

The background of the entire page is black, featuring several blurred, horizontal light trails in shades of blue and white, suggesting motion or digital data. The word 'ennéad' is centered in the upper half of the page.

ennéad

MFA IN DIGITAL ARTS EXHIBITION 2021



MICKAYLA ZUGER
EMMA CINI
PETER MAGRO
LARA MANARA
NICOLE PACE
BERNARD FOLIDANO
CLAYTON SALIBA
DAPHNE SAMMIT
NICOLE SAMMIT



*Photo: Marco Giuliarelli for
Civitella Ranieri Foundation*

FOREWORD

Prof. Vince Briffa

Head of Department of Digital Arts
and course leader

On behalf of the students and fellow faculty members I would like to introduce you to Ennead, the Graduate Degree Exhibition of the MFA in Digital Arts, a degree run by the Department of Digital Arts of the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, University of Malta. The exhibition is the culmination of two years of intensive research and production.

This year's participating artists are: Mickayla Bugeja, Emma Cini, Peter Magro, Lara Manara, Nicole Pace, Bernard Polidano, Clayton Saliba, Daphne Sammut and Nicole Zammit.

We would like to invite you to experience works which utilise a variety of media to address the equally diversified concepts, and where the digital medium in particular, is not only a tool for creative expression and artistic creation, but also an inherent component to shape the conceptual process. The works being exhibited not only recognise the significance of the skilful application of traditional media, but also acknowledge the potential of emerging technologies to give rise to new processes of conception. In turn, such an unconventional



blending of media proposes the notion of hybridity itself as a cultural construct to be negotiated, altered, enhanced or challenged by both artists and the consuming public.

The MFA in Digital Arts programme provides the artistic and contextual framework for such a forum to materialise. Through its focus on creative practice and interdisciplinarity, the degree promotes a learning environment in which historical traditions and new practices confront and influence each other within a contextual, cultural and theoretical framework. The curriculum is grounded in a visual arts tradition, is informed by a rigorous study of the history and theory of modern and contemporary art, and is enriched by opportunities to work in an interdisciplinary fashion with other departments, institutes and faculties on campus.

I would like to wish all the participating students the best of luck with their creative endeavours, and a long, fulfilling and successful career within the arts.



Photo: Ian Noel Pace

AN EXPLORATION OF BEING

Giulia Privitelli

M.A., B.A Hons (Melit.)

The first time most of us are likely to have encountered the name 'Ennead' (n. *enneas*, Greek for 'group of nine'), is in its applied form for the widely popular personality test referred to as the Enneagram. This oft-consulted diagram presents a functional typology of nine interconnected facets of the human psyche, providing indications on how these different personality types may interact, complement or clash with one another. On some level, this may be transposed to the kind of dynamic at play in this year's exhibition of the University of Malta's MFA in Digital Arts, wherein a group of nine personalities and their discernibly distinct creations are brought into immediate or more oblique and subtle relations with one another. However, be this as it may, there is yet another significant reference which the name *Ennead* might call to mind, that is, Porphyry's *magnum opus* of the six tomes recording Plotinus' neo-Platonic doctrines and writings, each of which comprises of nine treatises, collectively known by the same name. Succinctly put, each of these volumes addresses different modes of being in their progression towards an ultimate whole and oneness in being. The explorations of these nine creatives echo, in some respect, this quest and researched progression as they provide their own aesthetic, visual and aural exhortation which may be tentatively traced to the *Enneads*.

In Porphyry's first collection of nine treatises, the notion of being human in a world experienced through dialogue, beauty, goodness, suffering, loss and death forms the core of the study. In one section, the enquiry delves into the source from which certain ontological states, such as happiness, might arise, and where memory—rather than being mistaken for the origin—serves as a window that reveals the possibility and disposition to being: 'For it is not the memory of having been happy that would make a difference, nor is it in talking about it, but rather being happy is in being disposed somehow. But the disposition is in the present, that is, in the activity of living.'¹ In other words, the past and awareness of the moment—however chaotic or ordered—opens up the enquirer to the very livelihood of being in the world.

Naturally, the notion of being is bound to that of the passing of time, of the manner in which things retain, lose or change in substance. 'It was not possible, after all, for anything to remain altogether permanently in the same condition,' writes Plotinus, 'if indeed the whole was to remain as it is, having its permanence consist in its being in motion.'² The strange and paradoxical relation between change and permanence, whereby permanence is dependent on the continuous movement and transformation of the object, not only reveals what is at stake with every attempt at progress, but it belies the very elusive, fluid and progressive reality of the digital world, including that of art, which nonetheless sinks its roots in the physical reality and experience of being.

The investigation into the dialectic between being and non-being and the elusive relation between presence and absence—of always being somewhere but not always everywhere—in Plotinus' assessment, also touches upon the phenomenology of seeing, whereby 'indefiniteness consists in a kind of affirmation. And just as with the eye, when colour is impossible to see, we see darkness, which is the matter of every colour, so too, then, with the soul; when the soul has stripped off all that lies upon sensibles like light, it is no longer able to make what remains definite, and this is comparable to seeing in the dark... It sees in the way that one might see an absence of form or an absence of colour or something lacking illumination.'³

At times, then, the act of seeing results in ambiguity; a gap opens between the limits of sight and the reality of the seen (or unseen), which is, in a way, the same challenging gap that opens up between different media of representation and the common object or idea they seek to express. This seems to be at the core of the digital question, whereby 'it isn't easy to illustrate in any other way exactly the sort of things that are present while preserving the substrate so that it remains identical...' ⁴ However, even if, in this sense, realities cannot be so precisely represented that they retain their original substance and be experienced as if they were, in fact, truly present, they may nonetheless be communicated. Indeed, it would rather be the absence of communication that might indicate the absence of some original substance and not its partial or incomplete mediation. As Plotinus argues: 'If, however, the medium receives the affection first and in a way receives an impression of it—an indication of this is that if someone stands in front of us looking at a colour, he also sees it—it follows that, if no affection had arisen in the medium, it would not reach us.' ⁵

In many ways, the reformulation of the method of communication of reality is a primary pillar of this exhibition. This development, however, also necessitates a new level of comprehension of gestures and mannerisms, a level which involves a synthesis of ideas, or rather, the open synthetic reception of qualities related to the personal, the conceptual, technical, historical, and scientific. In other words, it propagates the development of a new iconology, which is, according to Erwin Panofsky's classification of the interpretative method, the deepest and most complex stratum of comprehension of that which is being communicated. ⁶ Verbal language is, perhaps, the most straightforward means of advanced communication. However, in a time of apparent regression, this method seems insufficient and, worse still, misleading and alienating. As some of the creatives in this collective advocate, a return to a more primordial and immediate means of communication is necessary, one which might draw parallels to ancient communities who, in their display of wisdom 'don't use forms of letters which spell out arguments and propositions, or imitate sounds and the

verbalisation of statements. Rather, they draw images, and carve them in their temples—each thing having one image, rather than a discursive description.¹⁷

One step towards immediate reality is a step closer towards pure form and unity—the activity of the mind and soul. Curiously, however, rather than this taking the form of an active search for a communicable state of being, this quest relies on patience and expectation, as if heeding to Plotinus' claim that 'one must not try to discover where [the Intellect] comes from...it is not necessary to pursue it, but to remain in stillness, until it should appear, preparing oneself to be a contemplator, just like the eye awaits the rising sun.'¹⁸ Images, signs or sounds, in this view, retain their raw purity if communicated directly across mind-to-mind synapses, unfiltered by reason and craft, but received as pure emotion, full of meaning and content, yet beyond rational comprehension.

Perhaps, such must be the beholder's approach in evaluating sights and sounds which point to some transcendental reality. In the last analysis, then, *Ennead* is about waiting for meaning as much as it is about searching for it, indeed, 'as if someone were waiting to hear a voice that he wanted to hear, and, distancing himself from other voices, were to prick up his ears to hear the best of sounds, waiting for the time when it will come—so, too, in this case one must let go of sensible sounds, insofar as they are necessary, and guard the soul's pure power of apprehension and be ready to listen to the sounds from above.'¹⁹

¹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 1.5.1, from Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Enneads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 87.

² *The Enneads*, 454 (4.4.32).

³ *Ibid.*, 174 (2.4.10).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 321 (3.6.12).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 470 (4.5.1).

⁶ Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology,' in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 26-54.

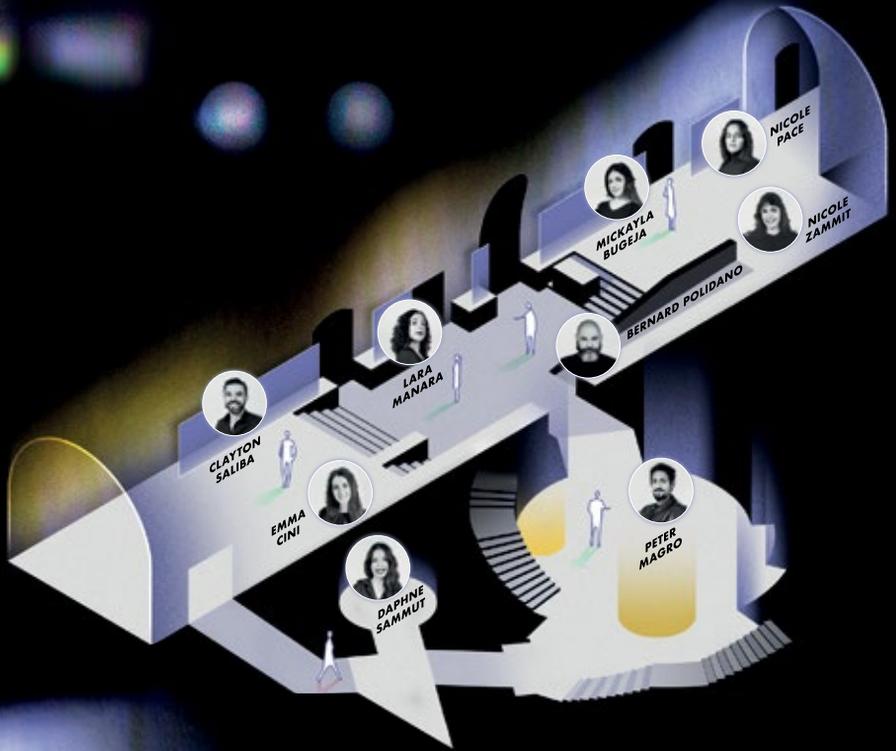
⁷ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 616 (5.8.6). This is in reference to ancient Egyptian civilisation who, coincidentally, also had a term for 'ennead' to denote the nine great deities of the Heliopolis.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 591 (5.5.8).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 547 (5.1.12).



**WE ARE
ENNEAD**



CLAYTON SALIBA



EMMA CINI



DAPHNE SAMMUT



LARA MANARA



MICKAYLA BUGEJA



BERNARD POLIDANO



PETER MAGRO



NICOLE PACE



NICOLE ZAMMIT



MICKAYLA
ZEIGLER

Essential communication

Illustrations & Video

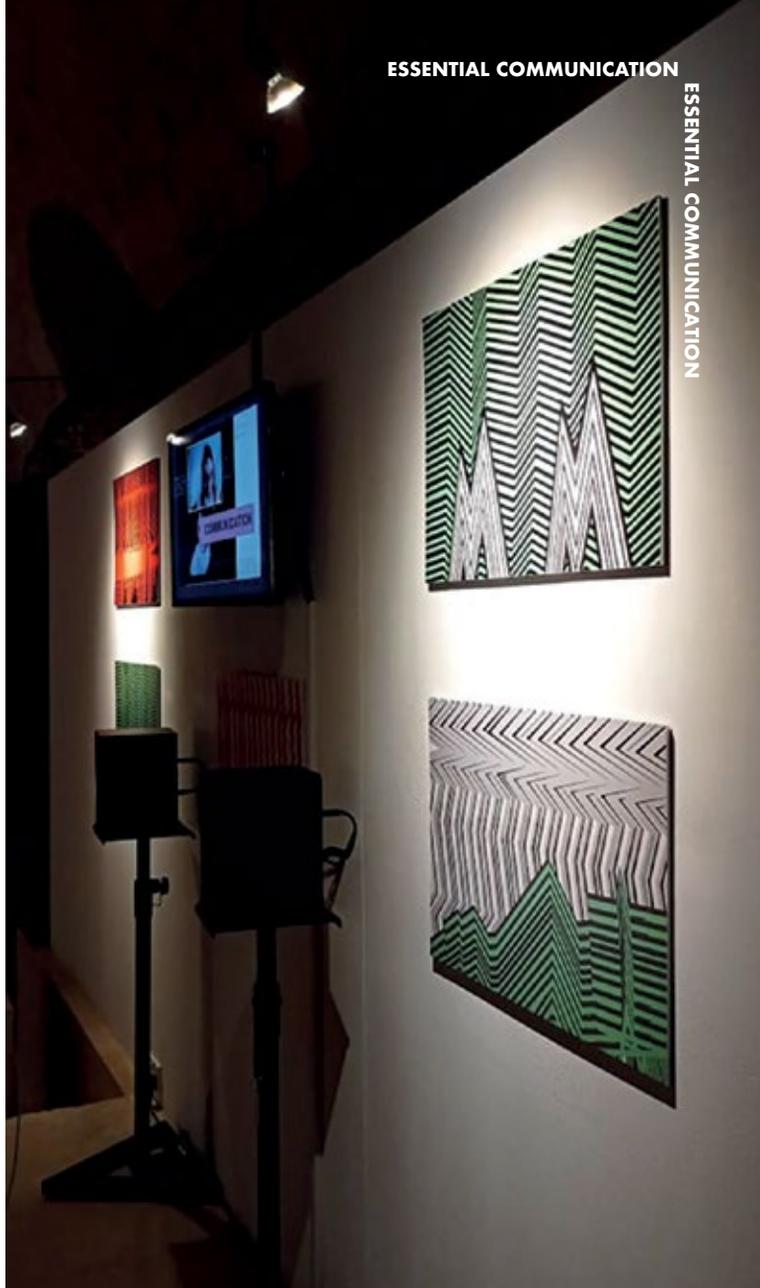
The “unsaid” that is the nonverbal communication refers to facial expressions, gestures and mannerisms. This study is inspired by the researcher’s intrigue in workings of communication through online platforms. COVID-19 and ensuing lockdown have significantly made an impact worldwide and since its reshaped communication both in professional and informal contexts.



ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION

ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION







EMMA CINI

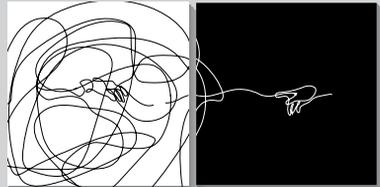
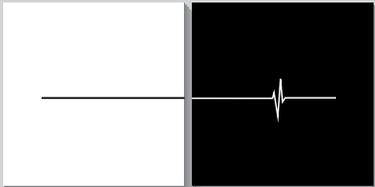
True Colours

Illustrations

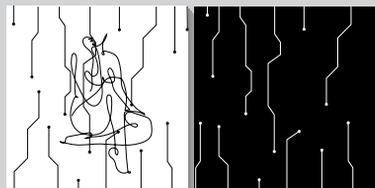
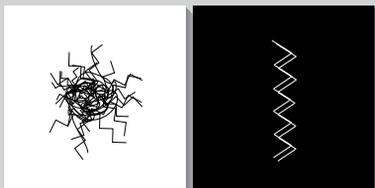
The aim of this study is to create illustrations that will communicate the feelings described by the participants in order to help people identify with and express their own fears and hopes and create an artistic representation of the pandemic experience on our islands.



TRUE COLOURS



TRUE COLOURS





PETER MAGRO

Ode to a Stone

Video converted from ink drawings

Ode to a Stone is a visual metaphor which questions human intervention in the natural world, as well as our legacy vis-a-vis the test of time. Inspired by multiple visits to a location on Manoel Island, this began with a poem, through psychogeography and phenomenological research, to discover multiple changes within the area.

Supported by



This research is partially funded by



ODE TO A STONE

ODE TO A STONE



ODE TO A STONE

ODE TO A STONE





LARA MANARA

CHAOS | ORDER

Video Installation

An autobiographical work that delves into temporal thoughts and being within a digital world, thus bringing out inner experiences and memories of the artist through a performative video installation. This triptych in video captures slices of moments within the artist's life, portraying the embodied artist at the very centre of a collection of videos representing personal thoughts, moments and places from her past and present. The work is a merge between experiences and contexts, which ultimately serves as a self-portrait and self-narrative that communicate being-in-a-mind as a reflection on being-in-the-world.

This research is partially funded by



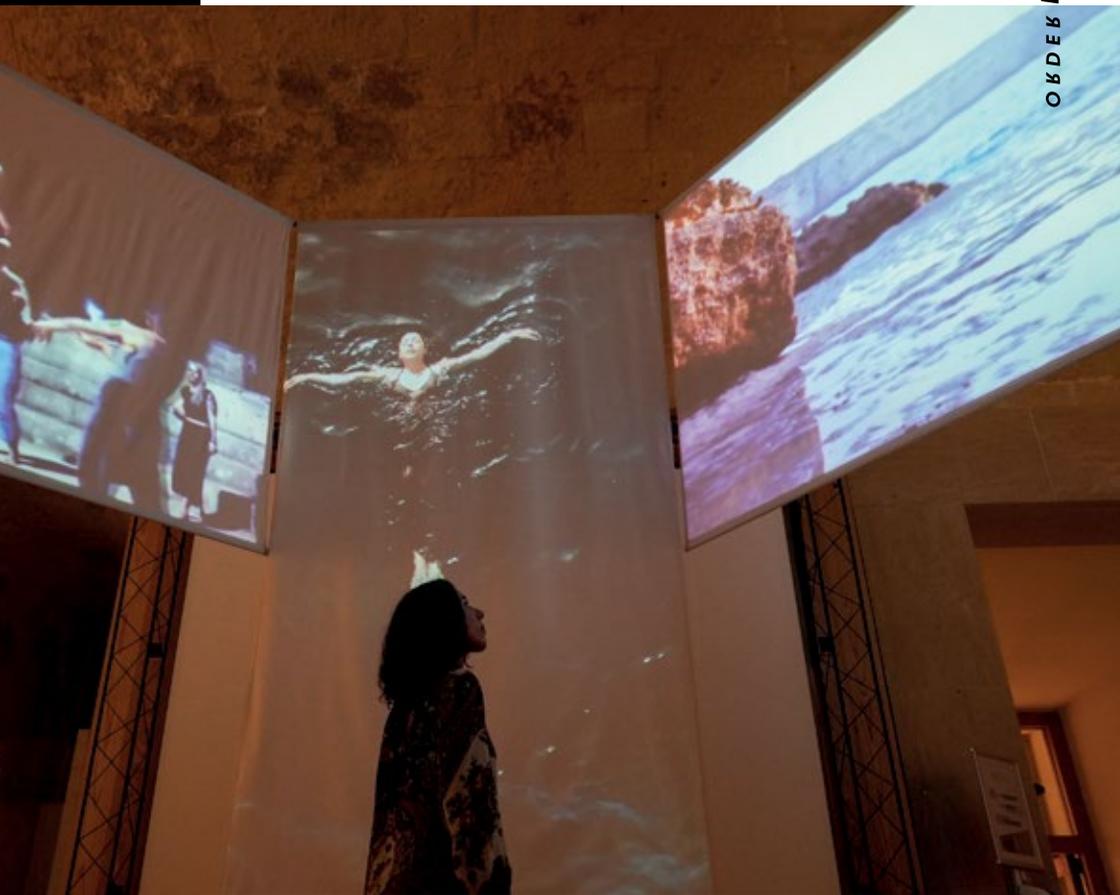
ORDER | SOACH

CHAOS | ORDER



CHAOS
ORDER
SOAHC

ORDER
SOAHC





NICOLE PACE

***Not always everywhere
But always somewhere***

Scanography, slide projection

As visual as it is experiential, this research applies darkness and light as unphysicalities that physically condition the viewer in an immersive work of art as a reflection on the human condition. The notions of absence and presence, physical and unphysical inhabit a pervasive quality within the work, explored through an interaction with and interruption through the viewer's presence and eventual absence. This ultimately alludes to a darkness and light which are humanly inevitable.

This research is partially funded by



NOT ALWAYS EVERYWHERE

BUT ALWAYS SOMEWHERE

NOT ALWAYS EVERYWHERE

BUT ALWAYS SOMEWHERE



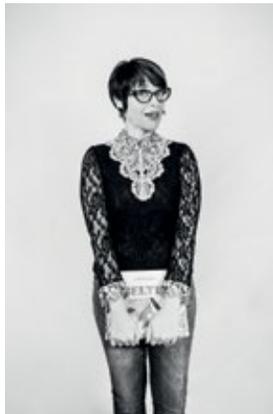


BERNARD POLIDANO

Confronting the Gaze

Photography

This study aims to examine whether or not a person's character and identity can be captured objectively visible in a photographic image. During this project, I focused on searching the inner self of the sitter over aesthetic accuracy via the use of a symbolic object of representation and a combination of cameras set at different vantage points. In this sense, a portrait is viewed as a piece of data fragmented in time that can be gathered, deconstructed, and optimized to generate a result that effectively examines a subject's character







CLAYTON SALIBA

Digitus

Vectorgraphics, Online

Digitus is a Digital tool that focuses on post-treatment and the educational stages of diabetes. It explores the merging of digital illustrations with the medical field and endeavours to shed light on the importance of having medical information accompanied by appropriate images and illustrations. Keeping the last technologies in mind, this project focuses on the use of digital illustration, and thereby print-based brochures were side-lined.

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care | compassion | dignity



DIGITUS
DIGITUS





DAPHNE SAMALUT

[Psyche Uninterrupted]

Sound Art, Brain-Computer Music Interface

In this thesis, I look at sound, mainly noise, as a conceptual grounding as well as a physical effect for generating altered states of consciousness. Thriving for the discovery of new interfaces for musical expression, I aim to create new platforms where anyone is able to make electronic music. The instrument that I opt for in this project does not require any previous knowledge in musicality, in fact, the brain is capable of creating a connection with the machine, and in this hybrid, the individual becomes a “technological self”.

This research is partially funded by



[PSYCHE UNINTERRUPTED]

[PSYCHE UNINTERRUPTED]

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**NICOLE
ZAMMIT**

The Meditating Mind

Audio/Visual Installation

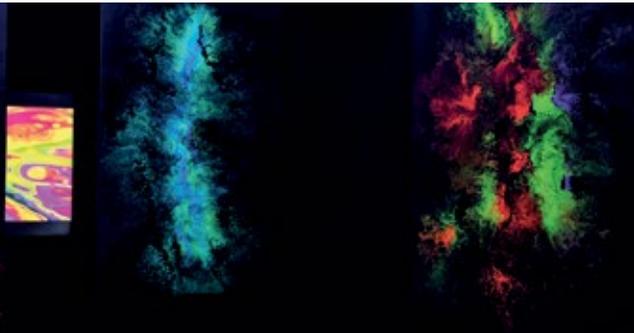
The Meditating Mind is an immersive, audio/visual installation aiming to create a therapeutic escape for viewers to engage in present moment awareness. This research combines notions of psychology, art therapy and neuroscience and investigates how mindfulness and meditation can be explored from an artistic point of view. The fluorescent paintings featured in this work represent a depiction of neural experiences happening in the brain during meditation. Making use of an approach known as meditative-painting, this research explores using the technique of fluorescent paint pouring as a process of self-awareness and reflection. This technique is a form of expression through paint, aiming to release negative thoughts, sensations and emotions while being grounded in the here and now.

Supported by



THE MEDITATING MIND

THE MEDITATING MIND



THE MEDITATING MIND

THE MEDITATING MIND



ENNEAD IS SUPPORTED BY:



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Media &
Knowledge Sciences

Department
of Digital Arts

SPAZJU
KREATTIV



STRETTA

Co-ordination / Logistics

PETER MAGRO

Videography & PR

LARA MANARA

Logo & Branding

NICOLE PACE

DAPHNE SAMMUT

Social Media

NICOLE ZAMMIT

MICKAYLA BUGEJA

EMMA CINI

Photography

BERNARD POLIDANO

Website Design & Development

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prof. Noellie Brockdorff, Dr Matthew Galea, Dr Trevor Borg, Prof. Ġorġ Mallia, Dr Adnan Hadziselimovic, Dr Irene Biolchini, Dr Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone, Dr John Grech, Mr Joseph Cassar, Mr Daniel Zerafa, Mr Malcolm Bonello, Mr Patrick J. Fenech, Mr Fabrizio Cali, Mr Peter Paul Portelli, Ms Giulia Privitelli, Ms Simone Chircop, Dr Margaret Mangion and The Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking & Innovation, the staff at the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, the staff at Spazju Kreattiv, University of Malta, Campus FM, MaltaToday, Times of Malta, Gadgets, LovinMalta, Maltartii, TVM.

Thanks also to our families and friends for their support.

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MFA IN DIGITAL ARTS EXHIBITION 2021

4-27 JUNE 2021

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ST JAMES CAVALIER, VALLETTA



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