



il-ħajja

an exhibition of sculptures by
MARIO AGIUS

DEDICATED TO

Nina Agius

Isaac Casha

Peppi Agius

Luke Casha

Matthias Casha

Celine Muscat

Ian Casha

il-ħajja

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IL-HAJJA

Curatorial Note by Elyse Tonna

“Those would at times observe in tree trunks, clumps of earth or other objects of this sort, certain outlines which through some light changes could be made to resemble a natural shape.”

Leon Battista Alberti

Focusing on the depictions of life and essential states of being, *il-hajja* explores narratives transmitted through various elements associated with the cycle of life through materiality, symbolism and sculpture. The body of work presented by Mario Agius investigates what it is to be human, showcasing a certain affinity to the natural processes of human development and life through its primarily expressionistic nature. At heart to the artist's work is an exploration of figurative elements as vessels for the eternal soul, where various representations of the body are direct reflections of fundamental human experiences, spirituality and emotions. The artist also brings to focus and questions anthropocentric subjects about the nature of existence and reality through the use of natural materials such as wood, stone and marble. The essential states of being such as birth, youth, procreation and old age also allude to the artist's inner psychological thoughts and personal experiences, transposing the exhibition to an introspective and a process of self-reflection. Agius further resorts to mimetic tendencies as they appear in nature tending towards the humanistic and naturalistic which are conveyed through sculptural elements and articulated

with flowing and continuous lines. Alluding to primitive sculpture, the parallelisms conveyed between the reflections on the essential meanings of life and their interpretation are guided by the haptic suggestiveness of tree trunks and natural rock formations. The intuitive projections of the artist's inner sensations also draw in the concept of empathy, whereby the artistic process is driven by the artist's previous cognitive experiences which subjected him to develop and define his repertory of physical manifestations. Exploited by prehistoric artists and also primitive art styles such as African art, the inherent form of tree trunks facilitates the production of figurative forms, the soul of the tree itself projected through humanistic representations.

Il-hajja is an exhibition whereby our senses are shifted beyond the materiality of the figures being represented and towards further understanding of the meaning of life, representing the need for continuous growth. It showcases radiantly charged intersections between the material and the ineffable soul. The cycles of life are ultimately universal issues which have been experienced throughout centuries, and so will they remain.



COMPULSIVELY THINKING ABOUT LIFE

Joseph F. X. Zahra

There is a *leitmotif* in Mario Agius' solo exhibitions and his individual works – a continuous and nearly compulsive thinking process about life and its journey. Indeed we are all products of inherited genetics and personal transformation through family and society at large. But Mario is gifted in expressing this directly, without inhibitions, with lucidity and luminosity; all through a process of thinking and meditation. (*Imhasseb, Imhassba, Solitudini*). His works are a reflection on the cycle of life, from its commencement in the womb (*Guf*) through the joy and sorrow of its evolution (*Seeds of Innocence, Intimità, Maghquda, Familjari, Imhabba sal-Abħar, Għaqda, In-Natura, Hlewwa, Omm u Wild*), and later at ripe age and death (*Imhabba sal-abħar*). It is not surprising that he picks on Epicurus (*Epicurus*), the philosopher of interdependence of nature struggling to achieve happiness as the ultimate goal of human life. The societal surroundings of people in the village, on the island of Gozo and the cultural influence of the Roman Catholic Church and religious devotion form an integral part of his view of this human journey.

The depth of his works lies in his search of the meaning of existence, through the mind and eyes of a specific culture and a physical, emotional and intellectual context – Gozo, Xaghra, Ggantija, home and family. A concoction of prehistory, history, contemporaneity, evolving into the Now – a process of metamorphosis (*Adam, Eva, Hieles, Aliases, Anġli, Metamorfosi ta' Ciclope*).



It is indicative that Mario's works are in wood, stone and marble. Nature is life and wraps life to make it breathe, feel and think. Nature cannot be regarded as separate from ourselves as a mere stage which we inhabit. Mario extracts life from what can be considered as inanimate stone and cuts and shapes frantically with his chisel on wood to painfully express himself in his definition of an anguished life in search of meaning.

It is also significant that a central figure in this exhibition is Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the environment, an advocate of Mother Earth and a patron of those who promote ecology. The figure of Francis (*San Franġisk ta' Assisi*) is striking in its figurative power but paradoxically emits the values of humility, obedience, patience and compassion that humanity needs in building a constructive relationship with nature and the environment. Social interaction, human interrelationships and the relationship with nature are means to achieve peace and harmony. (*Samaritan, In-Natura, Hlewwa, Ghaqda*)

However compare this sense of fraternity and peace with God and nature in *San Franġisk ta' Assisi* with the disturbing figures of *Il Senatore* and *Superior*. Humanity is being shaped if not transfigured by the happenings in our common home – take pollution and climate change, the frantic race for materialism and money, waste, manipulation of human life, and global inequality. The culprit is still human, but this time rather than the sensuality of motherhood and family warmth, the protagonist is human

greed and indifference. Mario had to include these two-outstanding works to shock the viewers with the other reality of suppressed human dignity and despair.

Stop to reflect in front of the work *Sigra*. There are no demarcation lines between the person and nature and that life is flowing through the relationship between humanity and nature demanding unity and fraternity.

For Mario, the earth is a gift and not a possession. Even abandoned stone and withered trunks can be transformed in vivid figures and images radiating powerful messages. The world that he would like to leave to his children and grandchildren is one of hard work, creativity and achievement but with an underlying modesty and sense of service. Art is a means of giving to others part of yourself through incisive and penetrating communication in different forms. Inspired by Saint Francis, Mario is serving humanity in forwarding a message that creativity is a means of charity and not of power and submission and that there is a relationship between nature and the environment and social and human reality. As human actors on this earthly stage we are free to choose. Mario is on the side of humanity and ecology; and he reminds us that our priority should be the quality of human life and the avoidance of a breakdown of society.

14th February 2022



SIGRA
Olive wood
108 x 83 x 28cm



ANGLI
Olive wood
76 x 95 x 21cm

FAMILJARI
Olive wood
78 x 49 x 33cm





ADAM

Oak

80 x 38 x 18cm



EVA
Oak
82 x 36 x 18cm



ALIASES
Carob wood
55 x 30 x 40cm



SUPERIOUR

Olive wood
62 x 40 x 28cm



MISTRIEH

Olive wood

85 x 34 x 26cm



IMHABBA SAL-AHHAR

Olive wood

41 x 54 x 22cm



EVA
Olive wood
78 x 33 x 39cm



ADAM
Olive wood
76 x 21 x 20cm

INTIMI
Olive wood
104 x 56 x 40cm





MAGHQUDA

Olive wood

52 x 13 x 15cm



GHAQDA
Olive wood
63 x 21 x 18cm



IN-NATURA
Olive wood
71 x 28 x 25cm



SEEDS OF INNOCENCE

Olive wood

94 x 25 x 25cm



OMM U WILD

Cherry wood

82 x 22 x 22cm



GUF
Olive wood
45 x 13 x 22cm

IMHASSBA
Olive wood
71 x 34 x 30cm





HLEWWA

Olive wood

33 x 24 x 22cm



SOLITUDNI

Olive wood

60 x 27 x 23cm



METAMORFOSI DEL CICLOPE

Carob wood

46 x 24 x 40cm



SHELTERED

Olive wood

78 x 53 x 40cm



L-EREMITA
Olive wood
157 x 50 x 52cm



IL SENATORE

Olive wood

95 x 35 x 35cm



LA SALVEZZA

Olive wood

100 x 33 x 15cm



SAN FRANGISK T'ASSISI

Olive wood

85 x 23 x 24cm



SAMARITAN

Olive wood

97 x 49 x 16cm



HIELES

Globigerina limestone

56 x 30 x 35cm



SAN PAWL
Globigerina limestone
57 x 22 x 22cm



EPICURUS

Globigerina limestone

44 x 25 x 30cm

INTIMITÀ
Gozo marble
30 x 44 x 15cm



MERAVILJA
Gozo marble
65 x 18 x 23cm





IMHABBA
Carrara marble
54 x 16 x 14cm



PREŻENTAZZJONI

Travertino Rosso marble

41 x 8 x 8cm



IMHASSEB

Carrara marble

37 x 9 x 8cm



MARIO AGIUS (b. 1956) studied sculpture and design with the late Maltese artists Anton Agius and Harry Alden and furthered his studies in the UK with sculptor Ian Norbury. Juginder Lamba, a sculptor of international repute described Mario's works as if they *"oozed with humanity and the human condition in a truly universal sense"*.

Agius's sculptures are in constant dialogue with our surroundings and aim to create connections and parallelisms between human life and drama expressed with natural materials such as olive trunks, Carrara marble and Gozo hardstone. He has exhibited his works both locally and internationally and his sculptures are found in private collections worldwide. Some of his international exhibitions included collective shows organised by the British Woodcarvers Association in the UK and by the Marzi Art International Gallery in Hamburg, Germany and other collective shows in Gotland in Sweden and in the city of Nantes in France. Two of his large-scale public sculptures are exhibited permanently in Beesle – Holland where he sculpted a 3.5 metre St George from one wooden trunk and at the Mgarr Terminal in Gozo where he has the sculpture named 'Komunita' which was selected through a national competition.

Mario Agius is married to Maria nee' Sultana and has three children: Victor, Graziella and Charlene. He is grandfather to Nina, Isaac, Peppi, Luke, Matthias, Celine and Ian.

Artist contact details

Mario Agius, Ġgantija Art Gallery, John Otto Bayer Street, Xagħra Gozo-Malta.

Mobile- (00356) 99472831

Email – agiusmario@gmail.com

Website – www.marioagius.com

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www.marioagius.com