

In His Own Way

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Contents

Excerpt in Maltese	2
By the same author: <i>The Official Colours of War: Recording Malta in WWII</i> ..	13
Excerpt in Maltese.....	14

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COLOUR LINOCUTS

Citta Vecchia indicates that Weaver Hawkins was quick to experiment with the use of colour blocks in his work. The process of linocut making starts off with a working drawing which can be traced down onto the lino block using transfer paper. It should be kept in mind that the image will appear reversed when printed. The tracing has to be reversed if the artist wishes to read it the same way around.

Multicoloured linocuts can either be prepared by the reduction method in which successive cuts with a set of print-making tools are made on the same block of linoleum, with a new colour being applied at a following stage. Alternatively, a separate block for every colour is employed. This method grants the artist time to proof the colour results independently. Producing linocuts in colour reflects the artist's wish to put an effort into developing the image

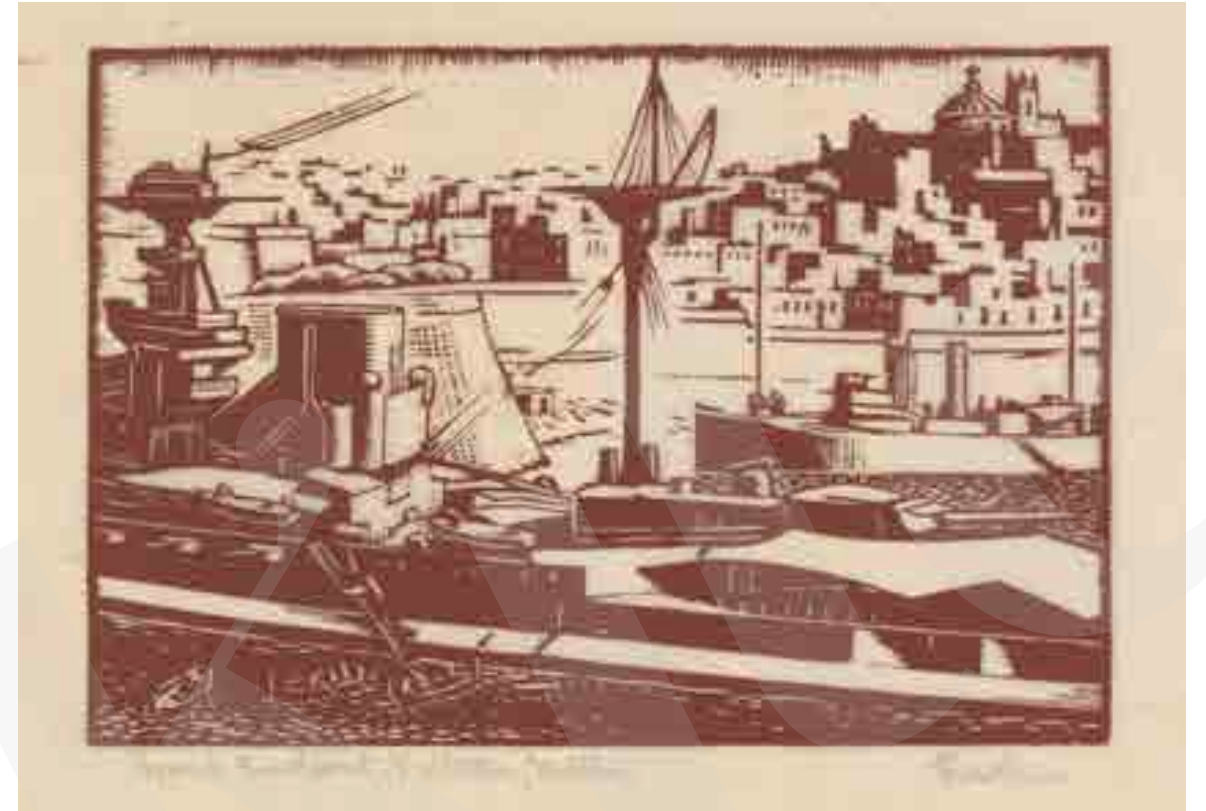
and colours need to be located separately in order to produce a unified image. The graphic qualities of linocut printing may be lost if the colour relationships become too crowded or complex. A limited palette is usually the best choice in order to achieve an overall balance. It also reflects a controlled form of artistic expression.

V-tools and gouges lend themselves to create broadly hatched lines. Finer tools are used to cut the main shape in outline on the linoleum block or to cut away surrounding areas.

Senglea, Malta, also entitled *Grand Harbour, Valletta* in the monochrome version, is a dynamic composition which illustrates activity in Grand Harbour and the synergy between old and new modes of marine transportation. With industrialisation still in its infancy, the Grand Harbour offered the clearest examples of the modernisation



View of Senglea, Malta, colour linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard c 1928-1929. Exhibited in April- May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta.



Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta c.1928, linocut, printed in brown ink, from one block. © National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1976. The Estate of H.F Weaver Hawkins. This is probably an earlier version of the one overleaf as it is monochrome. When printing an image having only two colours, the artist can check whether there is a good balance between positive and negative areas as well as where to focus the colour areas on.

taking place on the island. A couple of luzzus in the left foreground are juxtaposed with a naval vessel. Its tall mast divides the picture plane into two almost equal parts.

This linocut betrays an interest in compositional structure. With Senglea in the background, the houses are treated in a cubic manner reminiscent of the artist's Tangier compositions. It also displays minimal vortocist elements, specifically the one which evokes the mechanical clarity inherent in architectural and engineering drawings. The hatching on the top left corner must have been intentionally introduced by the artist to cover up some bleeding of paint.

It is interesting to compare this composition with two other etchings by British artist, Robert Binnings, which are almost coeval. *Arrival of a Ferry*, 1934 displays a cubic arrangement of Fort St. Angelo in the background. *Dockyard, Malta, Dock no 4* is also modern in its treatment of subject matter. Another artist, Dorothy Hirst exhibited her prints, including linocuts, at the Malta Art Amateur Association Exhibition in 1931 and Muza have a small collection of her work.¹ Two of her competent prints capture maritime activity in Grand Harbour and a third displays a similar cubic arrangement of houses to Weaver Hawkins' in Valletta viewed from the Sliema side.

There is a strong sense of light and shadow in *Maltese Market* and it is successful at reflecting the glaring heat. The configuration created by the figures engaged in a conversation at a market is an informal yet dynamic one. Note that

the man in the right foreground and the seated one are barefoot. The street name on the top right corner is almost discernible and the author has reason to believe that the scene represented in this linocut is the old vegetable market place in Rabat, close to the Domus, which was within walking distance from Raokin's residence in Mdina. This linocut is similar to *El Sokko Grande, Tangier*, 1923 discussed in chapter two as both works display an aestival market scene where long shadows dominate.

A contemporary article penned by a tourist writing under the pen name of *Artide*, published in the *Queen*, November 1927, and which appeared in the *Malta Herald* of 7 December 1927, captures the 'glow' of this summer market scene. 'Devotees of vivid colour effects will find plenty to satisfy their tastes in the scenery of Malta with its wonderful sunsets and background of dazzling Mediterranean. In the daytime everything seems crude and bright with the sun breaking down on the flat roofed yellow stone houses and throwing into relief harsh shadows on the white dusty ground.'

It is interesting to note that *Maltese Market* contains traditional elements of street life also seen in the works of Weaver Hawkins' contemporaries, namely Edward Caruana Dingli (*Street Market, Floriana*) and artist-photographer Geo Furst's photographic and watercolour versions of *A Street Market*. Similar barefoot men wearing the same beret and starched white shirt with rolled up sleeves



The Vegetable Market, Rabat. Postcard. Author's collection. Refer to pages 54-55.



Robert Binnings, *Arrival of a Ferry*, Linocut print 1934. Private Collection.



Robert Binnings, *Dockyard, Malta, No 4 Dock*, Linocut print 1927. Private Collection.



Maltese Market, colour linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard c 1928-1929. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta. Exhibited in May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. The unevenness of the border and the fact that the composition is not level betrays the fact that the linocut was hand printed.



Maltese Market, colour linocut on translucent paper c 1928-1929. Private Collection. The scene is the same as the previous one but the words lino-cut in brackets and *et imp* (and printer) have been included. The bundles in the foreground, as well as the shop doors under the awning are a different colour, possibly indicating that this version was a later one.



Geo Furst, *Market place*, 1933. Postcard. Author's Collection.

worn under a dark coloured waistcoat may be observed in all three works. Similarly, ladies clothed in *faldettas* are featured in the marketplace, presumably to catch up on the day's news and to make their purchases. The traditional Maltese wicker basket, or *qoffa* made out of yellowish cane, and used by storekeepers to display their fresh produce, also feature in all three artists' work. The content is similar in all three images but differ in their execution.

Frances Hotham, another tourist and author on a day trip to the islands wrote an article for the *Lady*, entitled *A Peep at Malta*, which was reproduced by the *Malta Herald* on 2 April 1928. Hotham had arrived on the P&O cruise ship and wrote about her 'vivid impressions' of a Maltese Karozzin (Carrozza) which are amusing to read in spite of their embellishments:

We found ourselves disembarking and surrounded by a host of 'carrozze' drivers all clamouring for our patronage. We climbed into a rather dirty looking vehicle and gave the driver the address of our destination [...] We jolted along the cobbled street of Valetta at a tremendous rate and we were nearly thrown out of the conveyance on turning an abrupt corner. I shrieked to the driver to go a little slower, but the only reply I could get was: 'Me no speak English.'

In *Maltese Dhaisas[sic]* the spaces between the *dghajsas* are represented by white ripples, which seem to catch the bright sunlight and sparkle. The designs also mimic the splash of the oars. Francis Hotham finished off

her description of the day her group spent sightseeing in Malta by saying that: 'later on in the evening we pushed off in a green 'dhaisa' [sic] similar to a Venetian gondola, to the P & O, which was waiting to take us eastward.'

The two seated women at the back of the flat cart featured in *Maltese Cart* are wearing *faldettas* and add to the visual interest of this linocut. Also worth noting are the subtle patterns and texture in the background created by cross hatching, as well as the long dark shadow under the cart.

The domestic animals represented in *Maltese Goats* have bells around their necks and appear in the foreground. Up to the nineteen forties, a herdsman would walk his flock around the village streets and milk the goats for his clientele, who were usually housewives.² Author and politician Herbert Ganado vividly describes Patla, the herdsman with his unmistakable cry of 'halib, halib' approach the family home in Floriana as well as the jingling of the tiny bells on the goat's neckband in the first volume of his series of books entitled *My Century*.³ In a recent article penned by Michael Galea in the *Sunday Times of Malta*, the author describes how Leo August Wehrli, a Swiss visitor to Malta in 1927 described the scene in very similar terms.⁴

The indigenous Maltese goat is black and was known for its high yield of milk.⁵ The ones represented by the artist are light coloured and have slightly pendulous ears. According to a contemporary description in *Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated* published in 1915, the 'white haired [variety] were



Maltese Carrozza, c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta. Note the long shadows and umbrella in the left background as well as the long tassels flanking the horses' sides.



This linocut was included in the artist's memorial exhibition and also featured in the catalogue accompanying it. Catalogue, Weaver Hawkins' Memorial Retrospective Exhibition 1977-1979.



Maltese Dhaisas[sic], c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut. Private collection. The artist has chosen to confirm that he was also responsible for the printing of the linocut by adding the words *et imp.*



Geo Furst, *Dghajsas* 1930's. Postcard. Author's Collection.



Edward Caruana Dingli, *A Fishing Boat*, 1909. Postcard. Author's Collection.

preferred by goat men but it was found they were less hardy than the reddish or black-haired ones.⁶

The goats in both *Maltese Cart* and *Maltese Goats* appear to be wearing bells around their neck and are of the long-haired type. Weaver Hawkins' treatment of the animal is a far cry from the bucolic and idealised versions of established artists, Edward Caruana Dingli and Gianni Vella.

The last two linocuts betray the artist's interest in the domestic animal. This could reflect a topical debate which later developed into a local controversy about the safety of unpasteurised goat's milk in Malta. In the nineteen tens and twenties, the Colonial Government and the military authorities banned the drinking of goat's milk in barracks and hospitals. Villagers however took little heed of the regular Government health warnings and continued to drink milk

brought directly to their doorsteps.⁷ The decline of the indigenous species of goat on the island was largely due to the discovery of brucellosis in goat's milk by Temi Zammit and this illness will be mentioned again in connection with Rene Weaver Hawkins, who contracted the disease in Malta whilst pregnant with her third child.

Weaver Hawkins retained a life-long interest in printmaking even after he settled down permanently in Australia. In the early 1960's he became a founder member of the Sydney Printmakers Group which was the first society of printmakers to be re-established after the Wall Street Crash had terminated the etching and printing boom of the nineteen tens and nineteen twenties. The Malta linocuts are executed in a mostly depictive fashion, however his later work is more abstract in composition.



Maltese Cart, c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut. Private Collection.



Maltese Goats, c. 1928-1929 colour linocut, private collection. Exhibited in May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. Note the bare feet of the herdsman. The viewpoint is unexpected and cropped in a photographic way making the goats, and not the herdsman, the main protagonists of the linocut. The words *Et Imp* clarify that Weaver Hawkins was both the creator and the printer of the linocut.



Edward Caruana Dingli, *The Milkman*. 1909. Postcard. Author's Collection. This is a typical street scene with Maltese goats and eager housewives waiting their turn to buy fresh unpasteurised milk. This is almost contemporary in production to Weaver Hawkins' scene, yet the treatment is very different.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ *An Encyclopaedia of artists with a Malta Connection*, Albert Ganado, Antonio Espinos Rodriguez, FPM, 2018, 326.
- ² *The Maltese Goat Breed*. Jeanette Borg, 2008
- ³ *My Century, Volume 1*, Herbert Ganado, Be Communications Ltd, 2004, 33. Patla was the nickname given to the herdsman and halib means milk in Maltese.
- ⁴ *Sunday Times of Malta*, 5 November 2023, article entitled A Swiss Visitor to Malta in 1927 by Michael Galea.
- ⁵ *Malta and Gibraltar, Illustrated*. W.H & L. Collingridge, London, 237.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *My Century, Volume 1*, 26-27.

Frances Hotham, *A Peep at Malta*, *The Malta Herald* 2 April 1928, The National Library of Malta. This offers a first-hand tourist's view of Malta in 1928. The article has provided most of the quotes and insights utilised in this chapter to supplement the description of Weaver Hawkins' colour linocuts.

By the same author: *The Official Colours of War, Recording Malta in WWII*

Genre: Art History/Coffee Table Book

Publication Year: 2018

Pages: 256

The Official Colours of War takes a look at Leslie Cole's six-month stay in Malta in 1943. Malta's Governor, Lord Gort, with the backing of the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) in London, agreed that Malta's war effort should be recorded through the eyes of an officially sanctioned war artist in order to memorialise Britain's war effort abroad.

The Official Colours of War groups together most of Leslie Cole's Malta and Mediterranean wartime paintings. The artist's canvases are skilful renditions of the local social and historical conditions at a time when the island also became an offensive springboard in the Mediterranean. Contemporary critics commented favourably about the paintings' 'haunting vividness'.

Rights availability

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Worldwide

Excerpt in Maltese

Lulju

tal-ġelat ġa ilu ġimgħat
jittantana minn faċċata
fil-pitazz, il-linji għodhom dabu
l-ittri jitkarkru bla heġġa
tiġi int, u moħħna
u l-bitħa tal-iskola
jitbattlu bl-istess heffa
l-uniformi mwarrba
fil-gwardarobba, sajf sħiħ tiċkien
is-somom jitgħažżnu fil-basket,
mixħut f'rokna kif ġie ġie
Lulju – il-basal tal-pikles jitbaskat
fil-gallarija
il-bajtar tax-xewk jitbaħbaħ
f'banju taż-żingu
l-arloġġ jitnikker fuq il-komodina
il-waranofsinharijiet jiġġebbdu
kollox jeħmed
kollox jillajma
ħlief l-uriezaq
u kuġinti ż-żgħira
iddomm id-daħk u l-kutrumbajsi
fuq is-sodda l-kbira
fejn nannti saret mara
Lulju – laħamna togħma
ta' baħar
xagħarna jċarċar frisk
tul daharna

truf subgħajna għaxart
imriewaħ ċkejna
ixappu l-ħobż
fiż-żejt taż-żebbuġa
Lulju – in-namrar bil-moħbi
l-idejn jissindikaw
taħt il-flokkijiet skullati
is-swaba' jilagħbu mal-kużakki

in-nifsijiet jitqalu
ix-xufftejn iċedu sakrana
fl-ismura ġdida tal-ġilda
is-sħana tross
is-sħana tiggoffa
xi ħaġa ġo fina tixxaqqaq
ixxenxel dehxa
– ċaqlembuta
tefgħa ta' ġebbla 'l bogħod
jidwu monotoni n-numri tat-tombla
u aħna nippreferu nemmnu
li qatt ma se nixjieħu
bla nafu ngħidu
liem'hu l-isbaħ ġigġifogu
hux dak ifaqqa' ġewwa fina
jew il-bukketti li qed ilewnu s-sema

*ħlief f'ħarstek
qatt, ħanini, ma naf li ntlift imkien
u nħallu l-implusa tmantnina*

nerġgħu nbillu xufftejna f'dan l-aħna-issa-u-hawn

*irridna
ningarru mill-ġdid
irridna*

qabel ma l-ħamba tibda titħanxel fit-toroq

*u s-sikta tinstelaħ
qabel ma d-dalma tixxaqqaq
u l-ħolm jisfa' loqom
qabel ma tofrogħ l-irtuba tan-ngħas*

**qabel ma tofrogħ l-irtuba tan-ngħas
u l-ħolm jisfa' loqom
qabel ma d-dalma tixxaqqaq
u s-sikta tinstelaħ**

qabel ma l-ħamba tibda titħanxel fit-toroq

**irridna
ningarru mill-ġdid
irridna**

nerġgħu nbillu xufftejna f'dan l-aħna-issa-u-hawn

**u nħallu l-implusa tmantnina
qatt, ħanini, ma naf li ntlift imkien
ħlief f'ħarstek**

rxixxa

Tieqaf l-irxiexa
u l-belt dlonk tieħu bixra oħra.
Riħa ta' ġebel imxarrab.
Femda umda
li xejn ma jħarbat
ħlief it-tinwiħa
ta' qattusa ċkejġna
mkebbba tregħida waħda
ma' koxxa ta' bieb.
Foss ta' ilma jqattar,
tal-katusi jtektku.
L-ispralli jitqanzħu taħt saqajna.
(Xi darba nirrakkuntalek
il-logħob ta' dari
fil-kantina ta' nannti,
id-daħk sfrattat
mill-fatati mistħajla.)
F'għajnejk ukoll hemm
mistura mitt ħrafa.
Ma' kull pass li mmiddu,
spallejna jitħabbu –
aptit ta' żifna.
Nefħa riħ tbandal
il-fanali mdendla
minn naħa għall-oħra tat-triq,
u magħhom,
fuq iċ-ċangaturi leqqiena,
jitbandal id-dawl –
artab daqs leħnek.

English translation by Miriam Calleja

July

the ice cream man has been teasing
us for weeks from across the street
letters in exercise books drag themselves
along half-melted lines
you turn up and our minds
empty with the same vigour
as schoolyards
discarded uniforms
spend the summer shrinking in wardrobes
math problems snooze
in ditched school bags
July — pickled onions ferment
on the balcony
prickly pears soak
in a zinc tub
a clock naps on the bedside table
in long drawn-out afternoons when
everything is silent
everything is slowed
except for crickets
and my younger cousin
laughing, somersaulting
on the large bed
where our gran became a woman
July — our skin the taste
of sea
our wet hair
dripping down our backs
the tips of our fingers ten

paper-thin fans
dipping bread
in olive oil
July — making out in secret
hands roaming
under low-cut tops
fingers playing with flies

breaths heavy
lips surrendering drunkenly
to new suntan lines
a pressing heat
a dishevelling heat
something inside us cracks
quivers
seesaws —
bingo numbers echo monotonously
just a stone's throw away
and we prefer to believe
we'll never grow old
not knowing
which is the most beautiful Catherine Wheel
that which flares inside us
or those bouquets emblazing the sky

*except in your gaze
love, I don't believe I've ever been lost
feeding on tenderness
dipping our lips in this us-here-and-now*

*I want us
carried anew
I want us*

*before the streets lose their peace
and silence is grazed
before the dark cracks
and dreams unspool*

before the softness of sleep gets unstitched

before the softness of sleep gets unstitched

and dreams unspool
before the dark cracks
and silence is grazed
before the streets lose their peace

I want us
carried anew
I want us

dipping our lips in this us-here-and-now
feeding on tenderness
love, I don't believe I've ever been lost
except in your gaze

rain shower

The rain shower stops
and this city suddenly looks changed.
It smells of wet stone.
a damp stillness
undisturbed
except for the cry
of a kitten
wrapped in shivers
against the doorpost.
Sounds of water dripping,
of water pipes ticking.
Gratings creak beneath our feet.
(Someday I'll tell you
about our childhood games
in grandma's basement,
our laughter interrupted
by imagined ghosts.)
Your eyes also
hide a hundred tales.
With each step
our shoulders rub —
craving a dance.
A gust of wind swings
the suspended street lamps
from one side of the road
to the other
and with them
light swings in
reflected cobblestones —
tender as your voice.

The Backdrop: The Ministry of Information, State Patronage and Leslie Cole


Leslie Cole who, as you know, has produced some excellent war subjects, which we are very glad to have acquired. The War Artists Commission are determined that a first-rate artist should be sent to Malta to record the great events which are taking place there, and they have agreed that no better choice could be made for this purpose than Cole.

Montgomery O'Rorke Dickey, WAAC Secretary to R.E. Moore, Director of Education, Hull. 29 August 1942.

Leslie Cole (1910-1976) was twenty nine years old when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. He was the right age and had already accumulated enough experience to become an official war artist. A graduate from the Royal College of Art and art teacher in Hull before the war, he was recruited by the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) in 1942 to paint war scenes in Malta. The committee had been established within the Ministry of Information at the onset of the war to serve as an official patronage scheme for artists and war painting was regarded as a form of war service essential to promote Britain's cultural values at home and abroad. Cole was assigned the rank of Honorary Captain with the Royal Marine Commandos and issued with a War Correspondent's Licence. Malta was his first overseas

commission and he arrived on the island by way of Gibraltar on Easter Sunday in 1943. Cole's six-month stay on the island and the paintings he produced during this short but eventful period provided a British audience with images of Malta and its inhabitants who had courageously endured a historic seige.

Cole bore the official designation of *Ministry of Information Artist: Specialisation Malta-Royal Marines Subjects*.¹ The Royal Marines included amongst their ranks the amphibious commandos and by assigning the artist to this detachment, the decision makers in Britain were anticipating that Cole's artistic services would be also be required in the Mediterranean. Malta was not just any Mediterranean island in 1942 – it was an imperial possession with a pivotal role to play in the war. The island was at the forefront of

British War Correspondent's Licence No.		Photograph and Description of the Holder of this Licence	
PERIOD OF VALIDITY		Name	MR LESLIE COLE
From		Nationality	British
To		Date of Birth	11.8.1910
Signed		Height	5ft 4ins
War Office	P. M. Staff	Hair	Dark
Signed		Eyes	Dark Green
Air Ministry	Air Staff	General Build	Slight
Duty			
Countersigned			Distinctive Marks
Dep. Dir. Public Relations, H.Q. Army		Signature of Holder	Leslie Cole
Countersigned			
Service Press Officer, H.Q. Royal Air Force			
Place			
Date			

Leslie Cole's War Correspondent's Licence. Private Collection

this: 'it is only a shot at venturing whether he can produce anything worthwhile.'¹¹ On the 9 August 1942 further candidates were suggested and ten days later Leslie Cole was awarded the Malta posting as the Committee's third and final choice.¹² Scanlan, Worsley and Cole were all artistically disposed at rendering what Clark had termed as 'character action and *mise en scene*.' The following chapters will demonstrate that Cole's artistic compass was oriented towards the human figure.

Cole's official nomination came through on the 18 August 1942. The entire month of August was a critical month for Malta and the Santa Marija Convoy had successfully delivered the supplies necessary for Malta's survival three days before Cole's appointment. The fact that Cole was engaged by the ministry in charge of state propaganda in Britain to paint war subjects in Malta during this crucial period and that he continually received instructions from the War Office indicate that Cole's stay on the island was not being viewed solely through a cultural lens. Another internal handwritten memo confirmed that by 17 August 1942 'completed arrangements had been made by the War Office for Mr. Cole's work in Malta.' The memo added that 'the War Office are pressing for him to go with minimum delay' and the army's eagerness may be understood as further publicity for their endeavors in Malta.¹³

RAF Planes taking off from Luqa's bombed runway, 1943. IWM. Oil on Canvas 76.2cm x 43.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum. This is one of Cole's Malta paintings in which the arrangement of the visual elements resembles the cinematic process described by Kenneth Clark as *mise-en-scene*.



Artist Willie Apap, who had executed Vittorio Emmanuele III's portrait, underwent a 'conspiracy trial' in 1946-7. He was one of the seventeen Maltese nationals in Rome who had failed to return to 'British Malta' once hostilities had broken out and accused of having renounced to his British passport. His 'disloyalty' to the crown had been in contrast to Anton Inglott and Emvin Cremona who had preferred to return to Malta from Rome in 1939. Apap was eventually acquitted of all charges but the incident underscores that the demarcation line between cultural and political issues had become pencil-thin in colonial Malta and that an atmosphere of distrust had lingered on well after the hostilities had ceased.²⁸

THE BRITISH COUNCIL

'Cultural diplomacy' was another term for propaganda efforts made by British officials to reach out to all levels of public opinion. Following the demise of the Empire Marketing Board in 1933 the British Council was set up in 1934 under the supervision of the Foreign Office and its aim was to have foreigners appreciate various aspects of British culture. Reginald Leeper was largely responsible for its creation and he was assisted by Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of the State for Foreign Affairs. Both men harboured 'a deep suspicion of the course of German events since Hitler's rise to power in 1933.'²⁹ In March 1935 Leeper wrote to Vansittart acknowledging that political considerations were at play in spite of the public emphasis on the cultural

nature of the Council's work: 'We are concerned with increasing British influence in those countries that are important to us politically.' Leeper continued: 'If we could strengthen our influence in countries with adequate sums at our disposal we could use our cultural work as a very definite political instrument. This work should go hand in hand with our foreign policy and quite definitely the Foreign Office should be the advisors to the Council.'³⁰

Issues of German rearmament in 1935 and of the Abyssinia crisis of 1936 had revealed an increase in anti-British propaganda in the eastern Mediterranean and made it imperative to have the British point of view come across in this area vital to imperial interests. The Dante Alighieri Institute had been set up to promote 'a love for Italian civilization in foreign citizens' and was particularly active in Egypt. The Germans had established language schools in Athens, Cairo and Constantinople and the Alliance Française similarly served French colonial interests in the Mediterranean.³¹ The setting up of the British Council was possibly the official British response to the situation. An early British Council report confirmed that the Italians were spending the equivalent of £1,000,000 on cultural propaganda in 1938-9 and the Germans three times that amount underscoring the considerable sums allocated by the totalitarian regimes to cultural matters in this sensitive region.³²

The Chairman of the British Council between 1937 and 1941 was Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (1879-1941).

Denis Barnham, *Battle over Malta: Spitfire Attacking JU 88s but in a Dog-Fight with ME 109s*, undated, IWM. Oil on Canvas 102cm x 26.5cm with support. ©Imperial War Museum. If the rock in the foreground is Filfla then the cliffs would be those on the south west of Malta and the church in the middle ground would be Dingli church. Placing the bastions of Valletta in the top left instead of the Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs in Gozo is a geographical error.



THE OFFICIAL COLOURS OF WAR

paintings were ultimately intended for viewing in Britain.⁵¹ The British public had become progressively 'image-hungry' for eye-witness testimonies of the war and more so for its 'success stories.'⁵² Two of Cole's Malta paintings were displayed at the National Gallery in early 1944,⁵³ three more at the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull in September, 1944 and a total of sixteen at the Royal Academy in 1945 after they had been shipped back home.⁵⁴

Cole's exhibition of war art in Malta fits into a pattern already established in Britain at the start of the hostilities and implemented on a regular basis by the WAAC at the National Gallery in London. The National Gallery had been emptied of its priceless treasures and its rooms became the ideal venue to hold the war-themed exhibitions. Exhibitions were perceived to have the capacity of reinforcing the Christian values of the Empire against the Fascist threat and they registered a marked success in attracting new audiences to cultural events.

Kenneth Clark had noted that reproductions of war art would be valuable as British Council style cultural propaganda.⁵⁵ Both exhibitions and reproductions of the war paintings themselves in the form of postcards, thematic booklets and calendars harnessed art to the requirements of war and its politics.⁵⁶ Two of Cole's Malta paintings, *Portrait of Brigadier de la Bere* and *Heavy A.A. Zebug, Malta* were reproduced in the March 1944 edition of *The War Illustrated* and another eight were featured in Eric Newton's *War through Artist's Eyes*, published the following year. Rather than just target cultural elites the reproductions displayed a capacity to reach all British citizens.

Top middle and right hand side images are reproductions of two of Cole's Malta paintings. Bottom middle image is a reproduction of a Sicily painting by Official Admiralty artist John Worsley. *The War Illustrated* 24 March 1944. Private Collection.



war's victims and not just its foot soldiers.¹³ On the 31 July 1943 Cole wrote to Brenda describing his forays underground. Cole narrated that:

For two days now I've been deep in shelters among the poor devils and brave souls who live underground. They have no homes except this. They can go out up into some gardens and in the sun but they spend many hours in the dim electric light. It's cold and wet down there and ideal for disease and vermin [...] Scabies ran through the shelters like an epidemic-who can wonder. They grouped around the altar and there are several in the shelters and prayed while I sketched them. I told the supervisor when I'd finished and the score or so kids clamoured around and then rushed off into the sunshine – but the old ladies carried on – I left them to it and I was there nearly an hour.

His eye-witness description tallies with this particular painting which portrays several families gathered around an altar. Small posies of flowers delicately arranged in slender vases fuse in tonality with a patterned backdrop of local tiles. The altar is laid out with a crisp white cloth and the precise way Cole renders a hanging oil-lamp demonstrates the artist's sharp eye for detail. Although the canvas is a crowded one the subject matter is instantly legible due to Cole's sense of pictorial organisation. The painting also has qualities in common with contemporary propagandistic literature published on Malta. Author John Hay Beith, who wrote under the *nom de plume* Ian Hay, was in Malta at the same time as Cole. Hay describes an underground scene in similar terms:

The larger shelters were furnished with tiers of bunk-beds, and around these each family would congregate – cooking, sleeping, singing or telling their beads. Each shelter had its own shrine, with its flickering lamp and picture of the Virgin, and maybe a few flowers.¹⁴

Another two of Cole's canvasses underground canvasses are entitled *Malta. Preparing for the Night in the Crypt of St. Augustine's, Valletta* and *The Dormitory under St. Augustine's*.

Malta. Shelterers Praying During an Air Raid, 1943, IWM. Oil on Canvas 71.1cm x 91.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.



Cole had formerly been on the teaching staff at Hull College of Art and his connection with the city explains why *The Hull Daily Mail* took an interest in Cole's overseas career. On the 14 March 1944 the newspaper reported that: 'Leslie Cole, a member of the staff of Hull College of Art, has recently returned from Malta where he has found plenty of scope for his work. These pictures of Malta are in the current War Artist Exhibition in London [National Gallery 1944], and it is hoped that at some point they will come to Hull.' A short while later the same newspaper critic penned another article entitled *Royal Academy – Pictures by War Artists* and after commenting that war subjects were few in number, he singled out this painting to comment upon: 'Leslie Cole whose home is Victoria-Ave has a notable oil painting in the Exhibition. It is called *Maltese Women with Newly Born Baby in their Underground Home in the Ditch Kospikwa* [sic]. It is a work in which the artist's imagination and skilful use of colour have full play.'¹⁹

The newspaper critic must have been aware that the painting had just been acquired by the director of the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull and possibly wished to publicise the gallery's sponsorship of local artists through his article.²⁰ The curator of the gallery, Vincent Galloway (1984-1977) was a portrait-painter by profession and he and Cole knew each other socially but it was assuredly the engaging human quality of *Maltese Women* and its polished finish that made it a valuable addition to the gallery's extensive collection of paintings by the Hull School.²¹

Cole sketched and painted five more 'underground scenes' in Malta. Three of them are listed on his

The Dormitory under St. Augustine's, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper 48.2cm x 65.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.





'Diffone' Workers Mending the Roof of the Officers Mess, Floriana, 1943, IWM. Oil on canvas 51.7cm x 82.5cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

“
COLE PAINTED THESE
CHILDREN DURING A
VISIT TO A VALLETTA
UNDERGROUND SHELTER



Gorg, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.



Study of Maltese Boy, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.



Marguerite, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.

//

CAPTURES THE
PROMINENT BREAK IN THE
ELEGANT AND HISTORIC
ARCADE

*The Harbour Barrage from Upper Barracca, 1943, IWM. Oil on
Canvas 76.2cm x 91.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.*



*No Time to Lose. Soldier Dockers unloading a Convoy during a Raid, 1943, IWM. Oil on Canvas 64.4cm x 91.6cm.
©Imperial War Museum.*





Maltese Women, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper
38.4cm x 57.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

Studies for Victory Kitchen, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper
38.4cm x 57.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

Craters and Dust: A Detour Round a Blockhouse, Sicily, 1943, IWM.
Watercolour on paper 48.2cm x 65.7cm. ©Imperial War Museum.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE COLOUR LINOCUTS

Citta Vecchia indicates that Weaver Hawkins was quick to experiment with the use of colour blocks in his work. The process of linocut making starts off with a working drawing which can be traced down onto the lino block using transfer paper. It should be kept in mind that the image will appear reversed when printed. The tracing has to be reversed if the artist wishes to read it the same way around.

Multicoloured linocuts can either be prepared by the reduction method in which successive cuts with a set of print-making tools are made on the same block of linoleum, with a new colour being applied at a following stage. Alternatively, a separate block for every colour is employed. This method grants the artist time to proof the colour results independently. Producing linocuts in colour reflects the artist's wish to put an effort into developing the image

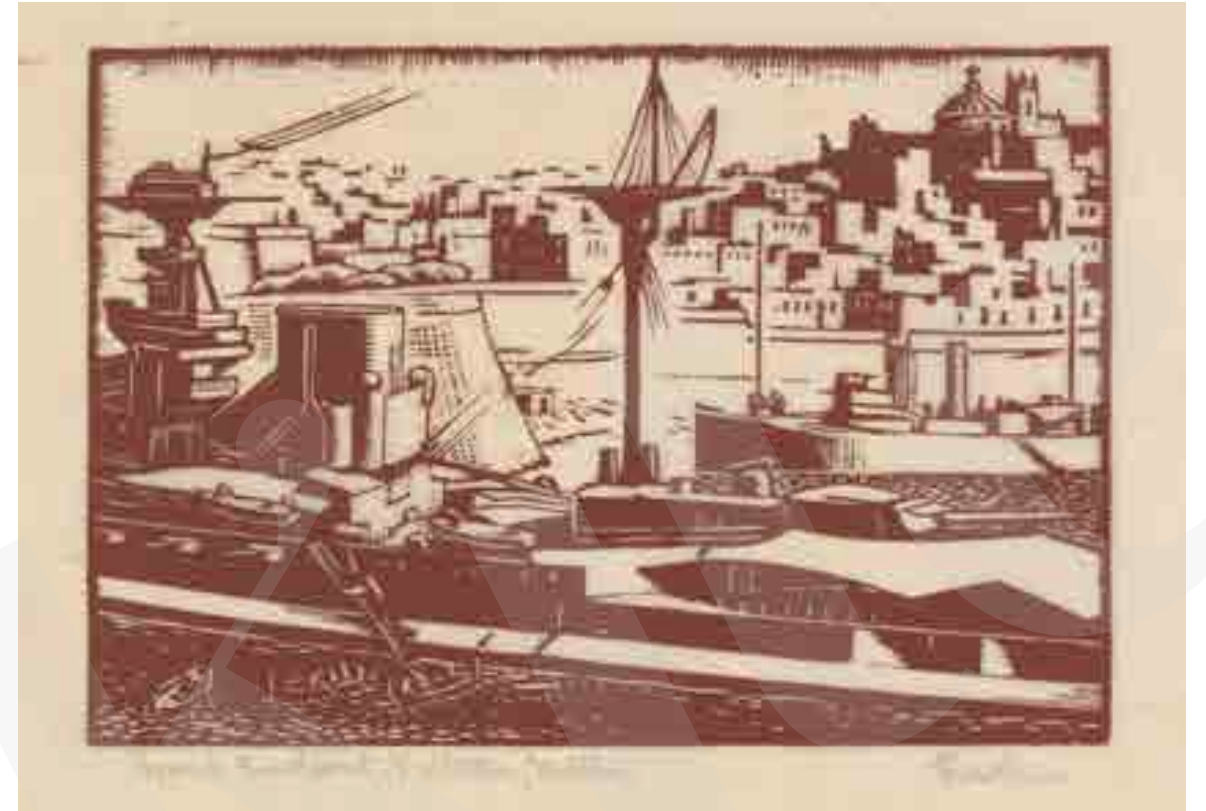
and colours need to be located separately in order to produce a unified image. The graphic qualities of linocut printing may be lost if the colour relationships become too crowded or complex. A limited palette is usually the best choice in order to achieve an overall balance. It also reflects a controlled form of artistic expression.

V-tools and gouges lend themselves to create broadly hatched lines. Finer tools are used to cut the main shape in outline on the linoleum block or to cut away surrounding areas.

Senglea, Malta, also entitled *Grand Harbour, Valletta* in the monochrome version, is a dynamic composition which illustrates activity in Grand Harbour and the synergy between old and new modes of marine transportation. With industrialisation still in its infancy, the Grand Harbour offered the clearest examples of the modernisation



View of Senglea, Malta, colour linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard c 1928-1929. Exhibited in April- May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta.



Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta c.1928, linocut, printed in brown ink, from one block. © National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1976. The Estate of H.F Weaver Hawkins. This is probably an earlier version of the one overleaf as it is monochrome. When printing an image having only two colours, the artist can check whether there is a good balance between positive and negative areas as well as where to focus the colour areas on.

taking place on the island. A couple of luzzus in the left foreground are juxtaposed with a naval vessel. Its tall mast divides the picture plane into two almost equal parts.

This linocut betrays an interest in compositional structure. With Senglea in the background, the houses are treated in a cubic manner reminiscent of the artist's Tangier compositions. It also displays minimal vorticist elements, specifically the one which evokes the mechanical clarity inherent in architectural and engineering drawings. The hatching on the top left corner must have been intentionally introduced by the artist to cover up some bleeding of paint.

It is interesting to compare this composition with two other etchings by British artist, Robert Binnings, which are almost coeval. *Arrival of a Ferry*, 1934 displays a cubic arrangement of Fort St. Angelo in the background. *Dockyard, Malta, Dock no 4* is also modern in its treatment of subject matter. Another artist, Dorothy Hirst exhibited her prints, including linocuts, at the Malta Art Amateur Association Exhibition in 1931 and Muza have a small collection of her work.¹ Two of her competent prints capture maritime activity in Grand Harbour and a third displays a similar cubic arrangement of houses to Weaver Hawkins' in Valletta viewed from the Sliema side.

There is a strong sense of light and shadow in *Maltese Market* and it is successful at reflecting the glaring heat. The configuration created by the figures engaged in a conversation at a market is an informal yet dynamic one. Note that

the man in the right foreground and the seated one are barefoot. The street name on the top right corner is almost discernible and the author has reason to believe that the scene represented in this linocut is the old vegetable market place in Rabat, close to the Domus, which was within walking distance from Raokin's residence in Mdina. This linocut is similar to *El Sokko Grande, Tangier*, 1923 discussed in chapter two as both works display an aestival market scene where long shadows dominate.

A contemporary article penned by a tourist writing under the pen name of *Artide*, published in the *Queen*, November 1927, and which appeared in the *Malta Herald* of 7 December 1927, captures the 'glow' of this summer market scene. 'Devotees of vivid colour effects will find plenty to satisfy their tastes in the scenery of Malta with its wonderful sunsets and background of dazzling Mediterranean. In the daytime everything seems crude and bright with the sun breaking down on the flat roofed yellow stone houses and throwing into relief harsh shadows on the white dusty ground.'

It is interesting to note that *Maltese Market* contains traditional elements of street life also seen in the works of Weaver Hawkins' contemporaries, namely Edward Caruana Dingli (*Street Market, Floriana*) and artist-photographer Geo Furst's photographic and watercolour versions of *A Street Market*. Similar barefoot men wearing the same beret and starched white shirt with rolled up sleeves



The Vegetable Market, Rabat. Postcard. Author's collection. Refer to pages 54-55.



Robert Binnings, *Arrival of a Ferry*, Linocut print 1934. Private Collection.



Robert Binnings, *Dockyard, Malta, No 4 Dock*, Linocut print 1927. Private Collection.



Maltese Market, colour linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard c 1928-1929. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta. Exhibited in May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. The unevenness of the border and the fact that the composition is not level betrays the fact that the linocut was hand printed.



Maltese Market, colour linocut on translucent paper c 1928-1929. Private Collection. The scene is the same as the previous one but the words lino-cut in brackets and *et imp* (and printer) have been included. The bundles in the foreground, as well as the shop doors under the awning are a different colour, possibly indicating that this version was a later one.



Geo Furst, *Market place*, 1933. Postcard. Author's Collection.

worn under a dark coloured waistcoat may be observed in all three works. Similarly, ladies clothed in *faldettas* are featured in the marketplace, presumably to catch up on the day's news and to make their purchases. The traditional Maltese wicker basket, or *qoffa* made out of yellowish cane, and used by storekeepers to display their fresh produce, also feature in all three artists' work. The content is similar in all three images but differ in their execution.

Frances Hotham, another tourist and author on a day trip to the islands wrote an article for the *Lady*, entitled *A Peep at Malta*, which was reproduced by the *Malta Herald* on 2 April 1928. Hotham had arrived on the P&O cruise ship and wrote about her 'vivid impressions' of a Maltese Karozzin (Carrozza) which are amusing to read in spite of their embellishments:

We found ourselves disembarking and surrounded by a host of 'carrozze' drivers all clamouring for our patronage. We climbed into a rather dirty looking vehicle and gave the driver the address of our destination [...] We jolted along the cobbled street of Valetta at a tremendous rate and we were nearly thrown out of the conveyance on turning an abrupt corner. I shrieked to the driver to go a little slower, but the only reply I could get was: 'Me no speak English.'

In *Maltese Dhaisas[sic]* the spaces between the *dghajsas* are represented by white ripples, which seem to catch the bright sunlight and sparkle. The designs also mimic the splash of the oars. Francis Hotham finished off

her description of the day her group spent sightseeing in Malta by saying that: 'later on in the evening we pushed off in a green 'dhaisa' [sic] similar to a Venetian gondola, to the P & O, which was waiting to take us eastward.'

The two seated women at the back of the flat cart featured in *Maltese Cart* are wearing *faldettas* and add to the visual interest of this linocut. Also worth noting are the subtle patterns and texture in the background created by cross hatching, as well as the long dark shadow under the cart.

The domestic animals represented in *Maltese Goats* have bells around their necks and appear in the foreground. Up to the nineteen forties, a herdsman would walk his flock around the village streets and milk the goats for his clientele, who were usually housewives.² Author and politician Herbert Ganado vividly describes Patla, the herdsman with his unmistakable cry of 'halib, halib' approach the family home in Floriana as well as the jingling of the tiny bells on the goat's neckband in the first volume of his series of books entitled *My Century*.³ In a recent article penned by Michael Galea in the *Sunday Times of Malta*, the author describes how Leo August Wehrli, a Swiss visitor to Malta in 1927 described the scene in very similar terms.⁴

The indigenous Maltese goat is black and was known for its high yield of milk.⁵ The ones represented by the artist are light coloured and have slightly pendulous ears. According to a contemporary description in *Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated* published in 1915, the 'white haired [variety] were



Maltese Carrozza, c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut on translucent paper mounted on cardboard. Location: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Heritage Malta, Valletta. Photograph courtesy of MUŻA and Heritage Malta. Note the long shadows and umbrella in the left background as well as the long tassels flanking the horses' sides.



This linocut was included in the artist's memorial exhibition and also featured in the catalogue accompanying it. Catalogue, Weaver Hawkins' Memorial Retrospective Exhibition 1977-1979.





Maltese Dhaisas[sic], c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut. Private collection. The artist has chosen to confirm that he was also responsible for the printing of the linocut by adding the words *et imp.*



Geo Furst, *Dghajsas* 1930's. Postcard. Author's Collection.



Edward Caruana Dingli, *A Fishing Boat*, 1909. Postcard. Author's Collection.

preferred by goat men but it was found they were less hardy than the reddish or black-haired ones.⁶

The goats in both *Maltese Cart* and *Maltese Goats* appear to be wearing bells around their neck and are of the long-haired type. Weaver Hawkins' treatment of the animal is a far cry from the bucolic and idealised versions of established artists, Edward Caruana Dingli and Gianni Vella.

The last two linocuts betray the artist's interest in the domestic animal. This could reflect a topical debate which later developed into a local controversy about the safety of unpasteurised goat's milk in Malta. In the nineteen tens and twenties, the Colonial Government and the military authorities banned the drinking of goat's milk in barracks and hospitals. Villagers however took little heed of the regular Government health warnings and continued to drink milk

brought directly to their doorsteps.⁷ The decline of the indigenous species of goat on the island was largely due to the discovery of brucellosis in goat's milk by Temi Zammit and this illness will be mentioned again in connection with Rene Weaver Hawkins, who contracted the disease in Malta whilst pregnant with her third child.

Weaver Hawkins retained a life-long interest in printmaking even after he settled down permanently in Australia. In the early 1960's he became a founder member of the Sydney Printmakers Group which was the first society of printmakers to be re-established after the Wall Street Crash had terminated the etching and printing boom of the nineteen tens and nineteen twenties. The Malta linocuts are executed in a mostly depictive fashion, however his later work is more abstract in composition.



Maltese Cart, c 1928-1929 Colour Linocut. Private Collection.



Maltese Goats, c. 1928-1929 colour linocut, private collection. Exhibited in May 1929 at the Auberge d' Italie. Note the bare feet of the herdsman. The viewpoint is unexpected and cropped in a photographic way making the goats, and not the herdsman, the main protagonists of the linocut. The words *Et Imp* clarify that Weaver Hawkins was both the creator and the printer of the linocut.



Edward Caruana Dingli, *The Milkman*. 1909. Postcard. Author's Collection. This is a typical street scene with Maltese goats and eager housewives waiting their turn to buy fresh unpasteurised milk. This is almost contemporary in production to Weaver Hawkins' scene, yet the treatment is very different.



Frances Hotham, *A Peep at Malta*, *The Malta Herald* 2 April 1928, The National Library of Malta. This offers a first-hand tourist's view of Malta in 1928. The article has provided most of the quotes and insights utilised in this chapter to supplement the description of Weaver Hawkins' colour linocuts.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *An Encyclopaedia of artists with a Malta Connection*, Albert Ganado, Antonio Espinos Rodriguez, FPM, 2018, 326.
- ² *The Maltese Goat Breed*. Jeanette Borg, 2008
- ³ *My Century, Volume 1*, Herbert Ganado, Be Communications Ltd, 2004, 33. Patla was the nickname given to the herdsman and halib means milk in Maltese.
- ⁴ *Sunday Times of Malta*, 5 November 2023, article entitled A Swiss Visitor to Malta in 1927 by Michael Galea.
- ⁵ *Malta and Gibraltar, Illustrated*. W.H & L. Collingridge, London, 237.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *My Century, Volume 1*, 26-27.

By the same author: *The Official Colours of War, Recording Malta in WWII*

Genre: Art History/Coffee Table Book

Publication Year: 2018

Pages: 256

The Official Colours of War takes a look at Leslie Cole's six-month stay in Malta in 1943. Malta's Governor, Lord Gort, with the backing of the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) in London, agreed that Malta's war effort should be recorded through the eyes of an officially sanctioned war artist in order to memorialise Britain's war effort abroad.

The Official Colours of War groups together most of Leslie Cole's Malta and Mediterranean wartime paintings. The artist's canvases are skilful renditions of the local social and historical conditions at a time when the island also became an offensive springboard in the Mediterranean. Contemporary critics commented favourably about the paintings' 'haunting vividness'.

Rights availability

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Worldwide

Excerpt in Maltese

Lulju

tal-ġelat ġa ilu ġimgħat
jittantana minn faċċata
fil-pitazz, il-linji għodhom dabu
l-ittri jitkarkru bla heġġa
tiġi int, u moħħna
u l-bitħa tal-iskola
jitbattlu bl-istess heffa
l-uniformi mwarrba
fil-gwardarobba, sajf sħiħ tiċkien
is-somom jitgħažżnu fil-basket,
mixħut f'rokna kif ġie ġie
Lulju – il-basal tal-pikles jitbaskat
fil-gallarija
il-bajtar tax-xewk jitbaħbaħ
f'banju taż-żingu
l-arloġġ jitnikker fuq il-komodina
il-waranofsinharijiet jiġġebbd
kollox jeħmed
kollox jillajma
ħlief l-uriezaq
u kuġinti ż-żgħira
iddomm id-daħk u l-kutrumbajsi
fuq is-sodda l-kbira
fejn nannti saret mara
Lulju – laħamna togħma
ta' baħar
xagħarna jċarċar frisk
tul daharna

truf subgħajna għaxart
imriewaħ ċkejna
ixappu l-ħobż
fiż-żejt taż-żebbuġa
Lulju – in-namrar bil-moħbi
l-idejn jissindikaw
taħt il-flokkijiet skullati
is-swaba' jilagħbu mal-kużakki

in-nifsijiet jitqalu
ix-xufftejn iċedu sakrana
fl-ismura ġdida tal-ġilda
is-sħana tross
is-sħana tiggoffa
xi ħaġa ġo fina tixxaqqaq
ixxenxel dehxa
– ċaqlembuta
tefgħa ta' ġebbla 'l bogħod
jidwu monotoni n-numri tat-tombla
u aħna nippreferu nemmnu
li qatt ma se nixjieħu
bla nafu ngħidu
liem'hu l-isbaħ ġigġifogu
hux dak ifaqqa' ġewwa fina
jew il-bukketti li qed ilewnu s-sema

*ħlief f'ħarstek
qatt, ħanini, ma naf li ntlift imkien
u nħallu l-implusa tmantnina*

nerġgħu nbillu xufftejna f'dan l-aħna-issa-u-hawn

*irridna
ningarru mill-ġdid
irridna*

qabel ma l-ħamba tibda titħanxel fit-toroq

*u s-sikta tinstelaħ
qabel ma d-dalma tixxaqqaq
u l-ħolm jisfa' loqom
qabel ma tofrogħ l-irtuba tan-ngħas*

**qabel ma tofrogħ l-irtuba tan-ngħas
u l-ħolm jisfa' loqom
qabel ma d-dalma tixxaqqaq
u s-sikta tinstelaħ**

qabel ma l-ħamba tibda titħanxel fit-toroq

**irridna
ningarru mill-ġdid
irridna**

nerġgħu nbillu xufftejna f'dan l-aħna-issa-u-hawn

**u nħallu l-implusa tmantnina
qatt, ħanini, ma naf li ntlift imkien
ħlief f'ħarstek**

rxixxa

Tieqaf l-irxiexa
u l-belt dlonk tieħu bixra oħra.
Riħa ta' ġebel imxarrab.
Femda umda
li xejn ma jħarbat
ħlief it-tinwiħa
ta' qattusa ċkejġna
mkebbba tregħida waħda
ma' koxxa ta' bieb.
Foss ta' ilma jqattar,
tal-katusi jtektku.
L-ispralli jitqanzħu taħt saqajna.
(Xi darba nirrakkuntalek
il-logħob ta' dari
fil-kantina ta' nannti,
id-daħk sfrattat
mill-fatati mistħajla.)
F'għajnejk ukoll hemm
mistura mitt ħrafa.
Ma' kull pass li mmiddu,
spallejna jitħabbu –
aptit ta' żifna.
Nefħa riħ tbandal
il-fanali mdendla
minn naħa għall-oħra tat-triq,
u magħhom,
fuq iċ-ċangaturi leqqiena,
jitbandal id-dawl –
artab daqs leħnek.

English translation by Miriam Calleja

July

the ice cream man has been teasing
us for weeks from across the street
letters in exercise books drag themselves
along half-melted lines
you turn up and our minds
empty with the same vigour
as schoolyards
discarded uniforms
spend the summer shrinking in wardrobes
math problems snooze
in ditched school bags
July — pickled onions ferment
on the balcony
prickly pears soak
in a zinc tub
a clock naps on the bedside table
in long drawn-out afternoons when
everything is silent
everything is slowed
except for crickets
and my younger cousin
laughing, somersaulting
on the large bed
where our gran became a woman
July — our skin the taste
of sea
our wet hair
dripping down our backs
the tips of our fingers ten

paper-thin fans
dipping bread
in olive oil
July — making out in secret
hands roaming
under low-cut tops
fingers playing with flies

breaths heavy
lips surrendering drunkenly
to new suntan lines
a pressing heat
a dishevelling heat
something inside us cracks
quivers
seesaws —
bingo numbers echo monotonously
just a stone's throw away
and we prefer to believe
we'll never grow old
not knowing
which is the most beautiful Catherine Wheel
that which flares inside us
or those bouquets emblazing the sky

*except in your gaze
love, I don't believe I've ever been lost
feeding on tenderness
dipping our lips in this us-here-and-now*

*I want us
carried anew
I want us*

*before the streets lose their peace
and silence is grazed
before the dark cracks
and dreams unspool*

before the softness of sleep gets unstitched

before the softness of sleep gets unstitched

and dreams unspool
before the dark cracks
and silence is grazed
before the streets lose their peace

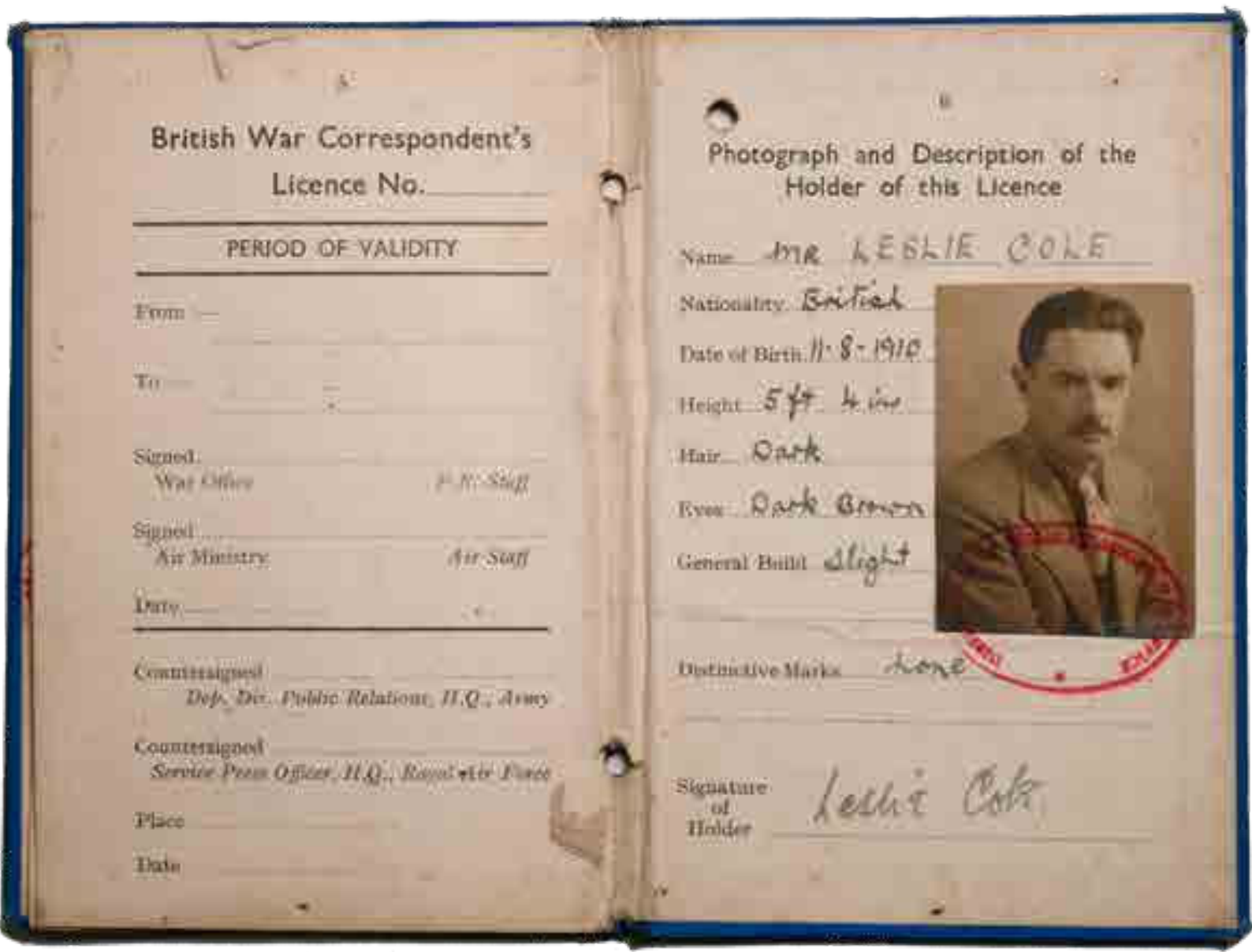
I want us
carried anew
I want us

dipping our lips in this us-here-and-now
feeding on tenderness
love, I don't believe I've ever been lost
except in your gaze

rain shower

The rain shower stops
and this city suddenly looks changed.
It smells of wet stone.
a damp stillness
undisturbed
except for the cry
of a kitten
wrapped in shivers
against the doorpost.
Sounds of water dripping,
of water pipes ticking.
Gratings creak beneath our feet.
(Someday I'll tell you
about our childhood games
in grandma's basement,
our laughter interrupted
by imagined ghosts.)
Your eyes also
hide a hundred tales.
With each step
our shoulders rub —
craving a dance.
A gust of wind swings
the suspended street lamps
from one side of the road
to the other
and with them
light swings in
reflected cobblestones —
tender as your voice.

The Backdrop: The Ministry of Information, State Patronage and Leslie Cole



Leslie Cole's War Correspondent's Licence. Private Collection

Leslie Cole who, as you know, has produced some excellent war subjects, which we are very glad to have acquired. The War Artists Commission are determined that a first-rate artist should be sent to Malta to record the great events which are taking place there, and they have agreed that no better choice could be made for this purpose than Cole.

Montgomery O'Rorke Dickey, WAAC Secretary to R.E. Moore, Director of Education, Hull. 29 August 1942.

Leslie Cole (1910-1976) was twenty nine years old when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. He was the right age and had already accumulated enough experience to become an official war artist. A graduate from the Royal College of Art and art teacher in Hull before the war, he was recruited by the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) in 1942 to paint war scenes in Malta. The committee had been established within the Ministry of Information at the onset of the war to serve as an official patronage scheme for artists and war painting was regarded as a form of war service essential to promote Britain's cultural values at home and abroad. Cole was assigned the rank of Honorary Captain with the Royal Marine Commandos and issued with a War Correspondent's Licence. Malta was his first overseas

commission and he arrived on the island by way of Gibraltar on Easter Sunday in 1943. Cole's six-month stay on the island and the paintings he produced during this short but eventful period provided a British audience with images of Malta and its inhabitants who had courageously endured a historic seige.

Cole bore the official designation of *Ministry of Information Artist: Specialisation Malta-Royal Marines Subjects*.¹ The Royal Marines included amongst their ranks the amphibious commandos and by assigning the artist to this detachment, the decision makers in Britain were anticipating that Cole's artistic services would be also be required in the Mediterranean. Malta was not just any Mediterranean island in 1942 – it was an imperial possession with a pivotal role to play in the war. The island was at the forefront of

this: 'it is only a shot at venturing whether he can produce anything worthwhile.'¹¹ On the 9 August 1942 further candidates were suggested and ten days later Leslie Cole was awarded the Malta posting as the Committee's third and final choice.¹² Scanlan, Worsley and Cole were all artistically disposed at rendering what Clark had termed as 'character action and *mise en scene*.' The following chapters will demonstrate that Cole's artistic compass was oriented towards the human figure.

Cole's official nomination came through on the 18 August 1942. The entire month of August was a critical month for Malta and the Santa Marija Convoy had successfully delivered the supplies necessary for Malta's survival three days before Cole's appointment. The fact that Cole was engaged by the ministry in charge of state propaganda in Britain to paint war subjects in Malta during this crucial period and that he continually received instructions from the War Office indicate that Cole's stay on the island was not being viewed solely through a cultural lens. Another internal handwritten memo confirmed that by 17 August 1942 'completed arrangements had been made by the War Office for Mr. Cole's work in Malta.' The memo added that 'the War Office are pressing for him to go with minimum delay' and the army's eagerness may be understood as further publicity for their endeavors in Malta.¹³

RAF Planes taking off from Luqa's bombed runway, 1943. IWM. Oil on Canvas 76.2cm x 43.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum. This is one of Cole's Malta paintings in which the arrangement of the visual elements resembles the cinematic process described by Kenneth Clark as *mise-en-scene*.



Artist Willie Apap, who had executed Vittorio Emmanuele III's portrait, underwent a 'conspiracy trial' in 1946-7. He was one of the seventeen Maltese nationals in Rome who had failed to return to 'British Malta' once hostilities had broken out and accused of having renounced to his British passport. His 'disloyalty' to the crown had been in contrast to Anton Inglott and Emvin Cremona who had preferred to return to Malta from Rome in 1939. Apap was eventually acquitted of all charges but the incident underscores that the demarcation line between cultural and political issues had become pencil-thin in colonial Malta and that an atmosphere of distrust had lingered on well after the hostilities had ceased.²⁸

THE BRITISH COUNCIL

'Cultural diplomacy' was another term for propaganda efforts made by British officials to reach out to all levels of public opinion. Following the demise of the Empire Marketing Board in 1933 the British Council was set up in 1934 under the supervision of the Foreign Office and its aim was to have foreigners appreciate various aspects of British culture. Reginald Leeper was largely responsible for its creation and he was assisted by Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of the State for Foreign Affairs. Both men harboured 'a deep suspicion of the course of German events since Hitler's rise to power in 1933.'²⁹ In March 1935 Leeper wrote to Vansittart acknowledging that political considerations were at play in spite of the public emphasis on the cultural

nature of the Council's work: 'We are concerned with increasing British influence in those countries that are important to us politically.' Leeper continued: 'If we could strengthen our influence in countries with adequate sums at our disposal we could use our cultural work as a very definite political instrument. This work should go hand in hand with our foreign policy and quite definitely the Foreign Office should be the advisors to the Council.'³⁰

Issues of German rearmament in 1935 and of the Abyssinia crisis of 1936 had revealed an increase in anti-British propaganda in the eastern Mediterranean and made it imperative to have the British point of view come across in this area vital to imperial interests. The Dante Alighieri Institute had been set up to promote 'a love for Italian civilization in foreign citizens' and was particularly active in Egypt. The Germans had established language schools in Athens, Cairo and Constantinople and the Alliance Française similarly served French colonial interests in the Mediterranean.³¹ The setting up of the British Council was possibly the official British response to the situation. An early British Council report confirmed that the Italians were spending the equivalent of £1,000,000 on cultural propaganda in 1938-9 and the Germans three times that amount underscoring the considerable sums allocated by the totalitarian regimes to cultural matters in this sensitive region.³²

The Chairman of the British Council between 1937 and 1941 was Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (1879-1941).

Denis Barnham, *Battle over Malta: Spitfire Attacking JU 88s but in a Dog-Fight with ME 109s*, undated, IWM. Oil on Canvas 102cm x 26.5cm with support. ©Imperial War Museum. If the rock in the foreground is Filfla then the cliffs would be those on the south west of Malta and the church in the middle ground would be Dingli church. Placing the bastions of Valletta in the top left instead of the Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs in Gozo is a geographical error.



THE OFFICIAL COLOURS OF WAR

paintings were ultimately intended for viewing in Britain.⁵¹ The British public had become progressively 'image-hungry' for eye-witness testimonies of the war and more so for its 'success stories.'⁵² Two of Cole's Malta paintings were displayed at the National Gallery in early 1944,⁵³ three more at the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull in September, 1944 and a total of sixteen at the Royal Academy in 1945 after they had been shipped back home.⁵⁴

Cole's exhibition of war art in Malta fits into a pattern already established in Britain at the start of the hostilities and implemented on a regular basis by the WAAC at the National Gallery in London. The National Gallery had been emptied of its priceless treasures and its rooms became the ideal venue to hold the war-themed exhibitions. Exhibitions were perceived to have the capacity of reinforcing the Christian values of the Empire against the Fascist threat and they registered a marked success in attracting new audiences to cultural events.

Kenneth Clark had noted that reproductions of war art would be valuable as British Council style cultural propaganda.⁵⁵ Both exhibitions and reproductions of the war paintings themselves in the form of postcards, thematic booklets and calendars harnessed art to the requirements of war and its politics.⁵⁶ Two of Cole's Malta paintings, *Portrait of Brigadier de la Bere* and *Heavy A.A. Zebug, Malta* were reproduced in the March 1944 edition of *The War Illustrated* and another eight were featured in Eric Newton's *War through Artist's Eyes*, published the following year. Rather than just target cultural elites the reproductions displayed a capacity to reach all British citizens.

Top middle and right hand side images are reproductions of two of Cole's Malta paintings. Bottom middle image is a reproduction of a Sicily painting by Official Admiralty artist John Worsley. *The War Illustrated* 24 March 1944. Private Collection.



war's victims and not just its foot soldiers.¹³ On the 31 July 1943 Cole wrote to Brenda describing his forays underground. Cole narrated that:

For two days now I've been deep in shelters among the poor devils and brave souls who live underground. They have no homes except this. They can go out up into some gardens and in the sun but they spend many hours in the dim electric light. It's cold and wet down there and ideal for disease and vermin [...] Scabies ran through the shelters like an epidemic-who can wonder. They grouped around the altar and there are several in the shelters and prayed while I sketched them. I told the supervisor when I'd finished and the score or so kids clamoured around and then rushed off into the sunshine – but the old ladies carried on – I left them to it and I was there nearly an hour.

His eye-witness description tallies with this particular painting which portrays several families gathered around an altar. Small posies of flowers delicately arranged in slender vases fuse in tonality with a patterned backdrop of local tiles. The altar is laid out with a crisp white cloth and the precise way Cole renders a hanging oil-lamp demonstrates the artist's sharp eye for detail. Although the canvas is a crowded one the subject matter is instantly legible due to Cole's sense of pictorial organisation. The painting also has qualities in common with contemporary propagandistic literature published on Malta. Author John Hay Beith, who wrote under the *nom de plume* Ian Hay, was in Malta at the same time as Cole. Hay describes an underground scene in similar terms:

The larger shelters were furnished with tiers of bunk-beds, and around these each family would congregate – cooking, sleeping, singing or telling their beads. Each shelter had its own shrine, with its flickering lamp and picture of the Virgin, and maybe a few flowers.¹⁴

Another two of Cole's canvasses underground canvasses are entitled *Malta. Preparing for the Night in the Crypt of St. Augustine's, Valletta* and *The Dormitory under St. Augustine's*.

Malta. Shelterers Praying During an Air Raid, 1943, IWM. Oil on Canvas 71.1cm x 91.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.



Cole had formerly been on the teaching staff at Hull College of Art and his connection with the city explains why *The Hull Daily Mail* took an interest in Cole's overseas career. On the 14 March 1944 the newspaper reported that: 'Leslie Cole, a member of the staff of Hull College of Art, has recently returned from Malta where he has found plenty of scope for his work. These pictures of Malta are in the current War Artist Exhibition in London [National Gallery 1944], and it is hoped that at some point they will come to Hull.' A short while later the same newspaper critic penned another article entitled *Royal Academy – Pictures by War Artists* and after commenting that war subjects were few in number, he singled out this painting to comment upon: 'Leslie Cole whose home is Victoria-Ave has a notable oil painting in the Exhibition. It is called *Maltese Women with Newly Born Baby in their Underground Home in the Ditch Kospikwa* [sic]. It is a work in which the artist's imagination and skilful use of colour have full play.'¹⁹

The newspaper critic must have been aware that the painting had just been acquired by the director of the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull and possibly wished to publicise the gallery's sponsorship of local artists through his article.²⁰ The curator of the gallery, Vincent Galloway (1984-1977) was a portrait-painter by profession and he and Cole knew each other socially but it was assuredly the engaging human quality of *Maltese Women* and its polished finish that made it a valuable addition to the gallery's extensive collection of paintings by the Hull School.²¹

Cole sketched and painted five more 'underground scenes' in Malta. Three of them are listed on his

The Dormitory under St. Augustine's, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper 48.2cm x 65.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.





'Diffone' Workers Mending the Roof of the Officers Mess, Floriana, 1943, IWM. Oil on canvas 51.7cm x 82.5cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

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COLE PAINTED THESE
CHILDREN DURING A
VISIT TO A VALLETTA
UNDERGROUND SHELTER



Gorg, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.



Study of Maltese Boy, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.



Marguerite, 1943, MUŻA, Valletta. Pencil and chalk on paper.

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CAPTURES THE
PROMINENT BREAK IN THE
ELEGANT AND HISTORIC
ARCADE

*The Harbour Barrage from Upper Barracca, 1943, IWM. Oil on
Canvas 76.2cm x 91.4cm. ©Imperial War Museum.*



*No Time to Lose. Soldier Dockers unloading a Convoy during a Raid, 1943, IWM. Oil on Canvas 64.4cm x 91.6cm.
©Imperial War Museum.*





Maltese Women, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper
38.4cm x 57.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

Studies for Victory Kitchen, 1943, IWM. Watercolour on paper
38.4cm x 57.2cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

Craters and Dust: A Detour Round a Blockhouse, Sicily, 1943, IWM.
Watercolour on paper 48.2cm x 65.7cm. ©Imperial War Museum.

