

# Freedom of expression in Freedom Square?

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All but two of the people portrayed in the exhibition are Maltese citizens. Photo: Chris Sant Fournier

Valletta's Freedom Square does not exactly symbolise Malta's finest architectural hour. Its bareness and shabby-looking arcades do little justice to what is meant to be the entrance to a world heritage site.

But an exhibition by Norbert Attard in the square in the past few weeks is turning heads and, more importantly, has raised the pertinent question whether the arcades could well become a permanent open air art gallery.

The exhibition entitled 'Where Are You From' is an initiative of the European Parliament Office in Malta in collaboration with St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity and the Valletta council.

"Freedom Square is contemporary, unloved and has an uncertain future. While it stands, we can make the most of it as a new, original, outdoor gallery for artists who are crying out for new spaces to express themselves in," said Julian Vassallo, head of the European Parliament Office in Malta.

With limited exhibiting and cultural space in Malta, the square could well serve to ease the problem and give budding artists an ideal platform.

So what do other artists think of Freedom Square becoming a permanent exhibiting space?

Patrick Fenech believes it is a brilliant idea: "After all, when one considers the amount of monies spent on this single project, then perhaps extending the project will justify the capital expenditure."

James Vella Clark said the exhibition would hopefully lead to more public spaces being devoted to artistic and visual projects and exhibitions that stimulated the minds of passers-by.

Valletta mayor Alexiei Dingli pointed out how the exhibition was making people stop and take note of the surroundings. He favours the idea of a permanent exhibiting space, though the decision to do so should be taken with the consensus of all stakeholders connected with the square.

Dr Dingli suggested that other spaces such as derelict buildings in the capital city could also be used: "While we wait for the rent reform, why not hide that shabbiness with a large work of art?"

National co-ordinator for the 2008 European Year of Intercultural dialogue, Toni Attard, agreed the space should be integrated into the full development of City Gate, the bus terminus and the Opera House as a creative project.

"This is a project everybody wants to see delivered as soon as possible; however, nobody seems to have the stamina to fulfil it. There is a sense of urgency for such a project since we're only 10 years to potentially becoming the European Capital of Culture. And if Valletta aspires to be part of the Capital of Culture bid for 2018, these projects need to be developed immediately."

Dr Vassallo said the European Parliament office was talking to St James Cavalier's management about keeping the frames in place. The plan is to hold competitions in order to select artists' works to put on display. In this way, the square will become a permanent gallery.

During the launch, Fr Peter Serracino Inglott said the exhibition by no means threatened Maltese identity: "A stimulus on our 'changing' is not an attack on our identity but is something that should help us keep this identity alive.

"Unless it is alive it does not exist. We must not be afraid that because an identity is changing we are losing something."

## Comments

Denis Catania (2 weeks ago)

I think setting up a permanent soapbox, so Maltese can express their thoughts, would be a great move, in Freedom Square.

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Etienne Bonanno (2 weeks, 1 day ago)

Hey yeah. Make love not war. Pass the bong and turn up McCartney!

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carmen caruana (2 weeks, 1 day ago)

The exhibition is cool, let's stop being conservative and start loving all the worlds diversity and it's beauty, rockers, intellectuals, gays, lesbians, muslims, christians, old people, black brown yellow and every skincolor on this earth. We're all brothers and sisters who live on the same earth.

Let's love diversity and live in peace =)

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Albert Attard (2 weeks, 1 day ago)

How long do the Maltese people have endure the ugliness of this site?

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