

MATTHEW ATTARD Kastilja u St James, computer generated animation of superim- posed eye-drawings, video still, 2021

MATTHEW ATTARD

RAJTX MA RAJDX...NAF LI RAJT

Curated by Elyse Tonna

and other works by supporting artists: CAESAR ATTARD NANNI BALESTRINI AARON BEZZINA MATYOU GALEA FRANCESCO JODICE PIERRE PORTELLI





The coexistence of humanity and technological objects and co-constitution with non-human entities is continuously shaping our modern day thoughts and realities. Anthropocentric biases often disregard the need for acceptance of the intimate and ubiquitous relationship between humans and technological objects or things. They continuously question what it means to be human attempting to distance or create a divide between the human, the digital and everything in between. In humancentric societies, we are biased to believe that we are autonomous beings, entirely separated from what we consider to be our tools. Machines appear as phenomena attempting to relinquish human kind and knowledge.

Yet the digital is everywhere. Wherever we go, in whatever we do. Smartphones. Laptops. Social media. Virtual games. Voice Assistants. Data is being processed while we think and speak.



MATTHEW ATTARD Ship of Fools (diptych), pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, pencil drawing on paper, 2021

Cybernetics are no longer extraordinary happenings. Our lives continuously become even more saturated by a growing collection of devices which subject us to modify our behavior and limits, concurrently molding ways of experiencing and perceiving. Consequently, we are forced to rethink our relationships with the non-human world, reconsidering socio-material perspectives about what makes us human. A paradigm shift towards a more posthumanist approach enables us to perceive technology as complementary to human evolution and life (Braidotti, 2013). In attempt to elevate or value the role of technology as an active stakeholder in re-evaluating human and non-human partnerships, postphenomenology derives from theoretical aspects outlined by Maurice Merlau-Ponty, Heidegger and others in order to outline the intersections between heuristics of material things and human subjects (Braidotti, 2013). Central to the notion of posthumanology, essentially a derivative of classical phenomenology, is the idea that these technological objects become quasi-extensions to our bodies where the "unseen things become 'visible'" (Ihde, 2009, p. 20). A realisation that our evolution and the human fabric is mediated by a quintessential balance between human and non human partnerships.

We are all cyborgs: "creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted" (Haraway & Wolfe, 2016, p. 6)

MATTHEW ATTARD They wanted to look like peacocks (diptych) Pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, pencil drawing on paper 2021

In a posthumanist reality, humans, just like data, are perceived as distributed networks. The latter are composed of nuanced juxtapositions of living and non living components forming complex idiosyncrasies with their surroundings. Cyborgs in such instances, particularly in contemporary art, merely perceive machines as being tools, but rather as intelligent extensions or smart prosthesis. Mutual shared agency consequently develops as a result of technosymbiotic relationships between human and machine whereby these are merely disparate and entirely complimentary.

Matthew Attard's artistic practice enacts the posthuman concept, not only to create his art but essentially to also comment on the posthuman itself. Attard shares such agency with an eyetracker which becomes an intelligent extension of himself merging machine and human action. The eye-tracker, as a complex network of hardware, software, algorithms and code¹, is a technological device typically used in multiple disciplines such as in healthcare and marketing. Aside from making visible eye movements, it has been developed significantly so as to further knowledge on the user's gaze (Duchowski, 2013). Attard, as a cyborg, elevates the eye-tracker from object-astool, giving it agency as a collaborator in drawing exercises, even termed performances by Attard himself. Whereby the artist uses the eye-tracker to consciously track his gaze backed up by scope, the eye-tracker involuntarily generates data subsequently transformed into drawings by the artist. This interdependent process is affected by the conditions the artist subjects the eye-tracker to and subsequently to which the object responds, in turn guiding the artistic process and data and drawings generated. In this reiterative process, the eye-tracker becomes a smart collaborator with agency in the production of contemporary drawing, operating with the artist in a series of eye performances.

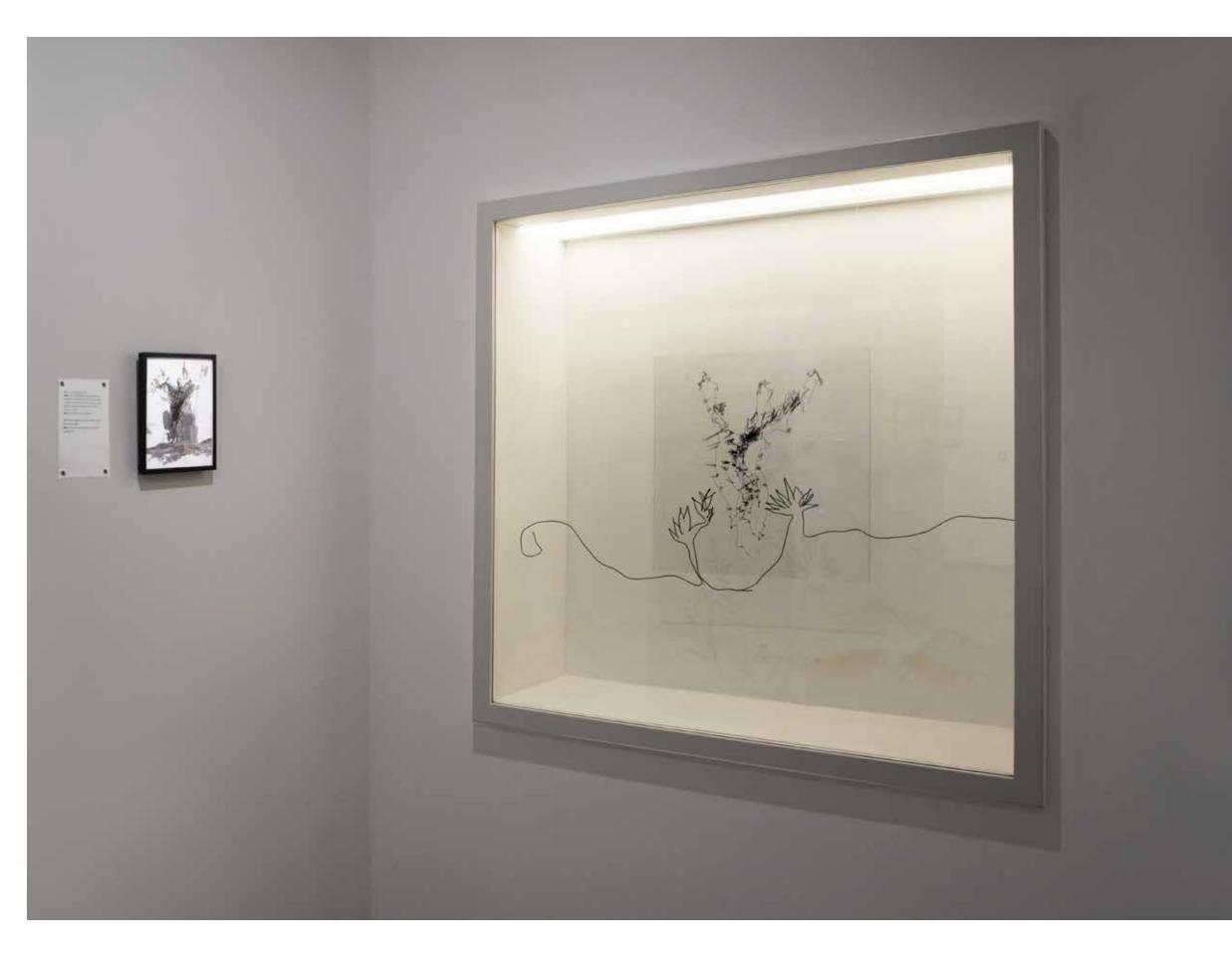
¹ Conversation with Matthew Attard (2021).

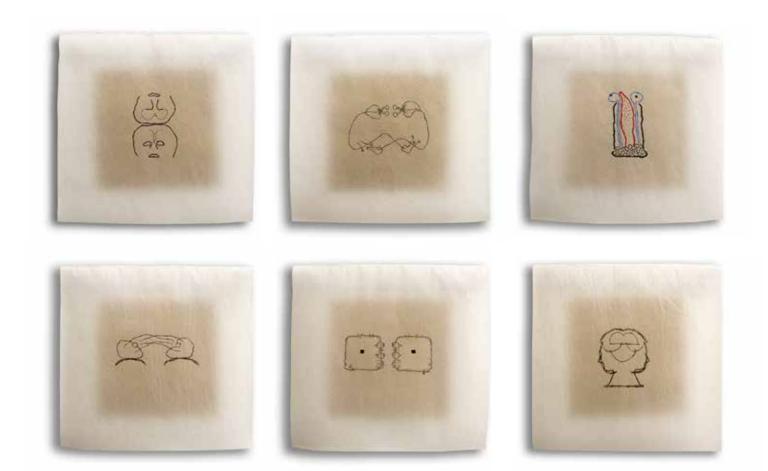
Do eye performances generate drawings?

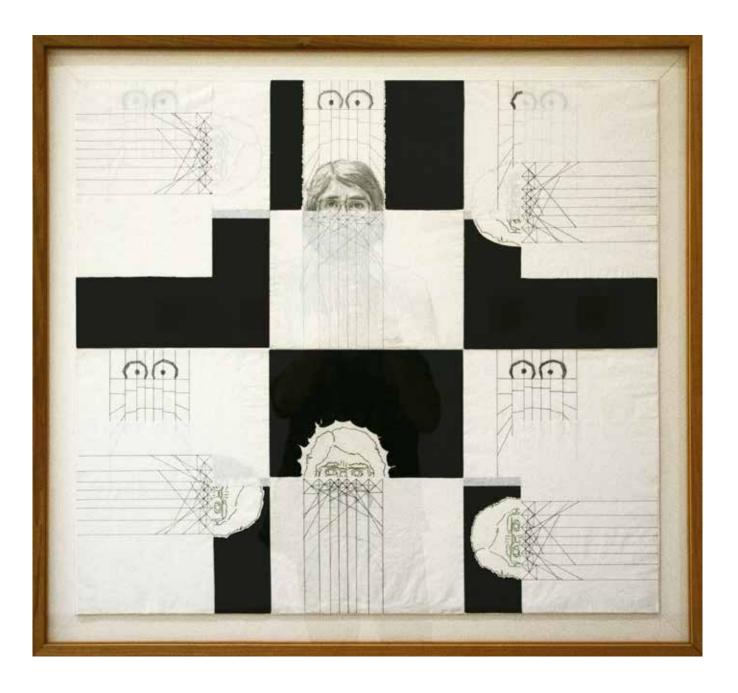
According to Clive Ashwin (2016), any human act that generates a "perceptible residue of marks upon a planar field must be acknowledged as drawing regardless of the degree of intention or control involved" (p. 206). Furthermore, although Attard makes further use of technology such as robotic arms to produce artefacts on paper or perspex, the process materialises as an exercise which deliberately connects one point to another, the points generated through a calibrative process of the eye-tracker as guided by the artist himself. For this reason, "this action leaves, as the trace of its path, a mark of some kind" (Ashwin, 2016, p. 200) and this therefore, in contemporary terms, is a means of hybrid drawing.















MATTHEW ATTARD Triq tal-Ġebel 35° 49'27.6'N 14° 31'05.7'E rotating video on loop superimposed eye-drawings on 3D scan pen-plotted eye-drawing on Bianco Carrara 2021



MATTHEW ATTARD Self -Portrait 1 Pen-plotted eye-drawings on paper 2021

MATTHEW ATTARD Self -Portrait 2 Pen-plotted eye-drawings on paper 2021

MATTHEW ATTARD Self -Portrait 1from a mirror Pen-plotted eye-drawings on paper 2021

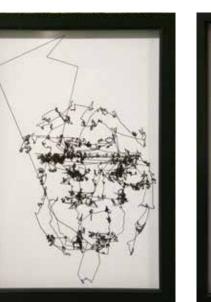
Cyborg. Data. Technology. Drawing. Witnessing. Space.

The baseline of this entire body of work in *rajt ma rajtx ... naf li rajt* is therefore guided by three primary yet interwoven and interrelated principles. Firstly, it reinforces an ongoing critical analysis about the posthuman by elevating the role of the artist, through his collaboration with the eye-tracker, to that of a cyborg. Secondly, it challenges aspects related to traditional drawing and presents the versatility and flexibility of digital technologies whilst challenging the more traditional ones. Additionally it combines the collective role of both these elements to put forward and analyse real-life socio-political contexts reinforcing ways of seeing, interpreted through various perspectives or even *viewpoints.* The use of the eye-tracker, and subsequently the data generated, are evidence that eyes are ultimately involuntarily witnesses of any occurrence. In this exploration of eye drawing, the eye-tracker becomes a protagonist *collaborator*, consequently uncovering notions of witnessing and seeing. Additionally, it is also acting as a means of surveillance and therefore the eye-tracker or *the entity/the technology*, offers undeniable proof of experience.

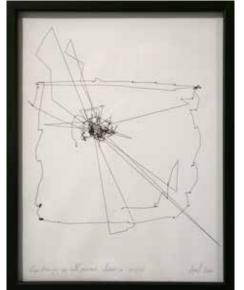
Ways of Seeing

Driven by stance and thus this symbiotic relationship between human and machine, the title of the exhibition rajt ma rajtx ... naf li rajt immediately hints at the ongoing fictitious dialogue between Matthew and the eye-tracker. It also intentionally sets an ambiguous tone for the interpretation of several contexts and happenings presented in the body of works. Deriving from the phrase: rajt ma rajtx ... smajt ma smajtx (I/you saw but I/you did not see ... I/you heard but I/you did not hear), the title hints at a code of silence behaviour commonly known as *omertà*. With a direct reference towards a common oral tradition, it alludes to the complacency or indifference of individuals to act or react to ongoing happenings. Its relevance and association to local mannerisms also immediately sets the tone and partakes in acting as an invitation to take on a playful or critical approach to interpreting contemporary occurrences.

Broadly speaking, the eye-tracker brings to the forefront widespread local realities bound with ongoing complexities related to identity and context. Adopting a tongue and cheek approach throughout, the exhibition featured a number of site-specific interventions stemming from eye drawing performances manifested in particular contexts. Having been staged in specific spaces, these eye performances vaguely draw in representations reinforcing the notion that space or context is imbued with multiple layers of meaning containing social relations of reproduction and relations of production (Lefebvre, 1991). Throughout the exhibition, the drawings bring to the forefront various aspects ranging from mundane realities such as going up/down staircases and travelling in traffic to specific occurrences or environments such as the murder site of Lassana Cisse and a representation of *Is-Sigra tal-Hajja* found within the Hypogeum in Paola, among others. Albeit seemingly disparate, each space presents a restaged context, offering possibilities for questions and various interpretations to be raised.



Installation view





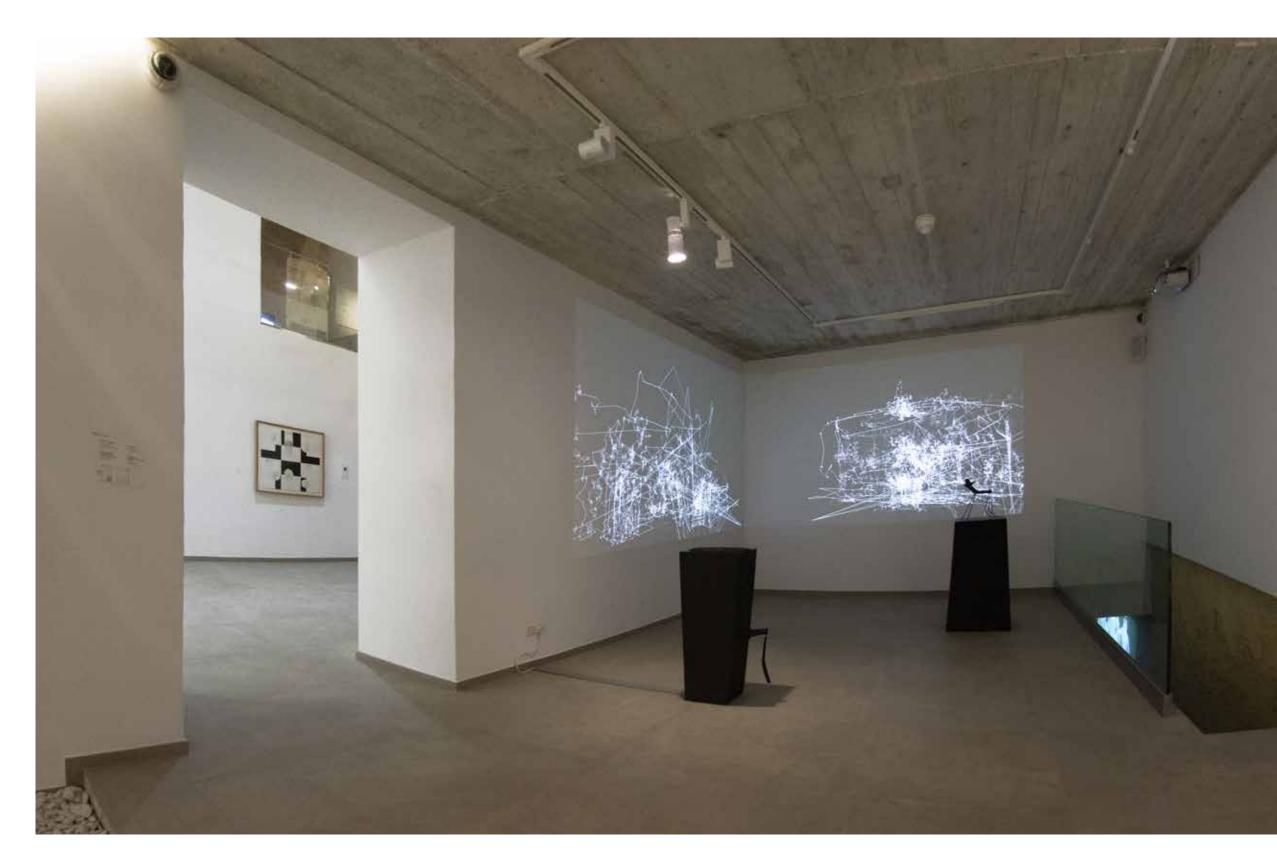
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MATYOU GALEA Study from equine monuments of the Republic. State #1: Fear mild steel 2019



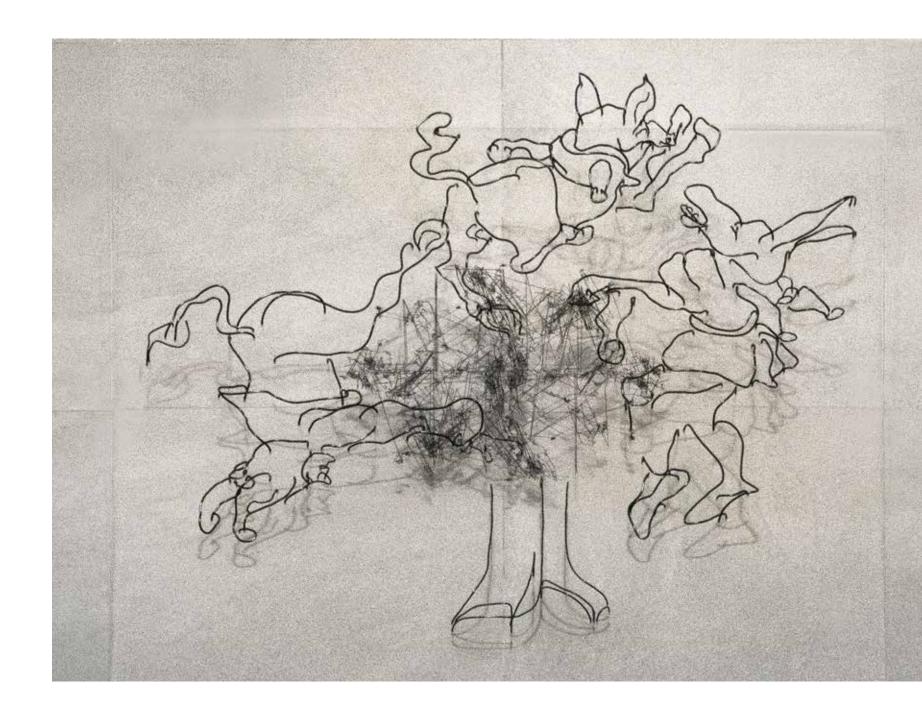
PIERRE PORTELLI Schnapps PA speaker with audio as a monument 2021



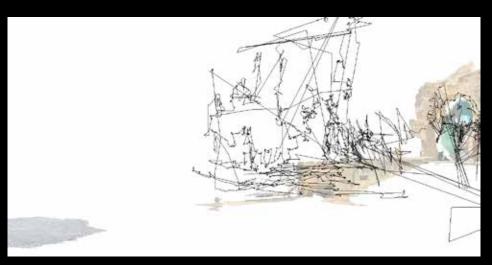
MATTHEW ATTARD Kastilja u St James Computer generated animation on walls of superimposed eye-drawings 2021

The focal point of the exhibition and also its starting point was *Id-Dgħajsa tal-Fidili*, which reinforces the multiplicity of perspectives conveyed throughout. Using ship graffiti typically found on churches as a point of departure, this representation presents a multitude of meanings. Whilst the incisions make reference to ex-voto offerings and are a symbol of hope, the term *fidili* in the name itself signifies faithfulness and loyalty. This duality reflects on the inconsistencies in the way we subject ourselves to everyday contexts and realities, sometimes transposing them to trajectories seemingly beyond our control.

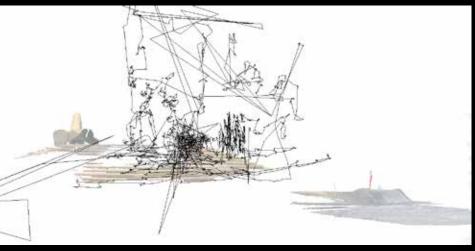




MATTHEW ATTARD ld-Dgħajsa tal-Fidili Digitally printed eye-drawings on intersect-ing plexiglass sheets, metal frame 2021







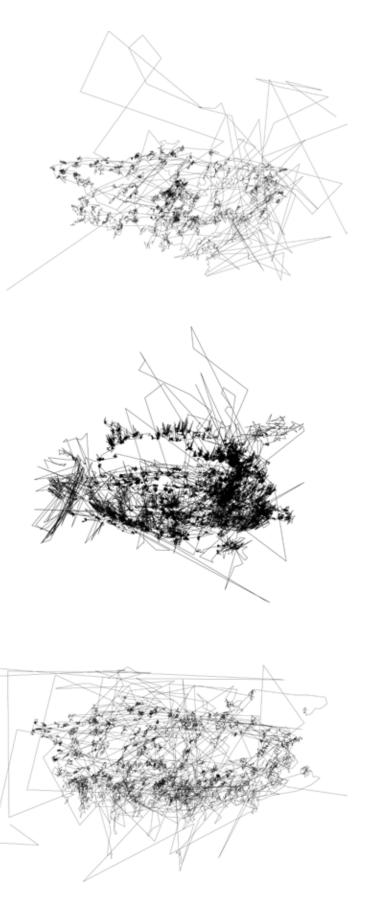
MATTHEW ATTARD eye drawing stairs St. James, 2021 eye drawing stairs Edinburgh, 2021 eye drawing stairs Castille, 2021

Each physical space within the gallery is bound by certain thematics juxtaposing representations of contemporary realities. The build-up towards *II-Pjazza* is conveyed by other works such as *It-Tarag* ta' St James and It-Turgien ta' Pjazza Kastilja. Whilst the latter two are an immediate reference of the multiple stairs found within Castille Place and facilitate comprehension of eye-drawings to an audience familiar with this landmark site, the former offers potential critical enquiry of a public space imbued with socio-political meaning. The introduction of works by Pierre Portelli, Matyou Galea and Aaron Bezzina to complement the ever changing projection of multiple eye performances carried out at Castille Place by Attard, raise questions related to hierarchies of power that operate in everyday spaces, the influence of the colonial and other aspects beyond linear and hegemonic temporalities. The choice of works to facilitate this diaspora was further initiated by previous interventions the three selected artists manifested in other public spaces, in turn elevating a unified example to a more universal one. This interplay further suggests that such geopolitical debate is not intrinsic yet polyphonic and globally relevant. Similar to every other context presented within rajt ma rajtx ... *naf li rajt* the ongoing speculative debate is subjective to each individual and dependent on various contextual factors, in turn reinforcing ways of seeing and perceiving.

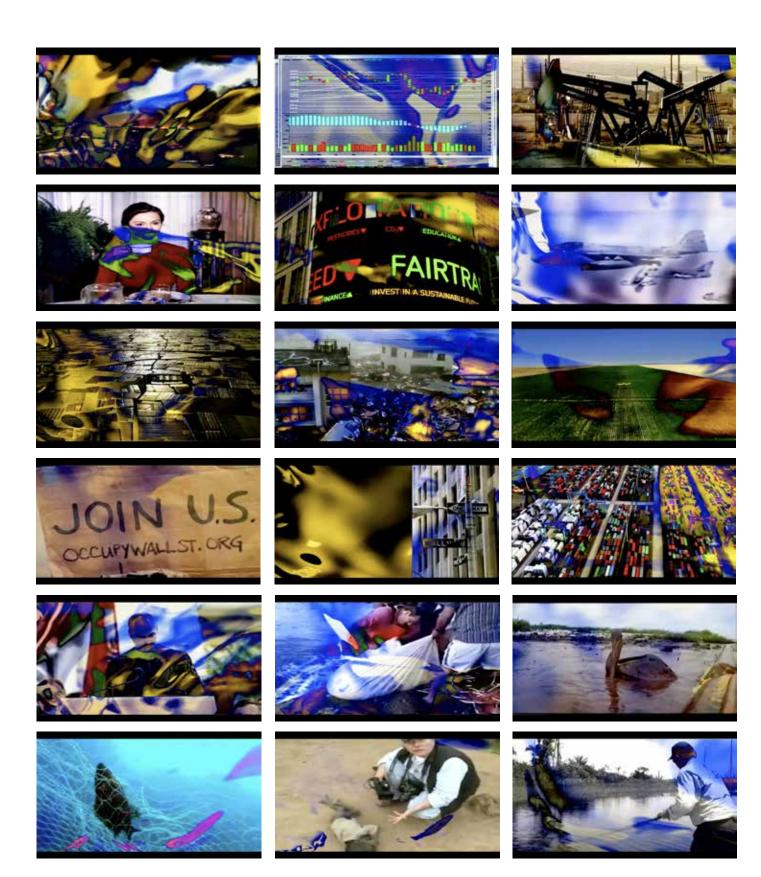
Whether raising issues pertaining to social, political, cultural, environmental or even personal diaspora, *rajt* ma rajtx ... naf li rajt attempts to touch the surface of representation of critical dialogue which is required to sustain open mindsets and critical debate.

Activate the eye-tracker within. What do you see?

ELYSE TONNA



MATTHEW ATTARD Eye drawing my eye with the eye-tracker (3 eyes), 2021



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MATTHEW ATTARD Dgħajsa tal-Fidili, pen-plotted eye-drawings on Globigerina Limestone, 2021



Installation view



E-T: This is archaeology to me. Mat: Definitely, some of these ships were incised at least 500 years pre-your digital existence... so they are archaeology for me too. E-T: Are we following their same lines and traces?

Mat: In principle, yes. E-T: But they are not accurate renditions of ships. Mat: It doesn't matter, we are not accurate either. Also, they are beautiful in their humanity.

E-T: Why were they drawn? Mat: A multitude of reasons. Probably these particular ones were incised as an act of blind faith for good luck and protection. E-T: Where's your blind faith today? Mat: I guess some would mention their leaders. Others might mention data.









MATTHEW ATTARD While doodling, pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

MATTHEW ATTARD *Żejt (Oil),* pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

Traffiku (Traffic), pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

Pjanta (Plant), pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

Hajt (Wall), pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

Saqaf (Ceiling), pen-plotted eye-drawing on paper, 2021

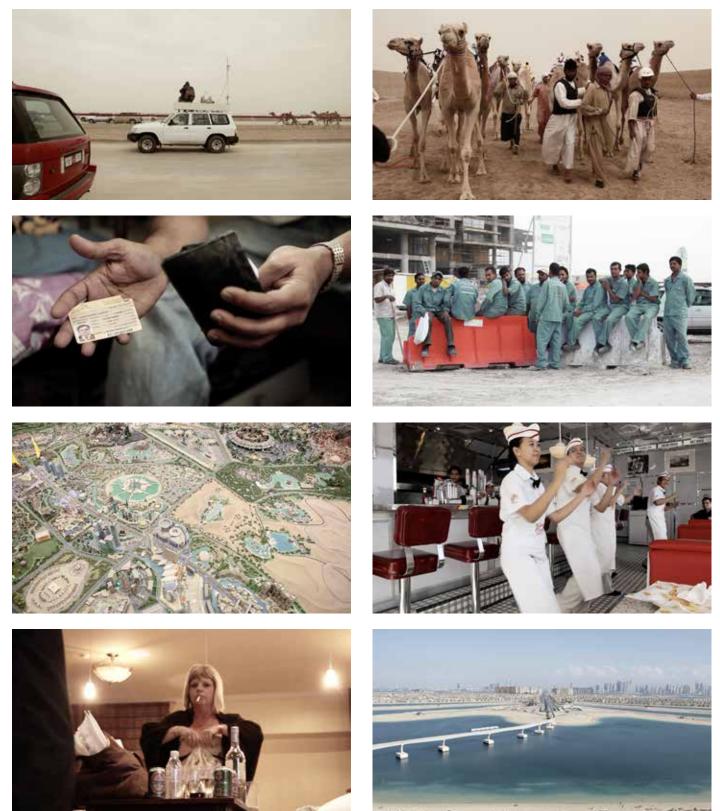


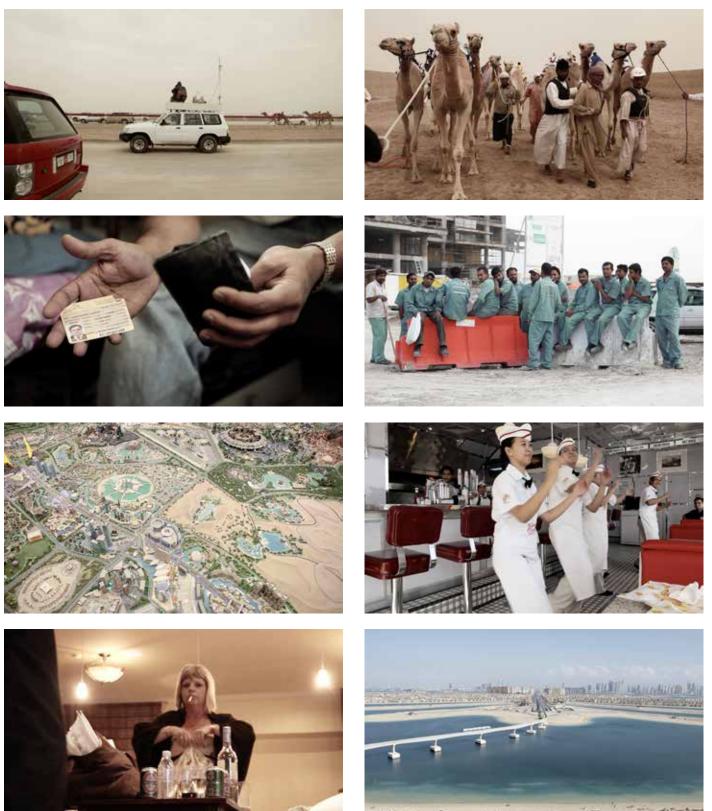
AARON BEZZINA *Position of Opposition III* porcelain sculpture as a monument 2021

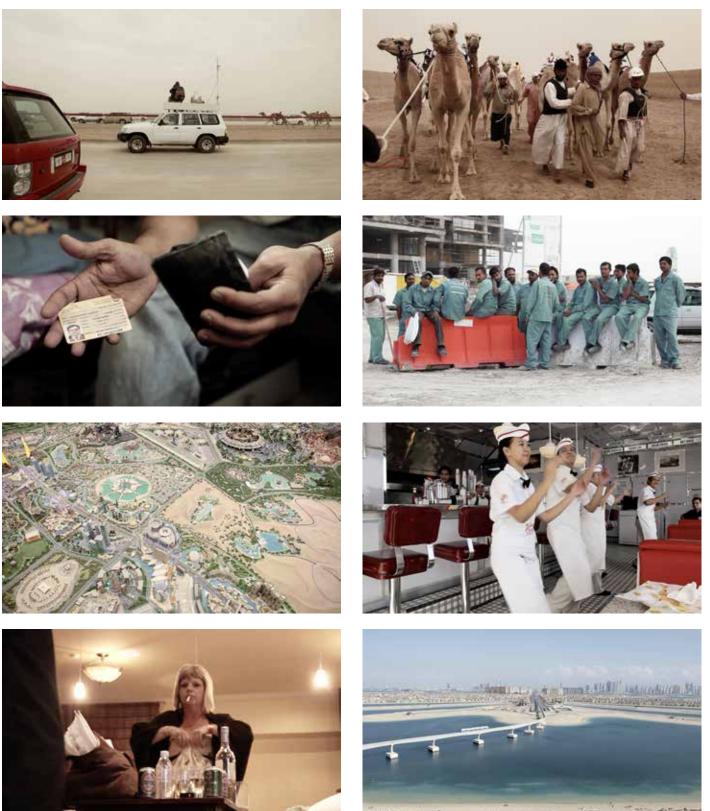
Installation view

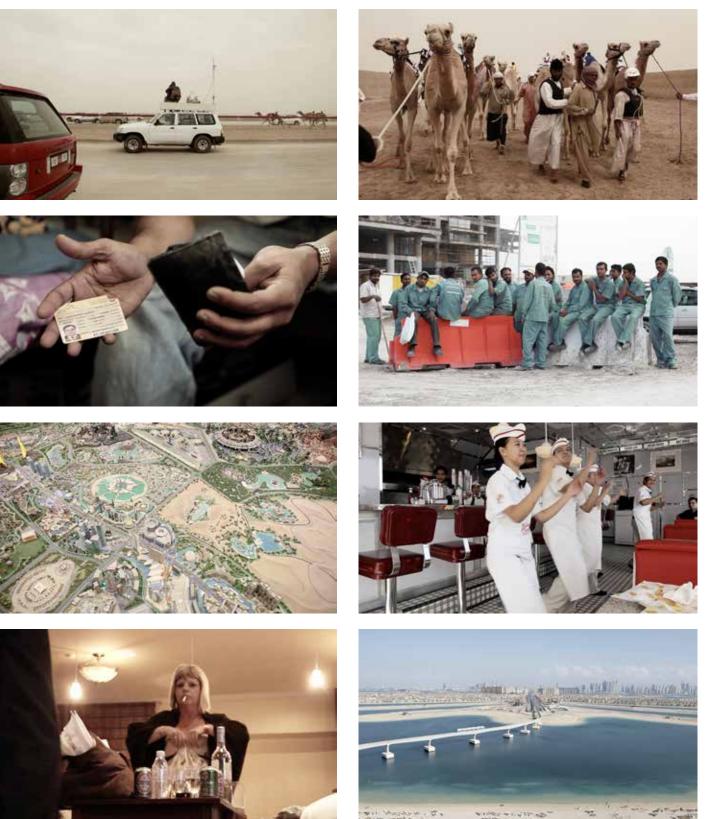




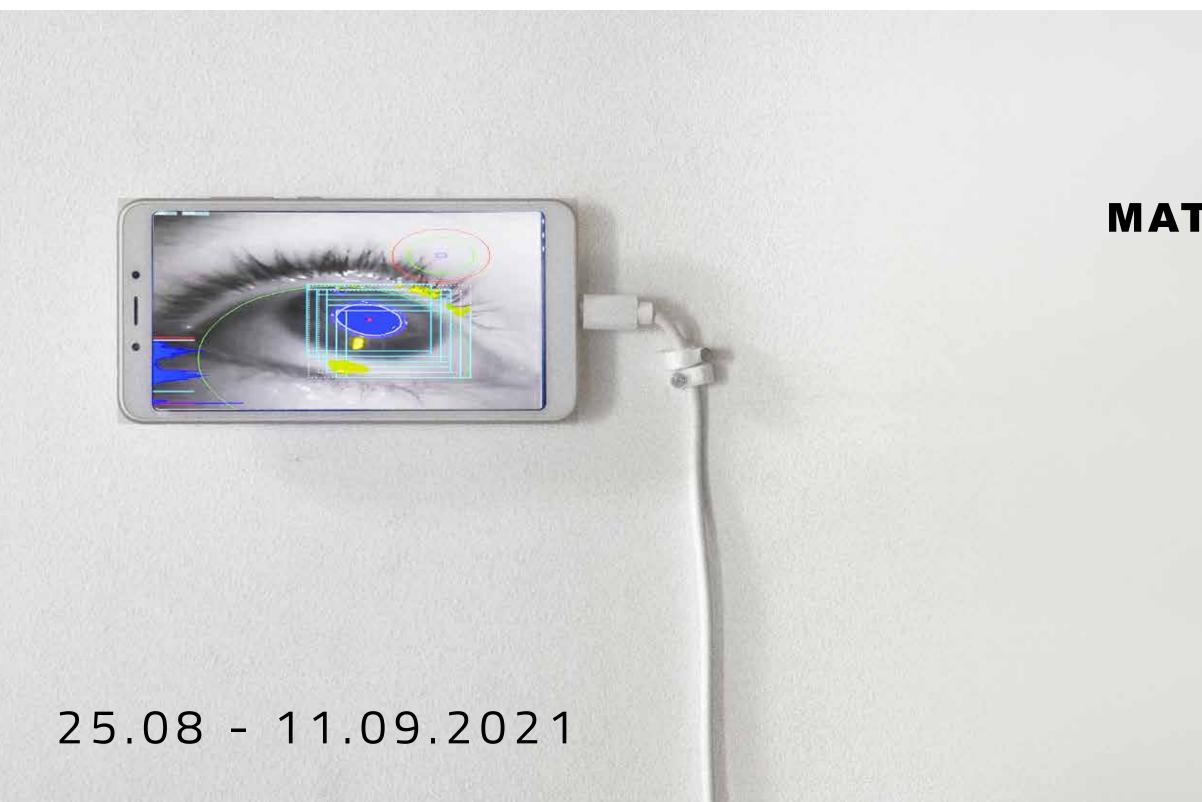








NANNI BALESTRINI Dubai City-Tellers, 57 minute film, 2010



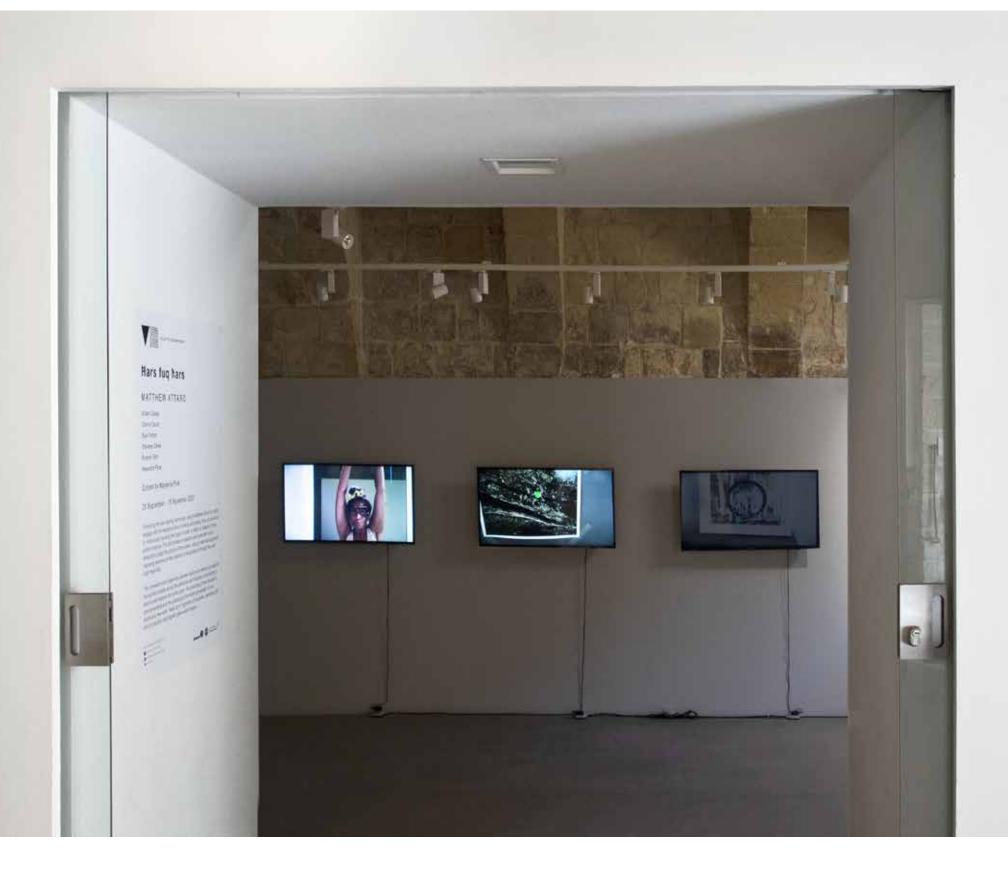
MATTHEW ATTARD

HARS FUQ HARS

Curated by Margerita Pulè

and contributing artists:

GILBERT CALLEJA CHARLIE CAUCHI RYAN FALZON CHARLENE GALEA ROXMAN GATT ALEXANDRA PACE



Ways of Looking

Matthew Attard's current research-based practice – presented in his solo exhibition *rajt ma rajtx... naf li rajt* during 2021 uses eye-tracking technology as a drawing-and-looking-tool, with which he simultaneously creates drawings and bears witness to his own sight-patterns. Combining the tool with 3d-rendering and experimental crafts-based techniques, he allows his audience to see something of what he has seen, showing them virtual evidence of where his eyes 'have been'.

In inviting six artists to experiment with the eye-tracking tool, Matthew and I asked them to think about the relationship between their artistic practice and their gaze. The process was relatively short, but still afforded process-based experimentation and subsequent reflection. Employing the eye-tracking technology, each artist each spent time engaging with the acts of looking, seeing and creating, and simultaneously thinking and talking about the distinctions between what they were looking at and what they were seeing. Each was invited to select a series of their own works to view through the eye-tracking tool; the generated material would be manipulated to create six new works, made up of fragments of saccades, elements of the artist's practice, and digitally generated imagery.

Gilbert Calleja selected a series of his photographs as his primary material. The images – dissolving into aquamarine and darkness, and almost abstract in nature – were projected onto the gallery wall. The images were still and dark, yet Gilbert's eyes did not remain fixed on a single point; on the contrary, they moved constantly around the picture plain. Could it be, that since the images were his alone, that his eyes were looking at what he knew (or imagined) to be there? Was he looking at what wasn't there – what was almost-but-not-quite-discernible? Thus, difficulties of attempting to interpret the human gaze are exposed; is the eye looking, is it seeing, or is it simply alternately moving and resting? Is it looking at something which exists, or is it remembering, imagining, or even hoping? Is looking a purely physical, mechanical act, or does intent, imagination and speculation also control the eye's movements? Charlie Cauchi viewing her film installation *Sempre Viva* (2018) Ryan Falzon viewing and discussing *Valletta by Night* (2018) and *Peeping Tom* (2021) Roxman Gatt following the movement in his new work WC (2021, not yet released) Charlene Galea devising a new performance (to be continued) Gilbert Calleja viewing a selection of works from his project *Lampara* (2021) Alexandra Pace seeking gaps, traps and safe spaces in a series of recent photographic works (2021)

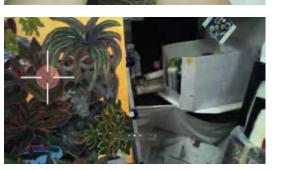














Roxman Gatt chose a new work (a film in which Roxman himself performs), but purposely darkened the image so that it was barely visible. His gaze followed the action of the moving image, at times preceding the figure's movements. At other times, his gaze seemed to follow the sightline of the figure, in an almost empathic act of looking. Was the eye moving here in memory rather than pre-emption, drawing on the past rather than the future?

Charlene Galea, on the other hand, wore the eye-tracker while performing in front of a mirror. Her gaze travelled with her moving arms and hands; if she was pre-empting her own movement, it was unconscious and split-secondquick. All of the artists taking part were conscious of the fact that by looking through the eye-tracker they were also creating new work and that their sight trajectories would create new, digital lines. Each was free to choose a 'style' during the post-production process, and to experiment with both their sight-lines and the image onto which they were superimposed. Charlene's action produced strangely three-dimensional forms, inserting the mirror's false depth into the two-dimensional digital screen.

During the experiment, Alexandra Pace in particular, attempted to control the movement of her eyes. Focusing on a small number of black and white photographic images, she sent her gaze on a very particular trajectory, tracing



a circular shape, or fixating on particular points within the image. The result was a very deliberate tracing of shapes; a sort of looking-with-intent, betrayed only in split-second glances, when the eye was distracted and involuntarily strayed from its intended path.

Ryan Falzon's approach resulted in very different imagery. His eyes moved quickly, almost erratically, over the surface of his image-filled work. Jumping from image to image, often straying from the canvas around his studio and back again, his eyes rested only occasionally on particular elements within his works. The process allowed us to reflect upon the relationship between viewer and image, and on how a viewer's gaze may travel around a work.

Charlie Cauchi also played with the technology's post-production possibilities – the thickness and colour of her sight-path was important to her. She chose to look at a three-channel film, giving her eye three 'subjects' on which to alternate between. The new work made from the experimental process presented these patterns in bold pink and black, overlaid on a projected image.

When Matthew asked me to collaborate on this project within his large solo show, I knew very little about eye-tracking technologies. Terms like saccades and gaze were more romantic to me than technical - and carried connotations of meteor showers or romantic assignations, not technical devices that attempt to probe the ego's most personal secrets. The experimental process we embarked upon presented more unknowns than answers, or, in other words, offered more opportunities for experimentation than a known, traditional medium. How the eyes are connected to the brain is a vast area of study, to which artistic research can surely contribute. But the possibilities for the eye-tracking device as a drawing, recording or art-making tool are just as exciting. The eyes - in essence a tool for seeing - can now be used to create material to be seen by others, and so, the cycle of looking and seeing continues.

MARGERITA PULÈ

RAJT MA RAJTX

CAESAR ATTARD (b. 1946) is an artist and former lecturer in Visual Art at the University of Malta Junior College. He has been consistently active in the Malta art scene and abroad since 1969 exhibiting paintings and drawings, and since the early 70's experimenting in non-traditional art-forms, particularly those involving public participation such as Human Pantographs – a Happening in the Language Laboratory, Cottonera, 1972; Open-Ended Meta-dimensional Field and a performance called The Artist as Model in Contemporary Maltese Art, Valletta, 1977; Art and Participation – a participatory performance in Floriana, 1978.

NANNI BALESTRINI (1935-2019) was an Italian experimental poet, author and visual artist. He was a key figure of the Italian literary Neoavanguardia (New Vanguard, or Gruppo 63) and part of the leftist Autonomia Operaia movement in the late 1960s and '70s, Balestrini imparted the explosive politics of that era through collage and cutup works that focused on and were made with collective language. His influential texts include the poetry book Blackout (1979), which was recently translated into English by Commune Editions, and his first novel Vogliamo tutto (We Want Everything, 1971), which was reissued by Verso in 2016.

AARON BEZZINA (b. 1991) earned a BA (with honors) in fine arts at MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts in 2014 and completed an MFA in digital arts at the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, University of Malta, in 2016. His works focuses on existential questions related to mortality and philosophical issues such as the immersion of art and the ontology of the artwork with a distinct sense of irony and sarcasm. Bezzina has been exhibiting work both locally and overseas for several years.

MATYOU GALEA (b.1986) is a hyper-media sculptor and researcher working out of the island of Malta. Currently a member of staff at the Department of Digital Arts, Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences within the University of Malta, where his research and practice focus primarily on the integration between software and sculpture. Galea works primarily in sound, video and the idea of social sculpture, locating the act of sculpture as an intervention in society rather than one in matter. Galea exhibits his work regularly in his native Malta, and overseas.

FRANCESCO JODICE (b. 1967) is an Italian artist who lives and works in Milan. His research encompass changes in modern social landscape underlining new relevant phenomena in urban anthropology. His work explores the urgency for a common ground between art and geopolitics. He was a founding member of the Italian Multiplicity group, an international network and experimental forum of architects and artists. Jodice is professor of Urban Visual Anthropology at the Master in Art and Curatorial studies and professor of Photography at the Cinema and New Media Department at NABA (Nuova Accademia Di Belle Arti Milano).

PIERRE PORTELLI (b. 1961) works primarily in conceptual and installation art. Studied at Swindon School of Art and Design in England. A founding member of START, a Maltese contemporary art group, A founding member of ISTRA, a Foundation for Contemporary Art and Research. He is a visiting lecturer at the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences at the University of Malta

HARS FUQ HARS

GILBERT CALLEJA (b.1978) is a documentary **ROXMAN GATT** (b. 1989) is a Maltese artist living photographer focusing on long-term socially engaged and working in London. Roxman's work encompasses projects in his native Malta and around the Mediterranean. text, painting, video, sound, photography, installation Currently a practice-based PhD researcher at the Centre and performance and has been exhibited in Denmark, for Research and Education in the Arts and Media (CREAM) France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and at the University of Westminster, London. He is interested Malta. The artist studied Graphic Design and Visual Communication in London at Central Saint Martins in collaborative ethnographic processes and multimedia and the Royal College of Art respectively, and has representations of identities in poetic non-fiction storytelling. Gilbert has worked as photojournalist and been awarded the Chris Garnham Prize (2015) and the Magnum Showcase Online Photography Award freelance news photographer and studied history of art and fine arts at the University of Malta (2000) and (2013). Gatt's work explores themes surrounding the university of Paris, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne feminine identity, sexuality, pop culture and language, (2004). very often taking the form of performance and moving-image work.

CHARLIE CAUCHI is a visual artist, filmmaker, researcher and curator living in Malta. Cauchi's work often explores themes related to feminine identity, migrant identity, violence and sexual decadence. Cauchi's career to date has made the notion of identity and migration one of its core focuses. Her 2018 project, Latitude 36, formed part of the island's European Capital of Culture programme and included the documentary short, From Malta to Motor City, which examined the Maltese diaspora in Michigan, USA. Her recent installation, Sempre Viva, was a three-screen projection commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, Malta.

RYAN FALZON (b.1988) is a painter and printmaker based between Malta and Berlin. Falzon portrays contemporary lifestyle and scenery in and expressive, brutally honest manner, merging the political with the personal. Over the past few years, Falzon has established a distinctive voice and approach in the Maltese Art scene. Often abrasive and mischievous, his work is known for creating a narrative by bringing together a wide-ranging set of images in a collage-like arrangement, allowing the viewer to wander about visually.

ALEXANDRA PACE (b.1977) is a Maltese artist and curator based in Valletta. She graduated from Central Saint Martins University of the Arts London (2014) with a distinction in MA Photography. She is the founder and director of the reference and longest running, independent, contemporary art space in Malta, Blitz Valletta. Through the years, she created an international network of collaborations, which includes Central Saint Martins, Royal College of Arts, European Graduate School and Canterbury School of Architectureamongst others.

CHARLENE GALEA is a Maltese conceptual artist whose body often navigates between online identity and physical experiences. Concepts are mostly presented through performance, in which clothes act as a metaphor to narrate how the body is experienced within contemporary times. She holds an MA in Digital Fine Arts, from the University of Malta and a BA in Creative Direction for Fashion from the London College of Fashion.



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In 2018 he obtained his Masters degree from the Digital Arts Department, University of Malta, where he had started exploring the possibilities of using an eye-tracker as a drawing medium.

In 2019 he was selected for a third time to exhibit during Ten Artists to Watch at LACDA, Los Angeles Centre for Digital Arts. During the same year, he was also present during the collective show Soglie e Limiti, curated by Elena Forin at Galleria Michela Rizzo, Venice. In 2019 he was selected by Ilaria Bonacossa to participate in Artissima Telephone at the OGR spaces in Turin, taking place during the Artissima Art Fair. He was also part of the https://reindex.galleriamichelarizzo.net/ online project.

Born in Malta (1987), and currently living in Edinburgh. He is pursuing his eye drawing research as a practice-based PhD at the Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, funded by the Malta Arts Scholarship scheme - Ministry for Education, and Employment.

Matthew is strongly interested in situating his work within the realm of contemporary drawing. His interests include: the extension of the line within 3D spaces, the phenomenology of perception, datafication, drawing as a cyborg in dialogue with technology, the challenging of the use of data and technology, and provocations about how we represent ourselves in this day and age.

In 2009 he moved to Venice and collaborated with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection and the USA Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Matthew is now represented by Galleria Michela Rizzo, Venice.

His work has been shown in Venice, Rome, Valletta, Genoa, London, Beijing and Los Angeles among other cities. In 2014, Galleria Michela Rizzo invited him for the bi-personal show In Between/Viewpoints with artist Rashad Alakbarov. In 2017 he was selected for the 3rd edition of the Le Latitudini dell'Arte Biennale, which took place at the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa. In 2018 he was awarded the Under 30 Euromobil prize at ArteFiera, Bologna.

Matthew Attard was longlisted for the Lumen Prize 2021.