

Arts

Mdina's travelling donkeys cross the channel and will be on show in Gozo

Donkeys come in peace

Jennifer Grech

Church faithful and tourists visiting the Ta' Pinu National Shrine, the revered sanctuary of pilgrimage in Gozo, will this week also find life-sized fiberglass sculptures symbolising the need for peace and compassion between the Middle East and the West.

On Friday, Gozo will host 21 donkeys, all exhibits taking part in the *Mediterranean Peace Donkeys* project. This peace-building exhibition showcases 21 life-sized fiberglass 'Maltese' donkeys decorated by renowned Gozitan, Maltese, Egyptian and Western artists, symbolising a donkey for each of the 21 nations in the Mediterranean basin.

The forms were sculpted by Egyptian artist Reda Abdel Rahman and then built in Malta.

"Against a backdrop of the recent terror attacks in the West and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, Gozo is taking a strong stand for peace," says Paul-Gordon Chandler, founder and president of Caravan, an international peace-building arts NGO, that is organising the exhibition.

This event takes place at a time when the peoples of the Mediterranean need to unite and stand together for peace in the region and globally.

"Strategically, using the famous and rare Maltese donkey as a symbol of peace and compassion, 21 life-sized fiberglass 'Maltese' donkeys have been produced by Caravan and decorated by Gozitan, Maltese, Egyptian and Western artists: a donkey for each of the 21 Mediterranean nations," Chandler said.

The donkeys have already been exhibited at the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale. The exhibition also follows the widely successful 2013 public art donkey exhibition in Cairo, Egypt and London, which was seen by over 120,000 people.

"It is an artistic expression by 21 noted visual artists from different cultural and religious backgrounds communicating a message about the importance of living in peace and with compassion towards each other, which is a critical need in our time," Chandler added.

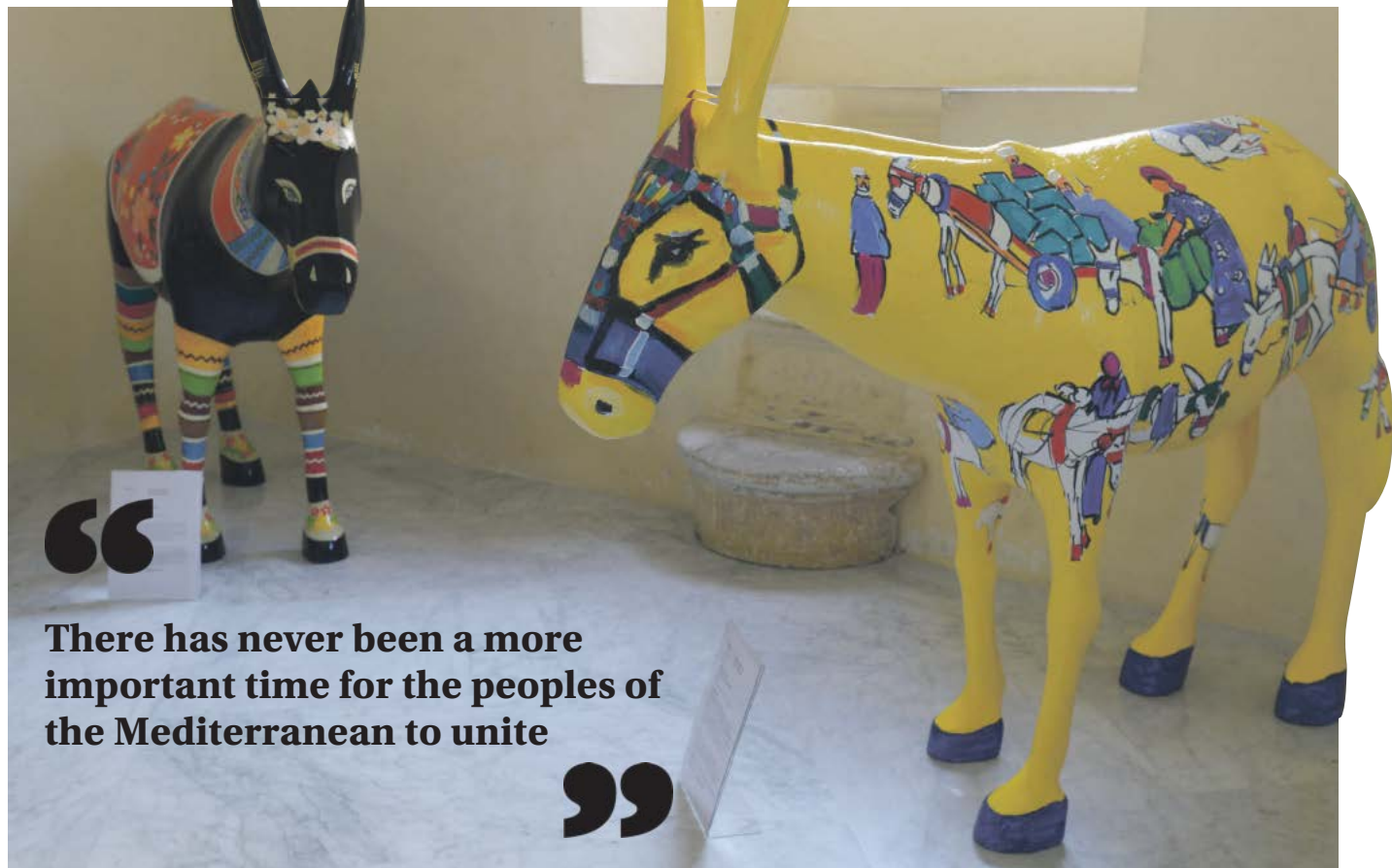
There has never been a more important time for the peoples of the Mediterranean to unite and stand together for peace in the region and globally.

This unique art exhibition is a crucial showcase of how people everywhere can participate and work together towards harmony, understanding and peace.

One of the artist taking part, Emma Morgan and her business partner Abi Macleod Clark, together with artist Federico Chini, created the donkey called 'All Aboard'.

She and her fellow artists also created and designed the 'Happy Donkey' with 370 primary school children.

"We are all very excited about the exhibition coming to Gozo as the island is a fantastic backdrop for art and the ethos of



the exhibition fits so well with the philosophy of Ta' Pinu," she says. "It's lovely to be working at Ta' Pinu and we have been very warmly received by everyone involved with the shrine."

Anna Galea, another participating artist, says she was inspired by the crystal waters of the Mediterranean and the olive tree, an endemic symbol of the region. Since classical antiquity the olive branch has been a symbol of peace. It was also used to keep away evil spirits.

"My donkey is therefore immersed in the clear waters of our Mediterranean Sea, reaching out with olive twigs offering solidarity and peace.

"The 21 spiral waves bordering the seas represent the 21 Mediterranean countries and are inspired by the art of Malta's unique prehistoric megalithic structures which predate the Egyptian pyramids and Stonehenge by over a thousand years.

"I also drew inspiration from Michelangelo's *Creation* in the Sistine Chapel where the Creator's hand is reaching out to mankind."

The exhibition uses the symbol of the renowned and endangered Maltese donkey to focus global attention on four critical needs.

"This unique art exhibition is a crucial example that people everywhere can contribute towards harmony, understanding and peace, with the island of Gozo, both historically and contemporarily, representing an intercultural bridge between the East and West," Chandler adds.

The exhibition will be open until February 28.



Need for peace between East and West

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey exhibition uses the symbol of the renowned and endangered Maltese donkey to focus global attention on four critical needs:

Inter-religious harmony: the donkey represents peace and compassion in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and in the cultures of the Middle East and West.

East-West relations: the Maltese donkey is a historic East-West symbol. Four Maltese donkeys were sent to General George Washington in 1786, prior to becoming US President.

Donkey welfare in conflict zones of the Middle East: as a 'beast of burden' the donkey acts as a humanitarian symbol, thereby raising awareness about the difficult conditions facing working donkeys in the Middle East region.

Humanitarian assistance for migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean: in its journey, the donkey also symbolises the thousands of migrants and refugees passing through the Mediterranean region looking for a better life.

Photos: Matthew Mirabelli