

Report to the World Interfaith Harmony Week

THE MEDITERRANEAN PEACE DONKEY (at the Ta' Pinu National Shrine) February 2016 GOZO, Malta

A strategic exhibition of 21 life-sized fiberglass Maltese donkeys painted by noted Gozitan, Maltese, Egyptian and Western artists from Christian and Muslim faith backgrounds symbolizing the need for peace between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and West

Introduction

The **Mediterranean Peace Donkey** project was a strategic public arts initiative that focuses on the critical importance of building harmony between the creeds of the Middle East and West by creatively communicating a message about “peace and compassion” toward the “other”.

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey was an artistic expression by 21 premier visual artists from different religious backgrounds communicating a message about the importance of living in “peace and with compassion” towards the “other,” and illustrating how people everywhere can participate and work together towards harmony, understanding and peace, which is a critical need in our time. This exhibition took place when there has never been a more important time for the peoples of the Mediterranean countries to unite and stand together for peace in the region and globally.

The Mediterranean region, unlike any other in the world, with its 21 countries, represents both historically and contemporarily an interreligious and intercultural bridge between the Middle East and West. Within this region, the island of Gozo is a symbolic and historic icon of East-West interaction. The Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition was held in the renowned Ta' Pinu National Shrine, a place of revered pilgrimage for centuries.

Strategically using the famous and rare Maltese donkey as a symbol for peace and compassion, 21 life-sized fiberglass “Maltese” donkeys were produced by CARAVAN and painted/decorated by 21 noted Gozitan, Maltese, Egyptian and Western artists: a donkey for each of the 21 Mediterranean nations.



Mediterranean Peace Donkeys
on display at Ta' Pinu National
Shrine in Gozo, Malta

Strategic Need

In the midst of the increasing chasm of discord and misunderstanding that exists between the cultures and creeds of Middle East and the West, our day calls for a new kind of movement; one that builds on what they hold in common and that wages peace on the “other”.

The growing tensions between the Middle East and the West highlight that much work lies ahead toward finding ways that both can live peacefully together. Therefore, it is critical that “creative demonstrations of dialogue” be established. It could not have been timelier for this peace-building, high visibility public art project, The Mediterranean Peace Donkey initiative, that focused on fundamental message of intercultural harmony.

The early 20th century Lebanese artist and writer, Kahlil Gibran, who profoundly bridged East and West, beautifully said: “Your neighbor is your other self dwelling behind a wall. In understanding, all walls shall fall down.”

The overall goal of The Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition was to use the arts toward an interreligious and intercultural interchange, and to enhance understanding, respect and deepen relationships between individuals of different religious backgrounds from the Middle East and West. This public art project sought to play a considered role in the overall goal of seeing an end to sectarian strife, and of encouraging a global society that inherently respects and honors diversity, living and working together in harmony.

The Symbolism of the Maltese Donkey (Hmar Malti)



The Maltese Donkey

The form for the life-size “Maltese” fiberglass donkeys is based on the celebrated and endangered Maltese donkey, which has great symbolism. Through these Mediterranean Peace Donkeys we are attempting to focus international attention on four critical needs represented by the symbolism of the Maltese donkey.

1-The donkey is an **interfaith symbol** as it represents “peace and compassion” in the primary religions (**Christianity, Islam and Judaism**) and cultures of the Middle East and West. Examples are numerous, such as both Jesus and the second Muslim caliph, Omar Ibn El Kattab, each riding donkeys when they entered Jerusalem. This therefore highlights the importance of peace, harmony and tolerance between faiths. The painted “Mediterranean Peace Donkeys” serve as “Encounter Points” to help to change negative stereotypes of the “other,” encouraging intercultural and interreligious friendships.

2-The Maltese donkey has **historic symbolism for East-West relations**. Four of these Maltese donkeys were sent by the Marquis de Lafayette of France to George Washington in 1786 (soon to be the first President of the United States of America) as a gift from the Mediterranean to the West. Hence the Maltese donkey is in many ways an historic “East-West symbol,” hence these Mediterranean Peace Donkeys speak powerfully to today’s need of creating respect, developing understanding and encouraging friendship between the Middle East and West.

3-The donkey is seen throughout the Mediterranean as a “beast of burden” for the poor and is therefore a **humanitarian symbol** that raises awareness about the difficult conditions and challenges facing working donkeys in the Middle East region. Our aim in this exhibition is to draw global attention to donkeys, raising their status from exploited animals to ones that should be treasured, and play an essential role in local economies. More specifically, CARAVAN is partnering with The Donkey Sanctuary, the global leaders in the field of donkey welfare, to highlight the plight of donkeys caught up in human conflict throughout the Middle East.

4-The donkey is a means of journeying, and therefore is also a **symbol of the thousands of Muslim and Christian migrants and refugees** passing through the Mediterranean region trying to reach to Europe, fleeing conflict or economic hardship in their own countries, and their desperate need for humanitarian assistance.

The Artistic Creation of “The Maltese Donkeys”

For The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project, a Maltese donkey was sculpted by the premier Egyptian artist Dr. Reda Abdel Rahman, of Muslim background. In Egypt a mold was fashioned from this sculpture and shipped to Malta and then reproduced in fiberglass forms.



“Maltese Peace Donkey” form
(unpainted)

First two Maltese Donkeys being made (unpainted)



Participating Artists

The 21 artists selected for The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project include women and men from Christian and Muslim faith traditions, either premier contemporary artists or emerging younger artists from Gozo, Malta, Egypt and Western Europe. A variety of artistic mediums were used to illustrate/paint the donkeys.

ABI MACLEOD CLARK

AGATHA GRIMA

ANNA GALEA

CHRISTOPHER SALIBA

CLAIRE MARIE PEARMAN

DANIELA GUEVSKA

DAMIAN EBEJER

EMMA MORGAN

FARID FADEL

FEDERICO CHINI

HEND ADNAN

IBRAHIM EL DESSOUKY

JAMES MICALLEF GRIMAUD

JAMES VELLA CLARK

KARIM ABD EL MALAK

KENNETH ZAMMIT TABONA

KHALED HAFEZ

MARIAM HATHOUT

MOHAMMED TALAAT

MYRIAM O

RACHEL GALEA

THE HAPPY SCHOOL

VALERIO SCHEMBRI

Co-Curators (Christian & Muslim)

REV. PAUL-GORDON CHANDLER is the Founder and President of CARAVAN. An author, interfaith advocate, arts patron, social entrepreneur and a U.S Episcopal priest, who grew up in Senegal, West Africa, he has lived and worked extensively throughout the Islamic world in leadership roles within faith-based publishing, relief and development agencies and churches. Most recently, he served as the rector of the Church of St John the Baptist-Maadi in Cairo (2003-2013). He has curated exhibitions on Trafalgar Square in London, and at St. Paul's Cathedral-London, Egypt's Museum of Modern Art, Washington D.C.'s National Cathedral, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, and St. Martin's in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London.

Dr. Reda Abdel Rahman: Born in Ismailia, Egypt and having studied at the University of Minya at the College of Fine Arts, Reda Abdel Rahman is one of Egypt’s leading contemporary artists. Enjoying a prolific and international career in the Arts, his artistic career has taken him around the world, from Latin America to Europe. He has also focused on encouraging emerging Egyptian artists and promoting the Egyptian art scene. He has been integral to the formation of internationally recognized events such as the Luxor Painting Symposium and the formation of the annual Aswan Sculpture Symposium. He has also led the Fustat workshops in Old Cairo that bring together a range of artists from around the Middle East. Reda was an important founding artist in the CARAVAN arts initiative and is also an ongoing participant artist in the CARAVAN exhibitions, seeking, as a Muslim, to use the Arts as a means to build bridges between the Middle East and West. Reda was the sculptor of the acclaimed Egyptian donkey used for the 2013 CARAVAN “In Peace and Compassion” public art initiative in Cairo and London.

Opening Reception and visiting VIP Guests

An official opening reception and program was held with the **Minister for Gozo, The Honorable Dr. Anton Refalo**, as the VIP guest. The reception was also attended by religious dignitaries, including as the Vicar General, Mgr. Tarcisio Camilleri.



Minster for Gozo, Malta, The Honorable Dr. Anton Refalo speaking at the opening program.

The Minister for Gozo being presented a peace donkey for permanent display at the port of entry to Gozo as a reminder for the need of interfaith harmony.



While the peace donkeys were on exhibition in Malta, it was a special privilege to be able to welcome **Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall**, to the "Mediterranean Peace Donkey" exhibition. Prince Charles is known for his passion for building bridges between the Abrahamic faiths, and the Duchess of Cornwall is known for her animal welfare advocacy; hence the uniqueness of the peace donkey exhibition for them, with the donkeys representing peace in both Christianity and Islam, and drawing attention to the plight of working donkeys caught up in conflict zones in the Middle East.



Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, visiting the Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition in Malta (*speaking with the Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler from CARAVAN*)

Media and Publicity

The exhibition was attended by thousands and was extensively covered by the media, in national newspapers, television and radio. Many of the peace donkeys have now gone permanent display to advocate for interfaith harmony and peace in important venues around Gozo and Malta that are frequently visited, such as the upcoming Gozo Museum, the Port of Entry to Gozo, APS Bank, schools, the Karmni Grima Museum, Malta Duty Free, etc.

Educational Role

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey had considerable meaning and value as a catalyst and purveyor of peace locally, in the region and globally.

Serving as a focus for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the donkeys provided a starting point for discussion and interaction among all age groups. Primarily, it was a creative and entertaining way to introduce children to religious and cultural diversity and understanding and the need for peace. A variety of age appropriate activities were developed by different schools that directly addressed the particular issues facing both their respective communities and our world.

One of the highlights was to see how schools in Malta, encouraged by the **Ministry for Education's Curriculum Department**, used these painted peace donkeys as a creative teaching vehicle to children and youth to address themes of harmony, tolerance, peace and respecting religious and cultural diversity.



Gozo Rabat Primary School receives a peace donkey to paint



Children leaving their "mark of peace" on the peace donkey at the Happy School

School children visiting the peace donkeys



Program Partners and Sponsors

Integral to the implementation of The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project was a focus on partnership.

Primary Sponsors and Partners:



**THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY**
WORKING WORLDWIDE



UNITED RELIGIONS
INITIATIVE



GOZO CULTURE AND
INFORMATION OFFICE



**Roman Catholic
Archdiocese of Malta**



Appendix: Background on CARAVAN, the coordinating entity

CARAVAN is an international interreligious peacebuilding arts NGO that originated out of Cairo, Egypt that has the objective of building bridges through the Arts between the creeds and cultures the Middle East and West. CARAVAN's experience has shown that the Arts can serve as one of the most effective mediums to enhance understanding, bring about respect, enable sharing, and deepen friendship between those of different cultures and faiths from the Middle East and West. One of the flagship initiatives of CARAVAN is the globally recognized CARAVAN Exhibition of Visual Art, a unique arts initiative that brings together many of the Middle East's and West's premier and emerging artists. These CARAVAN exhibitions have resulted in unprecedented gatherings of renowned Middle Eastern and Western artists coming together to use art as a bridge for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. For more information, see: www.oncaravan.org