations and interrogations that are part and parcel of any process of hybridization." As Papastergiadis (2005:62) says "these disruptive acts of mixture can lead to new forms of awareness and construct new networks of agency, however, there are no guarantees that mixture will always entail equality. Hybridity, mobility and difference show us the other side of things, takes us to foreign destinations, provide a new perspective - this in itself is not liberatory. It is just different."

Harmony is not achieved by going the other way and trying to weaken the process of hybridisation, because the situation of hybridity occurring is unalterable. It is more advantageous to admit that the process is not perfect. This can be demonstrated with the summary of Papastergiadis (2003:176). He reported his conversation with Ricardo Dominguez and Coco Fusco who are averse to political jargon, addressing a “radical hunger for an alternative.” They further submit that: “The only ethical option that seems viable is to commence with an understanding of the limitations that are built into every cultural perspective and to acknowledge the need that this incompleteness will also inspire new forms of translation between and across cultures. To dismiss hybridity as a form of inauthentic subjectivity and to conflate multiculturalism with the colonising logic of globalisation is to overlook the actualities of transformation that occur in identity and culture.”

Initially, a number of Maltese artists, including myself, were expected to assimilate exclusively into the way of Australian life and custom, but it was discovered that this posture was ineffectual, and hybridity was more agreeable and mutually beneficial. Hybridity is not tantamount to assimilation, but is constituted of a heterogeneous existence. This existence suits Maltese-Australian artists because they are not compelled to forgo their cultural attachment no matter what superficially hybridity may seem to be about. In fact “hybridity is dependent up the very things it strives to overcome. Boundaries are a necessary part of the modern world.” (Papastergiadis 2005:60). This concept was noted for examination of the attitude of Maltese-Australian artists of whether they consciously pondered and are they usually bothered about modernism aligned with debatable globalisations and are they so immersed in their culture, not realising as Bernard Smith says that culture is absorptive and adaptive, changeful rather than eternal. This situation needed testing whether for them art is created instinctively focussed on the act of production without troubling to engage in theoretical thoughts.

Then the importance is brought to bear of Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher’s (2004:3) reference to Edward Said as “amongst the most distinguished advocates of the ‘exile’ position”. They referred to Said’s “seeing the entire world as a foreign land, makes possible originality of vision. Most people are aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous

dimensions.” Elsewhere Said concedes that “new alignments are being made across borders, types, nations and essences,” and that, “all cultures are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic.”

Mosquera and Fisher (2004:6) dwell on the negativity of proposing assimilation, maintaining that: “If the older settlements may be characterized by patterns of assimilation (usually enforced by the host nation), the more recent ones may be more aptly described as ‘adaptation and resistance,’ maintaining ‘cultural corridors’ to the place of departure and a multiple national identification that is more than a hyphenated identity.”

This is also in accordance with Peter Beilharz (1997:29) who noted from Bernard Smith that “cultural forms like art would always be hybrid, but even more emphatically in the framework of imperialism...assimilation processes of unequal but significant cultural exchange.”

Other thoughts on hybridity are to be found in *Over Here*. (Mosquera and Fisher 2004). One reference is to an art exhibition curated in 1997 in Paris by Hou Hanru. The exhibition entitled *Parisien(ne)s* prompted Hanru (2004:225) to comment on Paris which now had an “identity as a modern city, changing into a pluralist, multicultural and constantly changing post-modernist city.” Also John Clarke (2004:225) says: “Hou accepts Homi Bhabha’s concept of a third space between cultures that is replacing the mainstream dominant ‘national’ culture,” for “as immigrants are more central in society, society is increasingly defined by immigrants.” Another reference is to a belief in cultural equality and it follows that if hybridity comes into the equation, it is expected that the ratio of overseas culture to local culture is equalling. This is a challenging departure from ‘simple’ assimilation or even the usually implied result of the ‘arriving’ culture, presumed belonging to fewer population mixing with the existing, numerous population with a prevailing culture. Jouanno and Huo (2000:13) propose: “we must accept that the diverse points of view coming from different cultures are of equal value and coexistent, and accept, too, that the different understandings and practices of modernity should be privileged and developed.”

This concept is taken up repeatedly by Bernard Smith specifically regarding Australian art. Smith mentions again early Australian art such as engravings of parks which resembled English ones, except for the localising sprinkling of tropical palms, (not yet gum trees) till Streeton and his Heidelberg School associates and Heysen and curiously, Namatjira corrected. Beilharz (1997:44) summarises Smith, saying: "The difference, in Smith's eye, was that this kind of phenomenon was taken to be significant, symbolic of elementary forms of cultural exchange rather than of simple cultural arrogance and distortion." He adds: "At some point on the long scales of civilizational time the subordinate culture would also begin to affect the superior culture of the haughty metropolis," illustrating that "human nature, in other words, might or might not be more or less fixed, but culture was always shifting, never was essential or final."

Continuing on the subject of hybridity, I turn again to Itoni *et al* (undated), who together authored *Media, Minorities and Hybrid Identities*. They go beyond the abstract theoretical deliberations, and address the emotional and stabilising psycho-cultural existence of the individual. They state that "dual identity, constructed and forged as a post-modern experience, does not necessarily evolve along the marginalisation – acculturation – integration continuum typical of the melting pot ideal, but rather creates a condition that allows for belonging simultaneously to the majority and the minority." The writers analysed Russian immigrants in Israel. Their adaptability, similar to that of the Maltese, varied between individuals, but it was always nonetheless enhanced through 'acculturation' processes, such as entry into professions and the workforce amidst other cultures, financial equilibrium and maturation of the young generation. Berry (1990:18) stressed that flexible acculturation reduced stress and increased self-esteem. Hall (1993:19) refers to the benefit of inhabitation of at least two identities, the ability to speak at least bilingually "to negotiate and 'translate' between them". This ability is reflected in the multicultural public media exemplified by bilingualism of Russians and Arabs (in Israel) and the Maltese (in Australia). Itoni *et al*. cite Hall in relation to the media:

The new media system created conditions that permitted their citizens to inhabit several identities, to negotiate among them, and to become "products of cultures of hybridity". This new type of hybrid identity constructed and forged as a postmodern experience...

constituted a constant hybrid condition that allowed members to periodically participate in both centrifugal and centripetal movements.

In the context of the discussion on hybridity, it could be argued that it is impossible to carry indefinitely home hues on the palette, because, to paint a new local picture, fresh colours need to be squeezed and they mix with the old ones, enriching the palette. Colour mixing occurs voluntarily or as a matter of course. The words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:107) resonate when she says “whether we choose to concentrate on another culture, or on our own cultures our work will always be cross-cultural. It is bound to be so, and in my case, not only because of my personal background and historical actualities, but also and above all because of the heterogeneous reality we all live today, in post-modern times” (1991:107). And she reiterates the quest for this other in us can hardly be a simple return to the past or to the time-honoured value of our ancestors. Changes are inevitably implied in the process of restoring the cultural lineage, which combines the lore of the past with the lore of the complex present in its histories of migrations.

Pictures, paintings and other works of art graphically denoted where the diasporic artists are situated in-between the two cultural worlds that they inhabit, even if they overstate or resist attachments to one or the other of these imaginary spaces. According to Hall (Pile and Thrift 1995:10):

Translated men and women...are people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically); inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home who have learned to “negotiate and translate” between cultures, and who, because they are “irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures” have learned to live with, and speak from difference.

Nostalgia

Homesickness is the lot of political émigrés, wilful or forced immigrants, fugitives, refugees and all types of people, including artists, who permanently leave the place where they are born or to which they are accustomed. Depicting Malta scenes springs from a desire for the

old place. Such depiction is frequent in Maltese-Australian art. Cauchi (2002:231-232) observed that:

Some can never overcome the initial sense of loss of the old ways, the homeliness, the closeness, the friends, and the family. These feelings ebb and flow and gain momentum with time...Homesickness is never too far from many a migrant's mind. Some try to rationalise this feeling: Breytenbach, for instance, would ask, 'Homesick?...Crack a joint. Home? What home?... Where....? What a debilitating concept!' and 'From a distance, home acquires even brighter hues and stronger perfumes.'

Consideration of the place of nostalgia in the artistic productions of Maltese-Australian artists, makes it pertinent to refer to Pickering and Keightley (2006:933) for whom in the recent century the concept of nostalgia "has become the *bête noir* of cultural critics, sociologists and historians". For these writers nostalgia entails an ardent longing for the past. Discussing the nostalgic in the text of ethnic minority writers, but with a relevance to all of the creative arts, Sneja Gunew (1994:6) argues that the function of nostalgia "is to return to the unified subject." However, as Pickering and Keightley (2006:920) point out, for a number of theorists, nostalgia involves a set of emotions that are "fixed in a determinate backwards-looking stance." Stuart Hall (1994/5:62), for example, argues that while the "narratives of displacement, in which the emotions of loss and longing are central, continue to arise and in some contexts are used creatively." But for Hall (1997:62), it is only "when diasporas give up the idea of really going back to where they come from, that is the most productive moment in their lives." Consequently, Pickering and Keightley (2006:923) suggest that for some there is a view that the longing for an idealised past or return to some imaginary place, may be limiting in "that it closes down the transactional value of the past in the present."

However, Pickering and Keightley (2006:937) argue that the concept of nostalgia can only properly be conceptualised as a contradictory phenomenon, because on the one hand, it may be yearning for a return to the imaginary idealised past, while on the other, it can represent "a knowing and reflexive relationship" involving a creative use of memory. Unlike the discipline of history, nostalgia "foregrounds the elements of disavowal and fantasy in the representation of the past." Similarly, Gunew (1994:6), writing on the homeland, nostalgia and the uncanny suggest that, "If they (ethnic minority writers) incorporate the element of

nostalgia (in their texts) this does not in itself mark them off as a primitive stage in an evolutionary model of a national literature.” This is because, in her view, the personal and collective stories of these writers have actually “contributed to the founding narratives of migration as well as offering other constructions of Australia.”

Moreover, for Gunew, nostalgia, as an emotion or literary representation may not be backward looking but functions as an idea that gestures towards the future. After all, says Gunew (1994:6), it may “operate, in culturally specific ways as a factor in the writings of all those who call themselves Australians.” Moreover, nostalgia, is expressed across all the creative arts according to Pickering and Keightly (2006:937), who quote Oliver “has long been a locus of possibility and a source of aspiration...for the future opens into otherness only in so far as the past does too.”

Clearly, my art contributes colours to the palette in such a way that it may be considered to express a sense of nostalgia. Art done in Malta, or that produced on return to Australia from sketches or photographs done in that country, reflects the heightened passion of loving my birthplace. My paintings are exclusively landscapes, streetscapes with architecture, and seascapes incorporating historical defence bastions and local sea vessels. They afford ‘souveniring’ for taking to Australia to help memory so that it is both a re-creation and factual. The works are remindful of some connection with the locals who watched me paint and who added verbally their own ‘stories’ to the imaged subject matter, though here it should be noted that the bulk of my artwork is Australia based, referencing Australia. The greatest frequency refers to landscapes, streetscapes and seascapes also as *plein-air* painting is my first choice.

Here the debates about nostalgia provide a way of framing my project. For example, a key concern is the exploration and reflection on the extent to which the artistic representation, both in my own work and that of other Maltese-Australian artists are employing nostalgic imagery in a productive and future oriented way. Moreover, some consideration was given to the idea, as argued by Mycak (1998) that the nostalgic expressions in writing, and possibly other creative productions may, in some cases, or at certain points in time, function as a narrative or artistic strategy rather than a demonstration of simple sentimentality; even more

than “bringing a cultural repertoire...carrying a nostalgia of vision.” However, while useful, it was necessary for the study to move beyond the concept of nostalgia and consider the view that: “Cultural identity is best understood as a metaphor for the way we make sense of our position in the world. It is an elastic metaphor, one which stretches and embraces the way in which we live.” (Papastergiadis 2010:61). Working from this view, Papastergiadis suggests that “mixture, experimentation, displacement and reconfiguration, collage and juxtaposition have become the cultural practices which are now seen as the most expressive of our times.” (2010:61). Consequently, a key task for the researcher in this project was to utilise not only the concept of nostalgia, but also that of metaphor as a way of constructing a self-portrait of the diasporic artist.

Working across the concepts of nostalgia and metaphor, the researcher sought to position the image or impression within the context of post-modernity. Barry Smart (1993:39; see also Smart 1994, 1997) referred to post-modernity as the “complex and confusing forms of articulation between, on the one hand global processes and associated interdependencies, and on the other hand the inescapabilities and particularities of local forms and identities.”

Nevertheless, in this endeavour the myself as research/artist do not desire or cannot escape being very conscious of Maltese cultural aspects embellishing and impinging on his work. For instance, I recall my experience as a child at Number 38 Third Street (renamed Monsignor Dandria Street – refer to earlier paragraphs regarding changes to ‘remembered’ locations!), Msida, where he painted *The Death of Saint Joseph*, copied on site from the large horizontal painting by Anton Inglott that is directly behind and above the main altar in the choir apse, at the local church. I painted it to adorn his play church that he constructed out of a discarded largish wooden box and was intended to be imitative of the interior of the Msida parish church dedicated to Saint Joseph where he served for a time as an altar boy. It was done as a sign of religious faith, and of belonging, apart from a gesture of self-expression. Many decades on, the project undertaken moved out of this recollection to again explore matters of belonging, but also those of loss, identity and displacement, from a different location (position), at a different moment in time (68 years on). In line with Hall’s (Terry 1994/5:62) view, I acknowledge that the challenge in producing a creative self-portrait of the

diasporic artist required me to “deal symbolically and metaphorically rather than literally with re-mindedness.”

Identity and culture

Literalness, which has the connotation of static in identity, is likewise being dealt with as “incompleteness of cultural identity – that is always remains open and mixed” (Papastergiadis, 2006:93). Identity, having been gradually built on an original cultural existence among ‘alike others’ should not be accepted as formed, as complete at any time. We are advised by Paul Carter that: “It is an urgent ethical responsibility to learn to walk in the tracks of others and having learned this, to re-groove these traces creatively and differently. Without this power of recollection we are doomed to repeat the same steps, with the same destructive consequences.”(2009:84). For culture influencing identity is seen as continuously shedding old modes of life and acquiring new adaptations. Well-argued by Zygmunt Bauman (2001:61) is the idea that “cosmopolitans are born natural culturists, culture of their brand of culturalism being an assembly of revocable conventions, the site of invention and experimentation, but above all of no points of no return.” It is also very well put by Bauman (2001:64), again asserting the changeability of identity in a modern world which also challenges values and integrity as long held unquestioned, Bauman writes “...people engaged in identity battles fear ultimate victory more than a string of defeats. The construction of identity is a never ending and forever incomplete process, and must remain such to deliver on its promise (or, more precisely, to keep the promise of delivery credible)...and freedom to choose is simultaneously the principal weapon and the most coveted prize. Ultimate victory would in one fell swoop remove the stake, decommission the weapon and cancel the prize.” The solution is: “To avoid this eventuality, identity must stay *flexible* and always emendable to further experimentation and change, it must be a truly ‘until further notice’ kind of identity.” Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:160) is wise when she says: “The quest for this other in us can hardly be a simple return to the past or to the time-honoured values of our ancestors. Changes are inevitable, implied in the process of restoring the cultural lineage, which combines the lore of the past with the lore of the complex present in its histories of migrations.”

Moreover, flexibility to function beneficially must be contextualised in interdependency. Bauman (2001:61) explains that: "There are tasks which each individual confronts but which cannot be tackled and dealt with individually...control can be gained only *collectively*."

It is agreed, and this researcher has found in talking to Maltese in general and to Maltese-Australian artists in particular, that identities which began to be acquired from infancy which is the most prone to imitate, and which continued to be ingrained as (bodily coupled with mental and emotional) development occurred, present multi-difficulties to embrace change and to appreciate any compensating benefits. If we are to use language as a comparison to culture and identity, as Maurice Cauchi (2002:91) did, we present that people away from their mother country, assuming that like Malta it has its own language, may lose the full command of the original language, even if we do not at this point consider that the original speech, still as an example, has somewhat altered its vocabulary and idiom of expression; the loss increases with the length of duration abroad, especially (and sometime despite) if those people did not have returns to their starting home. The researcher who engages in interpreting assignments in the Maltese community is aware of the loss of explanatory abilities of a linguistic nature (as different from the human trait of some more naturally versed than others) and interestingly, notes the metaphoric admixture of ways of expression in the two cultures of Malta and Australia. Still more interesting is to hear differences (at times comical or absurd) which pinpoint the area wherein the Maltese islands the utterer originated. The admixture referred to directs to the observation of social theorists regarding inevitability of change. Lack of change is implied by many of the writers as dangerous, but Beilharz (1997:34) continuing his study of Smith, is explicit: "Change, traffic, contact, difference were the kinds of processes that made up culture...culture as we know it, springs not from the soil or even from beautiful if paradoxical mirage-representations (referring to Australian landscape paintings) of it. Culture, like identity is human and therefore transient. Authenticity is a redundant, indeed a dangerous notion."

It is not being advocated that in migration, the new 'culture' is to be revered without question or that absolute shedding of the original is paramount for success in settlement. Either is undesirable. In fact "There are two types of cultural provincialism; unawareness and over-

awareness of the ‘centre,’ a hedged complacent identity and a loss of it in a desperate chase to keep up with the Joneses of the international art scene.”(Beilharz 1997:46).

The above amounts to be properly weighed hybrid identity. But it is easier to preach ‘weighing’ than to effectively calculate the measurement. There always are debatable boundaries, in accordance with stance adopted. Papastergiadis (2003:171) affirms that: “All cultures use boundaries, depending from which point of view one stands. Cultural identity is constituted not only by its contents, but also in the way boundaries are defined to allow flow and offer resistance. Beyond the space of the boundary is where the known ends and the unknown begins. It is the space of the other. In such a zone the rules that define identity can be inflected, suspended or inverted. To be in such a space may be a threat, or it could be the highest thrill.”

Difference and postmodernity

It is acknowledged by many theorists that there are struggles to achieve satisfaction of life in an altered environment, but this is not to be confused with conflict. Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:150), answering viewers’ questions in relation to her films, that is why her films do not portray conflicts, explains; “My suggestion to this so-called lack is: let difference replace conflict. Difference as understood in many feminist and non-Western contexts...is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness...difference is not what makes conflicts. It is beyond and alongside conflict. This is where confusion often arises and the challenge can be issued.”

In his work Papastergiadis (2010:51; see also O’Connor 2010), implies that art has traditionally preferred to be different, to be elitist, but he proposes that there is in fact a dialogical relationship between art, politics and theory – “a game between antagonists...bound to respect the integrity of their mutual differences”. For him such an arrangement disturbs the status quo in which art is always seen to adhere to an elitist standpoint. Consequently, art can do with a challenge.

Nonetheless, we are not to be concerned that art may lose its content of cultural representation no matter how modern, postmodern and global it may eventuate from the collaborative engagements as Papastergiadis states “globalization may present us with a more aggressive and restrictive form of culture, but this new manifestation should not be confused with the death of culture.” (2004:330). Papastergiadis further says that “a contestatory model of cultural struggle obscures the resilience of the old in the form of the new, the unconscious repetition of previous habits within current practices, the subtle transpiration of traditional values in contemporary norms.” (2004:330).

Victor Tupitsyn (2004:391-2) puts another slant on this subject and affirms that art, contemporaneously with the ‘other,’ has already done its exchange on the premise that ultra-modernity admits of anything and everything as art and “anyone can now be an artist...the mentality and terminology of art has taken root in every sphere of life, without exception. Art has successfully completed the infiltration of its Other: for all intents and purposes, it has no Other anymore.” Globalisation features in this respect. Petersen (2012:203) referring to Charlotte Bydler in her ‘On the globalisation of Contemporary Art’, states: “Bydler’s relevance to the topic of cultural identity is made all the more pertinent because she demonstrates that transnational migration and labour is one of the primary causes of art communities becoming globalised and that notions of what counts as ground-breaking art and leading art scenes have changed.”

This thought fits with the four key characteristics of postmodernity identified by Barry Smart (1993:39) as being: “future orientated, innovative temporal imagination; iconoclastic attack on the institution, organisation and ideology of art; technological optimism, bordering at times on euphoria; and promotion of ‘popular culture’ as a challenge to ‘high art’.”

Smart (1993:39) acknowledges that these issues are not blindly accepted, but are debated (Huyssen, 1984; Foster 1985; Wright Mills 1970) as ‘post-modernism of reaction’ and ‘postmodernism of resistance’ because postmodernity implying a change is itself continuously changing, yet paradoxically “there is nothing new under the sun.” Smart explains “in so far as modernity is itself continually in a state of flux, perpetually in motion, as processual in character the idea of a condition of postmodernity must, in turn, be situated

in relation to developments and transformations in sociality, culture and communications, technological innovation and economic production, and political life.”

Visibility of postmodernity will always be there, simply because it recycles. Beilharz (1997:167) compares it to civilisation which “if all civilisations recycle, then modernity or postmodernity recycle more than most; there is an increasing proliferation of available styles, images and ideas upon which they draw...Historically speaking, the post-modern will also pass; and then it will return, in different ways.”

We may also talk of modernisms, neoclassical, medievalism and impressionists. Beilharz (1997:174) says: “As Smith puts it, each succeeded in revising, rather than erasing Europe’s embattled classical tradition.” Barry Smart (1993:31) agrees: “Critics of the idea of post-modernity and its diverse corollaries place emphasis on the persistence of familiar structures, experiences and problems.” For Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:108): “Each creation I come up with is, at the personal level, a historical experience. It is a working out of an old problem and the formulation of a new question.”

The local and the global

There is an inevitability of thinking beyond the mono culture which implies localised meaning expressed through its codes of language, beliefs and behaviour in a manner described by Hall (1997:2) as “culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them and ‘making sense’ of the world in broadly similar ways”. Hybridity incorporates a mixture of the cultural hues of the new arrival and the well established host. This thinking extends further to encompass the ramifications of the global. In fact: “Over the past few years the extent to which humanity has been incorporated into world system has dramatically accelerated, such that we are all virtually subjects of (or to) both the local and the global.” (Mosquera and Fisher 2004:5). Petersen (2012:202) has this view “a work of art is always received and interpreted locally even when it circulates in the international exhibition system. Nevertheless the *popularity* of the term ‘global art’ is historically significant. It testifies to the profound impact of globalisation on the whole art system.”

Sneja Gunew (2003:236) explains that Anthony Giddens has defined globalization as “intensification of worldwide relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” Gunew (2003:236) adds that “this intensification...has accelerated during this century with the spread of technologies, finance and people as well as of images, ideas and ideologies.” Further on Gunew (2003:236) comments that, “If the hybridity argument has any merit then it is that the local is always transformed as a result of engagement with others but that this transformation is never uniform across cultural sites; that globalisation produces new hybrid formations that are highly context-specific and localised”.

Nonetheless, as Hall (1997:61) explains, “one important idea about representation [passing of meaning of culture] is the acceptance of a degree of Cultural Relativism between one culture and another, a certain lack of equivalence, and hence the need for translation as we move from the mind-set or conceptual universe of one culture to another”. This action is not just theoretically deemed necessary, but it is important in practice, nowadays even more so. Ang (2003:30) reiterates “globally and locally, cultural traffic and encounters of people from different cultural backgrounds – as a result of travel, tourism and migration – have increased not only in frequency but also in intensity and pervasiveness. In this situation, the need to understand and communicate with cultural ‘others’, that is the need to translate, has acquired unprecedented pragmatic importance (not just poetic or aesthetic). In other words, it has become part and parcel of the very practical conduct of life...”

The two configurations of local and global are often written about in context of the inevitability, through common humanity, that the former’s hue is heavily tinted by the latter’s, the easy or qualified intermingleness of the two, and the subjection of beings to both simultaneously. All this has bearing on the fitting of the contemporary art’s stance vis-à-vis global existence. Mosquera and Fisher (2004:5) say it plainly: “The increased complexity of both the signs and sites of culture has enormous significance for art and critical practices because they have long understood that controlling representation also conveys the power to control meaning.” Mosquera and Fisher (2004:5) also point out that “globalization does not mean that between the local and the global all power relations are now equal, or that there is a

seamless flow of knowledge unified by any consensual principle or claim to truth...At the same time, in some Heizenbergian manner, there is no event in one 'local' that does not have repercussions on a global level; we are all now neighbours, if not yet 'brothers,' our fates inextricably entwined, irrespective of space-timed differentials."

This brings the point of interdependency which is made by Zygmunt Bauman (2001:149-150), that "If there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right."

Not mistaking interdependency for absolute completeness, Mosquera and Fisher (2004:7) qualify this, saying: "Far from producing a world of synchronised signs and meanings...translation and appropriation are imperfect acts of coupling and uncoupling...the process of globalization is an intricate, conflictive articulation of forces, rather than just a dual dialectic."

Ang (2003:38) concurs with this imperfection, but qualifies it as not "an absolute and permanent incompatibility". However, "we can only enter into dialogue with one another on the assumption that we can understand and comprehend each other, but to the extent that full mutual understanding (which would amount to full mutual identification and sameness) is impossible, the common discursive worlds we construct through our dialogues will always be necessarily partial". Ang quickly points out that this 'disadvantage' actually induces concentration on an effort to try more and more to be understood, despite "intercultural acceptance of risks, unexpected detours, and complexities of relation between break and closure. Every artistic excursion and theoretical venture requires that boundaries be ceaselessly called to question, undermined, modified, and reinscribed." (Trinh T. Minh-Ha 1991:232)

It could be suggested that the Maltese-Australian artist in a way identifies with the Chinese artist Chen [Zhen] (2001:40) who states; "in the use of the phrase *rongzhao jingyan* the

experience of blending together and transcending experience: to penetrate into humanity to combine with others to make one whole.”

Making one whole is envisaged as establishing and maintaining universal harmony as an ideal; “And let me add, universality of humanity is the horizon by which all politics of recognition, to be meaningful, needs to orient itself.” (Bauman 2001:135). How and why so? Bauman (2001:140) answers “universality of humanity does not stand in opposition to the pluralism of the forms of human life; but the test of truly universal humanity is its ability to accommodate pluralism and make pluralism serve the cause of humanity, to enable and encourage ongoing discussion about the shared conception of the good as long as we mitigate against the possibility that “on the other hand, pluralism can be a prison without walls. Borges once told the story about the best labyrinth: The desert’s incommensurate openness, from which it is impossible to escape.” (Mosquera 2003:22).

There are in fact some reservations about aspects of ‘labyrinthian’ globalisation. For example, Robert Hughes (1980:345) who came up with the interesting idea of people searching the T.V., flipping from channel to channel, in effect editing their own montages “in a chaotic way, we make our own montages in between watching the montages of others.” It shows a degree of scepticism because while we are looking at images of reality, we are not living reality. Hughes (1980:345) asserts that “whole societies have learned to experience the world vicariously, in terms of swift montage and juxtaposition. But its effect has not been (as artists in the twenties hoped) to convey us towards the heart of reality, wherever that organ may be, but rather to insulate and estrange us from reality itself, turning everything into disposable spectacle; catastrophe, love, war, soap. Ours is the cult of the electronic fragment.”

Relative to the local and the global in art, in his essay *Chinese Artists in France*, John Clark (2004:224) quotes the words of Hou Hanru in Köppel-Yang, *Zeng Shengtian* who “considers that Chinese artists overseas not only provide information and other materials for other artists in China, but they stimulate their imaginative powers, and they themselves in Western society open up a space for a multi-ethnic site in truly globalising artistic creation.”

This quote may be coupled with a quote from Rosa Martinez (1999) regarding her curating a Santa Fe Biennial. “The title of the biennial is *Looking for a Place*, because we have to reinvent the places occupied by art, beyond the limitations of disciplines, cross over the museum walls, discover the implications in the separation of public and private spaces and redefine the politics of exploitation... Art must contribute to make the world a more habitable place.” Martinez cited in Marian Pastor Roces (2004:240) who also says that: “A more habitable place was similarly claimed at the 2000 Shanghai Biennial, expressed as a struggle with the ruling powers of the People’s Republic of China.”

Martinez’s dictum about reinventing art places is agreeable to Papastergiadis who, as Erin O’Connor (2010) says, reviewing Papastergiadis’ *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, “The context of globalisation, Papastergiadis observes, has profoundly altered our experience of place, altering the nature of artistic responses to new political issues. To ask ‘what is the place of art today?’ is not, he suggests, to simply account for the state of contemporary art. Rather, it involves a reflection on ‘some of the journeys and transformations’ – the complex patterns of exchange and new forms of attachment - that inform and inspire artistic practice, production and dissemination.”

Summary

It is pertinent to summarise the issues that provide a framework for discussion in some detail, comparing and contrasting applicability to the eight individual artists.

In brief the diaspora is seen as a state of physically living away from the original habitation acceptably toiling to acclimatise with a host society, and, whilst establishing a new cultural home, remembering the original, render an influence on existence. Hybridity in diaspora creates new identities. These differ from the locals, yet harmony is enhanced by the similarity of thinking that is inherent in universal human nature. In the artists’ case, art is another means by which they are able to negotiate identities. In the abstract to their article, Smith, DeMeo and Widmann (2011:186) articulated “for marginalized populations separated from their homelands, the arts are one of the most effective ways by which groups negotiate their identities at the crossroads of various cultures and influences. Through both hybridized and

traditional artistic presentations, translocal and transnational communities engage the issues of identity in ways that renegotiate, challenge and define the unique characteristics that make them who they are.

The researcher set out to explore whether it does and, if so, how living in diaspora is reflected in the artists' performance. In this context, the researcher was interested in the artists' perceptions of their own works and also finding out the effectiveness of particular art works by themselves without the need of their authors' additional information in words.

Art is influenced by its place of initiation and time. So, the researcher took note of the whereabouts and the period relevant to artists' work and endeavoured to engage the shape that attaches to it by these two phenomena.

Interest in working across two cultural landscapes, necessitated focus, primarily by means of discussion, on the day to day mode of living, the thinking and the feeling in a comparative exercise involving carrying over of past existence, nostalgic remembering including inaccurate reinventing, and incorporating the new. This concept has been referred to by various theorists as cross-cultural hybridisation or binarism or heterogeneity, but they warn against absolute and exclusive classifications. Variance in degree of adaptability by individuals to this psycho-cultural experience called for attention.

An 'acculturation' process aided adaptability by means of a number of actions, such as, in the artists' case, exhibiting their work in solo as well as in group exhibitions mixing with the 'other', and significantly exhibitions which are organised to celebrate certain local historical and cultural events. Once again, referring to working across two cultural landscapes involves nostalgia and the yearning of the past that is associated with it is one aspect, but another is its constructive use in the present and its contributing to future combinations. The research encompassed reflection on art of these two facets in visual and lingual offering. Nostalgia reflected on the way which is lived metaphorically for self-portraiture.

Identity thus formed is incomplete at any time. It remains open to evolving situations and flexibly orientated in its response to complex modernity and post-modernity. Identity

changing formation is also fraught with struggles, not conflicts. Modern, post-modern and global considerations impact on identity and hence on art as a reflection of identity. Nonetheless, all 'isms' recycle.

Matters, both problematic and accordant, relate to simply being in, and then, working in the circumstance of diaspora. They apply to the Maltese-Australian artists interviewed for this study, additionally to the researcher himself likewise working in the condition of diaspora.

Chapter 2

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE – SIMILARITY OF THINKING

An introduction to each of the eight Maltese-Australian artists is appropriate prior to discussing their *status quo* and continuing reactions to the matters raised in chapter 1.

Maree Azzopardi

Maree Azzopardi (Image 1) is a professional artist who had numerous solo exhibitions in Australia, Malta and Italy. She was born in New South Wales Australia, her parents being Maltese, and is a member of a large family. Her parents and grand-parents, by living the 'Maltese way', instilled in her, a love of Malta. However, her personal religious orientation, differs from that of her parents and grand-parents, but respects their choice to remain faithful to their own strict Catholic upbringing.

Azzopardi is a highly original artist in choice and in presentation of subject matter. Visiting Malta, she changed her impression of 'poorness of culture' to seeing it more richly. She uses photography that she sometimes juxtaposes and alters and adds other media to compose works that accord with her message. She originated works dealing with AIDS, having observed in hospital for quite some time people afflicted by the illness and on their death bed. Another subject was the Virgin Mary represented in context of feminism. Also fish, being an early Christian icon, as symbolic of religion as well as of Maltese culture, Malta being a group of Islands amenable to fishing. Azzopardi goes in meaning beyond the basic representation to relevant cultural associations and to higher levels of thinking. Her work suggests so, and she herself articulates these interpretations. Azzopardi's *modus operandi* is to work in series. Some series titles speak for themselves: 'Shadow, Relic' and 'Flesh: Humana' (Images 2,3), 'Chrysalis' (deals with AIDS) (Images 4,5), 'Missing...From the Garden' (deals with AIDS), 'Fishworks', 'I Walk the Line', and 'The Poet Assassinated'.



Image 1 - Maree Azzopardi



Image 2 Maree Azzopardi - Relic - Sacred Feet - Humana - Shadow, Relic & Flesh



Image 2 Maree Azzopardi - Relic - Sacred Hand - Humana - Shadow, Relic & Flesh



Image 4 - Maree Azzopardi - Mark - Chrysalis



Image 5 - Maree Azzopardi - Gordon - Chrysalis

Paul Borg

Paul Borg (Images 6,7) is a professional artist and also teaches art and is well known within the Maltese community in Victoria. Born in Australia of Maltese parents, he made use of Maltese background images, particularly in his early work. His style reflects a fine realistic artist but is not content with mere representation. Thus when he presents a familiar subject such as a view of his street, Borg endeavours to put mood into it, and infers social commentary. He deals with varied subjects such as self-portraits, for example the unusual 'Self-Portrait on Painting Rags' with true likeness as well as connotation of labour for achievement of the ideal and sacrifice to so achieve as in the painting 'Go in Rags'. Family is often the subject of personal works, for example 'Mum, six months here, six months there,' referring to caravanning travel, and 'Dad since the by-pass' (Image 9), showing dad holding a cage with a bird inside, implying restricted living and the preciousness of life needing looking after. He deals uniquely with the issue of migration and life and settlement within a new environment. For example 'Drifting' (Image 12) and 'Moving Home' (Image 13), to telling pictures depicting home frames, therefore not yet filled with new life objects, being carried on top of closed suitcases drifting on the waves. 'Interior of Past and Present' (Image 11) offers a commentary on the 'two homes idea': the reference to life in Malta is translated from the Maltese lace in the foreground and the Maltese luzzu (fishing boat) in a corner of one room, whilst two figures, one male and one female, are sitting together. The image of the lady playing the piano (a new tune of migration?) is seen in another room through an open door. The natural environment is another concern of this artist. Powerful works like 'A Sacrifice, in an Accumulative Culture', 'Fracture, Fragmented Hill', 'Progress', and 'Made Redundant' lament the devastation of nature by humans, intending to progress on one hand, destroy in another. The paraphernalia of modern living and gigantic scaffolds are used to construct a weird crucifixion in three panels imitating church painting suggesting, what we now worship. Other subject matter is handled by Borg, a versatile artist.

The researcher was escorted through Borg's large studio in the back yard of his home and some works in progress suggest a continuum of serious themes as in the above mentioned and the meaningful psychological work 'Since that Day (The Day of September '11)'.



Image 6 - Paul Borg
Self - Portrait on Painting Rags

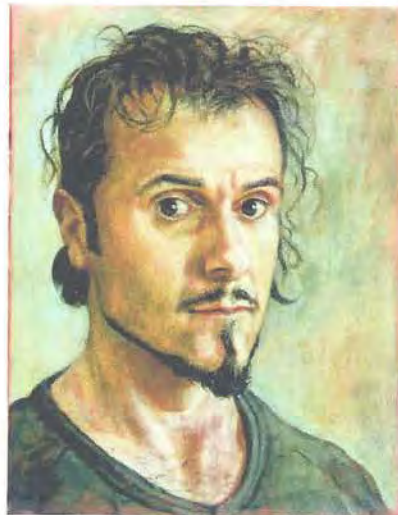


Image 7 - Paul Borg Self - Portrait



Image 8 - Paul Borg Mum Six Months Here, Six Months There



Image 9 - Paul Borg Dad Since the By-Pass



Image 10 - Paul Borg - Super Jesus



Image 11 - Paul Borg - Interior of Past and Present

Image 12 - Paul Borg Drifting

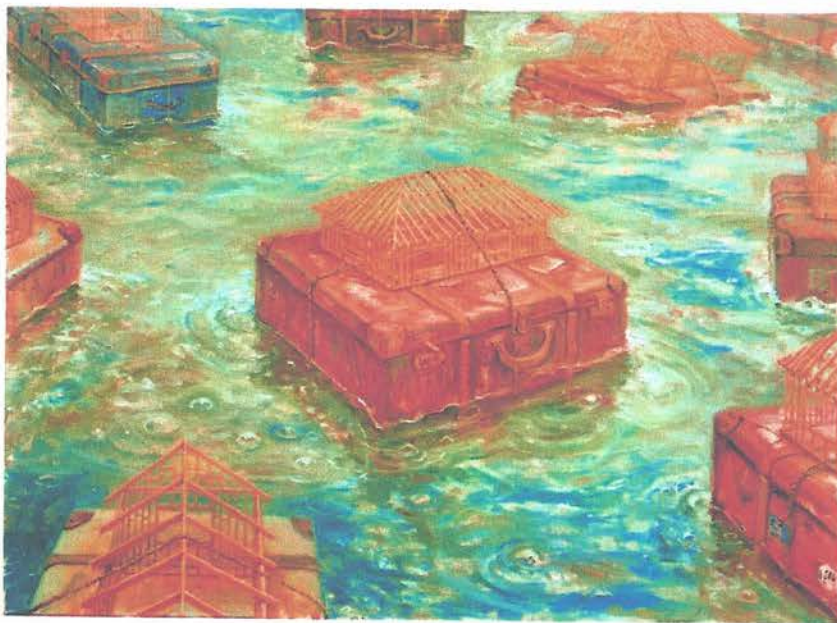
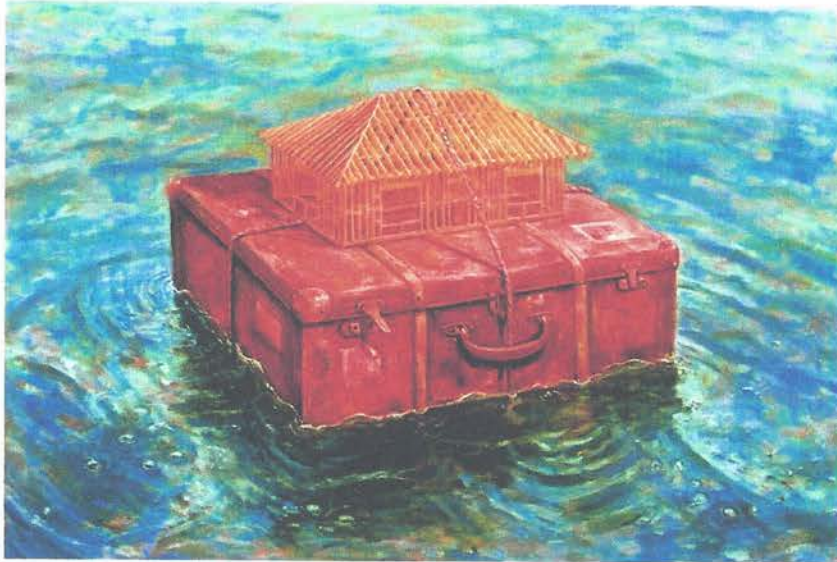


Image 13 Paul Borg Moving Home

Percy Cartwright

It is difficult to gauge supremacy in the varied thematic choices of Percy Cartwright (Image 14), another artist of 'ideas' presented in abstraction which require concentration from viewers, but can be 'translated' once Cartwright's 'language' is learnt. His studio in the basement of his home is full of sizable paintings and work in progress, for example 'Life Travel' that he is comfortable to discuss and to acknowledge that they often needed concentrated attention to draw out their meaning. Titles are helpful. For example, one may not grasp immediately the symbolism of the half face, even though it trickles blood, with staring eyes and the stylised fingers in 'The Hand of Christ'. There are some alphabetical letters written across, but the nearly totally black canvas would seem to present difficulty to decipher the painting 'Friend's Death' which relates to an incident of fatality caused by drug overdose.

In accord with Borg's interest in contemporary events, Cartwright also dramatically put in paint his reaction to September '11 (Image 16). In his own words: "It tells you what it's about: September '11. You see the mask on the top right. You also see the tower and people falling from there. It's a bit surreal, because the tower is still up, hasn't fallen; on the left side of the picture its already fallen, and I read in the paper somewhere that when the piece fell, it fell in the shape of a cross; so this part of mingling metal and people went through the cross. The hand in here has splinters of metal and flames going up, so it's still drama happening. I normally like to put eyes, but in this situation a hand felt everything, with the hand you can always feel the shape, so the hands are always more important".

Cartwright is always original in his conceptual ways of thematic dealing. He also pays homage to the surrealism of Salvador Dali, as in Cartwright's 'Millenium' with the clock image and to the bizarre dreams of Francisco Goya, in Cartwright's 'Detox'. The artist explained his painting Detox as "That's related to drugs. He's a drug addict and he wants to come out of it, and he's suffering, stressful, blood, everything. But the green is beautiful here: it represents the earth, and its broken through and its got blood coming through it and he's putting the belt on his arm and he's sticking his needle. I feel sorry for people on drugs; they are trying to get out."

Cartwright previously lived in Hamrun Malta. He carries in his remembrance and partly in lifestyle a haunting representation of Maltese culture, but uncontroversially proclaims links to the contemporary global in his art production.

Image 14 - Percy Cartwright
holding cartoon of Saint Philomena

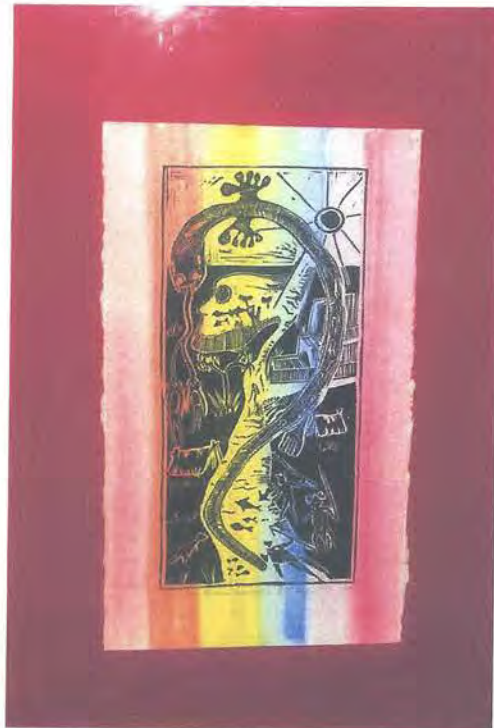


Image 15 - Percy Cartwright
Dreaming



Image 16 - Percy Cartwright September 11



Image 17 - Percy Cartwright Future Noah's Ark - Mother Theresa's The Vehicle



Image 18 - Percy Cartwright Claiming Right

Joseph Engerer

There is no hesitation in saying that one of the best classically Baroque artists in the Maltese Islands is Joseph Engerer (Images 19, 20) who is well known and lives in Nadur, Gozo. He lived for a number of years in Melbourne. Engerer states that “when I migrated to Australia I felt more or less like every migrant from whatever country who feels somewhat socially isolated; but rather than staying home dreaming or complaining, I got up and went to learn playing the guitar.” He played the guitar in a trio entertaining the Maltese community. The guitar features in some of his paintings. Painting also mitigated against loneliness. Engerer mentioned that he did some paintings *en plein air* in Melbourne, but he is basically a studio-based artist. He maintains that the subject matter that he enjoys painting is “a reflection of the mentality and culture of Malta”. Prominent subjects are flower and fruit still life (Image 23) bound with the appreciation of nature, and Maltese history, particularly the involvement of the Knights of Saint John and the second Great World War. Explicit religious subjects are noticeably absent from his work, although he agrees that there is a spiritual aspect on looking at beauty thinking about flower pictures. He adds that there are roses which are named after saints, such as the Saint Joseph Roses and the Madonna Flowers.

To Engerer items of still life carry a symbolic meaning: “pomegranates signify life, flies imply contamination and the passing of time. In times past a lot of religious significance attached to still life. Today it is not so significant. But in itself, the work is synonymous with nature’s beauty.” Anomalously, he parallels beauty of realistic still life with abstraction, saying “you simply feel that nature produces something so beautiful, the same as certain abstract painting that does not push any message or form, but is so beautiful in itself because it exists by itself”.

Melitensia is frequent in whatever work he creates, as if a signature tune. Often this symbolic Malteseness is presented recognisably in the distant background. Examples are: ‘The Window’ that interestingly shows a flower still life before a window opening and in the distance duplicates the window idea by showing the famous Gozitan landmark called ‘The Window’. ‘The Old Windmill’ is in fact the title of the painting, although the windmill is in the background of the prominent flower still life in the foreground. ‘Flowers In A Wooden

Vase' is a still life of flowers in the foreground and a '*razzett u hajt tas-sejjieh*' (a Maltese type of farm and a rubble wall) in the background. Works foregrounding Melitensia include 'local bounty a still life of *gbejna* (Maltese cheese delicacy), a *kenur* (small stone stove), a kerosene lamp and clay pot, also the paintings *Gbejniet Tal-Bzar* (pepper cheeses) and 'Dinner Time' with fruit, Maltese cheese and wine.

Engerer's work evidences his statement that "still life is sometimes called *natura morta* (dead nature). I prefer to use the term 'still life', and I include a segment of country side which lends a glimpse of the Maltese or Gozitan environment. We are blessed here with the quality of the environment, and Gozo has an intact environment and so it produces beautiful scapes. I personally like to incorporate them."



Image - 19 Joseph Engerer Painting in his studio at Gozo, Malta in presence of the researcher, his wife and daughter



Image - 20 Joseph Engerer being interviewed by the researcher in Joseph's studio , Gozo, Malta



Image 21 - Joseph Engerer A Rotation of Scouts



Image 22 - Joseph Engerer The Defenders

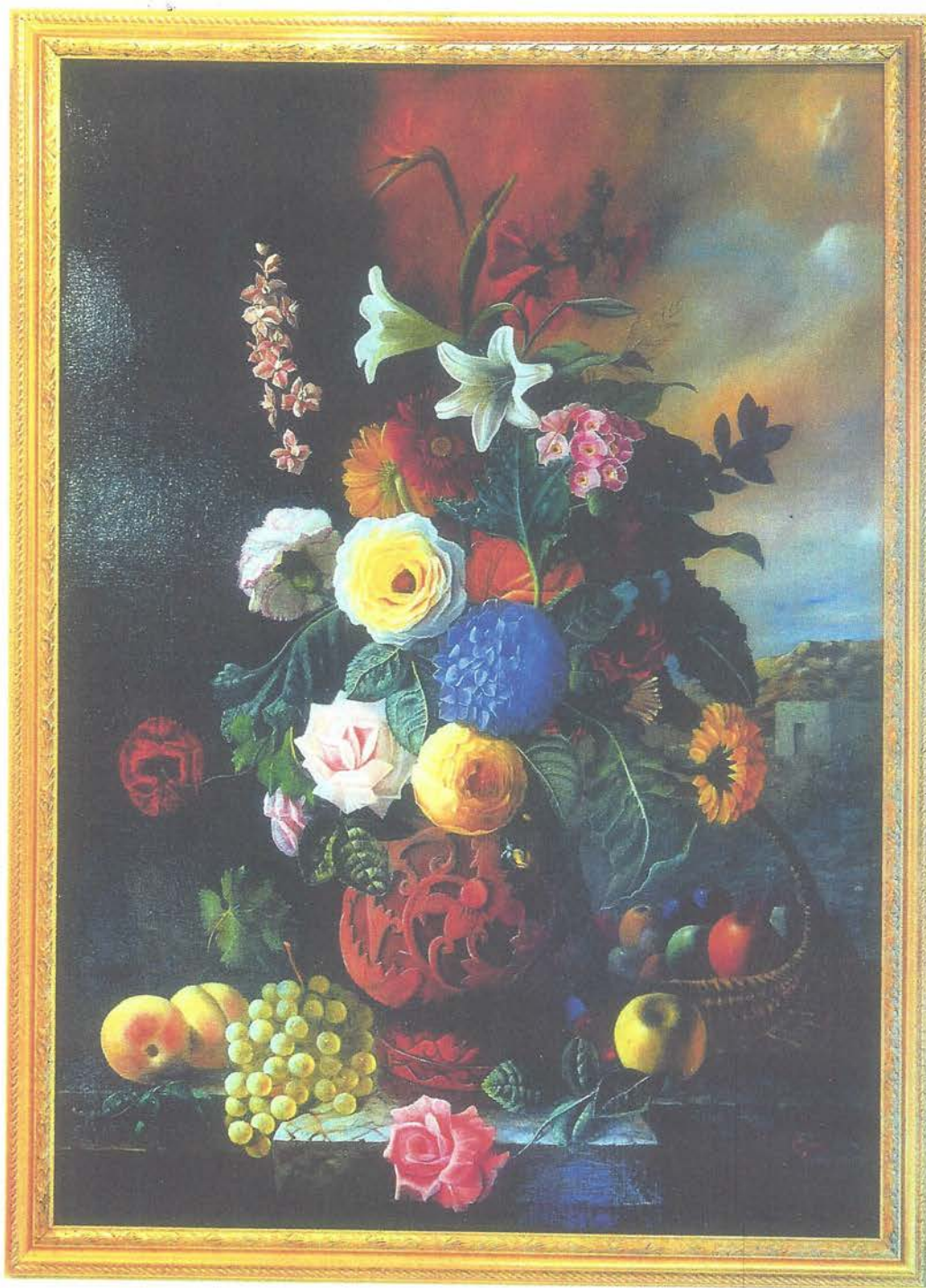


Image 23 - Joseph Engerer - Flowers in a Wooden Vase

Paul Xaviour Gatt

Paul Xaviour Gatt (Image 25) was a self-taught artist and was uninfluenced by any classroom-studio disposition advocating twenty-first century currency. His work is personal in his perception and, if his beliefs remained unchanged from when he first took up art decades previously, therefore he remained consistent. His work is realistically faithful to actuality in traditional colours such as deep blue-green of the Mediterranean Sea, light blue of clear sunny skies warmly yellow-tinged at the horizon.

Conversing with Gatt, the researcher understood that Gatt felt identically as the majority of the Maltese community of Australia, as much as can be ascertained. He had the same retention of love of the motherland. His imagination was full of pictures of Malta as he knew it before emigrating. He had the same longing, but this was tempered by the knowledge that he was leading a good life in Australia and that his immediate family was around him. He was not a prolific artist and did not live (in Greystanes NSW) on the proceeds of art. He was a hobbyist whose pictures decorate his home walls. They invariably show Maltese landscapes and streetscapes and he identified himself with some particular figures such as a man on a boat “You may reckon that’s me going back to Malta”.

The researcher attempted to interview Gatt a second time, but sadly learned that he had passed away. His wife Doris sentimentally showed the researcher around his pictures and brought out his paint box with paint tubes and brushes (Image 27).

Examples of Gatt’s work are ‘Sliema, Malta, Beach Road’ (Image 24). The scene highlights the road to Balluta and buildings overlooking the sea. It sentimentally emphasises the road that Gatt would have at times travelled in a recreational outing. It accounts for the artist omitting to include the monumental Church of Lady of Mt.Carmel which possibly he did not often stop to visit. The researcher also painted the same scene, but in his case the church is prominent, mindful of his attending religious ceremonies within it. Gatt, however, gave prominence to a church in ‘Village Church, Malta’ (Image 28). The name of the village was not disclosed. ‘The Eye Watch Tower’ (Image 29), uses a subject, which typically recalls Malta’s surrounding bastions, and is a subject favoured by many Maltese artists.

There is not the slightest hint in Gatt's work that he explored any other subject matter other than the representation of Malta, despite the fact that he emigrated to Australia when he was eleven and lived here for over forty years.

Gatt relates his memory of Malta to his life there as a youth, supplemented by various visits in his adult life. He considers his paintings as personal, giving as an example, painting bastions, he stated that "the memory that sticks out is of when we were young and we used to swim below them, smelling the smell of dangling capers [bushes] and the sea. As you paint, it is as if you can smell them".¹

¹ Gatt: "L-unika memorja li kelli hija ta' meta konna zgħar u konna nghumu taħthom, ixxomm ir-riha tal-kappar u tal-baħar. Waqt li qed tpingiha, qisek qed ixxommha."



,Image 24 - Paul Xaviour Gatt Sliema, Malta, beach road buildings, overlooking the sea



Image 25 - Paul Xaviour Gatt being interviewed by the Researcher in Gatt's home at Greystanes, NSW



Image 26 - Paul Xaviour Gatt - Two fishermen at their boat, Malta



Image 27 Doris Gatt holding Paul's - her late husband paint boxes at their home in Greystanes, NSW



Image 28 - Paul Xaviour Gatt Village Church, Malta

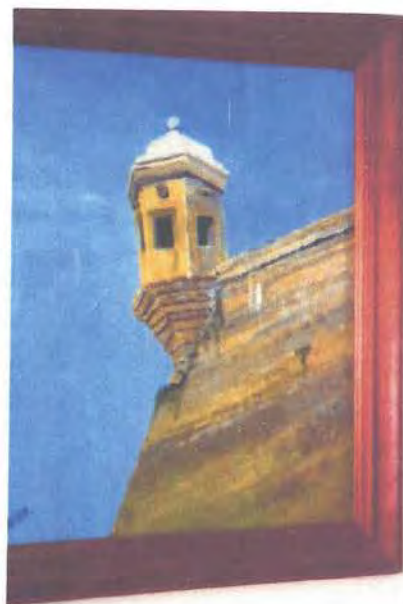


Image 28 - Paul Xaviour Gatt
The Eye Watch Tower on top of a bastion corner, Malta

Mark Gerada

Gerada expresses the same idea as Azzopardi and Gatt when he states that “this is with other cultures also, when they are living here, it’s like being frozen in time”. But it does not mean that Gerada lives in one cultural landscape. Although the landscape prevails (Images 31,32,33), there are many pictures that suggest interacting with another cultural landscape. On the one hand, he produced ‘Zejtun’ (his mother’s village birth place), ‘Sahha’ (Goodbye), ‘Leaving this Place, Strathnaver’ (name of migrants’ ship), ‘Leaving Customs House for a mystery land on the other side of the world’, ‘Nannu’s Garage’ and ‘Nannu’s BBQ’, whilst on the other hand he painted ‘We Can Do Whatever We Want’, ‘52 Garfield Street’, ‘61 Eddy Street’, ‘The Black Cuillin Mountains’, ‘Glamaig 2’, and ‘The Red Hills’.

Referring to hybridity, Gerada asserts that “in the case of the Maltese, it was easy to assimilate in this (Australian) culture which has a lot of British content”. He adds “it’s an advantage to be both Maltese and Australian. It depends where I am. In Malta I am an Australian artist. Over here (Australia) I am a Maltese artist.”

Gerada’s belief was repeated by John Paul Grech, Representative of the Republic of Malta to the United Nations in the International Dialogue on Migration held in Geneva on the 18-19 June 2013. It was reported that “he (Grech) underscored the excellent qualities of the Maltese migrants and their capacity to effectively integrate themselves well within foreign communities. He referred to the significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of their recipient host countries, adding to each indelible aspects of Maltese traditional customs and beliefs.”

The researcher asked for comment, remarking “you are anything but a *plein air* artist. You are more an abstract thinking, cerebral, emotional thinking artist.”, to which Gerada replied “but thinking can be very literal as well. But the portrayal at the end may not be so literal, which confuses.”

Gerada was prompted to speak further about his art. Inter alia, he explained that “I love colour and texture. I get my colour theory from Kandinsky [his book *The Spirituality In Art*] I

actually worked my undergraduate thesis on architecture on Kandinsky. Art helps visual communication through any form. I learned a lot about Kandinsky who had a scientific approach to theory and colour, composition, form and space, all those things to do with sculpture. My work became more abstracted, and the more I forgot what Kandinsky was talking about, the more he was subconsciously teaching me. And I love people like Malevich and I love his idea of minimalism. Abstract to me is understanding the rules and knowing how to break the rules.”



Image 30 - Mark Gerada

Mark Gerada : Image 31 Malta Landscape
Image 32 - Dingli, Malta Inland Sea
Image 33 - Mellieha, Malta Ridge
Image 34 - Boat Shed and Luzzu, Malta
Image 35 - Maltese Fishing Boats

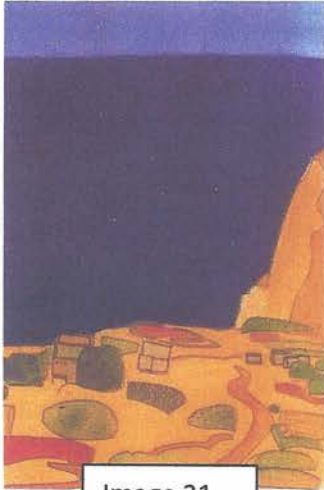


Image 31

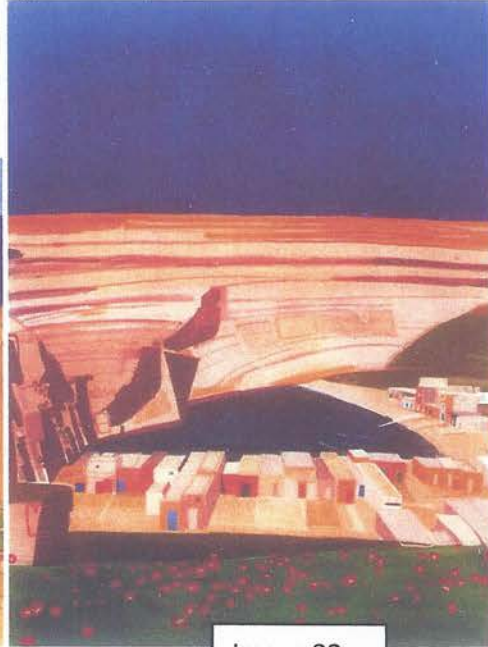


Image 32

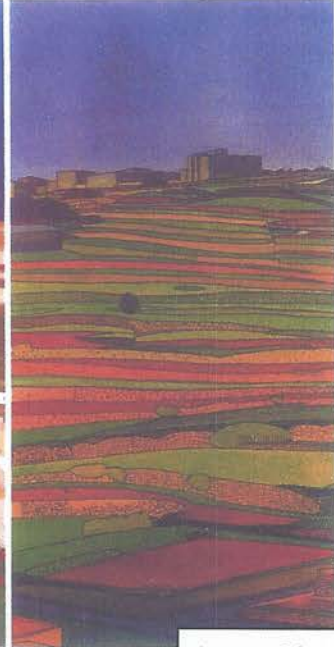


Image 33



Image 34

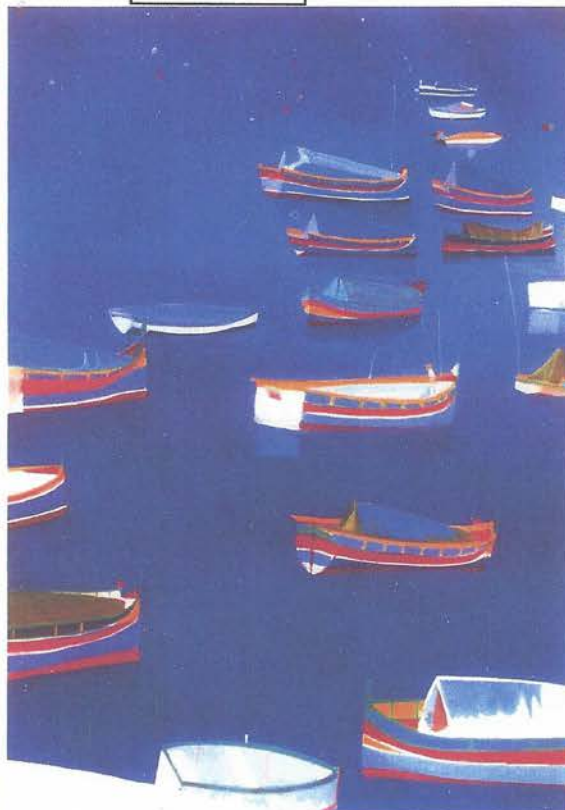


Image 35

Victor Grech

Grech is a painter, potter, sculptor and art teacher. He taught art at the Malta *Lyceum* for thirteen years, and in Australia for twenty years. Coming to Australia as an adult, he carried Maltese cultural influence in his outlook and consequently in his art which was mainly produced in Australia. He acknowledges Maltese impact, conscious and subconscious, in his choice of subject matter, though this is not exclusive, but there is the influence of the famous British sculptor Henry Moore in the sculpture pieces. Though not large, they are suggestive of massiveness. He says that Moore was influenced by the Stonehenge monoliths. There may be parallelism in the Maltese Neolithic megaliths being perceived to affect Grech's sculptures with massiveness.

He visits Malta every three to four years and sees more of Malta than when he lived there. He states: "take me, for instance, I am a Gozitan, but also lived in Malta. I did not visit certain places when I lived there. Now, because I do not live there, I do."

Grech is aware of, or personally attends, Maltese events, amongst which he mentions the Holy Week procession at Horsley Park, NSW, the Don Bosco and the Saint George processions in NSW, and Maltese council and Maltese clubs functions.

The remembrance of Maltese customs remain right through all the earth that the migrant is abroad according to all interviewed artists, including Grech, but the idea of hybridity is acceptable. Grech says that "when I was just a youth, we did go abroad here and there, but when you emigrate you learn certain aspects, you see certain differences; I say you do not necessarily become a wise person, but you will be aware of certain things that if I had stayed in Malta is unlikely to have accepted them."

In common with other immigrants, Grech's regret is the distance of this continent from Europe, because although here is agreeable to him, ideally travel between two continents could be more expedient. In his opinion, an artist should not do without first hand exposure to European and British art.



Image 36 - Victor Grech - Still Life with Fruit, Figures and Clay Jar - reminiscent of Malta



Image 36 - Victor Grech being interviewed by Researcher in Grech's home at Bass Hill, NSW



Image 38 - Victor Grech - Abstract



Image 39 - Victor Grech - The Oracle



Image 40 - Victor Grech - Horse, fish, cock and other sculptures

Marianne Vidal Potts

Marianne Vidal Potts (Image 41) is a print maker who does linocuts, holographs and lithographs. Potts migrated to Australia in 1970 when she was eighteen. She did a great deal of drawing in Malta, an example being 'Child' (Image 43) but she considers that she started her art career seven years ago, initially as therapy following a street accident. She says that differences in Australia made her think of Maltese culture and art which were taken for granted while living there. Contrary to the other Maltese-Australian artists, Potts depicts subterranean Malta. Her prints of the catacombs (Images 42,44,45&46) raised the interest of non-Maltese people, particularly historians, who were interested to find out more about Malta. In so doing, her remembrance of, and identification with, Maltese culture was further awakened. She says "I want to be Maltese and also want to be New Australian. I feel pride that I am Maltese with the right things that my parents have instilled in me and that I tried to instil in my kids", adding "we Maltese have mixed with the Australians and there have been no problems as far as we are concerned, and my kids [in their thirties] are so happy with a little bit of Maltese tradition also...I had no trouble fitting in. I fitted in quite well." Asked to comment whether it is paramount or simply advantageous to experience Malta by visiting if one is intent on producing genuine Maltese type art or does contemporary media fulfil this purpose, she remarked that "there is a lot on the internet but Malta itself, the whole island is a place of history. As you walk on it, each corner there is a church with all the antique things, and each corner has fortified walls, and underground everywhere they're finding out catacombs but little passages that go from one end of the island to another. It's something to go and see."

To Potts the catacombs denote that there is another kind of world and different cultures exist and her art points to her appreciation of her cultural inheritance that has been amassed throughout the ages. This thought was also expressed by Azzopardi, saying "I very much believe that what's coming through me is coming through Malta's six thousand years of history".



Image 41 - Marianne Vidal Potts



Image 42 - Marianne Vidal Potts - Underground Wonders - 2, Malta - linocut



Image 43 - Marianne Vidal Potts - Child - pencil



Image 44 - Marianne Vidal Potts - Underground Wonders - 1, Malta - linocut

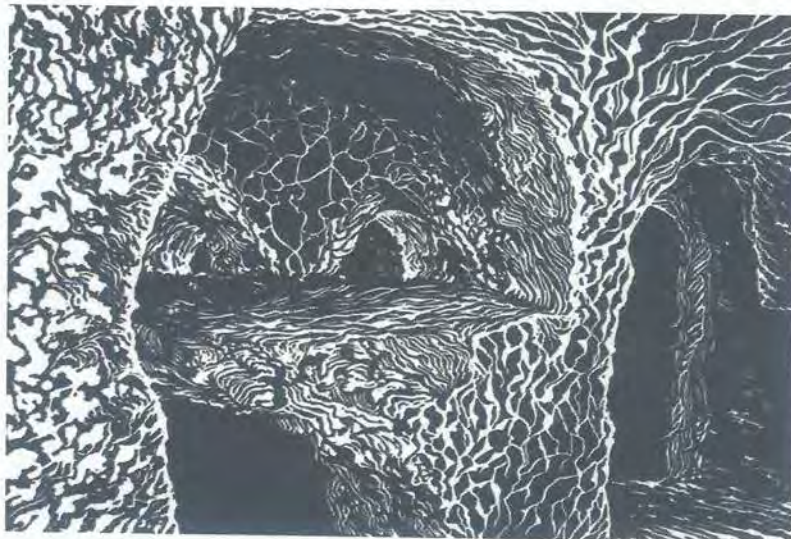


Image 45 - Marianne Vidal Potts - Rock Arches, Malta - linocut



Image 46 - Marianne Vidal Potts - Catacombs, Malta - litograph

Analysis of artists' attitudes and performance

The eight Maltese Australian artists interviewed are working across two different cultural landscapes. They verbally express this idea when questioned, notwithstanding that in every case there is a non-conscious realisation of the work proceeding in this manner. In the case of Joe Engerer, because in the last few years he has been living in Malta, cultural hybridity is currently inapplicable to his work. His work, whilst he lived in Australia, similarly to other Maltese-Australian artists, often inclined towards reminiscing of Maltese life, depicting objects and places that typified Malta, whilst inclusion of typically Australian references was accepted even if gradually. The struggle to balance the content and outlook of the work to mirror a changing pattern of living demanded a dedicated effort. The study elicited that indeed the “narratives of displacement” (Hall 1994, 1995) coupled with the forging of a new “positionality” (Hall 1994, 1995) are indeed discerned in ways that are either obvious or subtle. The concept of a “common culture” whereby it is a reflection of humanity that ‘humans think through similarity’ Smith’s view (Beilharz 1997:16) is accepted by all interviewed artists, but this agreement does not negate the enduring tendency to reflect individual experience of habituating in a specific original environment.

Maree Azzopardi expressly says in interview “I think most people in the world think the same, except to their individual circumstances what they find important to their lives. I think basically people are similar all over the world. Their family is important, their own culture, religion is important.” Whilst she affirms “I think fundamentally they are, yes, yes [they are similar], she adds the qualification “protecting their culture is important”. Azzopardi unknowingly answers the question whether cultural pluralism “improves the quality of shared existence” (Bauman, 2001:135-136) when she says: “I think us Maltese are the Number One assimilators than any culture I’ve ever seen.”

Paul Borg, is in agreement with Azzopardi, that “experience of life can make us similar”, not disregarding that “because I was born here in Australia, makes me think in a certain way. If I had been born in another country, in another culture, I would think differently, similar to people over there.”

It would make a difference to the stability of the world, according to Victor Grech, who exemplifies by citing Australia and the European Union as two instances whereby harmony of co-existence is visible. He says that “if you look at Australia, there are many ethnic groups, but they form one nation for the good of this nation... A single race is ideal as there would be less conflict in the world... In the European Union you may go wherever you want, work in any of its countries, its countries co-operate with each other.”²

Percy Cartwright likewise thinks “well we do think the same, but at the same time we are different because in Malta we live in a closely knit community, houses not as big as here and close to each other. We should not forget Malta.” Then he adds this telling image: “Malta is like my mother. Australia adopted me.”

A corollary to the above, is the consideration of deliberateness of identification of cultural similarities and the theoretical possibility of usage of a common language, benefitting harmonisation through similarity with the host society. Azzopardi, Borg and Grech again expressed agreement with this concept, but again stressing the desirability of retention of aspects that pronounce a particular original identity.

Asked whether it is important to retain our original language, and why don't we have a universal approach, Azzopardi stated “If you don't know who you are, where would you go? ... We can be all one in our thinking and we can all have one language, but we need our past, we need our ancestry and it's there anyway.” She points to a consequence if the connection with the past is subdued, saying “I believe it's within us and when people don't know their past, they always feel displaced.”

Agreeing with Azzopardi, Cartwright observes that, whatever language we are using, Maltese people merge and mix easily with other nationalities and it's just as culturally harmonious if the Maltese language was upheld, because “this country really accepts any language. There is no animosity, no feeling that it's causing harm if we use another language... It makes me feel Maltese that I *inkellmek bil-Malti* [speak to you in Maltese]. When we speak Maltese it's

² Grech: Thares lejn L-Awstralja ... ghalkemm fiha hafna gruppi etnici, bhala pajjiz sa certu pont poplu wiehed u għall-gid tal-pajjiz ... Razza wahda, kieku ideali ghax ikun hemm inqas glied fid-dinja ... Hemm L-Unjoni Ewropea, tista'tmur fejn trid u tahdem f'liema pajjiz, qed jikko-operaw u jahdmu flimkien.

more direct, more meaningful.” Cartwright points out that first generation Maltese best make use of Maltese. He, for instance, converses with his wife in Maltese, but their children find it very difficult to learn Maltese which they perceive as full of idiosyncrasies.

Relevance to this aspect in the case of Borg is affected by the fact that he was born in Australia and lived here ever since. His love of Maltese culture originates from his Maltese parents. Looking at his current work, in some a European influence may be detected to a small degree, as distinct from his earlier work which consciously depicted identifiable icons of Maltese culture metaphoric in images of, for example, Maltese lace and fishing boats. He explains: “People might look and say they see the European influence, but I am not trying to make my work to seem like the work of a migrant. I live here. These are my surroundings.” He reiterates: “Naturally things come as they are part of my heritage, but I don’t deliberately make this painting very European. If it happens, well o.k. But I try to make paintings of my immediate life.”

Language as a main source of cultural identification is useful to Maltese-Australian artists as, conversing in it with others the Maltese atmosphere soon surfaces and effects the artists to feel and think Maltese. It is then more natural for them to echo their situation in their work. Grech, among others, is content to let his work evoke Malta and he names some of his sculptures in Maltese, for example, *Astratt* [Abstract] (Image 38) and *L-Oraklu* [The Oracle] (Image 39). Maintaining his occasions to feel and be Maltese, Grech affirms that “we use Maltese between ourselves” and he cites his experience at the La Valette, a Maltese Club, as an example; “if you visit La Valette you won’t hear other than people speaking Maltese.”³

Embodiment of cultural identity in the artists’ ‘performance’

In terms of identity, memory and ‘nostalgia’, Azzopardi, Borg, Engerer, Gerada and Potts verbally and actually in their work, even if not consciously at the time of its creation, give credence to the continuing Maltese colouring into their performance. The diasporic situation is discernible, less often in explicit ways than in subtlety in the work.

³ Grech: Bejnietna nuzawh il-Malti; per eżempju, tmur La Valette u hlief nies jitkellmu bil-Malti ma tismax.

Gatt and Potts admit most to the deliberateness of reflecting the culture of their origin in their work and in conformity with their intentions, manifestations are prolific, in Gatt's case in oil paintings and in Pott's in prints. Gatt's 'nostalgia' for Malta did not change in years of diaspora. He expressed perennial sadness and intense longing and looking back when on an airplane on way back to Australia. His mind wanders, such as when physically sick, and then has visions of Malta; "your mind as if it wants to go home, sort of you undergo a vision: look I am walking through the Buskett Gardens [at Rabat, Malta], let me draw it."⁴

Some initial works of Azzopardi and Gerada were focussed on Maltese subjects. For Azzopardi's, female figures of the ancient statues and the Madonna as symptomatic of the creative and dominant matriarchal stance in her work; and in Gerada's paintings, ships and other images connected with the Second Great War and the Siege of 1565 involving the Knights of St John and the Maltese besieged by the Turkish force. In their current work the focus sometimes surfaces Maltese cultural traits in an accidental manner: "... photographing one thing that I'm thinking of and then I go and get it developed and then someone sees something else in it, and this is where I come from; I'm talking about what's inherent in me, what's been passed down through generations, what's in myself ... why do I feel this connection to this land Malta before I even got there?... I very much believe that what's coming through me is coming through Malta's 6000 years of history. That very much is my makeup and I connect with that. I don't really know what it is, but I paint it and it comes through" (Azzopardi). Gerada likewise contemplates the emergence of Malteseness at completion of his work: "... recognising how it has changed me. And I learned a lot through going through the process of painting. I think you learn a lot through retrospect; it made me even more comfortable with my Maltese background."

Borg does not purposely reflect Maltese culture in his paintings admitting that he does not particularly want to be classed as Maltese as a painter but some viewers' opinion is that he is a Maltese artist. When he was written about as a Maltese artist, Borg reiterated: "I'm not. I have a Maltese heritage, but I am Australian." Engerer returned to Gozo, retained a love of Australia originating from his 18 years of living in Hoppers Crossing, Victoria, visits Australia where he and his wife have relatives and has painted *en-plein-air* in Australia, and

⁴ Gatt: mohhok donnu jrid imur id-dar, bhal speci tigik 'vision': ara ghaddej mill-Buskett; ha npingiha.

he feels 'at home' here where "I expand my point of view and absorb its culture although I retained the Maltese and Gozitan cultures. When I go there on holidays I feel the same as if I am coming to Gozo, I do not feel a stranger or out of place at all... I believe that changes that affect migrants are positive."⁵ He further says directly that "when I arrive there [in Australia] it's like going to my home in the same way".⁶ He unknowingly echoes Hall (Pile and Thrift, 1995:10) who writes that "translated men and women are people who belong to more than one world... have more than one home".

Maltese cultural background continues to be embedded in Cartwright's performance in diaspora. He's proud of the label Maltese-Australian artist, placing Maltese first. The greatest use of his background is the religious reference. Even his colours and tones come from the chiaroscuro of the classical paintings in churches and the Malta Museum. He says his use of Maltese 'colouring' is deliberate as well as subconscious. He is nearing conclusion of an assignment of painting thirty-eight individual saints on glass in the windows of the Good Shepherd Catholic church at Gladstone Park. Apart from these commissioned works, Cartwright's works are not of the holy haloed type. Particularly religious is his copy of Rubens' 'The Prodigal Son', "because of the story, I saw it in Malta. There is the Malta connection." But his works sing of good values without explicit moralizing. He uses surrealistic imagery as a message vehicle, such as in his 'Tears in Heaven' not only titled from a song by Eric Clapton, but composed thoughtfully on ideas evoked by the song.

Potts declares simply that, "I want to be Maltese and also want to be New Australian". Embodying Maltese images in her work, in particular often reproducing, including stylized interpretations, images of Maltese catacombs, Potts likes to accompany her linocuts with statements explaining aspects of Maltese history and prehistory, satisfying "people that I have never spoken to, they're interested in Malta, they ask questions."

Contrasting results between Maltese-Australian artists as well as some concerns from Malta when it was felt that its culture may be misrepresented by an artist were observed as shared

⁵ Engerer: f'art kbira bhalma hija L-Awstralja ... nitghallim u nespandi l-punt di vista tieghi ... u assortbejt il-kultura ghalkemm zammejt dik il-Maltija u Ghawdxija. Il-lum meta mmur ghall-holiday hemm inhossni bhalma qisni gej Ghawdex; immur l-Awstralja u ma nhossni assolutament xejn strangier jew out-of-place ... jiena nhoss li l-affarijiet li dahlu fl-emigrant huma pozittivi.

⁶ Engerer: xhin nasal hemmhekk qisni wasalt id-dar tieghi xorta wahda.

inequalities. Confirming Papastergiadis' (2010:56) dictum "there is never a singular form of cultural identity which acquires the benchmark status of stability", Azzopardi's work in her series of 'Fishworks' was deemed confronting as it departed from expected traditional approach in depicting the Madonna. A picture of hers showed the Madonna touching her heart, with a dorado fish dangling in front of her face and she is as if peeking out from behind it. The artist explains her motif: "this is a very Maltese piece, because the image of Mary was in Malta, right, and this is the national fish, the lampuki fish, and also because it is the symbol of Catholicism and for me subtly it's a symbol for paganism and women as well and for me it's celebrating a Mediterranean island with a full on fishing history and a full on Catholic history and it's almost like a tongue-in-cheek." When the series was shown in Italy and Sydney it found acceptance especially in the former. In Malta Azzopardi's experience is negativity viewed from the general public and positiveness from some critics, and gallery directors, prior to accepting exhibits, hesitated pondering the pros and cons of possible public reactions.

Borg contrasts with Azzopardi in treating his local Melburnian suburb in a metaphoric sense as "expressive of Western culture, but then it's not as culture, it's sort of globalisation ... in the sense of appealing to the whole world, if you like." Borg agrees with Caravaggio as having painted his local scenarios, works very Italianised, but they have a universal appeal, emotions which are shared by humanity. Borg is aware that suburbia has been seen as negative, "whereas I am trying not to show that ... I paint how I feel it and hopefully they can see the positive in it."

Gerada comments that artists in Malta find it hard to paint contemporaneously abstract towards which he leans. "It is hard for them for most are painting scenery or Jesus or the Madonna." He suggests that few in Malta, like Caesar Attard are really contemporary. In this he is in agreement with Azzopardi. They both feel justified in being different as abstractionists to the extent that they are reflecting the currency of living abroad in addition to showing traits of a Malta existence. Gerada, making some comparisons, notes that Schembri and John Vella do not connect with Malta, "on the other hand when I think of John Spiteri, there is a definite Maltese trend in his work."

Cartwright disagrees with Gerada and, although he has no personal contact with artists in Malta, he sees their work on the internet. He comments that, "I think we are getting similar work now. I have seen some good ones", referring to contemporary inclusive of abstract artists.

In conformity with Potts, Grech displays associations with pre-history which impacts on the quality of Malteseness. To him the Maltese influence is obvious, although he executed work over here⁷, and this influence was accepted when he used to exhibit with the Society of Manufacture and Commerce, Malta. He prefers to work in wood and ceramic. Nostalgic leaning is exemplified in Grech's using of Maltese geological material, notably stone to carve small sculptures such as the Rooster which has the dual connotation of roosters perching over the flat roofs of farms in Malta and metaphoring cultural national pride, and the Sydney Roosters of the Rugby League. Evoking pre-history, Grech carved a wooden sculpture which he called 'The Oracle' (Image 39). "Its idea is the Maltese megalith, the Maltese stone in the neolithic temples like Hagar Qim, L-Imnajdra and Il-Ggantija. It's as if it has a human head, and it has a hole ... the Oracle, a voice talking through the stone." (Grech)⁸

Living in two homes and two landscapes

All Maltese-Australian artists subscribe to the idea of concurrency of habitation. Azzopardi, Cartwright, Gerada, Grech and Gatt in particular strongly affirm this concept in unmistakable terminology. Azzopardi says that she spent 25 years reconciling herself to Malta, but also that lately she tried to make up for the lack of attention to Australia. She describes herself as, "I'm a Maltese-Australian". People do not find it difficult to see her as Australian. "They (people) go, 'You are not Maltese, you are Australian, you were born here.'" Her next pronouncement leaves no doubt about the other home, Malta. "I go 'I am Maltese, the blood through me, and even the way I think about the world, is very Maltese and I don't want anyone to take that away ... I shut my eyes at night and I feel that I am in Gozo (Malta), I can feel it'."

⁷ Grech: L-influwenza Maltija ovvja ghalkemm hdimtha hawnhekk.

⁸ Grech: L-idea tagħha hi l-megalith Malti, l-gebla Maltija fit-tempji neolitici bħal Hagar Qim, l-Imnajdra u l-Ggantija. Speci minn banda għandha qisha ras ta' bniedem, u għandha toqba qisha halq ... L-Oraklu, titkellem il-vuci minn gol-blata.

Her work as summarised by Jonathan Turner (1998), can be un-mistakenly European and, as she says “very Maltese”. Turner amplifies: “Much of Azzopardi’s work is closely aligned to religious imagery – crucifixes, fish, poses reminiscent of Mantegna’s Dead Christ, the colours of Caravaggio. ‘I was born on a small farm’ says Azzopardi, ‘and my whole childhood was obsessed with watching things being born and watching things rot, and having a house full of plastic Last Suppers and glow-in-the-dark Virgin Marys’”. Turner suggests that there is also an Australian perspective in her work which is not overly sentimentally Maltese; “Azzopardi’s mixed Australian-Maltese heritage gives her an unusual viewpoint from which she reinterprets the emotional impact of classical religious imagery” (Brochure to “The Humana Series – FLESH at the Libby Edwards Galleries, in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

Borg, on the other hand, assigns the two homes concept to the older Maltese. He differentiates this from the younger generation, including himself, although attachment to Malta is discernible particularly in his earlier work. He says “myself, my brother and sisters, my nephews and nieces, they don’t feel like they have got a home in Malta or that they have a life there.” He quickly adds “they’re proud of it and they like to talk about Maltese and that they have a Maltese background to their friends, but they don’t feel that that’s another home.”

The two homes, two world’s concept is not just applicable to other first generation Maltese, but also to Cartwright, answering with an emphatic ‘yes’ to this question, but biased towards mentally residing in Malta. He says that the older he gets, the more he thinks of his origin. He can feel this at his current age of 67. He is sure of his attachment: “If I go to America, for instance, it’s a big difference how I mentally psychologically feel. In Australia, I still feel that part of me is like still living in Malta.” He is somewhat assuaged through internet communication. If circumstances were agreeable, he would return to Malta permanently: “I would go yesterday. But I stay because of my family. I am happy here but the instinct of where you are raised [to the age of 19 in his case] is inbuilt in you, it’s like a programme. Maltese culture is accepted as an asset and it would not contribute to success in Australia if it were discarded.”

Gatt, who came to Australia at age eleven, told the interviewer that we are in Australia “as in a time capsule” This perception extends even to instances of visits to Malta where he expects to see his friends as young as when he left them, though he knows well enough that they have aged. This feeling abides despite a number of visits to Malta. Psychologically he is attuned to sociologists’ reference to the immigrant living in two countries at the same time. Gatt exemplifies this directly in his work. Regarding the Maltese connection, Gatt’s work compares with similar work done by commercial artists in Malta, stylistically faithfully representative of ‘beauty spots’. Artistically, there is the danger of succumbing to a tried repetitive formula which regales a quality of beauty and even of perfection honed by continual practice. Some of his works depict harbour fortifications, churches and boats. He identifies his youth with boats at Marsa waterfront. Sadly, Gatt has passed away. He told this interviewer that on retirement he would have liked to physically live both in Malta and here, more here because of his children. In his case, his children were brought up appreciating Maltese culture; they can speak Maltese and read Maltese newspapers.⁹

With Gerada, the ‘two homes’ idea is not always in the forefront of consciousness, but he feels it retrospectively when he exhibits his work. His work is fairly abstract, but it may include forms of passenger ships which have connotations of emigrating to Australia, and he explained that some colours, notably intense *phthalo cum veridian*, are evocative of the Mediterranean sea. He went further – what could be more intimate? – saying “When I think of Malta, I feel really nice. The environment I’m living in now is not like Malta, it’s very green and lush, the opposite to Malta... I also feel like making the walls of my house thicker like the Maltese walls... big limestone walls... It’s a purely aesthetic thing.” By contrast, the interviewer lives in a solid brick home, but he never felt like Gerada does, that it’s Msida home. He does, however, have a great affinity with the concept of duality of abode.

Grech likewise expresses attachment in duality. His expressed problems are synonymous with every other artist involved in this project. He quotes the tyranny of distance, the financial situation and the time factor. He rightfully misses the opportunities of visiting from Malta nearby European countries which harbour a profusion of classical art and artistic

⁹ Gatt: It-tfal tiegħi darba marru Malta, jafu jaqraw il-gazzetti bil-Malti, jitkellmu bil-Malti.

contemporaneity. Grech says, "I am disadvantaged. Since I like art and culture, you wouldn't think twice to go to Italy from Malta, otherwise I enjoy it here."¹⁰

Borg and Engerer were the two most emphatic about the notion of the inevitability of forging 'new' identities in diaspora. Borg affirms "Definitely, new identities are formed." As he understood nostalgia to be, Borg excluded it. "I can't see nostalgia in my work. All I can see is the European influence." He questions its origin: "Is it because of my heritage or is it because I like to look at classical European art, I'm not too sure." From this flowed the question he was asked about relating to Maltese art in Malta. Surprisingly, in addition to the 'classical' works of Giuseppe Cali and those of the Italians, Mattia Preti and Caravaggio Merisi, Borg said that "the only things that stood out to me were the tiny paintings in the churches. I think they're called the Votive paintings" rather than paintings in the galleries. Votive paintings culturally signify that when family members are spared from a disaster such as tempestuous and treacherous sea depicted in a painting, the family would gift to the Church in appreciation of survival a new chandelier or other such object. Such paintings are usually amateurishly painted, but their cultural significance is substantial. Borg saw those paintings at the Ta' Pinu church in Gozo, and at the church of Mary of Ruins in Rabat, Malta.

Engerer assures that "the kind of characteristics that a person develops over time will cause changes in her or him despite the fact that the migrant wants to say that he/she is Maltese or Gozitan. I believe that changes in the migrant are very positive."¹¹

Cartwright assigns change to both physical and attitudinal. Naturally, physically we change simply because of the toll of time and our bodies, but also "I believe the food that we eat makes us change; for instance, fruit is different here. Identities change through mixing with others: here there is a lot of Asian influence rather than in Europe. He maintains that although there are some Maltese who verbally resist change, "even visually affects change".

¹⁰ Grech: Ghandi zvantagg. La jien inhobb l-arti u l-kultura, biex tmur sa l-Italja minn Malta ma konniex nahsbuha darbtejn. Minn hawnhekk iddum tahsibha, kemm finanzjarjament, kemm distanza, kemm zmien, il-kumplament I enjoy it.

¹¹ Engerer: Din il-kwalità ta' karatteristici li jiddevelloppa l-bniedem fuq perijodu taz-zmien taghmel il-bidla fih avolja l-emigrant dejjem jixtieq jghid li huwa Malti u Ghawdx i ... Jiena nhoss li l-affarijiet li dahlu fl-emigrant huma aktar hafna pozittivi.

Changes in meaning in passage through representation

Meaning in Azzopardi's case is forever evolving. Azzopardi does not stagnate on repetitive subject matter. Future work is unpredictable, but what is constant is the fact that her works are of thoughtful ideas. Meaning may be viewed as unstable, but only in the sense of its attachment to varying thematic presentations.

Initially she visited Malta and started a series of works of the goddess culture combined with "the cult of the Virgin Mary which is carried to Australia." At Sydney University she exhibited the theme of the Tarxien Megalithic temples. In Malta and Italy (Rome) in 2006/7 she exhibited the Humana series. She photographed people in shadow at a certain time each evening. "I was concerned with their shadows as if their spirits were walking past." Then there was 'Relic' (Images 2,3) which was inspired by her family's (mum and dad) at Haz-Zebbug, Malta. It focused on the holy relic in the crypt of the church, the relic (bones) that is inculcated in the feet and hands of 'the holy person', Azzopardi's preferred allusion. ('Saint is commonly termed by the parishoners). Then meaning changed to 'Flesh' which exhibited a series of nude people in Rome. Azzopardi sees the three presentations as "it makes essentially our flesh, our bones and then our spirit – what makes us up." Azzopardi puts forward a feminist view in her (as said above) combining the Virgin Mary with the goddess idea, and pointing to the matriarchal images which, according to her, concern the obsession with the Virgin Mary closely linked to the matriarchal being. Another feminist meaning was ascribed by Azzopardi to another show entitled 'Generation in Secret', the causation being the role that her own mother and grandmother played doing home duties: "They worked at home, so they didn't assimilate that well and they were left behind. And then I saw their role had they stayed in Malta, what they would have been ... because the role of women there has much greater weight. It's more respected. In Australian culture they didn't know what to do. And that influenced my work". Her current work returns to treating 'religious' subjects in her own way. She entered the Blake Prize competition with a piece called 'Sacred Feet' and another 'Trinity'.

The attitude to sacred art for Borg is likewise unconventional, such as the painting of the image of Christ in a shopping basket. He called it 'Super Christ' (Image 10) – Christ as Great

and Christ procured from the supermarket, with the significance of Christ able to be found in the commonplace and brought home. He imbues his work with meaning which he says has been fairly stable throughout his career. Psychological impact is an advance over earlier work. For example, his portrait of his ex-father-in-law appeals to other people's personal situations as when Borg says: "So I painted it on there." Borg painted his ex-father-in-law's portrait on a drop sheet which his in-law used as a house painter. The artist purposely retained the imperfections, for example a hole or holes in the canvas without mending for authenticity. "Then the interesting thing is that when I have it on show, people say 'that painting reminds me of my grandfather' or 'that reminds me of my dad ... that's my uncle', so really I captured without knowing it, something of other people's psyche, what they know, who they know, from this one portrait, and I was painting his life which was reflecting other lives, which to me was a plus." Borg reiterates that he has not changed much thematically, but at the same time he admits; "I think conceptually I've changed in that some paintings are a bit more experimental." Asked about how he sees his art developing in the future, he says, "I don't know whether I will still keep very figurative."

The two examples of Azzopardi and Borg are symptomatic of the other artists. They display that art is more than an exercise in using materials and making 'art'; it is a way of living, actioning the famous line of Alfred Lord Tennyson when he writes: "I am a part of all that I have met" (Ulysses). They subscribe to the axiom that art that is not the heart and soul of whoever creates it, is not art and is not alive. Azzopardi expresses emphatically, saying "my work, not only talks about what I am particularly painting at the time but it crosses many different parts of Maltese culture that I am observing, that's why what I am, I am a documenter" [in art]. Borg expresses that even when he paints physical portraits of others, he reflects himself in them saying that "when I do my portraits, whether I do myself or other people, I am not just painting look-alike, and not just painting myself how I look, but also how I feel at the time. I put elements in the background and so on around me so it becomes a cross between that of his life and my life".

Cultural and artistic perspectives in subject matter

Photographs or computer-generated artists' works were obtained reflecting verbal statements. Analysis of statements spilled onto the visuals as well. In Azzopardi's case, diasporization acts similarly to Borg, taking into account that they started life in Australia from birth or from a very young age. Their 'unsettling' lies in a conflict between a deep desire related to their parents' origin and of their chosen country of adoption. It is their parents who endured "unsettling, recombination, hybridization and cut and mix" (Hall 1996b:447). Azzopardi distinguishes "I think I was more preoccupied with my relationship to having Maltese ancestry, more than Maltese culture". There is a measure of debate about this since ancestry may plant its mark on culture. However, Azzopardi's series of 5 small digitally printed images entitled 'The Fish Tail' have as their aim to "comment on Catholicism, the Goddess History and Malta on a more physical thing, the fact that it's surrounded by water and its fishing culture." Azzopardi goes on to explain that the series works on three levels: the physical, that is catching fish for meals, the esoteric level with connotation to religion, fish being an early Christian symbol, thirdly; "I look at it as a symbol for women and for the goddess ... for me there's three levels." Other work is generally in series and each series presents meaning, not mere depiction. 'Memento Mori', 'Chrysalis' (Images 4,5) tackled the subject of H.I.V and A.I.D.S from the point of view of acceptance or not of death generally and how death relates to culture and, once again, how ageing and the thought of death affects her parents, her 'pre-occupation with her relationship'. Multi-layering of meaning in everyday material objects, fish in Azzopardi's case and personal items brought by Italians, in 'Other Spaces: migration, objects and archives' exhibition at the Immigration Museum of Melbourne (2010), is endorsed by this comment by Duggan and Gandolfo (2011:316) "...our engagement with material culture and history and to respond to the complex inter-connections and relationships between the objects, their history, their location, their symbolic, metaphorical and cultural meanings, as well as their imagined and documented narratives."

With Engerer, diasporization with 'unsettling' does not apply. He loves both Malta and Australia and chose to return to Malta, but his 'in-between' is confined to his admission that, to an acceptable degree (at least for him), he is willing to correct images if he judges them not

authentic such as trees not in accord with the Australian bush, and he is not against satisfying patrons who may want certain elements inserted or, more likely, already there but want them exaggerated somewhat. Engerer is a fine Baroque styled artist who gets commissions that are often requested as copies of others' celebrated paintings. He instances the commission he received of copying 'The Death of Dragut', a famous painting by the Maltese artist Giuseppe Cali. The patron wanted the background enhanced and Engerer did not object as he deemed the altered background heightening fire and smoke did not interfere with the subject matter and composition.

Maltese-Australian imagery follows consciously and unconsciously during execution of Cartwright's work mainly oil on canvas but initially he is deliberate in selecting subject-matter, so much that he often records his intended themes "in my little black book... I have a lot of things that I want to do".

Grech's continually being in between is often demonstrated in his sculptural work. He may sculpt a local or global subject, out of material brought from Malta. He says that the influence of wherever he resides or resided, may work subconsciously without trying. Referring to a small sculpture of a cock (Image 40) which was done from Maltese stone, he agreed with the suggestion that if one touches it, one touches Malta. Moreover, sculpting involves the sensation of touch much more so than, say, painting. Humorously, it was suggested that if one touches the dust over it, one touches Australia. He claims that he does not reflect Australia for the simple reason that he arrived here not so young.

It might be suggested that some Maltese-Australian artists, notably Azzopardi, Cartwright and Gerada, break the usualness of representing more or less intrinsic sentimental imagery recollecting Malta that may be alluded to as narration of the homeland ensuring appreciation by the average person within the Maltese community. They provide through difference in their art as a suggestion to the community that change has occurred in the diaspora and opening up to the new, as they did is important. This is what makes them Maltese-Australian. So, some Maltese-Australian artists in their art demonstration, agree with Papastergiadis (2005:55) when he says "migration irretrievably altered the idea of home and nation. It both intensified and weakened bonds, but, after the experience of displacement and its attendant

demands of cross-cultural comparison and evaluation, through the vertiginous immersion in the flux of modernity, the image of home was fundamentally altered.”

Posing the question directly, interviewed artists felt comfortable with the label ‘Maltese-Australian’. It is admitted that some artists struggle harder to find a means of representing the second ‘home’ that they adopted. It was however noted that, whereas many Australian artists themselves tend to relate Australia to the bush, prolific of gum trees, old dilapidated sheds and beaches endlessly and cleanly sandy, (Streeton, McCubbin, Williams), Maltese-Australian artists confine themselves to their immediate urban surroundings, (Borg, Cartwright). Once again, this relates to artists’ work reflecting their lives in accord with their preference. On the other hand, the Maltese connection surfaces in works that infer traditions, customs, values carried from the past, in characteristic geographical places, architectural buildings, especially churches, religious icons and ancient monuments (Engerer, Gatt, Grech, Potts).

Applying a dialectic approach to the work of artists like Azzorpari, Borg, Cartwright and Gerada, one does not discover a problematic contradictory representation of two cultural landscapes, rather in the existence of opposing manifestations of cultures it is accepted that in a transitional situation, hybridity is relevant. It enhances wider vistas of cultural identity. This co-habitation links painting across two cultural landscapes in an evolving construct. Hybridity in fact adds colour, philosophically and realistically, to the palette enriching the results, as is accepted appreciatively by Maltese-Australian artists who responded to this concept. Although they do not say it explicitly, Maltese-Australian artists’ tone is in agreement with Robert Young, quoted by Papastergiadis that “hybridity...makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different. In that sense, it operates according to the form of logic that Derrida isolates in the term ‘brisure’, a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity.” (Papastergiadis 2003: 37).

Uses of medium

In relation to media used by the interviewed artists, Azzopardi uses very large photographs which she works on them by hand with shellac, oil, charcoal, acrylic and a lot of gold leaf. She often crumples her photos, lacquers and layers them giving them a combined effect of antique and modern. She takes advantage of accidents. She says that if she accidentally makes a mistake, “something drops on another work ... that was a mistake, ruined the work and then a day later it was that it didn’t ruin it, oh my God, I’ll just start and develop that ... I love mistakes.”

Borg uses mainly oils, although collage is agreeable to him. In his mother’s portrait (Image 8) he stretched together tea towels and tent canvas, the material assisting meaning “because she spends half her time in St Albans, so tea towels represent suburbia, and the tent material because they [mother and father] spend 6 months in the caravan park ... and the materials signify her life.”

Engerer adapts his oil painting skills to the particular work if that work is a copy of an old painting by another master. He takes into account the fading that occurred through time. He adds that this attention may be given likewise to modern work that also sometimes succumbs to colour deterioration.

Gatt’s work is done solely in oils and generally is framed and hung decoratively in the family home. Gerada frowns on his decade with commercial galleries because they tended to be dictatorial, even in the use of medium. Like Borg, he uses collage “and that can be anything”, but mainly acrylic paint: “acrylic is an amazing medium, it’s plastic and the gel medium is like glue.” In collage he uses photocopying, photographs and objects. He also attends to drawing.

Grech is very varied: oil, acrylic drawing material, sculpture material: wood and stone and ceramic. His medium, in his own way, as in Borg’s collage, is adapted to the subject matter. Examples: A Horse Piece (Image 40) reminiscent of horse racing in the main street in Gozo is made of ceramic; the Oracle piece (Image 39) imitates Maltese stone akin to the Malta

Neolithic temples; the Cock piece (Image 40) is of Maltese stone – so precious he instructs his wife not to dust it; the dancer is made from a branch of the Maltese carob tree, some parts left natural, like the belly button so as not to obliterate the naturalness which is Malta; the elephant is made from ivy which suggested the subject; the abstract piece is from an offcut. Potts carves linocuts with which she is meticulous. Her prints indicate the intensive labour that is devoted to their production, in contemplation, cutting and printing.

Universality and expressiveness of a particular culture

Universal themes were prominent in a number of the artists' work since their appeal ultimately depends on their concepts being understood and accepted not just by their own but more widely on an international basis. . The Maltese-Australian artists are no exception to this ambition, but they are all proud to have an expression of Maltese culture in their work. "And for me, when I went to Malta at 9, Malta was my obsession. And when I went to art school, it was all the difference ... I started to celebrate my Maltese culture" (Azzopardi).

Azzopardi deals more intensely with globalisation, turning meditatively towards re-consideration of values, including spiritual, held by her parents. She says "I can see the transition happening, it's more humanitarian. We think globally. We think about the earth and what we are doing to it. How physically it's affecting different countries... What have people given up on? And now they're looking for something else again... I've got to work on something for us. And it's more about having a deeper level of understanding within ourselves, that we're part of this whole human condition that whatever anyone does, whatever one nation does, affects everyone else. And that's what the work is about." The work consists of thirteen pieces. The number thirteen is significantly associated by her with Catholicism (12 apostles and Jesus), the lunar circle, sacred number through any religion. Azzopardi often presents major exhibitions overseas. She spoke to the researcher in ideas that are in effect in accord with Petersen (2012:202) that "In contradistinction 'the visual' can often move with relative ease across cultural and national borders. Although the usual is not outside the realm of translation and interpretation, works of art have the ability to figure in highly diverse exhibition contexts in different parts of the world and still make some sense to local visitors".

Azzopardi's series 'Fishworks' recollects Malta, but her series on victims of AIDS belongs to universality despite its initial 'inspiration' from Malta. 'Fishworks' presented large format photographs of Madonna, seafood, naked women, scaly fish and a man with a loudspeaker in a small fishing boat. Why the man's actions? "One day I was sitting on the beach at Marsalforn [Gozo] and there is a fishing boat full of women and a guy with a loudspeaker doing the Rosary, going around the island, and this was on Mary's feast day." (Azzopardi). 'AIDS', on the other hand, was collated at St Vincent's Hospital, N.S.W., not referencing Malta.

Azzopardi's globalisation nurtures kinship rather than distinctness. This is expressed by Professor Liz Ashburn (Invitation to Exhibition Brochure) critiquing Azzopardi's series 'Chrysalis' (Images 4,5): "By approaching her project with a post-modernist consciousness and through working with subjects who are male and female, straight and gay, Anglo and NESB her images stress our affinity rather than difference. Perhaps projects such as this will help establish political alliances between those who are also *other* and *different*."

Borg is uncertain whether there is still a bias towards culture coming from overseas when evidenced in works of art. He therefore asks: "What do Australians make as their artists". He accepts the definition of Maltese-Australian artist for him. But he is watchful that he is not overlooked as an Australian artist. He cites the fact that an artist friend who came to Australia from Northern Europe when he was five or six years old is classed as Australian, yet Borg was born here and he is not always referred to as Australian. Specifically in answer to a direct question, Borg says that "it's sort of globalisation. ... If I do them and people can associate them with their life experience, then that works well. And I suppose I achieve works that work on different levels, that people can interpret in different ways depending on what they want."

Borg explains "because we have already crossed that line. Everything that happens on the other side of the world is going to be known and influence us. And if someone is doing it on the internet, then it becomes a habit, because everyone is doing it. On one hand that is good because it shows that everyone is working together".

Borg states that he hopefully reaches a lot of people (not just the Maltese) in painting suburbia which for him is contemporary enough. He paraphrases Matisse from *An Artist's Notes*, applying to Borg himself: "that's how I see my world, not being ignorant of what's going on, but I want the world to be seen as a brighter, happier, positive place." Duality of belonging and appeal to others universally whilst continuing to be individualistic do not present complexity or difficulty in acceptance by Maltese-Australian artists and so they do not necessarily follow the concerns of so many theorists.

In Borg his western influence is mainly in his style, whereas in Engerer it is the Malteseness of subject matter that is culturally expressive and Engerer does not seem concerned on how his works are read and translated to other than the Maltese, excepting his prolific flower still-lives in the Baroque style. His works often celebrate Maltese history and experience, such as the Knights' construction of buildings and *Melitensia* in general, including religious icons. Currently he is reminiscing the last Great War by painting scenes involving warships and the spitfires and the Messerschmidts dog fighting over Malta (Images 21,22).

Aligning with the statement of Azzopardi about the earth and what we are doing to it, Cartwright paints with international content when major disaster happens; "it doesn't matter where, then I paint about it. I feel it and I paint it." In his combination of surrealism and abstract, he says that his symbolism is Maltese. His work is actually injected with symbolism which is more than just Maltese. He does not emulate Engerer in aiming at celebration of Maltese history and experience.

So, all being virtually subjects of (or to) both the local and global (Mosquera and Fisher 1997, 2004:5) Maltese-Australian artists accept the consequentiality of being global as it is not seen that it subdues the local content but merely that the present existence, viewed readily by modern media, is deemed to parallel the human condition just about everywhere. What is being referred to are the basic feeling and expression of emotions, and the framework of reasoning and often modes of behaviour, and spiritual belief in other than the visible.

Robert Hughes' (1980:154) summation about the great French artist Matisse is "Mediterraneaness, the ease and sensuous completeness which was rooted on Maltisse's own

experience, education and legacy as a Frenchman. It was not a matter of artistic style; it issued from a complete attitude towards life and how to live it,” Engerer acquiesces and parallels with himself: “the subjects that I experienced generally reflect, I think, the tastes of the Maltese in this aspect which naturally depends on several factors.”¹²

The statement of Borg’s on acceptance is echoed by Gerada: “It’s an advantage to be both Maltese and Australian. It depends where I am. In Malta I am an Australian artist. Over here I am a Maltese artist.”

Critical material about Maltese-Australian artists is rare. When these have exhibitions, the general pattern is a brief description of the overall quality of the work, praising its presentation as ‘emanating from the Maltese’. No analysis is offered about the impact of subject matter or identification of a diasporic existence. The most discussed is Maree Azzopardi because she is seen as daring in dealing with traditional treatment of subject matter. The others, though varied in style, do not raise any difficulties of immediate acceptance. But observing the artworks, subtlety of diasporic effect can be traced in Azzopardi whose varied tackle of subject matter oscillates between Maltese cultural leanings and total departure from them. In her deviation, diaspora is absent. She cannot be compared to Gatt, and his like who depict ‘nostalgia’ almost exclusively.

An example of Gatt’s is a painting of two fishermen pulling up a Maltese boat (Image 26), “I am one of these fishermen pulling up the boat. That fisherman on the right, he is wearing exactly what my grandpa wore. He always wore a waistcoat and a cap and his pants rolled up.”¹³

Cartwright affirms that criticism in writing as such is scarce. Superficial criticism is often the case and this is verbally; “not so much review; people visit here [his studio], students and their friends. I notice that young people like my work more than older people – maybe they

¹² Engerer: “Is-suggetti li ghaddejt minnhom jiena jirriflettu, nahseb jiena, in generali t-toghma tal – Maltin f’dan il – qasam.”

¹³ Gatt: Jiena wiehed minn daww is-sajjieda, se ntellghu d- dghajsa ...dak is – sajjied fuq il-lemin, dak ezatt kif kien jilbes in – nannu tieghi. Kien dejjem jilbes is – sidrija u l-berritta u dejjem bil-qalziet imxammar.

like the colours and the meaning.” Older people may be baffled by surrealism; younger people, perhaps acclimatised by cartooning, relate more readily to it.

Dealing with attachments to ‘two homes’, Victor Grech feels that the migrant is a person without a country, however, in effect he speaks of belonging to two “you are here, live here, you live well, but you always feel the pull of your country more or less.”¹⁴ Joe Engerer on the face of it suggests that one cannot call another country his even if one has lived there twice as long as he did in his origin, but then he rethinks saying explicitly that one feels at home there eventually because “something mixed with your blood in that country.”¹⁵ Gatt differs from other artists by living on location, his choice being planning to acquire accommodation in Malta to add to his Australian and physically live, perhaps 12 months at a time in each location. This contrasts with Bartlett saying that in diaspora memory and other reflections, “constantly and continuously reshape recollection” (Tanabe and Keyes 2002:3). Gatt’s choice: “the best thing for us is a balance ... I tell my wife ‘Let’s go there for a year’. We are not pulling up our anchors from here, not cutting the cord from here because this country gave us a good life too.”¹⁶ On the other hand, Azzopardi talks about people not visiting Malta for 25-30-50 years and, rather than reshaping, they update because “people who haven’t been back to Malta think Malta is exactly what it was 50 years ago, same attitudes, same lifestyle, same everything ... and you think Malta is still that. Guess what, it’s not.” (Azzopardi).

Cartwright does think that memory tends to carry an unchanged perception of the past. For example, he recalls that the Fra Diegu Square [at Hamrun, Malta] where he climbed trees as a young person: “I thought it was a very big square and it is not as big as my backyard. When I got there I got a shock.”

Impact of change on values, dynamics and work

Azzopardi is in accord with Zua Hua (2008) when she states that “new values and dynamics” arise from the process of migration and contact with the host country. Referring to migrants

¹⁴ Grech: L-emigrant bniedem minghajr pajjiz, ghax qieghed hawn, tghix hawn, tghix tajjeb, imma dejjem thoss li pajjizek jigbdek ftit jew wisq.

¹⁵ Engerer: Dahlet xi haga fik minn dik l-art.

¹⁶ Gatt: L-ahjar haga li sibna hu bhal ‘balance’. Lill-mara nghidilha ‘Imxi hemm immorru nqattghu sena.. Mhux nigbru l-ankri minn hawn ghax s’intendi din l-art tatna l-hajja wkoll.

moving home, Azzopardi says: “Yes I would agree you are not going to stay stagnant and stale if you move to somewhere else. It’s not giving up what you’ve got, but making what you’ve got even richer.” Borg acquiesces but qualifies that change may or may not lead to recognition as one or other, Maltese or Australian. Borg prefers the overall label of Australian and change although contacts with other groups does not strictly apply to him. He maintains, in any case, that in his work change has been mainly technical. He knows that some other artists find it difficult to change because they keep intimately linked to Maltese culture. “So they wanted their friends to say, ‘Oh that’s Malta?’ So their paintings were still to do with Malta and made their community happy ... But at the same time trying to break away from that, making work that is more relevant to here, I think that is what they found to be a bit difficult.” (Borg). Engerer refers to his time in Australia, experiencing change through the influence of Streeton, Roberts and others, not simply in technique but importantly in their oneness with the land, particularly the bush. “These people grew up there, spent their lives there; their main theme was the Australian bush or the outback ... and when you see their work you realise how landscape should be done, because they are not simply technical, but like the guitarist playing well Spanish or Maltese folklore; he plays from the heart.”(Engerer).¹⁷

Change can impact on one’s personal view. Spotlight on it shows how varied it can be. Azzopardi’s admiration is centred on the old atmosphere of the Maltese islands and changes do not receive much attention in turn, in her work. She states “No, not for me [changes], because I want to go there to see the old, not the new. I live in a modern country, in the city here.”

Cartwright visited Malta after 25 years and later about 12 to 15 years, not noticing changes in Malta during his first visit, but some topographical ones and also the language in his second visit when he was aware of the new freeway and new linguistics: “Even now, I hear some Maltese words on radio that I don’t understand immediately, only some word, but then I gather the meaning from the whole sentence.”

¹⁷ Engerer: Dawn huma peress li trabbew hemm u ghamlu ghomorhom hemm, il-mamma taghhom kienet il bush jew l-outback tal-Awstralja ... u xhin tara x-xoghol taghhom inti tittendi actually kif ghandha tkun il-landscape ghax huma ma jaghmluhiex semplicement bit-teknika, imma bhal dak il-kitarrista li jdoqq sewwa l-folklore ta’ Spanja jew ta’ Malta: idoqq minn qalbu.

Borg does not comment on effects on his work from changes in any sphere in the old country simply because he did not live in Malta to start with. He is, however, aware of comments made by 'older folk' who for instance, observe how small the football field (the Empire Stadium) now appears to them having lived abroad. As far as he can tell, they are accurate in their recollection of the war, such as recounting the falling of a Lancaster bomber on his parents' home in Luqa. Gatt admitted that aspects of Malta surface in his work from his subconscious. He revisited Malta at least six times and he mentions the impressions made on him of the churches, the wharf, the airport, his childhood, Malta's history, the customs and the religious feasts. Gerada ascribes these memories to a romantic feeling that is imprecise but inevitable when one has lived abroad. "I think that if anyone left anywhere ... there's some emotional, romantic feeling. I think that's universal. Every time I go to Malta, there are big changes in Malta". So says Gerada, alluding to changes that do not immediately alter the emotional recollections.

Simulation by year's end

Azzopardi does not talk directly about hybridity, but she illustrates Robert Hughes' idea of art influenced by the society amongst which the artists perform, when interestingly she references the 'inspiration' of her series of work on hospitalised people affected by AIDS, to her "watching a procession from my cousin's house at Zebbug, Malta; of a statue and a whole lot of men in white (that looked like Ku Klux clans), they had chains with balls around their ankles, and they were flagellating themselves and bleeding." Both the Maltese and the Australian occurrences bore on her obsession with death in her earlier work. On a different level, she refers to her aunts and uncles "...who play bowls which for me is very Australian rather than bocci which typify Malta".

When he lived in Australia, Engerer adopted the attitude that his feeling of longing and isolation is mitigated by learning how to play the guitar and playing it in the open drew outsiders to himself. He shared his cultural leaning (the guitar is associated with folklore) with the public, rendering it an attempt at achieving hybridity. "The guitar is a popular subject in painting and these subjects are complex especially when connected to the migrant.

As I felt when I went to Australia is felt naturally more or less by every migrant from any country when shifting from one country to another” (Engerer).¹⁸ Likewise, Borg endeavours to ‘mix’ within two cultures of Malta and Australia, but is again apprehensive of not always accepted in Australia as Australian. He observes that “you will have natural change with experience, but feel that some artists can’t be accepted as being Australian artists; they are accepted as being Maltese.”

Gerada, on the other hand, in agreement with Naoki Sakai (Ang 2003:30), that translation is necessary as an integral part of social life, has not found it difficult to realise the occurrence of hybridity, even in his work. When complexities and binary classification was mentioned to him by the researcher, he replied “Not so much personally; I think it’s because of the cultural richness that I grew up with... My school friends, Irish, Italian, Maltese, different cultural backgrounds, when I talked to them recently decades on, they said that out of everyone I grew up in the most Australian household”. He also has the advantage that “my girlfriend (a Vietnamese) is more Australian than I am. To me it comes out of interest and an understanding that is important.” He also states that he agrees with the Maltese proverb ‘*ma’ min taghmilha, ghelug is-sena ssir bhalu*’ (whoever you mix with, you will simulate by year’s end.)

Grech understands the value of hybridity, saying; “You are in a different country and you must follow the customs of the country in which you live, but I don’t think that because you are living in a different country you should not remember that you are Maltese. The roots are still existing”. He exemplifies homage to hybridity in the practicality of “Us Maltese have an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time, because you will find Maltese who are members of diverse clubs rather than a Maltese club. It used to be when the Maltese Phoenician club was in existence, that some Maltese membership was more with the Bankstown or the Blacktown RSL Club rather than with the Phoenician club”.¹⁹

¹⁸ Engerer: Il-kitarra hija suggett popolari hafna fit-pittura u dawn is-suggetti huma komplessi speċjalment meta huma konnessi mal-emigrant. Kif hassejtni jien meta tlajt l-Awstralja naturalment fit jew wisq iħossu kull emigrant minn kwalunkwe country.

¹⁹ Grech: Qieghed f’pajjiz differenti u trid timxi mal-uzanzi tal-pajjiz li qed tghix fih, imma ma jidhirli li inti ghax qieghed f’pajjiz differenti ma ghandekx tiftakar li inti Malti. Ir-roots hemm ghadhom. Ahna l-Maltin ghandna vantagg u zvantagg ghaliex iktar issib Malti li hu membru ta’ klabb differenti milli ta’ xi klabb Malti. Hu l-Phoenician Club (issa spicca) il-Maltin iktar kont tarahom il-Bankstown RSL Club jew Blacktown RSL Club milli fil-Phoenician Club.

Despite the natural occurrence of hybridity, difficulties of negotiation and adjustment make themselves felt in varying degrees. Borg continues to talk about acceptance within the Australian fold. He boldly states that; “I still wonder whether the whole multicultural thing is a novelty or not.” Relating it to art, the researcher asked him whether he thought that it might be seen by some people as foreign, being a “little bit dark skinned so to speak”? He argued “I think so, yes. I think they do. The first thing that people ask me when they see my work is ‘where are you from?’” And they want to know about his background resulting in identifying him as Maltese.

Cartwright suggests that communication of daily matters does not present great difficulty to acceptance by the whole society and in his view, necessity of translation, should be directed towards politics and beliefs. He states that “beliefs are hard to understand ... I remember when I first came here it was difficult for Australians to understand ‘wogs’, other cultures, but now there’s not much difference unless it’s these and I don’t know it. Politics are different. So are religious beliefs”. Cartwright ascribes his ‘not much difference’ to the mitigating factors of inclusive hybridity which in his case had plenty of time to evolve in his 48 years (1964-2012) in Australia.

Grech has no problem either in his verbal or in his artistic work, in agreeing with Hall, regarding speaking from difference (1997:236). Then, in day to day practice, he is conscious of others noticing his speech accent, literally speaking from difference! But he has been accepted very well indeed, including as an art teacher.

Re-creation of origin abroad – factual – fictitious

Azzopardi’s work is not done in context of souveniring and bringing Malta to Australia, certainly not so to ‘ordinary’ Maltese, because they will not see expected realistic images of Malta, but rather those in a non-representational manner. It is another matter with Borg who paints realistically in *toto*, except that he didn’t paint Malta subjects such as touristic views; he merely included tokens recognisable as Maltese (for example lace, boats ...) intercepted with other images forming a composite tableau. Souveniring nostalgically as such does not apply to him. But he says that he would consider satisfying a commission of a typical Malta

scene, but only after studying its historical and cultural connotation. “If they paid me well, I would do it, but for my sake and for the sake of the painting I need to know its history, why it was built (say, a Barracca), why is where it is, what was the significance then and what is the significance now. How is it relevant to today’s culture?” (Borg). Potts notices the instinctive nostalgic need of the Maltese to keep pictures, paintings and photos, “of scenes, of churches, to do with Malta. They keep them in their lounge rooms. I see religious icons: the Madonna, the Crucifix, the Maltese type well in their front yards, the ‘*nicca*’ (stone crib), the Malta Cross and lots of photos of family members. Maltese are family orientated” (Potts). Potts’ own contribution is in her linocuts, holographs and lithographs of ancient catacombs found particularly in Rabat and in many other parts of Malta. They present no difficulty to relate to since they are ‘created’ realistically. ‘Created’ is apt in a metaphorical sense, the artists cutting into the lino recollecting inhabitants cutting into the rocks to create catacombs. Potts’ work is both a re-creation and factual, moreover it points towards a cultural identity and fits with Papastergiadis’ saying that, “cultural identity is best understood as a metaphor for the way we make sense of our position in the world.”

Employment of nostalgic imagery

For Gatt, nostalgia when applied to his paintings, is simply manifested in sentimentality. An example is his painting of the Valletta Grand Harbour bastions and a Maltese boat rowed towards them. Gatt explained that the painting recollects his departure from Malta; the bastions were the last objects that he saw from the ship and the rower represents the artist who sentimentally wishes he is going back towards the bastions which smell of the sea and the caper bushes that dangle from their crags.

Contrasting with Gatt, Gerada’s work does not entail an ardent longing for the past as such; instead, it utilises memory in a creative manner. His method is not strictly representational. Utilising nostalgia creatively, Gerada produced the minimalist paintings ‘Going Home 1’, ‘Going Home 2’, ‘The Sky is on Fire’, ‘Repeated Fire from the Sky’, and ‘Faith, Hope and Charity’. The first two referred to Gerada either going to Malta or to Australia as home (tone of the two homes) and the last three are a remembrance, whilst air travelling, of the bombardment endured in wartime and the only three aeroplanes initially available, the

defending inadequate old aeroplanes Faith, Hope and Charity. He explains. "Research is becoming more and more important to me, and then you start editing and a process of selection which comes into it almost at the end of the process ... my next exhibition, the body of work that I want to do is of Maltese subject matter, it's to do with Filfla (you know the little island)... I am interested in Filfla, every time I hear a story about the bird [the *Kangu*] that lays its eggs there, how the English used to use Filfla for target practice. I gather that, and then I start thinking how to portray Filfla." The interviewer, observing Gerada's results as collages of photocopying, photographs and other objects, intermixed with acrylic painting, remarked to him, so you are anything but a *plein-air* artist ... you're more an abstract thinking, cerebral, emotional thinking artist! To which he replied: "But thinking can be very literal as well. But the portrayal at the end may not be so literal, which confuses..." Confusion is more of an unsettling realisation that abstract and collaged work does not automatically attract recognition of meaning by the general public who are not used to confronting attitudes detached from imitation and the norm often messaging through metaphor, Gerada fits in with Papastergiadis' suggestion quoted earlier in this thesis, that "mixture, experimentation, displacement and reconfiguration, collage and juxtaposition have become the cultural practices which are now seen as the most expressive of our times".

The above comments also apply to Azzopardi. On first looking at her work, one may not immediately grasp the meaning behind it, but in fact her work is often personally based, assumes profound meaning when the background is known. Hence accompanying biographical and experiential notes can assist. Works in her show called 'Chaos and Revelry' are personal. 'Wings' is a picture of her niece with her ballet dress on with wings, and there is a depiction of a relic of St. Phillip of Haz Zebbug. She says "it's basically the story of my own life growing up as a young girl with religious icons." Another dramatic picture portrays an innocent girl and an animal carcass. "This is portraying how I was brought up. I was an innocent little girl, but also what I saw on the farm, my dad butchering cows, and what I saw in church in Malta, the fear that was put into me about the devil ..." (Azzopardi).

For Cartwright, nostalgia in his work is not of the kind of bitter-sweet constrictive limitation; rather, he utilises Maltese imagery of items found in his own home backyard as remindful of Malta. He cites as examples the introduction of the '*bajtra tax-xewk u t-tina*' (the prickly pear

and the fig tree) to enhance ideas expressed in his work. In this sense he is using nostalgia somewhat creatively.

More creative still is Cartwright's 'Future Noahs Ark' (Image 17) that goes beyond nostalgia over religious environment experienced in Malta. Cartwright gave the interviewer a good description as myself going into poetics of this creative painting. He said "there is a mask like an alien, and you can't miss Mother Theresa. This is the story of Noah's Ark. The mask is a super being of the world; it could be God making sure that this vehicle is going safely into space. My religious beliefs come from Malta: all my ideas. Now instead of a wooden ship I made a spaceship. At the bottom you have got two horses, two of each animal, and all of these little windows are males and females. The spaceship was built by Noah, but this spaceship is Mother Theresa; she is the vehicle. I think she is the most caring person in the world. I depicted her as the one who is going to take us all into this other journey. Then I put something there that you don't see; I used red to help the eye to see it. That's the world there, it's really a profile. That's what we have done to the earth; that's the eye, the nose and the mouth; you did not see that before."

While Borg denies nostalgia in his work, contrastingly Engerer, now in Gozo, experiences sentimentality looking at paintings executed in Australia. Anomalous is his 'remembering', through his paintings, his way of life in Australia typified by his guitar playing sessions in a trio of friends (himself, Freddie Cachia from Zebbug and Tony nicknamed Splice) playing to the Maltese public when those sessions actually were nostalgic for a previous life in Malta!

All in all, considering the pronouncements as well as studying the artworks, Maltese-Australian artists function as a narrative or artistic strategy, which, according to Beilharz (1997:29), are "bringing a cultural repertoire ... carrying a nostalgia of vision".

Modes of thinking: the old and the new

Though not specifically referring to Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:107), Azzopardi is in some disagreement with her statement that: "Changes are inevitable, implied in the process of restoring the cultural lineage" as when it comes to specifics, her observations are that some things have changed in Malta, but the imitated thing remained static in Australia. "My parents

came to Australia – my father at 17 and my mother at 4, and they were brought up by their parents in the Maltese way. So, they lived very much Maltese in everything that they did. And when I started going back and forth to Malta, I was the one that would come back and go “Maltese don’t think like that anymore, they don’t do that anymore, you’re still as though in the 1960’s, old Malta. Go and visit. You’ll see how much it’s changed. When they went visiting the first time in 25 years, they were shocked.” (Azzopardi). Azzopardi makes no mention of her parents’ observation of Australian culture. Borg thinks in the same mode as Azzopardi: the older generation retains the memory of Malta life more accurately as it was when they lived there. “Of course, it does not match the current situation” (Borg referring to the old local streets, the village, and the language).

Grech likewise does not dwell on change occasioned by living in a host society, but mentions some customs that emulate those in Malta, some more successfully than others. He alludes to mainly religious festivities, such as the observance of Holy Week incorporating large statues’ processions through streets of Horsley Park and the processions commemorating Don Bosco and the Bambina (the Virgin). The statues, the fireworks, the food - *partizzi*, nougat, honey ring cake, and a local drink *Kinnie*, lend a Maltese atmosphere.

There are also secular activities which are popular with the artists and the Maltese community. A prominent example is the Maltese folk music called *Ghana*. It consists of impromptu ‘song duel’ by two singers to the tune of three guitarists. As Eve Klein (2005, 2006:54) observed “Ghana is used in combination with other activities such as social, religious or political gatherings, cookery, dance, music and theatre performance to encourage a physical connection with the community. These cultural performances are drawn upon to bridge a sense of Maltese identity across real and imagined spaces.” There is in fact a Maltese club in Altona, dedicated to Ghana sessions. These Ghana sessions called *spirtu pront* to differentiate from the second popular folk singing activity named *Tal-Fatt*. Both types can be of some hours duration, but Klein reported attending an occasion of a five hour marathon of *Ghana tal-Fatt* which are narrations each usually sung by one singer. As Klein (2006:65) says “Fatt performance in Maltese-Australian communities utilises the nostalgia of transported folklore to provide a formal occasion in which to enshrine and fix community

standards in spite of the diasporic gap.” Cultural performances such as Ghana help the community to re-constitute itself through continuity which admits change.

This atmosphere surfaces from time to time in the Maltese-Australian artists’ work as it forms part of an indelible mentality, not expected to be effaced by hybridity whilst in some artists this atmosphere pervades their creations continuously, and in their case one may argue that it loads difficulties, or at least delays in the struggle to harmonise with change, though this is inevitable.

Inevitability of change

Gerada makes the point that Maltese assimilate easily into Australian culture because Maltese have been under British rule for about 150 years, “And also, as the Maltese have a mix of a lot of cultures, they’re in the middle of the Mediterranean”. But also Gerada hints that there is not a great effort to be made to be successful, as “I don’t think that the culture here [in Australia] is particularly strong. If there is a culture, it’s because of all the other cultures that arrived in recent times anyway.” Borg has no problem in agreeing that change is inevitable, “only if you’re brought up in one way of thinking, it makes it hard to change. But if you’re brought up with a cultural openness, then it doesn’t cause a problem.” (Borg)

For Potts inevitable change does not outweigh basic cherishing attitude towards Maltese culture. Asked if it varies with time, she emphatically states “I think it intensifies. There may be a certain age where it does not, but on the whole it intensifies”.

Consciousness of original culture when afar

With most, through being far from the original home, consciousness of culture becomes acute. With Azzopardi, it’s not a matter of being distant, not even a matter of having ‘lived Maltese culture’, it is a different situation: she cannot look back as she was not there in the first place. She travels to Malta to absorb Maltese culture having instinctively discovered that she is “Oh my God, I’m Maltese and I’m proud of it! I know where I get all my influence now.” Azzopardi is aware, however, of some people including relatives in Australia who, not

only do not miss Maltese culture, but rather question the artist gathering painting material “why are you taking photos of rocks [the Neolithic temples]? Why are you painting rocks?” She understands that where there was poverty, the main concern was breadwinning not cultural pursuits and/or appreciating the cultural environment.

Borg has an affinity with Azzopardi: both born here, both weighed by the tyranny of distance which anomalously brings closer the feel for Maltese identity. One of his paintings is called ‘The Tyranny of Distance’. He verbally ponders on imagining himself having been born and been living in Malta, whether he would have migrated. He resolves this question by “I think because of my personality, it might drive me out of Malta because of its close knit, one knows everyone else’s business. I don’t want to be part of that... but then again, because of the culture that’s there and the churches and the history and everything; that might have kept me there if I was born there. I don’t know. It’s interesting.”

Despite thirty-nine years living abroad, and departing from Malta at the age of eleven and a half, Malta’s memory for Gatt had not undergone any fading. It formed part of his psyche and resides both in his consciousness and subconsciousness, expressed by him as: “Your Malta memory – let us refer to the word “culture” – you’re right in it and hardly know what it is; it’s a natural thing ... we found ourselves as if in a time capsule... when you leave Malta to live in another country, then you begin to understand. So, as far as Malta is concerned, it’s as if we left just yesterday. We kept observing the habits.”²⁰

The idea of the phrase “time capsule” is simulated by Gerada “this is with other cultures also, when they are living here it’s like being frozen in time, and when they go back to their homeland, oh my God, it’s not like how it used to be.” Changes are in everything and extend even to the daily food. For Gerada, examination of the very concept of culture started by the example of his parents and his growing up in a Maltese atmosphere. It reached its peak when his mother booked him a flight to England and Malta. The impact is alluded to in his words “When I was over there, that’s when it hit me, so it’s in my blood, so normal to be there, the smell of it, the sea, the smell, how did I know that Maltese smell, possibly it’s in your

²⁰ Gatt: Il-memorja tieghek dwar Malta – nigu ghal dik il-kelma “kultura” – tkun fiha u donnok ma tafx x’inh; tkun haga naturali ... qisna gejna go “time capsule”... meta tinqalà minn Malta u tmur f’art ohra, mbaghad tibda tifhem xi haga. Jigifieri lil Malta qisni ghadni tlaqt il-bierah. Zammejna l-uzanzi.

blood... there is the conscious and the subconscious.” Grech agrees with the maxim that distance makes the heart grow fonder. According to him, things missed and then visited years later, are appreciated the more. It is acknowledged that migration affords the opportunity to examine the very concept of culture which “certain things that we do here are needed by seniors, but these things cannot replicate those at Malta itself. They are either added to or deductions are made from them.”²¹ Asked if they still represent Maltese culture in their altered state, Grech maintains that some specifics will always be Maltese. He cites as examples the Holy Week procession and the stage shows and possibly the soccer played by ‘the Maltese team’ and religious festas at which certain items of food are present like *pastizzi* (ricotta in pastry), *qassatat* (round cheesecakes) and, in Easter, *figolli* (large pastry figures usually with a chocolate egg in the middle and decorated with coloured icing). Some of these special foods are also sold in certain shops in the suburbs where the Maltese congregate.

Attitudes towards culture whilst living away from original homeland run in common with interviewed artists, at times using identical terminology in description. Potts clearly states “Living in Malta, I never thought about culture. You take things for granted ... the history of Malta is incredible and Australia is a fairly new country. It’s a great change from one country to another. Being here, after a little while, I realised just what a great place is Malta in culture and wherever you look there’s art everywhere in Malta. Australia is completely different.” Whilst not giving a definition of culture, for this artist culture is meaningful in a personal way: “For me culture is the way I was set up by my parents. Culture was in a way inherited by my parents... celebrating the rituals, religion; the behaviours of your family dictates how you are brought up... religion, that’s a very big thing in Malta.” She says that public demonstration of Maltese customs, the Holy Week Procession particularly in mind, “makes other people, people from Australia, aware of what goes on in other countries.” Also Catholics from all kinds of origin probably appreciate those commemorative celebrations. On the secular side, she mentions participation of the Maltese community through floats in carnival processions, but she misses on a lot of Maltese activities because she lives away from the Maltese. She says it’s another matter in the Blacktown area. In Melbourne there has been participation by Maltese flavoured floats in the yearly Moomba Festival. In day to day

²¹ Grech: Jiena nahseb li dawg in-nies li huma daqsxejn avvanzati ghadhom ifittxuhom . Le,ma jistax ikunu ezatti. Jew mizjudin jew imnaqqsin, ma jistax ikollok replica tal-haga li tkun saret Malta.

living, Potts says it's possible to live a distinct Maltese sort of way of life. She came across such people in Greystanes, Blacktown and Giraween. Even when she first came out here, living at her uncle and auntie at Giraween, "it was like living in Malta there." She qualifies: "But I do think of everybody and not just concentrate on one way of culture ... we are a multicultural society here and it's nice to mix with everybody."

Cartwright agrees with Potts that, whilst living in the midst of own culture, this is not thought of as being so, it's simply lived, but when living afar, it is recollected and missed, sometimes clearly identified and typified in material things, and at other times, it is not easy to define. Cartwright says that, "we brought food: *pastizzi*, *qassatat* ..., what we cannot bring is some ways of life. In Malta some things happen because of the closeness to each other. Not so here. Well, we cannot bring *il-gebla Maltija* (the Maltese stone globergina). I used to do some sculptures from the Malta stone which is easy to carve into." Referring to material objects, Duggan and Gandolfo (2001:316) remark that "arriving in Australia as migrants, many Italians brought with them material objects of personal value. These often vary ordinary things can be highly evocative and symbolic of the relationship between the notion of 'home' and identity. Since settling in Australia, Italians like other migrants, have visually expressed their cultural and ethnic identity through the material objects they have chosen to keep and display."

Cultural feasibility

Azzopardi makes a number of points about her understanding of culture and what things or aspects are encompassed and what is able to be imported into Australia and what affects her art. Firstly she deals with the religious aspect narrowed down to the representation of the Virgin Mary. Cultural activities including processions with the statue of the Virgin Mary do not trivialise Maltese culture. She says "No, no. They probably re-invent it because we are now in Australia. We are not walking down a little street in a little village. They're in a big football oval in the middle of Paramatta. It is quite different, but ultimately the essence is there". A feminist interest appeals to her. She identifies Malta as a matriarchal country which accounts for the obsession with the Virgin Mary. Also neolithic temples are about matriarchy. Her mother and nanna would have held a matriarchal position in the family in Malta, a

position lost to her father and grandfather who went to outside work where they met Australians, learnt English and assimilated. According to Azzopardi, because mum and nanna didn't, they were left behind. So, according to her, matriarchy is not 'an import' to Australia because the culture here is different. It did, however, inspire her show 'Generation in secret.' Nadine Brincat (1998), critiquing Azzopardi, remarked "she is interested in the relationship between the Maltese, their land, politics, religion, particularly the role of women in society."

Of all these aspects, religious commemorations are the principal mentions of all interviewed artists. They typically emphasize their importance to the senior people, it being an integral part of culture which is defined fairly similarly. Gerada: "Culture, I guess in relation to Malta, is the people, the strong will Catholicism, the religion, the people's outlook from such a tiny place..." Grech says "Apart from Maltese tradition, for me it's religious festivities.... More the tradition allied to religious aspects" but he adds that "It's true that now Maltese culture resembles that of any other country, especially if you go to the Paceville area [in Malta]."²²

With regards to whether the Maltese community in Australia is obsessive in its re-creation of Maltese cultural traits Azzopardi dwells on the religious manifestations only, specifically the patron saint feasts and the Holy Week rituals. She realises that there is not the excessiveness of behaviour that occurs in Malta. In Australia there is no political content since there are no competing clubs for the same event as one finds in Malta. The attendance here is mainly of the older people to whom the activities are most meaningful. She says "For half the country it's devout. For the younger generation it's party week. Even the village Festa it's similar. For the older people it's important; for the younger people it's the Saturday afternoon before the big Saturday night festa." She also makes the point that here, for some people it's satisfaction of memory of Malta, but for others, that is people born here, they experience these events 'second hand' from people who are re-creating and adapting to local conditions. Azzopardi did not allow imitative experience to influence her art and weaken the meaning of the result. She actively connected by personally visiting Malta.

²² Grech: '[Il kultura Maltija], apparti tat-tradizzjoni Maltija, ghalija l-festi religjuzi... Iktar it-tradizzjoni marbuta mal-aspetti religjuzi... Tassew li issa l-kultura Maltija tixbah lil ta' kull pajjiz iehor, speċjalment jekk tmur lejn Paceville.'

The intensity of observing Maltese customs dwells principally with the older Maltese and their cultural ties with Malta and living a Maltese version of life do not lessen the longer they live away from Malta, but as they pass on, each generation suffers loss of ties, unless, as Azzopardi observes, “Unless they’re visiting, unless they’re actively connecting.” Grech concurs that “Maltese of my age [mature] still observe Maltese traditions... that something that they look forward to... they remained part of their life. Unfortunately you won’t see [at the activities] the young. You won’t see many of the second generation, one person here and there. Some young ones sometimes attend at Horsley Park”.²³ Grech ponders on living a distinct way of life in context of a global scenario. He theorises that oneness devoid of extreme nationalism would be conducive to world peace. Malta is too small to make much of a difference. However, he illustrates that the world in general could learn from Australia, multi ethnic in content, but one people for the good of the country. “Europe is also exemplary. There is less conflict there; there is freedom of movement and work, there is a cooperative effort. Grech also points to America which, despite its many races, enjoys harmony”, or so he says.

Language, homogeneity, heterogeneity

The Maltese-Australian artists were posed questions about the role of the Maltese language in their identity and how does this consequently imprint on their art. Firstly they are all in unison with Gerada who specifically upholds the idea offered by Stuart Hall, describing “people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language...” (Pile and Thrift, 1995: 10). Artists who have Maltese partners speak Maltese at home and English elsewhere. Other artists are attuned to Maltese tone on hearing family members, usually parents and grand-parents, speak Maltese. The language has an imprint on the artists’ work in some recognizable ways.

One of the ways is the imagery that is profuse in the language. For instance, the language talks of ‘*hobz migjub bix-xoghol tal-gharaq*’ (bread earned with toil and tears), and ‘*hobz u sikkina*’ (bread and knife) signifying closeness. So, when Engerer depicts bread in still life,

²³ Grech: ‘Maltin li huma tal-eta’ tieghi ghadhom b’dawk it-tradizzjonijiet Maltin... dik ix-xi haga li “they look forward to”... ghalihom baqghet parti mill-hajja tagghom. Ma tarax iz-zghar unfortunately. Ftit tara nies tas-second generation, xi wiehed ‘il hawn u ‘l hemm. In-naha ta’ Horsley Park gieli jigu xi ftit zghazagh.’

he is inferring the family gathered at table and unity that traditionally exists within it. It also refers to labour that is applauded since it earns the daily bread of living. Bread also bears the connotation of the Last Supper, referencing Christian belief, a recurring theme of Maltese-Australian artists.

The use of the Maltese language by Maltese people very often displays an overflow of religious connection. The mention of God, for instance, as a source of provision of goodness and, conversely, in swearing connotation, is in context an optimum utterance and this is recognised as symptomatic of Maltese culture. Hearing the Maltese language used in an unusual setting, inspired Azzopardi to produce her series of 'Fishworks'. She narrates that "‘Fishworks’ is documentary images of my time in Malta. They are literally a photographic exhibition." She is fond of mentioning the observed episode of the boat and loudspeaker broadcasting the Rosary answered by "traditional Maltese, yes, yes, were responding from the beach. Oh, I thought it was amazing. That was a statement also saying the Rosary off a fishing boat you wouldn't get that in Bondi. [laughed]. I mean, this was fantastic".

Apart from language usage, in Azzopardi's Fishworks series, the fish image appears throughout. She says that "you can look at it literally about going fishing; alright the praying that is involved [praying for a good catch]; what you can look at this at an esoteric level with strong connections with religion. And then you can look at it at another level, you probably look at fish compared to Saint Christina and Mary; it's a very Catholic piece of work." Azzopardi assures understanding by making a second explanation: "I look at it, fish, also as a symbol for women and for the goddess; it's a direct link and for me there are three levels. A traditional Maltese will look at it as a fishing story: my dad will look at it as a fishing story. My mum will look at it: this is a Catholic fishing story. I go: this is about thousands of years of history put into this fishing story, OK it goes beyond it...".

Language as a major identity trait and this in turn influencing art, is so cherished by Gerada that he declares "probably it's a bit hypocritical of me to say, that part of me wants Malta to just be how it is. And it's sad that its language could go in Malta." Gerada was thinking of people who do not employ the Maltese language but revert to speak in an Englishised Maltese or just English between themselves. As far as he is concerned as an artist, he is

content to align his work anomalously in contemporary style, with unchanged Malteseness, which includes the unadulterated language. He explains the importance of language when he adds that: "You can understand a lot about a person, even within their overall culture of Australia, by the language they use and how they talk. It's the way you paint a picture; it is a tool." Grech agrees that Maltese is the vehicle that expresses culture. Potts similarly agrees, but stresses the importance of not to overdo identity. She says that she risked being "too Maltese" when she first came to Australia in her living with her relatives who "were still living in the 1950s as they were in Malta, and to me that was a little bit of a shock."

The language of origin identifies as Maltese and, as stated earlier, applies its imagery to the artists who, in embodying the images effectively utilise a language of art which, in the individual way s/he uses the images, this identifies the particular artist. Then in full circle, the artist is identified as Maltese.

Like Borg and Gerada, Azzopardi cannot speak or read Maltese except to a limited degree, yet, like them, she assigns to the language the role of identification. It defines who is Maltese, for as she says: 'If you don't know who you are, where would you go?' In answer to this question, the interviewer prompted "I would be a citizen of the world," to which she added "We can be all one in our thinking and we can all have one language, but we need our past, we need our ancestry, and it's there anyway. I believe it's within us and when you see people who don't know their past, they always feel displaced." Nonetheless, Azzopardi accepts that it is not salutary to uphold one's nationalism to an extreme extent.

Artists studied are generally painting across two cultural landscapes and they feel that they do, but putting into words what identifies them with one landscape or another is not facile. It is acknowledged that merely speaking the language is insufficient evidence of identity. An Anglophone studying Maltese does not make this person Maltese. Some people, as mentioned, do not even speak the language, yet they passionately maintain that they identify with Maltese. Their claim to identity is shaped by references to ways of daily living. For example, Potts did not undergo much change from living in Malta when she first emigrated in 1970 because she was accommodated with her aunt and uncle who observed fully the old home customs since their arrival in 1950 and she merged with their environment. "They had

no children, and they were still living in the 1950s as they were in Malta, and to me that was a little bit of a shock coming from Malta.” Asked about currently whether she tries to live a distinct Maltese sort of way of life she fulfils theoreticians’ observations about remembering, duplicating, re-inventing by migrants, and says ‘I do in a way.’ As a practical measure, she is assisted by contemporary technology. “We have SKYPE now and I can speak to my sister and brothers and see them in their own lounge room and we can chat and talk on an everyday basis.” Referring to accessibility to Maltese art, Potts points out that she is helped by the web. She finds that the art of Malta is completely different to that produced by Maltese-Australians, but then the researcher observed significant differences between Maltese-Australian artists themselves. It follows the differences within personalities, in that art is in part a reflection of the self, even in the generality of context of identification as Maltese. Borg is cautious about any rigidity in formulation of identity. He agrees with Bauman that identity formation is always incomplete. Borg says “I think it’s always on the move. But I don’t think that you never form an identity. Your identity is that you allow yourself to be flexible.”

Azzopardi applauds the relationship between the language and identity. She compensates her lack of knowledge of the language by her intensity of ‘Malteseness’ in her feelings. She incorporates her feelings in diverse Maltese images in her works which she presents as a series.

Summary

The eight Maltese artists interviewed all accept that they are working across two cultural landscapes. They are not necessarily conscious of this during actual performance. When finished, the work itself may denote the hybridity process that took place unconsciously.

Smith observed that hybridity is achieved easier because “humans think through similarity” (Beilharz 1997:76). (Azzopardi, Borg and Gerarda). This equivalence helps render globalisation and universality of messages achievable, minimising the political situation of *other* and *different*. The occurrence of being subject of (or to) both the local and global (Mosquera and Fisher 1997, 2004:5) does not mean that ardour for the old country and the

love of the new locality need to be abandoned to some state of being both settled in the absolute and in complete association. In any case, identity is always evolving (Bauman 2001:64), and flexibility is necessary (Borg).

Three artists (Azzopardi, Borg and Gerada) identify with Malta through their Maltese born parents, as these artists were born and lived in Australia. They have visited Malta. Memory and nostalgia in the diaspora is seen subtly rather than too explicitly in the works of Azzopardi, Borg, Engerer, Gerada and Potts. Nonetheless, there are several instances when nostalgia is observed used in a creative manner. (Cartwright, Gerada, Grech).

The love of Malta influences the belief that artists, as Hall believes, there is concurrency of habitation in more than one home (Pile and Thrift, 1995:10) a feeling that older Maltese feel more strongly. Sentimentality over a previous life in some, and unsettling in badly desiring relate to parents' origin in others, bear on the diasporization involving "unsettling, recombination, hybridization, and cut and mix" (Hall 1996b:447). Consideration is also given to the tyranny of distance increasing rather than otherwise the feel for Maltese observances, although they are often reinvented.

Retention of love of Maltese culture is not seen as detrimental to success in Australia. The frequent command of bi-lingualism aids assimilation and success; at the same time the Maltese language acts as a defining essentiality. Living here, and carrying a Maltese background leads to forging 'new' identities in diaspora. As stated earlier Hua (2008) suggests that, "new values and dynamics" emerge from change and introduced contacts. Catholicism is seen as a major contribution to the formation of Maltese culture and all Maltese-Australian artists embody religious themes in their work. However, these artists display variants from artists living in Malta or from how they would have developed had they lived permanently in the Maltese islands. Maltese-Australian artists seem to have been influenced by the often unconventional presentation of religious art in Australia. It is pertinent to admit that traditional ways of expressing religious belief are also upheld (Gatt). Both approaches can sometimes be discerned in the same artist in commission or not (Borg, Cartwright).

Maltese-Australian artists articulate as well as visually demonstrate that art and way of living are in unison. They go further saying that compositions cannot be called art unless they exteriorise the inner being of their creator.

Some artists (Azzopardi, Cartwright, Gerada) accept the dilemma that their abstraction is not easily understood by the general public, and yet it is often for them the best way to hint at complex thoughts and feelings. They continue to produce it as they are convinced of its profundity of meaning. Art, being personal, is a strategy of self-expression. Artists who work in abstraction are content with this form of expression, as part of the strategy of representation, even if perceived at times as being vague by others.

Chapter 3:

PAINTING A SELF - PORTRAIT

Chapter one provided a background of informed deliberations by social theorists on the perceived and actual effects of diaspora on the lives and performances of Maltese-Australian artists in context of painting across two cultural landscapes. Chapter two discussed specifically the raised issues with eight Maltese-Australian artists. Altogether a framework was formed against which the researcher-artist was able to place himself noting the emergence of a self-portrait simultaneously in similarity and in contrast.

In this chapter issues concerning the researcher personally, as a practising artist in diaspora, will be addressed. Here it is thought expeditious if the writer talks in the first person singular about his visual efforts and his deliberations relative to his existence within two different cultural landscapes.

The reference to landscapes is primarily relevant to cultural matters; however the work itself concerns landscapes physically depicted in artworks, mostly paintings. I do not solely draw and paint landscapes, but for this thesis I have limited my choice to them and to seascapes and streetscapes.

My landscapes depict scenes in Malta from where I originated in 1933 and in Australia where I emigrated in 1955. Most of the work is executed *en-plein-air*. There are exceptions, particularly abstracts, and some others which are composed from sketches done on location. These are created in my studio.

Having discussed with Maltese-Australian artists a number of aspects that are summarised in chapter 2 concerning working in diaspora, stylistically, I am different, but I also relate to the artists discussed in the chapter in so far as Borg depicts his suburb for self-expression, Engerer displays his fascination with the *dghajjes tal-latini*, the Gozitan sailboats with lateen sails, Gatt faithfully represents Malta scenes, and Gerada incorporates the Malta main harbour and migrants' sea vessels as background to his abstracts. Visiting Malta, I paint the

famous *en-plein-air* local streetscapes, align with the vibrant colours of the *luzzijiet*, two bows fishing boats and *kajjikki*, ketches for fishing, also depict the city and countryside and dwell particularly on the Grand Harbour. In the broad sense of streetscapes encompassing architectural constructions, I am in affinity with Grech and Potts. The former sculpted the Oracle Monolith and Potts produces prints of the catacombs. In two large paintings, I present the whole of two monoliths (Image 51) on different sites in Malta. Instead of catacombs, some of which being situated under churches, I depict the churches themselves. However, I do not relate as much in my work to Azzopardi and Cartwright in their conceptual work except in my abstract works. In abstraction I coalesce with the abstract producers' conviction that it is capable to express complex insights into the 'soul'. Abstraction is a heuristic device which, during unplanned execution, enables one to discover internal aspects without the aide of materiality.

In agreement, evaluating their words and their work, I benefitted through examining my stance in their context and by discovering something about myself. In fact this type of approach intrigued Papastergiadis (2010) when talking about looking at photographs by and of other people generally discovering oneself in others and vice versa, rendering the act of photographing a learning exercise whilst preserving images for revisiting in the future, if not for posterity.

In positioning myself relative to other artists, I enhanced my ability to 'paint a self-portrait' as artist, realising part similarity to them, whilst mostly having no common measure which is desirable of 'serious' artists. All our 'self-portraits' gain extra touches as they incorporate aspects of the changing conditions of hybridity. All in all, the eight Maltese – Australian artists and myself, being in the midst of life experience in a diasporic placement, generally discovered that the theoretical pronouncements of social theorists regarding being "at home" and "not at home", simultaneously, are applicable in the case of all the artists taking part in this study.

As tactile objects, my oils are of an *impasto* nature contrasted with thin application. Purposefully in my painting of the Valetta Grand Harbour (Image 54), I loaded the canvas thickly with lumpy paint, sand and art paint and slashing strokes where the buildings of Fort

Saint Angelo and Fort Saint Michael and the surrounding houses and churches are located, whilst the sky and sea are contracted with plain paint. The intention was to emphasise the solidity and texture of the cities and the main city which the national poet, Dun Karm Psaila, versed that it was built never to fall, and the exotic colours of the atmosphere and the Mediterranean. I deem textural tangibility effective on buildings, rocks, tree trunks, clouds, hills, and so on.

My water colours are characterised by equally expressive slashing brushstrokes. On the level of representation subject matter is realism rendered un-photographically with an underlying abstract quality in unnatural bright hues. Nature and the human form are re-invented with vivid high key colours.

As examples, I mention two watercolours painted on location in Gozo (Malta's sister island) 'Ix-Xlendi' and 'The Watch Tower'. The rugged Xlendi cliffs are rendered in heavy-handed strokes, the ruggedness is echoed in the cloudy sky: the Tower stands foregrounded in bright orange outlined in red. The sea in one painting is intense blue, whereas in the other the sea is turquoise. Although representational and titled accordingly, the paintings are not photographically detailed. The brush movement and the lively colours are my way of expressing excitement at revisiting places that connect with my youth. It was then a treat to travel by small boat to Gozo from the densely populated suburb of Msida in main Malta. The Tower is seen as significant of guardianship of the Maltese Islands against invasion intending to carry off the population to slavery and to adversely affect Catholicism. There was in fact an occasion in history when the entire population of Gozo was taken into slavery. Although the tower had little connection with the Second Great War, yet to me it is mentally connected with the defence of us the inhabitants horribly besieged in this War. I experienced this event as a child.

Self-expression in vigorous fauvish-expressionist pictures, metaphor and emotional and cerebral brooding are intended in the work which, despite the feeling of freedom, mindful organisation is observed for achievement of a meaningful effect.

My type of work therefore, does not afford 'arguments' such as when a viewer is confronted with subject matter that makes one deliberate on what is the message that is intended. Some of the work of Azzopardi, of Gerada and of Cartwright which are studied as well as that of John Spiteri, and Renald Portelli, (the latter two not forming part of this study) fall into the 'ideas' category. It is similar to modern poetry whose meaning is not necessarily absorbed on first reading. In Malta itself one is aware of the current European influence on the multi-varied styles employed by Maltese artists working contemporaneously, and experimentation is done by the young. The traditional Maltese artists are tonal in nature, deriving from the classical inheritance which can be seen in the National Museum, in palaces and in churches. My own work is on the surface straightforward in its representation of images and more so the scenery depicted is identifiable by the location revealed in the title in Maltese or in English. Then there is an underlying content encompassing varied emotions, personal narratives, metaphor, nostalgia, aesthetic statement, and deliberate or unconscious reflections of some statements proffered by social theorists who studied the diasporic existence. I will express my thoughts on how I react to a selection of relevant reflections as well as make reference to specific artworks to demonstrate possibilities of their 'reading.'

In unison with the eight Maltese-Australian artists interviewed I am aware that I favour two cultural landscapes because they are intrinsically part of my living experience, past yet present and present continuing even if it encompasses changes. There is a quality in the early upbringing that clings forever.

The two cultural landscapes co-exist in my psyche and I respect both, according them my wholehearted appreciation and I am aware of their influence on my lifestyle which in turn traces itself around my work.

Contrary to the other artists, when producing my work I am conscious of cultural hybridity manifesting itself, as Maltese is the choice of high key 'Mediterranean' colour and most importantly, the selection of subject matter when the painting location is in Malta, and as Australian in *plein air* working, an activity in common with the Australian impressionists, Roberts, Streeton and McCubbin being among the best known exponents, in front of Australian motifs. Moreover, Australian subjects are accorded very bright colours as well and

I feel that, in a way, I could be painting some of them in another country. The atmosphere about them suggests that it is of a painter originating from overseas. Titles and, in the case of geographical landscapes, individual aspects such as ranges of mountains or architectural structures define particular places in Australia, but they don't overcome the atmosphere of another continent. Referring to a detail, such as the sky in many of my paintings, it is often of a range of yellows rather than blue. Done on a bright day, yellow suggests to me the commonly referred to 'Malta, the island of *sunshine* and of history', at the same time '*sunny* Australia'. The sunny atmosphere also metaphorically alludes to the friendliness of this host country. As examples of Malta are 'Bastions, Church, Homes, Sun and Sea, All One: Faith', 'View across from Malta University, San Gwann', 'Bastions, Ta'Xbiex', 'Balconies and Nappa Bar, Sliema'. Examples of Australia: 'Repairing Nets near fishing trawler, Lorne', 'View from the Hermitage, Narbethong', 'At Nurrabundah, A.C.T.', 'The Rainman, StKilda Botanical Gardens'. Architectural subjects, such as churches which are a recurring favourite item, duplicate the two countries and they are accorded the same handling. More importantly to me, they are all equally remindful of my religious beliefs, no matter if the churches represented are of diverse religions. In my watercolour 'Il-Ggantija u l-Knisja Kattolika' (The Ggantija and the Catholic Church) I combined the Neolithic temple, representing the Maltese ancient religious belief in gods, with current belief in God, the picture not intended to be merely an essay in architecture. Another watercolour 'Knisja tal-Karmnu u tal-Ingliżi' (The Carmel Church and the Church of the English), the title is as they are known in Malta, are again of diverse religions and chosen as personally meaningful subject matter. Both paintings were done on site and more so they were instrumental in awakening memories of my childhood upbringing in a strict religious atmosphere and my reflection in later life on my persistence in the originating faith, typifying me as Maltese.

A nearly similar effect on me is the portrayal of churches in Australia, such as in my paintings 'Princes Bridge, Melbourne', (showing Saint Paul's Cathedral), 'Saint Mary's Church, Windsor', 'Church at Deans Marsh'. Religious content is also shown in my painting 'The Cross'. The Cross is symbolised by a gum tree that did actually have one main bare trunk and a thick branch on either side extending across in the form of a cross. There is a rough ground and there are some dark trees at the back with a sombre grey-mauve sky. It is meant to signify Golgotha. This painting is remindful of a black and white drawing that I did

on the road to Rabat, Malta, showing a dead tree that the lightning sculpted in the shape of a crucified Christ. This tree was well known for its religious image, and flowers and candles were placed before it. I believe that this tree has since disappeared. So, both Malta and Australia afford me inspiration for religious subject matter.

Continuing on with hybridity, this has the connotation, which I appreciate of humans thinking through similarity referred to by Peter Beilharz (1997:76) regarding the views of Bernard Smith. This thought is acquiesced by all interviewed Maltese-Australian artists but they invariably stress that the thinking processes as engrained by existence, past or present, or past in the present, in Maltese atmosphere are to be retained as uniquely precious matter. But despite hopefully, globalisation and universality, my work is expressive of two particular cultures. In my daily living I do not categorically try to identify aspects of cultural similarity, but I am cognisant of the need of pursuing cultural interests which generate a satisfactory instance of 'mixing' with my locals, which is further aided by my making an effort on my arrival to improve my grasp of the English language as a vital communication mean. Maltese is retained both as an identity indicator and as of use at home and amongst the Maltese Community which I assist as an interpreter, also in communicating with Maltese in Malta, mostly artists and writers.

In dispersion, existence in a diasporic context applies to me as well as to the other Maltese-Australian artists and I am likewise influenced in my 'performance' by my cultural identity. It would not have been acceptable to me had this embodiment been aimed at being transcendent. I concur with Ryoko Nishii (2002:240) that the social meaning discourse of the society to which I belonged, and ascribe in memory, "cannot be a substantiated entity that is fixed and static." I am conscious that a new identity has in fact been formed from my experience of displacement from Malta, despite 'nostalgia' and 'metaphor' lingering in my work. (Bhabha 1994a; Gunew 1994).

I also agree with Bauman (2001:135-136) that cultural pluralism improves the quality of shared existence. To achieve this, whilst as a displaced artist I am continually engrossed in the unpreventable contest to form a new 'positionality', I maintain flexibility in adopting aspects of other cultures, which contribute towards some shaping like the 'other,' aiming at

building bridges through patterning and repatterning, balancing retention and adoption of acculturation. I believe in observing flexibility, open to further experimentation. Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991:232) articulates this thus: “Every artistic excursion and theoretical venture requires that boundaries be ceaselessly called to question, undermined, modified, and reinscribed.”

Soon after my arrival in Australia, my work, both in the visual and in poetry began to acquire new colours which mixed with the previous on the palette. The determination to ‘burn my boat’ without return on my arrival was abided by, hence the occurrence of a necessitous struggle to change and to absorb as much as practicable out of a new culture. My attitude conforms to Azzopardi’s “not giving up what you’ve got, but making what you’ve got even richer” (See also Hua 2008). My work differed from Gatt’s and Potts’ physically depicting Malta. Nostalgia in the sense of homesickness was anathematized as antagonistic to success in the new environment. Nostalgia signifying memory aiding creativity in the new work was resorted to empathetically later. It is still cultivated as an asset. So do Gerada, Grech and Cartwright whose work bear ample evidence. Some of their work was discussed in Chapter 2 in the section ‘Employment of Nostalgic Imagery’. This trend continued and accelerated as familiarity with the host’s environment increased.

In creating my painting ‘Msida Church on Festa Night’ (Image 50), is not a mere looking languorously at my birth place, but it displays a balance between my restless over busy existence as represented by the exploding fireworks and the calmness of the well-lit church extension, not dissimilar to my struggles in the diaspora brought into equilibrium by the harmonious acceptance of the enlightened change as the church undergoes a yearly transformation in being encased in lights throughout its facade.

Contemplating the future, my approach to art is envisaged as encompassing as subject matter the human condition which explores feelings and attitudes in myself that spell my belonging to humanity. This statement is made with some confidence, having in the past dealt with this aspect in my poetry. Poetry is facilitated through usually being written at the desk, whereas, since I prefer to be an ‘on the scene’ type of painter, impracticability is often prohibitive. My role is to find a means of overcoming this difficulty; for example I may rely more on quick

sketches/drawings which are developed into paintings at the studio, a method that I currently resort to rarely. Although this is an old accepted practice in the art-world, one must do the utmost to preserve freshness.

In relation to painting across two cultural landscapes, judging from my involvement with the Maltese community, I expect that visual images will present themselves to ‘inspire’ artworks, when I focus purposefully on individuals’ behaviour and on clubs’ activities within the Maltese community, their ‘two homes’ stance mirrored in me. Another development that I envisage is to separately produce more of the totally abstract works seeking greater and more subtle expression of my psyche because abstracts act with consciousness and unconsciousness and with probing unfettered by compulsion to represent realism, “elaborating consciousness of what one really is [what I really am]” (Gramsci 1971). In this respect there is some conformity with Borg who suggests that he may turn towards abstraction in the future. There is also conformity with Azzopardi who persists on experimenting with new themes usually concerning human aspects, and ways of presentation of those topics. Also, in my future I would like to compose artworks of ‘ideas’ which is already a feature of my poetry. In this respect I would emulate Azzopardi and Cartwright though I seek to express my own thoughts in my own style.

Reflecting on Bartlett’s (Tanabe and Keyes 2002:203) “human experience constantly and continuously reshapes recollection”, I checked my recollection with the status quo when I visited Malta, initially after forty years absence. Since my interest was in painting images of historical interest although having connections with my past, such as bastions around Valetta and the Grand Harbour as in the painting ‘L-Isla Bastions Church’ (Image 49). Also equally of interest has been the Tal-Pjeta and churches such as Ta’ Liesse in Valetta and Lady of Mount Carmel at Balluta, as well as iconic geographical places like Wied iz-Zurrieq and It-Tieqa in Gozo. My recollection matched these unchangeable subjects. What changed was the familiarity with them which existed whilst I originally lived there, and the ‘nostalgic’ meaning which was superimposed over them from living abroad. As Nelson Mandela (1994) said: “there is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.” Therefore my depiction of them in artworks contains dual covert meaning. Nonetheless, on visiting I confirmed Azzopardi’s statement that in decades

Maltese in Malta made substantial changes to their social and political attitudes and to their lifestyle.

Returning to two of my works painted on location 'Bastions at Tal-Pjeta', Malta' and 'It-Tieqa' ('The Window'), Gozo, the bastions and the former rocky formation in the latter are unchanged, but they are also connections with my changing self since the time as a youth when a favourite walk was from Msida to Tal-Pjeta (with a prayer stop at the famous Pietà niche), up to Floriana and to Valletta. After meeting friends or satisfying some chores appropriate to the main city, I would visit the National Museum of Art and churches, such as Saint Francis and the cathedral of Saint John that are adorned with outstanding works of art. The second painting shows two small figures walking over the top of the bridge or window-like rocky assemblage, imagining that those two people are my sweetheart and myself walking over. They could also be ourselves re-visiting after decades. We are changed physically and mentally moulded by circumstances whilst living abroad.

In contrast to my experience of focus on art subjects – buildings and actual landscapes – in visiting Malta, I found that the old ways of life that some Maltese narrate to me in Australia, or that Maltese-Australian writers, especially poets, emotionally nostalgically sing about, embody many differences from current reality, including materiality referred to by Barker (2000:8) as “Cultural representations and meanings have a certain materiality, they are embedded in sounds, inscriptions, objects, images, books, magazines and television programmes. They are produced, enacted, used and understood in specific social contexts”.

Change also affected the Maltese language enough to be a distinguishing factor of Maltese-Australians when visiting Malta after decades abroad; in Malta, Maltese Anglicise many words directly from Britain's English, whilst we in Australia Australianise and so we are recognised by the Maltese in Malta as Australian Maltese.

No matter what form is Maltese practiced, it remains symbolic of identity. I agree with all interviewed artists that learning English is vital, yet one should still cherish one's original language as, if not, a prime indicator of one's culture is lost. With Gerada, I lament the over borrowing and, worse, the shedding of one's culture in preference not to speak Maltese,

anomalously to appear cultured! Cultivating Maltese, my works done in Malta, are usually titled in Maltese. Visiting major exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria, I also broadcast in Maltese art appreciations as the invited guest of a Maltese radio programme of the Special Broadcasting Service in addition to talks on literature, recognising my commitment to art and my lifelong contribution to Maltese literature. My use of Maltese is done as a natural activity, neither posing a concept that, needing 'translation' along with the cultural colour which is an integral part of it makes it special,²⁴ nor employing it as a vehicle forcing bringing Malta to Australia, nor thinking of adhering to ancestry, nor attaching any cultural advantage or power, nor ensuring understanding. As stated, it is innately established within myself and upheld as instinctive, not as an insistence of it as carrier of the old influence. Upholding the language, I ensure that in diaspora I maintain my identity defining myself – or that part of the self which is visible even in living under a new set of rules in a more "open" society mindful of L and R Grinberg's (1989:26) noting that "Migration ... is a change of such magnitude that it not only puts one's identity on the line but puts it at risk. One experiences a wholesale loss of one's most meaningful and valued objects... Not only does the emigrant lose his attachments ... but he is in danger of losing part of his self as well".

Returning to art and religion, I identified at least twenty-five of my oils and watercolours and a print depicting in each case a symbolic architectural structure. They present an artistic composition rather than 'holy pictures' of Jesus, the Madonna and saints, these images being commonly preserved in Maltese homes for private devotion. Publicly, the Maltese are known for the Holy Week processions around certain streets and the displays of garage size Christmas cribs and front garden settings of electrically lit Christmas images. The religious formation is, alongside the language, a major identifying factor for the Maltese. Outward expression of this identification in a new country which, unlike Malta, is not close to 100% Catholic is not without problems in its narratives. As a member of the Maltese community, I too accept my religious upbringing as a very significant part of my identity. Although my art has no resemblance to the multitudinous images especially inside the Malta churches as well

²⁴ Translation is referred to in the broad sense of understanding other cultures. In migrating I came across this phenomenon as a necessity from both the perspective of understanding Australians and from being understood. I don't subscribe to Wolfgang Iser's idea of 'insurmountable difference' (³⁹). From the start I made it my aim to smother differences by positiveness of outlook and, in so doing, I usually met with reciprocity. Other artists adopted a similar attitude, but some struggled more than others to assemble a new 'positionality'.

as those in Australia, the same churches which formed some of my paintings are no less found with my own religious formative influence. Thus, my watercolour, done at Balluta, Malta, of the Church of Lady of Mount Carmel, painted in almost psychedelic colours, purposely denotes my stimulation of religious narratives past and present. I would like to refer again to my oil painting of Msida Church on Festa Night painted recently, showing the Church lit up by an excessive number of globes attached to its structure and the sky ablaze with exploding multi-coloured fireworks. In this instance the allusion to religious fervour is explicit. This church, hence this painting, has more importance to me as the church that I regularly attended as a boy and a teenager. Still more important, it was a stimulus to my first painting 'The Death of Saint Joseph' imitative of that in the apse of this church.

Those artists who incorporate religious subjects in their work, all subscribe to a cultural landscape. My religious paintings differ from Cartwright's so far as he is currently engaged in depicting a series of saints as stained images in his local church. They also differ from Azzopardi's who made use of images from the Zebbug, Malta, church that her parents attended. They also differ from Potts' catacombs, some of which are found beneath Malta churches.

Members of the Maltese community often mention their connection with their town/village church in Malta as a sentimental tie. It can be part of their living in the past, but so living is insufficient for migrants to feel Maltese. Ways of thinking and of behaviour in the present of a kind that is appropriate to the 'Maltese mind' are greatly significant. In any case, Maltese in Australia generally keep in touch with Malta, literally because almost unanimously they have relations there and communication is frequent and improved through the highly refined contemporary technology: the internet.

It is noted that keeping of religious ceremonies is not gender specific, observed as usually attended by couples, but it is age specific to first generation Maltese. Cauchi (2002:52) suggests that: "Religion often means a great deal to the traditional migrant.... There is often a tendency whenever one is passing through a bad phase, a disaster, a hard time – not an uncommon experience in the life of the average migrant. Secondly, the church, as a physical and accessible building ... is often the only place to provide continuity with life in a previous

existence at home. The age-old ritual of religious practice provides a solid foundation familiar to the average migrant.” Without homogeneity of customs as perceived applicable to class structure, identity as Maltese suffers immeasurably. In my case, I do not overstress the importance of living a distinct Maltese way of life. I am aware of the importance to others and that it is possible to engage in such living in Australia especially in the preferred suburbs where the ‘other’ Malta exists, characterising the ‘otherness’.

Despite lack of strictness to adopt a Maltese way of life, I think that my art sheds some light on my share, no matter if not extensive, of predicament as a ‘displaced’ artist. I notice that my artistic expression is increased because of displacement, always feeling at home, and not, at the same time, to some degree, I remember the former and contemplate the future, looking forward, bringing out my ‘oneself’ through ‘fauvish-expressionist paintings, well in unison with Robert Hughes’ (1980:154) evaluation of Matisse’ quoted earlier: “It was not a matter of artistic style; it issued from a complete attitude towards life and how to live it.” It is not, therefore, a matter of just being a practitioner, but evolving in creating itself amounts to research. I have moved from the photographically detailed representation of my early years such as depicted in the painting of a gum tree in our backyard, and the finicky painting ‘Both Supported’ depicting an old man supported by his walking stick in the Greenmeadows Gardens, Balaclava savouring his walk, and a badly leaning tree supported by a bluestone wall; to the sombre dark period paintings like ‘The Cripple – Modern Living’ (Image 55) showing a dark figure again supported in this instance on a crutch, and limping in a narrow lane between overwhelming gloomy architectures and the painting of the ‘Corporate Suicide’ (Image 57) showing a figure jumping between distorted canyons of high city buildings and ‘Wandering the Night’ (Image 56) showing a lone figure bent over and walking at night on a path alongside masses of dark trees on hills not quite decipherable, and ominous black and grey clouds lit by a distorted moon. This is accompanied by a quotation from Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’:

...to suffer
the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

and by a quotation from a poem of mine ...

Night profuse of sheets
of darkness, yet not enough
to wrap up my woes.

These mentioned paintings reflected my life crisis breakdown; they show a striking difference on comparison with the joyous works of later and the latest years such as the series of works painted on art excursions to the Flinders Ranges and very many *plein-air* compositions including the most recent series created on a stay at Flinders Island. At the Flinders Ranges I produced several pictures simply titled but exuberant in colours, among them; 'Red Gum' and 'Flinders Ranges'. At Flinders Island in a week's painting full time I again produced a substantial number of happy oils and water colours, amongst which are 'Hill Face on Road to Mt Strzelecki National Park' (Image 58), and 'A Lagoon' (Image 59). I realise that I am a commingling of homogeneous and heterogeneous elements mixed during eight decades "worlded out there in the world" (Hall 1995). I fit into several of the meaningful practices studied and articulated in multiple deliberations of cultural studies theorists. In Diaspora, I am somebody who fulfils the categorisation offered by Hall who says: "what I would call the diasporic conception of the subject or identity refers to anybody whose cultural identity is already constructed out of the creolization or sychronitism of different cultural repertoires. This literally means between two cultures." Hues mixing resulting from acculturation in two cultural existences as a diasporic artist from tackling manifold subjects (of which landscapes, streetscapes and seascapes are selected for this particular project) across two cultural landscapes, helped my canvas to absorb facets of life both of a global and local nature and, giving substance and significance fleshed out in paint, viewing this visibly shaped, it aided further as a tangible means of seeing myself – beholding my own 'portrait'. Despite this occurrence, I am cognisant of the scope for painting future 'self-portraits' modelling, but as a mental investigation, the physical yet psychological actual self-portraits mindfully time spaced by Rembrandt and Van Gogh among others. I am aware that an end is not reached while life is not concluded. I concur with Bodò saying "behaviourist social psychology formulated the generally accepted principle that the self in continuous development; it does not exist from the very beginning, at the time of birth, but develops in the course of social

experiences and activity. Accordingly, it develops as a result of its relationship with the entire process and the persons participating in the process.” (2013:2).

I feel respectful of art that can afford effective means to maintain in continuity the inquiry of the self into the further emergent difference of the re-invented from the old remembered, and the newly experienced culture.

Summary

As shown I work in two cultural landscapes, enduring the struggles associated with making efforts to belong successfully to both. Shedding the original landscape is impracticable as it is engrained in one's psyche, nor is it possible not to undergo change. Effort is mandatory because to initially resist change is natural. The benefits accrue later, but they are not necessarily appreciated beforehand. Thus my work harbours an underlying content encompassing complex emotions, personal lived narratives, metaphor and nostalgia.

I endeavour to not overdo the appearance of being culturally 'other', but I am aware that my work stands out as different when exhibited before the public. Outwardly my work is marked by excess of colour allied to fauve and expressionist mode. Also European subject matter is exhibited alongside my Australian compositions. As Borg is concerned, so am I at times doubtful whether 'European' art is genuinely accepted in the Australian mainstream. Some work is in itself hybrid, displaying that it pertains to two cultures. Contrary to the other artists, I am conscious at the time of working of cultural duality manifesting itself.

In my 'self-portrait', in the first 'cultural landscape' content I retain two major identity characteristics: (a) the Catholic faith, an aspect that labels me a traditional Maltese migrant, to whom "the age-old ritual of religious practice provides a solid foundation familiar to the average migrant" (Cauchi 2002:52). However, I produce very little 'holy' pictures per se; (b) The Maltese language that bears directly on my work by suggesting visuals from its linguistic word pictures. Moreover, I gain inspiration from my lifelong interest in Maltese literature and contact with Maltese, including artists in Malta and abroad. Predicting the future, I favour (i) the human condition, (ii) ideas (essay) compositions, and (iii) more psychological

abstractions. These considerations will add to the continuity of cultural change in the formation of identity.

Painting my self-portrait is a repetitive exercise, except that each repetition shows changes that occur in the meantime for, as Stuart Hall maintains, “identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of culture.” (Terry 1995).



Image 47 - Manwel Cassar



Image 48 - Manwel Cassar
on ladder Painting Chernobil 305 cm H X 183 cm W, wife Josephine
ensuring safety



Image 49 - Manwel Cassar L-Isla Bastions and Church, Malta

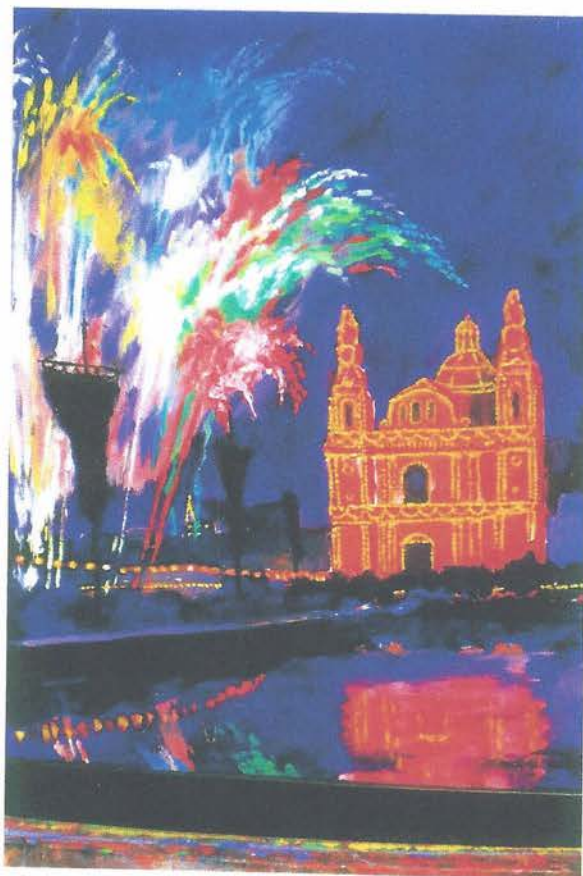


Image 50 - Manwel Cassar Msida Church on Festa Night, Malta

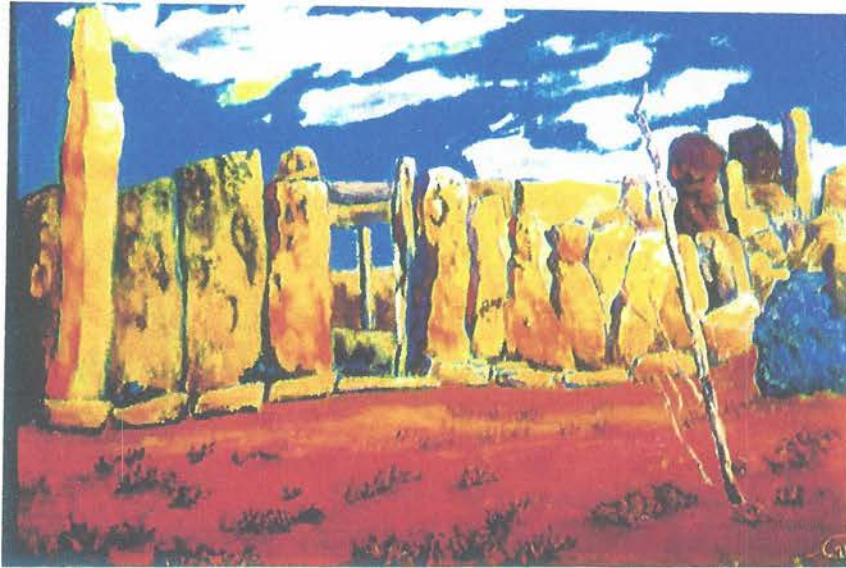


Image 51 - Manwel Cassar Hagar Qim Neolithic Temple, Malta



Image 52 - Manwel Cassar Bastions, Tal-Pjeta, Malta

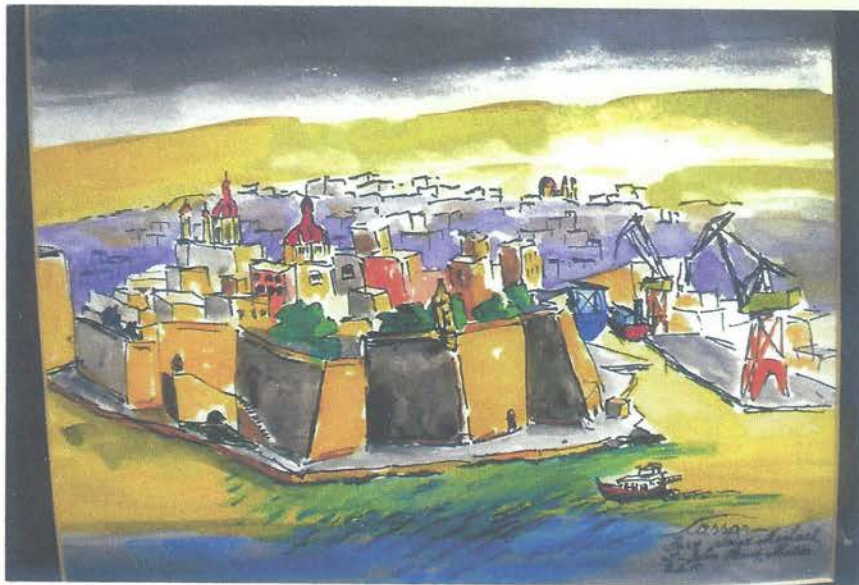


Image 53 - Manwel Cassar Fort St Michael, L-Isla, Grand Harbour, Malta

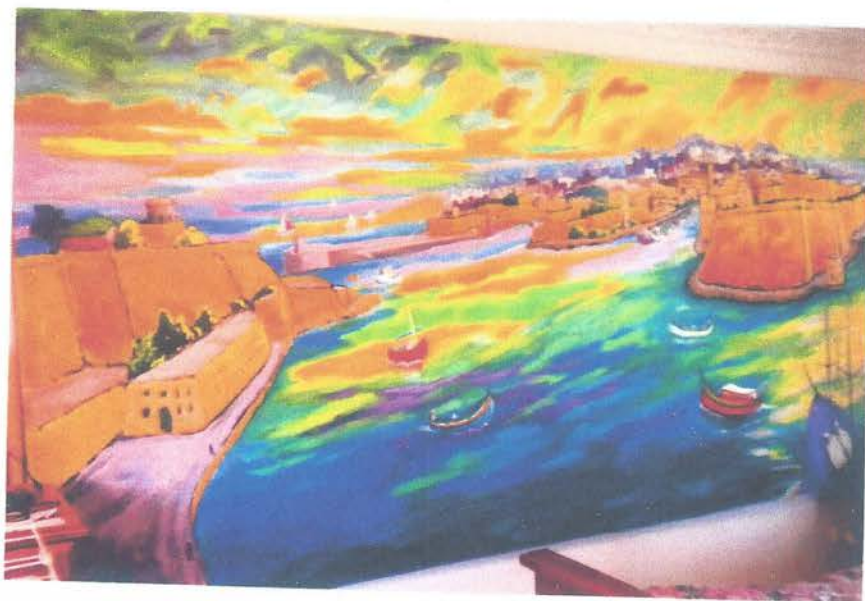


Image 54 - Manwel Cassar The Grand Harbour, Malta

Image 55 - Manwel Cassar The Cripple - Modern Living



Image 56 - Manwel Cassar Wandering the Night



Image 57 - Manwel Cassar Corporate Suicide



Image 58 - Manwel Cassar - Hill face on road to Mt Strzelecki National Park, Flinders Island

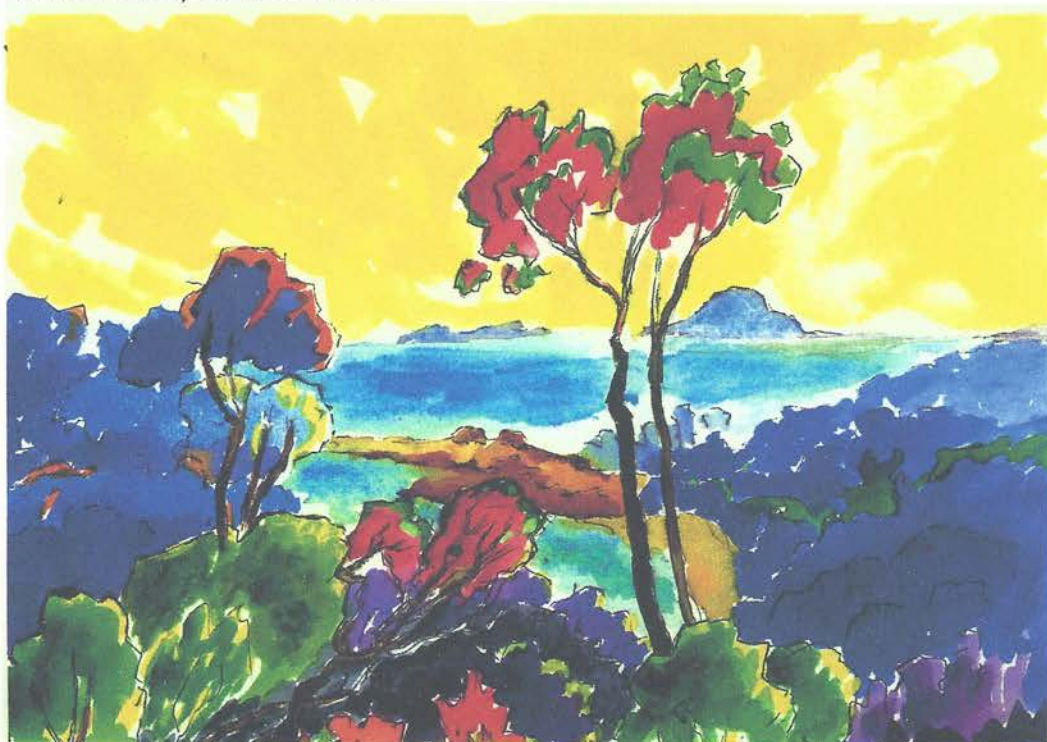


Image 59 - Manwel Cassar A Lagoon, Flinders Island

Conclusion

If the verbal responses as well as observation of works by the diverse eight Maltese-Australian artists are to be taken, as they seem, typical of Maltese-Australian artists in general, it is reasonable to discern general agreement with the statements of social theorists whose diverse discourse agrees on fundamental diasporic issues, although it is not attempted to overlook subtle differentiation in debates. In this regard this study elicited a fact that had not been established.

Key hegemonic issues explored and found to be applicable in unanimity, including the researcher himself, encompass the feeling that culturally the artists mentally configure and emotionally attach themselves to two homes, one of origin, and one of new adoption. Hence the artists in producing their paintings, sculptures and prints, conflated with living experience, work across two cultural landscapes.

Working in diaspora, contending with the mentioned duality, there are adaptability struggles, as well as of “identities constantly producing themselves anew through transformation and difference” (Hall 1990:222-238).

Therefore, artists recognise in themselves a construct of hybridity emanating from additional changing situations. It is an identity formed from the experience of displacement from Malta; “identity is not fixed and static” (Trinh T. Minh Ha 1991:156). Whilst artists accept that they metamorphose by what transpires in time, place and event, they answer affirmatively to the idea of “cultural pluralism improves the quality of shared existence” (Bauman 2001:135-136). The artists invariably stress that the Maltese atmosphere is to be retained as uniquely precious significance, even though they may or may not realise, as Bartlett said, that “human experience constantly and continuously reshapes recollection” (Tanabe and Keyes 2002:3). Their settlement is pivotal on this retention.

The fact that Maltese-Australian artists frequently mention the desire of ‘keeping Malta alive’ in many ways, including cherishing the language, in habits and in personal attitudes recollects

the thoughts expressed in lyrical terms in a poem²⁵ written by the researcher in the early years of his arrival into Australia. Decades later, his 'self-portrait' acquired hues and stylistic treatment inspired by hybridity, but he also kept sentiment aligned to the original expression. In metaphoric imagery the poem 'To Malta from Abroad, On 8 September', says that the tie (rope) that links your heart and mine is stretched, but the knot still exists. In a second image, the poem says that our life is a brush with which we are painting our home with new colours, but the white and red (of Malta's flag) continuously ooze out. The third stanza simply extenuates this sign: language demonstrates Maltese culture; no matter what effort is made by each one of us to talk in another language, the tonal accent is Maltese. So the poem 'To Malta from Abroad, On 8 September' acknowledges the struggle to change, effort to adhere to the new, but also respects the origin. It creates the feel of mixed cultural hues on the palette, as do the 'conversations' and reflections on Maltese-Australian art that have been the central focus of this study.

Lil Malta Minn Barra, Fit-8 Ta' Settembru

Malta mahbua, sliema f' Settembru!

Ta' qlubna w qalbek, mhux, ghad li mbieghda,

Maqtugh il-habel, 'mma bass ingibed.

Ir-rabta hemm qieghda.

Pinzell hajjitna w bih qed inbajdu

Dar gdida w godda huma l-ilwen,

'Mma l-abjad, l-ahmar l-gheziez hemm ghadom,

Jerhu f'kull zmien.

Baqghu drawwietek, sa fl-Ilsien Malti;

Kull wiehed minna, joqghod attent

Kemm joghod meta b'iehor jithaddet,

-Malti l-accent,

²⁵ The original of the poem was written in Maltese. It is titled 'To Malta from Abroad on 8th September'. This date signifies a national day commemorating the defence of Malta in 1564 by the Knights of Saint John and the Maltese people. The poem was written on 8th September 1964, nine years after arrival in Australia.

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