

THE MEDITERRANEAN PEACE DONKEY
(at The Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale)
13 November 2015 – 7 January 2016
Mdina, Malta
Curator: Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler
Artistic Director: Dr. Giuseppe Schembri-Bonaci



A strategic exhibition of noted Maltese and Mediterranean artists using the symbol of the Maltese donkey to communicate the need of “peace and compassion” between cultures and creeds

Introduction

The **Mediterranean Peace Donkey** project is a strategic public arts initiative that focuses on the critical importance of building harmony between the Middle East and West by creatively communicating a message about “peace and compassion” toward the “other”.

The Mediterranean region, unlike any other in the world, with its 21 countries, represents both historically and contemporarily an intercultural bridge between the East and West. Within this region, the country of Malta is a symbolic and historic icon of East-West interaction, both culturally and religiously. While today a member of the European Union, over its history the island has been ruled by a succession of Eastern and Western powers; Phoenicians, Romans, Moorish, Normans, Sicilians, Habsburg Spain, Knights of St. John, French and British.

The Maltese language illustrates this profoundly. Maltese is the only Semitic language in the European Union. The language descended from the now defunct Sicilian-Arabic dialect. Having a Semitic base, the language has a Siculo-Italian influence with French and English additions.

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey is an artistic expression by 21 noted visual artists from different cultural and religious backgrounds communicating a message about the importance of living in “peace and with compassion” towards the “other,” which is the theme of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale.

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition is held in the ancient city of Mdina, where the East-West nature of Malta is so clearly represented. Mdina is a medieval walled town situated in the center of the island on one of the highest points that owes its present primary architecture to the Arab period, from 870 until the Normans conquered Malta in 1091. Today the city displays an unusual mix of Arab, Norman and Baroque architecture. In the heart of the city stands the magnificent St. Paul’s Cathedral. This impressive cathedral is the host of the Mdina Contemporary Art Biennale scheduled between 13 November 2015 and 7 January 2016. Over 125 premier contemporary artists will participate in this significant art initiative.

Strategically using the famous and rare Maltese donkey as a symbol for peace and compassion, 21 life-sized fiberglass “Maltese” donkeys have been produced by CARAVAN to be

Painted/decorated by 21 premier and emerging Maltese and Mediterranean artists: a donkey for each of the 21 Mediterranean nations.

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey Project follows in the footsteps of both the widely successful 2013 CARAVAN public art donkey initiative in Cairo, Egypt and London, which was seen by over 120,000 people, and also of an international approach to public art that has featured painted animals.

2013 "Peace and Compassion" Egyptian Donkeys at St. Paul's Cathedral, London



The Symbolism of the Maltese Donkey (Hmar Malti)



The Maltese Donkey

The form for the life-size "Maltese" fiberglass donkeys is based on the celebrated and endangered Maltese donkey, which has great symbolism. Through these Mediterranean Peace

Donkeys we are attempting to focus international attention on four critical needs represented by the symbolism of the Maltese donkey.

1-The donkey is an **interfaith symbol** as it represents “peace and compassion” in the primary religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and cultures of the Middle East and West. Examples are numerous, such as both Jesus and the second Muslim caliph, Omar Ibn El Kattab, each riding donkeys when they entered Jerusalem. This therefore highlights the importance of peace, harmony and tolerance between faiths. The painted “Mediterranean Peace Donkeys” serve as “Encounter Points” to help to change negative stereotypes of the “other,” encouraging intercultural and interreligious friendships.

2-The Maltese donkey has **historic symbolism for East-West relations**. Four of these Maltese donkeys were sent by the Marquis de Lafayette of France to George Washington in 1786 (soon to be the first President of the United States of America) as a gift from the Mediterranean to the West. Hence the Maltese donkey is in many ways an historic “East-West symbol,” hence these Mediterranean Peace Donkeys speak powerfully to today’s need of creating respect, developing understanding and encouraging friendship between the Middle East and West.

3-The donkey is seen throughout the Mediterranean as a “beast of burden” for the poor and is therefore a **humanitarian symbol** that raises awareness about the difficult conditions and challenges facing working donkeys in the Middle East region. Our aim in this exhibition is to draw global attention to donkeys, raising their status from exploited animals to ones that should be treasured, and play an essential role in local economies. More specifically, CARAVAN is partnering with The Donkey Sanctuary, the global leaders in the field of donkey welfare, to highlight the plight of donkeys caught up in human conflict throughout the Middle East.

4-The donkey is a means of journeying, and therefore is also a **symbol of the thousands of migrants and refugees** passing through the Mediterranean region trying to reach to Europe, fleeing conflict or economic hardship in their own countries, and their desperate need for humanitarian assistance.

The Artistic Creation of “The Maltese Donkeys”

For The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project, a Maltese donkey was sculpted by the premier Egyptian artist Dr. Reda Abdel Rahman (who also sculpted the mold for the Egyptian donkey used in CARAVAN’s 2013 exhibition). In Egypt a mold was fashioned from this sculpture and shipped to Malta and then reproduced in fiberglass forms.



“Maltese Peace Donkey” form
(unpainted)

First two Maltese Donkeys being made (unpainted)



Participating Artists

The 21 artists selected for The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project include women and men, from premier contemporary artists to emerging younger artists from both Malta and the Mediterranean. A variety of artistic mediums are used to illustrate the donkeys. Also, symbolically, the selected artists will come from the three primary monotheistic faith backgrounds common in the Mediterranean.

Curator

PAUL-GORDON CHANDLER is the Founder and President of CARAVAN. An author, interfaith advocate, arts patron, social entrepreneur and a U.S Episcopal priest, who grew up in Muslim West Africa, he has lived and worked extensively throughout the Islamic world in leadership roles within faith-based publishing, relief and development agencies and churches. Most recently, he served as the rector of the Church of St John the Baptist-Maadi in Cairo (2003-2013). He has curated exhibitions on Trafalgar Square in London, and at St. Paul's Cathedral-London, Egypt's Museum of Modern Art, Washington D.C.'s National Cathedral, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, and St. Martin's in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London.

Artistic Director

DR. GIUSEPPE SCHEMBRI BONACI is currently senior lecturer in the Department of History of Art at University of Malta and is the Artistic Director of the Mdina Contemporary Art Biennale. He graduated from the University of Malta, the State University of Kiev, and the State University of Moscow. He also did postgraduate research at the State University of Milano. He specialized in Law, Philosophy and the Arts. Besides being the author of several academic research publications he is also an artist who has exhibited in various Maltese and international venues and galleries.

Sculptor

Reda Abdel Rahman: Born in Ismailia, Egypt and having studied at the University of Minya at the College of Fine Arts, Reda Abdel Rahman is one of Egypt's leading contemporary artists. Enjoying a prolific and international career in the Arts, his artistic career has taken him around the world, from Latin America to Europe. He has also focused on encouraging emerging Egyptian artists and promoting the Egyptian art scene. He has been integral to the formation of internationally recognized events such as the Luxor Painting Symposium and the formation of the annual Aswan Sculpture Symposium. He has also led the Fustat workshops in Old Cairo that bring together a range of artists from around the Middle East. Reda was an important founding artist in the CARAVAN arts initiative and is also an ongoing participant artist in the CARAVAN exhibitions, seeking, as a Muslim, to use the Arts as a means to build bridges between the Middle East and West. Reda was the sculptor of the acclaimed Egyptian donkey used for the 2013 CARAVAN "In Peace and Compassion" public art initiative in Cairo and London.

Program Partners and Sponsors

Integral to the implementation of The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project is a focus on partnership. CARAVAN's two primary partners and sponsors are The Donkey Sanctuary and United Religions Initiative (URI).

