

"CURIOSITY IS WHAT MAKES ME BOTH AN ACADEMIC AND AN ARTIST".

WORDS CHRISTINE CASSAR

# PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

## ĠORĠ MALLIA

**THIS MONTH I HAD THE PLEASURE OF MEETING THE WONDERFUL ĠORĠ MALLIA. WITH HIS LATEST EXHIBITION RHAPSODY-IN-PAIN BEING JUST DAYS AWAY FROM OPENING NIGHT, I WAS EAGER TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HIS WORK AND WHAT'S IN STORE FOR US. IN A FEW WORDS, ĠORĠ IS BEST DESCRIBED AS A CARTOONIST, A RENOWNED MALTESE AUTHOR, A COMMUNICATIONS ACADEMIC... AND EVERYTHING ELSE IN BETWEEN.**

As an Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Media and Communications, Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences at the University of Malta, some of his main research and lecturing interests are in graphic design; personal communications; impacts of immersed new media usage; social network use in education; independent learning; illustration; and visual storytelling and sequential narrative.

Ġorġ simply cannot live in a world without illustrations. It is an essential part of who he is. He also loves anything that has to do with digital media; he strives to communicate his message visually through all forms of art, be it cartoons, drawings, paintings, socio-political comic strips, his verse and books. But is his academic life different than the more creative one? Not at all. Ġorġ firmly believes that both lives parallel one another. "Nothing is different," he states. "Just like a great piece of art mirrors a great artist, the emotion inherent in a piece of creative writing can also reflect the emotions that are there in lecturing".

"Curiosity is what makes me both an academic and an artist," he continues.

We move on to discuss how the world of digital art is constantly evolving. While Ġorġ tells me that he misses being immersed in traditional art, he still manages to achieve the same result. In reality, it's not so different than the more traditional ways of creating art — in this case, a stylus replaces the brush and a tablet replaces the canvas. All prints are still sketched, lettered or are entirely digital. It is then up to the illustrator who decides if it's best to give them a splash of colour, or opt to leave them as grayscale prints. Additionally, having more tools to work with is handy, especially when it comes to undoing mistakes, simulating physical brush work and so on.

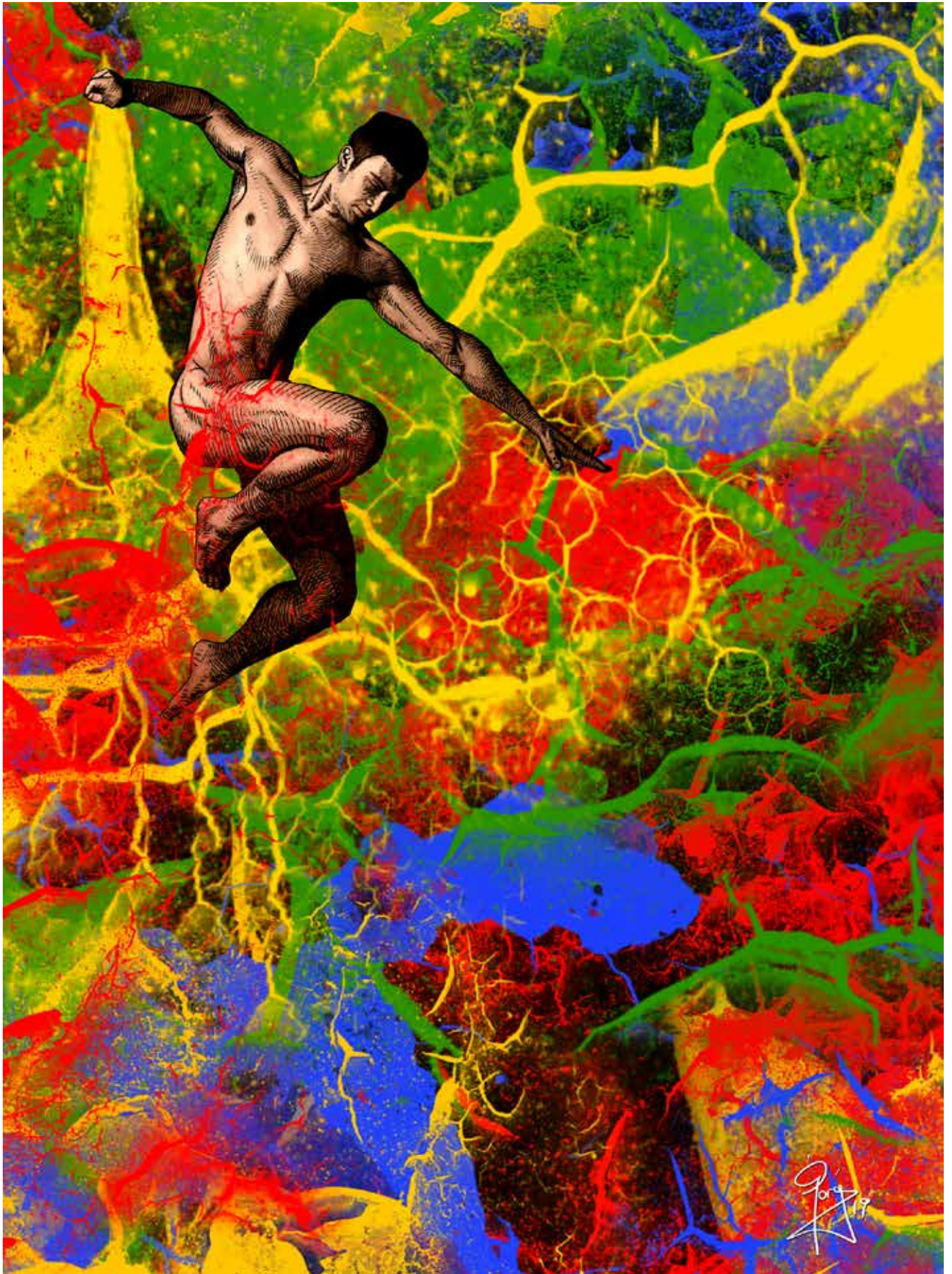
Ġorġ likes to experiment with colour media, as well as black-and-white. Both elements evoke different emotions, but it ultimately depends on the target audience. For example, children need to emote with colours; you can't just give them black-and-white illustrations or none at all and expect them to relate to them immediately at such a young age.

On the other hand, the Rhapsody-in-Pain digital prints showcase two different mediums — the dose of colour and the various intertwined circles and lines represent the mix of emotions - confusion, longing, rage, heartbreak, grief, hopelessness etc. that have been triggered by the collapse of his second marriage, while the pen-and-ink figures mirror those feelings in their posture, expression, contortion and gesture. As Ġorġ puts it, "It is in the darkest hours of my life that the digital paintings which comprise Rhapsody-in-Pain have exploded out of me."

Ġorġ has done so much for the digital arts and literature-circle. Everything is unique, but if I had to pick a favourite, I would choose his pen portraits. For starters, the Robin Williams and Lady Diana illustrations deserve a worthy mention. There are also other portraits hanging around his office, including ones of Heath Ledger as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* and Alan Rickman's portrayal of Professor Severus Snape. On that note, Ġorġ also proceeds to show me one of his notebooks. In between lecture notes, calendar events and so on, you'll also find many doodles that have been brought to life.

In this field of work, Ġorġ explains how being experimental goes hand in hand with being curious. This comes into play especially in some of his short stories for adults written in the stream of consciousness style and his children's books. "I always try to fill in the blanks and see what's missing," he tells me. ➤









With regard to his love for verse, Ġorġ's recent publication, *My love had eyes of blue and dreams – verses of love and pain* has garnered a lot of success since its release in 2019. Its four chronological sections, *Seventies, Eighties Nineties; Tmeninijiet u Disghinijiet – Versi bil-Malti; Two Thousands; and Epilogu*, present a series of pivotal events in Ġorġ's "emotional odyssey" throughout the years 1979 to 2019.

He believes that this collection of works resonated so well with the public because it projected a sense of familiarity in his readers. "I reach out with what I'm feeling at the moment. While I always write for myself, if they don't feel any sort of emotion when reading my verse, I've failed my audience," he states.

Ġorġ doesn't know what the future holds. His output is very varied. "Although my creative work is an oeuvre in itself, each

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manifestation is always very different," he replies. Nevertheless, he is sure of one thing; "I will be creating...the day I stop creating is the day I die."

The opening of Ġorġ Mallia's *Rhapsody-in-Pain*, will be held at 111 Art Gallery, Ta' Xbiex, on 6th March 2020, at 19:00pm. Should you wish to attend, please contact Ġorġ via email ([info@gorgmallia.com](mailto:info@gorgmallia.com)) or Facebook Messenger. The exhibition will also be available for public viewing until 20th March 2020. ✱

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