

# FOCUS

Newsletter of the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce



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## Nathan Portelli wins the 7<sup>th</sup> National Arts Competition

The seventh edition of the National Arts Competition, organized by the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, was held at the Society's premises at Palazzo de La Salle, Valletta. The first prize was awarded to **Nathan Portelli** with his work *Free Me From Plastic*. Before the presentation the Acting President of the Society, Mr Joseph J. Mifsud addressed the artists and guests present for the occasion. Ms Sue Mifsud, Curator of the exhibition, then read the report presented by the Judging Panel. Members of the Council were also present.

The other prizes were awarded as follows:- **2nd Prize - Untitled** by Valerio Schembri, **3<sup>rd</sup> Prize - Untitled** by George Muscat, **two Consolation Prizes - Sea Creature 1** by Walter Vella and *The Student* by Jude Zammit. Olena Belkins with *Scorpion*, Charles Bonnici with *Whisper*, Anthony Caruana with *Viridian Movements 2*, Sue Flask with *Paul*, Pierre Giusti with *Temple Tower*, Jennifer Lonfat with *Untitled 6*, George Muscat with *Untitled*, Ivanka Gosheva Nikolova with *Celebration*, Zell Osborne with *Reaching Out* and Godfrey Xuereb with *Fascination* all won an **Honourable Mention**. 93 works were exhibited.

◀ *Nathan Portelli receiving the Prize from Mr Joseph J. Mifsud, Acting President of the Society.*

## Notte Bianca

Once again the Society opened its doors during this year's Notte Bianca. Visitors had the opportunity to watch performances by the Ghaxaq Fold Ensemble and Marc Galea Guitar Duo. The hundreds of visitors went round the Palazzo and enjoyed the beauty this unique place offers, including the Council Room, the Knights Hall and the Exhibition Halls. At the time the Pastel Society was holding its second annual exhibition. Four member artists of the Society, Ivan Fenech, David Mifsud, Charles Bonnici and Sue Mifsud, exhibited their works, using the basement of the premises for this occasion "Free Standing". Carmen Ellul and her students put up a lace exhibition and demonstration.



# Editorial

In Malta many activities seem to be dormant during summer when even Parliament enjoys its annual recess. Instead the workload at the Society increases, as can be seen from the substantial intake of students during that period. In fact this year we had some 500 students attending the various arts, crafts and music courses held both in the mornings and evenings. The activities organized by the Society during the summer months attract quite a lot of people and their appreciation encourages the administrative staff in their efforts to promote new programmes for the future. This year's summer activities feature elsewhere in this edition of Focus.

On the academic side a new scholastic year of courses and lectures are being

held with the introduction of several new courses and the revival of other courses which had previously been given a short respite, in this area, which is the core business of the Society. This has been a success story and the Society is limited only by the number of classrooms available. In the coming months another classroom, on the ground floor of the building, will be ready for use intended to cater for music lessons. This will bring the total number of classrooms to ten.

Work should start on the restoration of the façade of the Palazzo, as funds have been earmarked for this project and tenders proceedings are in their final stages. Once this is completed the long due restoration of the Sala dei Cavallieri should be considered earnestly starting with efforts to obtain the necessary funds.

The Society is also looking at its internal setup and changes are anticipated in

order to give a better service to artist members and to exploit to the full the investment made by the Society in its exhibition halls. More information on this issue will be given in due course. The Society will also be introducing membership cards together with the implementation of a different payment system. The Society is also exploring how its members can benefit by making arrangements with retail outlets in order that special rates or discounts could be applied to purchases made by members. Much of the work mentioned above is in an advanced stage and the Society should start reaping the benefits of this work within the coming year.

Mr Spiteri Staines relinquished his post as Director of the Society at the end of September 2008 but he has generously accepted to continue his work as member of the Editorial Board of our newsletter.



## The Annual Art Exhibition at the International Fair of Malta

The Annual Art Exhibition, which for 50 years was held at the Trade Fair Ground in Naxxar, was for the first time held at the new MFCC venue at Ta'Qali. 90 artists, all Members of the Society, exhibited 90 artworks, including paintings, ceramics, sculpture and other media. The curator of this Exhibition was Eman Grima and space was allocated by the MFCC.

### Society Member Artists participate in Valletta Streets Alive

Several artists and sculptors, all members of the Society, were among the participants of this year's edition of Valletta Streets Alive. Most of these artists were stationed in front of Auberge D'Italie in Merchants Street, where they set up easels and tables to work on and display their works on three consecutive Fridays during the month of August.

### The Society assists the European Programmes Agency

The Society assisted the European Programmes Agency (EUPA) in running an Art Exhibition and Competition. The Exhibition was to commemorate the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. The exhibition was held at the EUPA's offices in Old Mint Street, Valletta and was spread over three age groups.

## More Art Exhibitions at the Society

The Society hosted four Exhibitions recently. **ARTEN** was held in June and was organized by ten member artists of the Society, Stephania Borg, Sue Mifsud, Johanna Borg Costanzi, Charmaine Zammit, Martin Formosa, David Mifsud, David Camilleri, Rene Sacco, Charles Bonnici and Benny Brimmer. **MEDITERRANEAN** by another Member Artist, Kevin Attard and friends was held at the Palazzo during the month of August. The Pastel Society of Malta held its **2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL EXHIBITION** at the Society during the months of September and October. **FREE STANDING** was an Exhibition by Member Artists Ivan Fenech, Charles Bonnici, Sue Mifsud and David Mifsud, held at the Society, this time at the Basement of the Palazzo.



Carmen is a lace teacher at the Society. She also has various roles in other organizations. She is the Treasurer of the "Klabb tal-Bizilla Maltija", member of the Bizilla Lace Guild, member of the Stitch in Time Club, member of the Malta Craft Council and a member in OIDFA. She qualified in Lace Making after following a four year course at the Society. She also attended a Lace Course under Consiglia Azzopardi and various other overseas courses in Prague, Athens and Groningen, The Netherlands besides a Bucks Point Course with the Klabb Tal-Bizilla and a Cluny Lace Course.

Carmen's work was exhibited abroad at the Malta National Stand at the 11<sup>th</sup> OIDFA Lace Congress in Prague, at the Malta National Stand at the 12<sup>th</sup> OIDFA Congress in Athens and at the Malta National Stand at the 13<sup>th</sup> OIDFA Lace Congress in Groningen, The Netherlands.

She participated also in various local events such as "Lace in the Street" Cospicua, "Lace in the Street" Zejtun, the Annual Arts and Crafts Exhibition organized by the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, The Cross-stitch Exhibition organized by the Stitch In Time Club at the Catholic Institute, at B'Kara Civil Centre, and at The Waterfront.

Carmen has also written two articles, one on 'Lace Collars' and one on the OIDFA Athens Congress for Is-Seher Tal-Bizilla.

Carmen was asked the following questions:

**How long have you been teaching lace, crochet and knitting at the Society?**

• I've been teaching Lace, Crochet and



Carmen Ellul (middle) with two of her students

Knitting since summer 2002.

**What aspect of teaching gives you most satisfaction?** • When a student tries her utmost at her work

**What frustrates you most when teaching?** • The most frustrating thing is when you do your best to teach and "some" students keep on talking and ignoring you completely.

**Is there any limitation as to age when starting to learn lace making?** • I think the best age for starting Lace Making Lessons is 7.

**If a student decides to take up this craft what should he/she be prepared for?** • This Craft needs a good deal of patience and attention.

**I understand that Malta Lace Making has its special skills and also equipment, does this mean that the student is restricted to just the traditional Maltese system or do**

**you also teach about lace of other countries?** • I base my teaching on Maltese Lace but can also guide students on other Laces.

**The patterns in use are quite traditional and some are handed down from generation to generation. Does this mean that no new or perhaps revolutionary patterns or patterns used by other countries are drawn up?**

• Although in Malta we see the Maltese Cross in nearly every single pattern, with some research one can find other revolutionary patterns.

**How do you think Maltese lace makers are being affected by the importation of machine made lace and sold under the guise of Malta Lace?** • It does affect because all that time dedicated to the precious piece of lace will never be bought whereas machine made lace which depreciates the real thing is cheaper and so easily purchased.

Forthcoming Exhibitions at the Society

- From November 6 to 22, 2008: Exhibition of the latest works by Jessica DeBattista is to be held at the newly uprated exhibition halls at Palazzo de La Salle. The works include works produced between 2006 and 2008. During the exhibition, Jessica shall also be launching her new novel "Out of the Shadows"
- From December 3 to 10, 2008: The Annual Exhibition of Work of Arts & Crafts by the students of the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

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# 7<sup>th</sup> National Arts Competition Awards



Nathan Portelli's "FREE ME FROM PLASTIC", the winning work of this year's National Art Competition

on



Above left, Valerio Schembri's 2nd placed UNTITLED work and above right George Muscat's 3rd placed UNTITLED work



Left, Walter Vella's work "SEA CREATURE 1" and above, Jude Zammit's work "THE STUDENT", both winners of a Consolation Prize



**B**orn in 1943 Charles studied art between 1959 – 1963 at the New York City School of Art & Design, New York Studio of Painting & Sculpture (Manhattan), Bridgeview School of Sculpture, Queens, New York. Fresh after high school he had his own studio in Soho – New York City. He also had quite a few solo exhibitions in Soho art galleries where he was very successful. For a time painting was sacrificed to love, marriage and family. He also had a great interest in sculpture and began sculpting with wood and steel. Charles spent the greater part of his working life as a technician repairing cash registers and restaurant equipment. Thus he had very little time to devote to his art work. On returning to Malta after about forty years he started working with limestone and for the second time in his life he fell in love again, but this time with the Malta limestone.

Stone is a challenging medium and it requires a lot of discipline, because once stone has been removed from a piece, it cannot be put back. Charles loves the simplicity of carving a piece of the earth itself into a work of art. There are always new things to learn. He finds that his techniques are constantly being refined and his artistic sense deepened.

“My ideas, my feelings and my experiences come from a spontaneous emotion. The time, patience and intimacy required to shape stone forms a bond between me as an artist and the stone. For me the stone is not ‘worked’, instead my thoughts shape the stone while the stone in turn shapes my thoughts. The final expression is always a surprise. The greatest blessing of this work comes from connecting to others who also feel that our passion brings wonder for the viewer and reinforces their ideas, feelings and memories of days gone by. Most of my sculptures have been influenced by the human figure and as I work on each piece of stone I like to feel the piece is growing and developing as I am carving. Though no words are spoken I feel I am communicating with the image as it develops. When I finish I sit face to face with what I have done. Still there are no words but now the silent stone expresses the thoughts and feelings inside me. Stone sculpture is a manipulation of space. It is taking away the waste to reveal the movement within. A sculpture should not only appear to the eye but also to the imagination allowing a movement in time to expand and capture

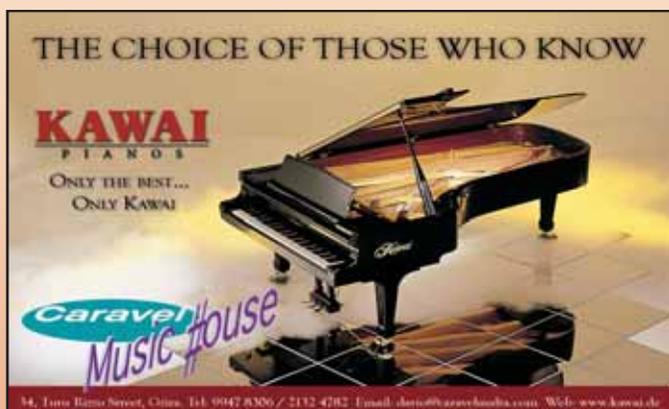


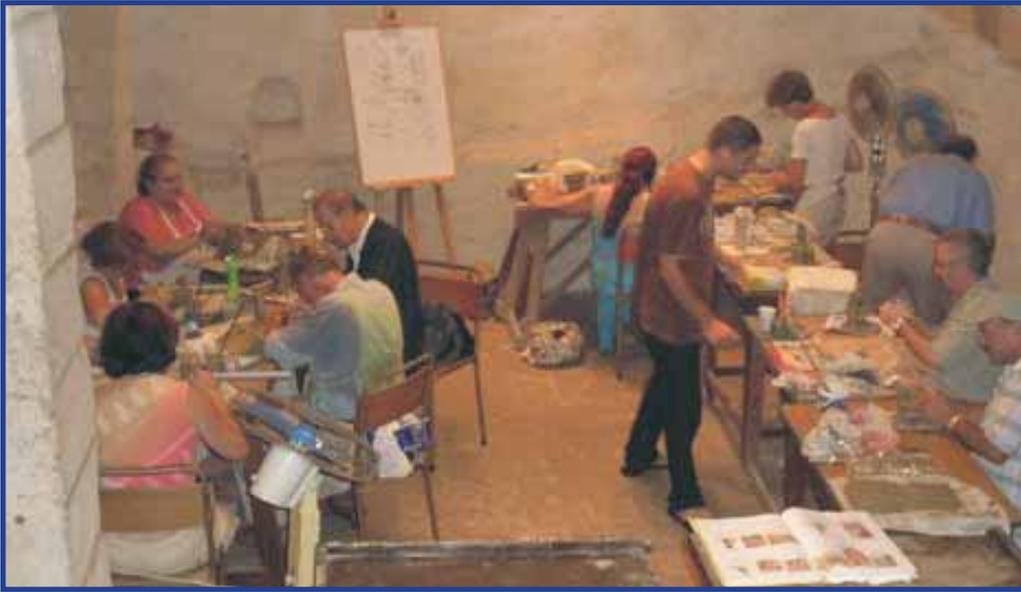
my feelings. I am intrigued by what comes out of me and the reaction of others who view it.”

Charles gets his inspiration from just living his life, things that happen to him, his family, current events, watching T.V. etc. All of these things inspire his work. He tries to be an idealist and to create movements in the stone which flow inward and outward and he also wants them to appear as natural as life itself.

Charles claims that to work with stone you do not really need to be strong. In fact he had young women attending his class and they had no problem in shaping the stone. When working with stone one has to know how to use the tools and remove the stone a little at a time.

As regards teaching, Charles has this to say: “I do enjoy teaching very much especially because I get to teach a mixed group of students from the very young to senior citizens like myself. I love to see their interest and their eagerness to learn. Some take to it easily while others do not. But within the 10 weeks they spend with me they all end up with a project or two to take home with them. I feel that everyone has the ability of doing whatever they want to a certain degree. One needs to have the interest and initiative to do so. So my job as a teacher is to wake this interest and initiative in all of my students. I hope that these young students will become our future stone sculptors. I feel that it is important to keep this sector alive and healthy. And this can only be achieved through the younger generation. A student enrolling in my class will find himself among friends both with me and all the other students. We all become friends sharing ideas and feelings and projecting them into the stone. My job is to guide them all, in creating a project from start to finish. I advise my students what tools to use, how to go about carving the piece as well as answering questions they might have.”





## Summer Courses at the Society

A large number of courses were held during the summer, many of which were introduced for the first time. One of them was the 50+ Clay Sculpture class and the photo above shows the class in session in the basement of the Palazzo.



## Annual Concert and Presentation of LCM Awards

The Annual Concert and the Presentation of the London College of Music Awards was held in the Ballroom of the Casino Maltese on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008. After a varied programme of music by candidates, certificates were awarded to candidates in grades 5 to 8 who achieved a distinction in 2007. 70 candidates in all received their certificates from the Honorary Secretary of the Society, Mr Stephen Sant'Angelo and the LCM Examiner in Malta for the Spring Practical Examinations, Mr John Beilby.



## Minister Dolores Cristina Visits Society

The Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Ms Dolores Cristina, visited the Society's premises in June. She was met by the Acting President Mr Joseph J. Mifsud and members of the Council. Minister Cristina met members of the staff and was shown around the Palazzo and several classes where she spoke to some of the students and teachers. The Minister said that her Ministry will continue to co-operate with the Society for the beneficial work the Society is carrying out.



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# Summer events at the Society



One of the Courtyard Summer Events organized this year by the Society, with the collaboration of Poezijaplus, was "Qalb Beltna (Valletta) Thabbat". Young and budding poets together with veterans read out excerpts from their work as also other work such as from "Rajt Malta Tinbidel". The music by Vince Fabri punctured the readings.



The Council of the Society held a Get-Together for the administrative and teaching staff, plus the artists participating in the Malta International Fair Art Exhibition. Mr Joseph J. Mifsud, Acting President, thanked everyone for contributing to the growing success of the Society.



Another Summer Event held in the Palazzo's Courtyard was a reading of Francis Ebejer's play "Il-Hadd fuq il-Bejt" by the Group D. The event brought out the skills and abilities of this young group in a vivid manner.



The last summer event held at the Palazzo's Courtyard was a concert by the Marc Galea Guitar Duo which included jazz, latin and contemporary music. The full house of mainly young enthusiasts enjoyed the programme.