Lifestyle & Culture

Good intentions for the New Year

Art and sharing after the closing of the Mdina Biennale

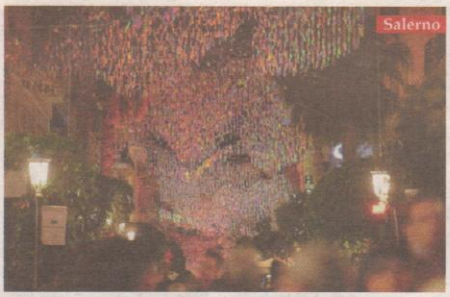
Irene Biolchini

On 29 December Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, the artistic director of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale, gave a talk entitled 'The Difference Between Nothing and Nothing... and Wine'. After his talk a reception was organised in order to share opinions, but also to enjoy the evening together. The event was one of the last ones in the calendar of the Mdina Biennale, which will close its doors on 7 January.

The event was a perfect reflection of the Mdina Biennale itself, which was conceived as a space in which artists, working with different media and in different fields, could meet in order to share their vision of art, to discuss and to enjoy the dialogue. This atmosphere was built in the course of the past years. Foreign artists were invited to come to the island, to develop their projects and to meet local artists. In November, the foreign community installed their works jointly with local artists and organisers, creating a positive exchange of genuine collaboration. I remember that once a foreign artist was looking for some specific materials in order to install his work: in a few minutes an international group started to discuss some possible solutions and pretty soon a Maltese artist kindly offered to help him purchase the required materials in order to facilitate the process. Once back they not only had the materials, but they also came up with a more efficient solution which they devised whilst driving and chatting.

The anecdote is just a small example of the healthy collaborations that were part of the installation process and which engendered the constructive character of the Biennale, a space of discussion and creation. The objective of the artistic director was to enlarge this exchange, creating a calendar of events able not only to involve visual artists, but also musicians, poets, performers and the general public.

Turin


Salerno

More particularly, the general public was also challenged in seeing the comfortable and quotidian spaces of Mdina, such as the Cathedral, the Cathedral Museum, and Palazzo De Piro, changed and reinterpreted by the artists. The decision of creating site-specific installations was guided by the intention of challenging traditional (and functional) spaces whilst providing a new interpretation of the same. And while well-known spaces were reinterpreted through the interventions of the artists, even other spaces, which are usually closed to the public (such as the Church of St Peter in Chains and the Church of St Roque) were made accessible thanks to the Mdina Biennale and the works of different contemporary artists.

The decision of re-designing the city of Mdina by reinterpreting its spaces, started with the present Biennale and one can only hope that it will develop further in subsequent years, fully supported by different sponsors able to believe and invest in the project, so that they may also intervene into the urban structure of the city. The intervention within the historic urban structure is in fact something which is fully accepted in other cities, such as Turin and, more recently, Salerno, which by creating the project 'Luci d'artista' were able to transform the city centre by installing works by contemporary artists.

Participating artist Monika Grycko setting up her work at the Mdina Cathedral Museum

The project, 'Luci d'artista' started as a way of reinterpreting the traditional Christmas city lights into site-specific projects designed by contemporary artists. The lights designed by the artists intervene into the city structure giving new form to the usually well-known spaces.

Besides the fact that 'Luci d'artista' became the biggest event of the year in Salerno, attracting an impressive amount of tourists, what is interesting for the Mdina Biennale is the possibility of comparing its project with other international realities which have already invested in a similar project, challenging tradition in order to open up thought and creativity to some contemporary interpretations.

The Mdina Biennale started this dialogue and we all believe that the closing of its doors will imply not the end of a challenging project, but the beginning of another one, which could possibly be even more ambitious.

Irene Biolchini (MPhil) is a doctoral student in the History of Art Department, University of Malta. Her book, 'Le faenze di Lucio Fontana' was recently published by the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza with the collaboration of the History of Art Department. She is part of the organisational team of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale which will be open until 7 January 2016. APS Bank is the main partner of the Mdina Biennale

We empower you to grow

www.FamalcoCareers.com