

PRESS RELEASE

VALLETTA, Malta, 13th July 2023

Against the white-cube!

by Sofia Baldi Pighi

A first-time biennial has no tradition to bow to, no historic exhibition pavilions to populate. It is faced with a blank canvas – an ideal space for shaping the imagination. To understand how best to do this, it is essential to know that Malta is the smallest state in Europe (a full eight times smaller than Luxembourg); cartographically it is located south of Tunis, and its language is a hybrid of Romance and Semitic languages written in the Latin alphabet.

The Maltese biennial will be spread across the archipelago, with the capital Valletta, a UNESCO world heritage site, as its core. The neighbouring harbour cities of Birgu, Bormla and Senglea, as well as the neolithic temples in Gozo are also included in the biennale map.

Delocalizing activities over the entire Maltese territory will permit the public to discover novel, magnificent historic locations.

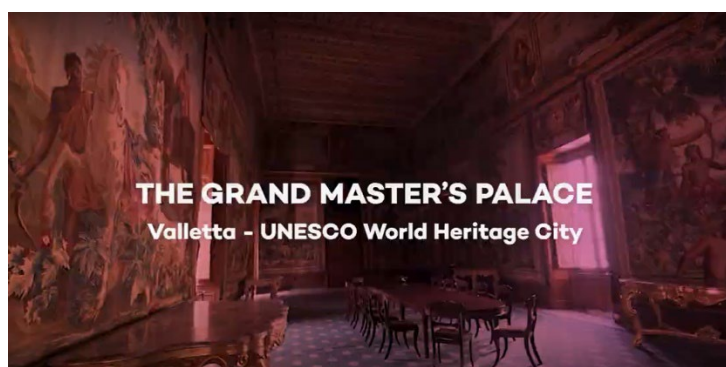
Where will Malta's Biennial exhibitions take shape? Where will the national pavilions be hosted? Where will the Biennial's Central Pavilion with international artists be located?

Heritage Malta – the national body responsible for the protection and preservation of Maltese cultural heritage – is at the helm. Palazzos, forts, churches, and archaeological sites that characterize the archipelago's expansive historic heritage, will be transformed by the works installed, or performed, within. Artists will be called upon to confront spaces with a marked historical dimension, filled with memories of events that together forged the island's future. No neutral space and no white cube for this biennial – the contemporary will be confronted with the ancient and baroque art of the island; the research of the invited and selected artists will be confronted with those of their colleagues who once frescoed and decorated these spaces.

We are proud to present to you some of the main locations of the [maltabiennale.art 2024](https://maltabiennale.art):

Grand Master's Palace, Valletta

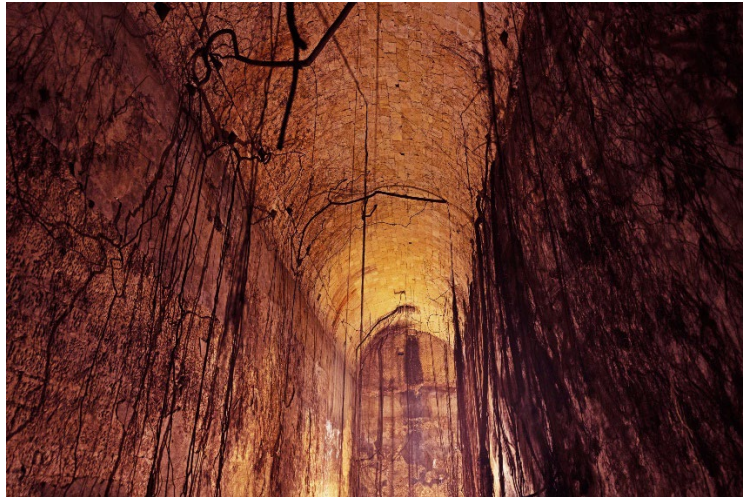
International artists will be called upon to engage with one of Malta's main centres of power over the past 450 years. The Palace has housed the residence of Grand Masters, the French Commander (after 1798), British Governors and the Parliament of Malta (1921-2015) up to the current President of the Republic. [LEARN MORE](#)



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Underground Valletta, Valletta

The capital's underground tunnels were once partly cisterns where collected rainwater or grain was stored, and partly a network of sewers. In World War II they were used as escape routes and provide shelter from aerial bombardment. Today they are places with evocative power. The wet walls bring to the surface the history and suffering of the people who once dwelled there, whilst the roots of the trees are the undisputed protagonists of the underground network.



Fort St. Elmo, Valletta

This fort is dedicated to the saint of sailors, and over the centuries has been repeatedly built and bombed. It was first built in 1552 following an attack by the Ottomans and bombarded by the latter in 1565. The battered fort was rebuilt and maintained as an active fortress during the 19th century. The artists selected for this space will be asked to reimagine a place that was once heavily militarized, with cannons and bombs still visible and a National War Museum at its centre.

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Ġgantija Archaeological Park, Gozo

The prehistoric complex of Ġgantija is the best-known of a number of megalithic/Neolithic sites found in Gozo. Ceremonial rituals were practiced, while sophisticated architectural achievements reveal that an exceptional society lived here more than 5,000 years ago. This complex, dating from before Stonehenge and the pyramids, remained in use for several centuries until the third millennium B.C., when the late Maltese Neolithic culture abruptly and mysteriously disappeared.

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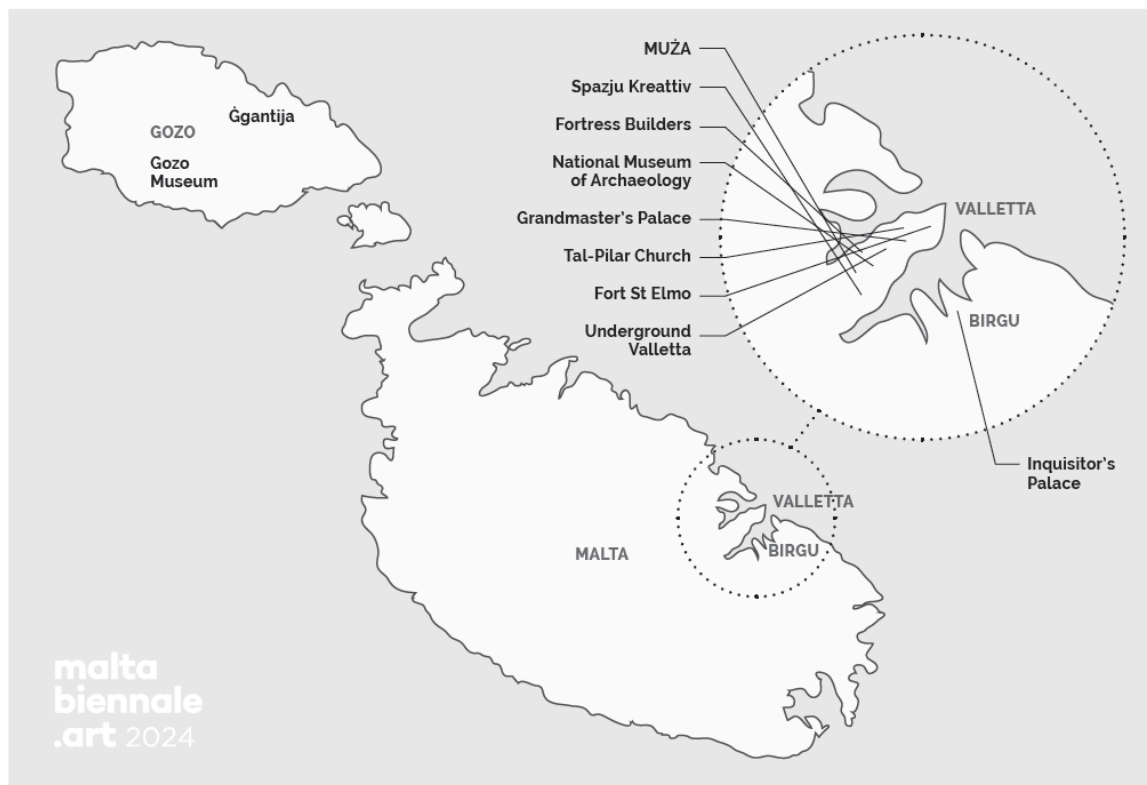
Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu

This Palace was the seat of the Inquisition from 1574 to 1798. All the inquisitors came from established Italian families and two were eventually appointed Popes. The Inquisition's presence in Malta influenced Christian Catholic devotion. Particularly interesting in the prisons are prisoners' graffiti, often in Arabic, which documented the stages of their prison sentence. [LEARN MORE](#)



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Thanks to the support of the Maltese government, many of these cultural assets are being restored. Teams of restorers, in religious silence, are suspended along the walls tending to the frescoes to rediscover their ancient luminosity, whilst on the ground, stonemasons are working to maintain these historic structures. Architects supervise the progress of the work, confident that by the inauguration of the biennial - March 11, 2024 - all these spaces will be fully restored, resplendent and ready to welcome the public.



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