

Myriam Thyes, 2008.

Video DV Pal / DVD Pal, 20:45 (loop), stereo.

4 / 8 screen video installation

(4 different video sources, each used twice).

A closed octagon in which the viewers can enter.

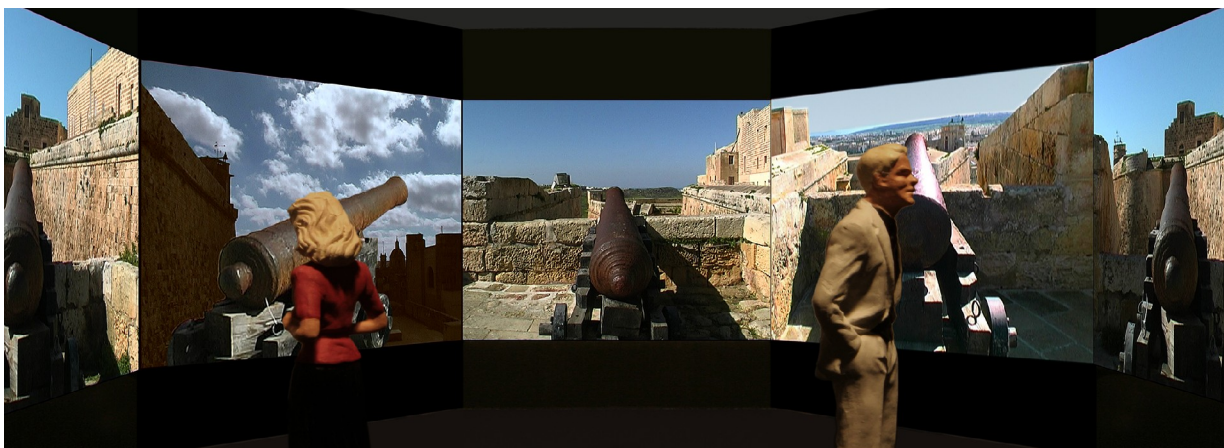
**Malta - a psychosocial magnifying glass:**

A visual and acoustic presentation of Malta as a metaphor for Europe - images for an internalised history and its parallels today.

The panoramic views in the octagon function as "inner" spaces and can also appear as false / artificial places – virtual memory spaces.

**Installation model, videos, and stills:**

[www.malta-as-metaphor.eu](http://www.malta-as-metaphor.eu)



The islands of Malta and Gozo impart, particularly in the time outside the tourist season, an intense awareness of the history of Europe, but also of a psychosocial sensibility which even today seems to influence our self-perception as Europeans.

A phenomenon on Malta is the fervent Catholicism which continues to be lavishly nurtured and celebrated. The yearly celebrations of the saints are numerous and the priests and parishes compete to have the biggest and most beautiful ceremonies and churches. Statues of saints are carried through the streets, the houses are decorated with pennants and strings of lights, the festival lasts into the night. The militarism of the music which accompanies the religious processions is a reminder of campaigns and crusades.

Omnipresent is the legacy of the Knights of Malta - an aggressive military order, also known as The Order of St. John of Jerusalem or Knights Hospitaller. From the 16th to the end of the 18th century the Knights of Malta were Christian Europe's Mediterranean police, who, on behalf of their members (France, Germany, Spain, England, Italy) and the Pope, defended Christianity and the coasts of the western Mediterranean against the Ottoman Empire (Turks and Arabs) and Islam. Malta is dominated by the extensive fortifications erected by the Knights.

So I felt myself on Malta to be in a state of paradox - simultaneously on an island and inside a castle. Many people on Malta and Gozo (400.000 inhabitants) feel divided by the love they feel on the one hand for a life in the security of the castle and in the security of strong beliefs, and by a sense of confinement that makes them restless and discontent. They race their cars (300.000!) along the narrow streets of Malta and Gozo at a speed as if on the small island there was no time to be lost. Dense population, dense building areas (living houses and hotels), dense car traffic – this too is typical for Europe.

Malta was for centuries the arena, starting point and target of innumerable wars and raids, both between competing West European rulers and between Christian and Muslim powers. In addition to this, came piracy, kidnapping, the slave trade and galley slaves. Consequently, for the Maltese, as well as for large parts of the population along the Mediterranean coast, abduction, exploitation and violent death were everyday occurrences. The constant presence of death is apparent in the intarsia images decorating the Knights' tombs in St. John's Cathedral - the deceased are represented as "living" skeletons.

For many boat refugees from Africa in the Mediterranean, MALTA is the point of arrival today. How "Fortress Europe" "defends" itself against immigrants from Africa has parallels to the way in which the Christian powers in the Mediterranean defended themselves against the Turks and the Arabs from the 16th to 18th century.



## THE VIDEO INSTALLATION

### The space: an octagon

A closed octagon made up of 8 black walls in which the viewers can enter through a door or a curtain.

Size of each wall: c. 3m wide and 3m high (at least). Dimensions of octagon: external diameter c. 7.5m, interior c. 7m (at least).

Each of the 7 complete walls contains a screen for frontal projection of 280 x 210 cm (at least).

The 8th wall with the door or curtain has a film for frontal projection on the interior.

Bottom edge of screen: 60cm above the floor.

The 8 video channels are a row of 4 different videos, repeated once; together they build fictitious "panoramas".

### Equipment

8 video projectors, hung beneath the ceiling inside the octagon. Wide-angle lenses are needed in order to provide a full screen projection (3,5m distance between beamer and projection surface).

4 synchronized CF-card media-players (each feeding 2 projectors), connected to the projectors with DVI or VGA cables.

4 loudspeakers (2 x stereo).

### Rationale for the closed octagon

The images should "crowd in" on the viewers, simultaneously showing perspectives and expressing confinement. Being closed in fits with the life experience and view of the world which Catholicism offers/offered or imposed on its adherents. The viewer experiences something of the situation of the "illegal" immigrant in the reception prisons and within the tight network of controls on Malta and in other places in Europe. Living in Europe, we still feel ourselves to be - in relation to events in other parts of the world - reasonably secure and protected, like being in a defensive castle.

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## CREDITS

All video and sound recordings: Myriam Thyes, Malta and Gozo 2006 + 2007.

Most photographs by Myriam Thyes, shot in Malta + Gozo 2006 + 2007, and at the Venice Naval History Museum, 2007.

Thyes used reproductions of old drawings + paintings of ships from "Sacra Militia" (2002 + 2005) and "Navi Venete" (1983).

Script, graphics, animation, editing: Myriam Thyes, 2008.

Sound mix: Denis Rosen, Dusseldorf.

Thanks in Malta to:

- Norbert F. Attard + Marisa, Gozo Contemporary, Gharb, Gozo, Malta
- Jesuit Refugee Service, Paul Pace
- all inhabitants of the Open Refugee Centre (tent village) in Hal Far, and centre manager Mick Quinn.

Introduction to the history of the Order of the Knights of St. John: Jörg-Dieter Brandes, 'Korsaren Chritsti'.

Background information considering refugees in Malta: Pro Asyl, Frankfurt, and Alessandra Sciruba, Venice.

Use of 8 photos, courtesy of:

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