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MALTA
AARON BEZZINA: GIVE UP WEAPONS

AARON BEZZINA [MT]
ARMI L-ARMI, 2024
Give Up Weapons in Armoury, Birgu
maltabiennale.art 2024

**Meditations on [Anti-]Interactivity of Artistic Interventions:
Biennials as displays of complex statements**

An Essay on Hook Metaphorology by Aaron Bezzina
Text by Verena Voigt M.A.



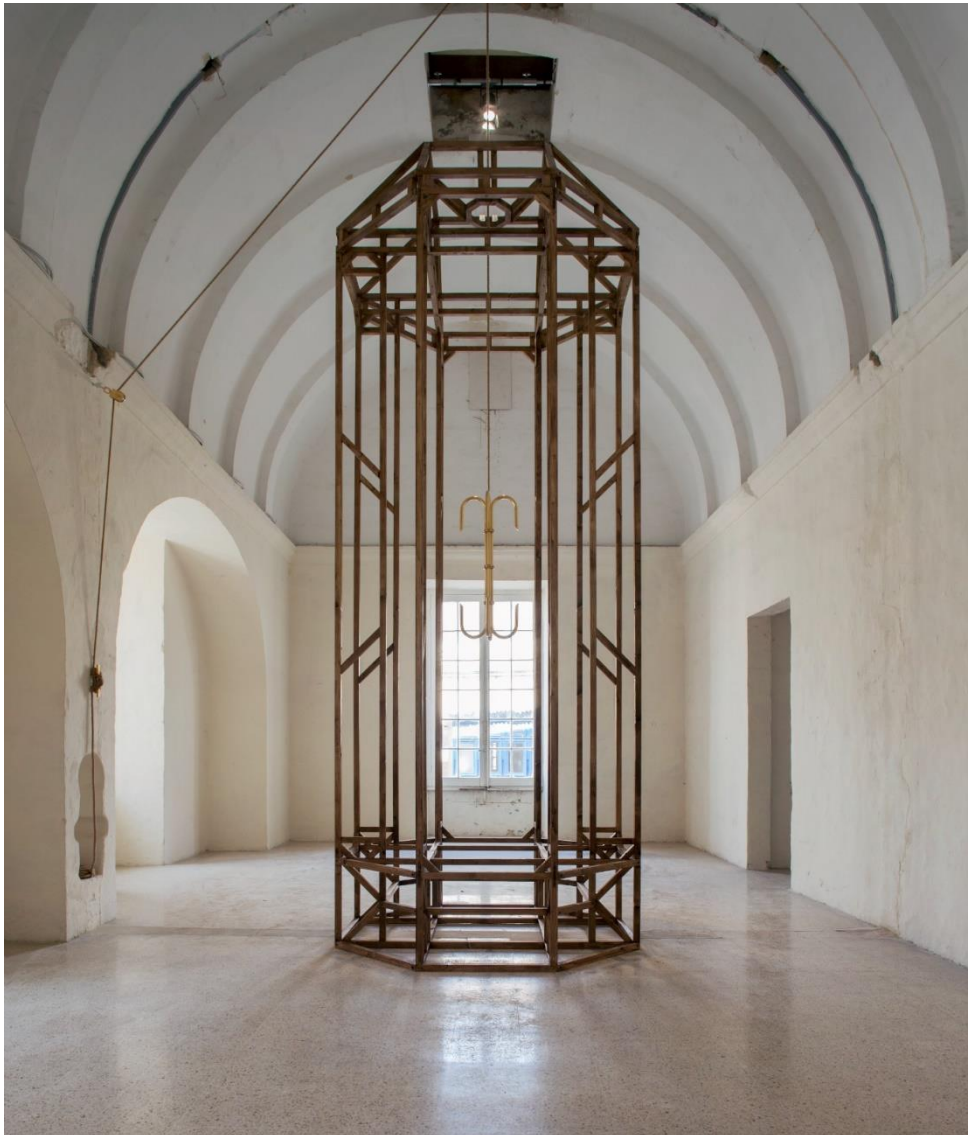
Aaron Bezzina, ARMI L-ARMI, Installation view in Armoury, Birgu.
maltabiennale.art 2024. Photo Julian Vassalo

If practicality, invisibility and eternity are the main parameters of perfection and relief, then the hook is one of the most advanced cultural achievements in human history. As a question mark, he leads an investigative life of his own. It

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helps to translate difference patterns into hybrid order patterns. She weights balances. Carpet weaving would have to be reinvented without him. As a lamp suspension, they swing the light from the ground to the sky. As a culture enabler, transportation facilitator and screwless furniture maker, they have a great career behind them, that just needs to be remembered. As an anchor, he keeps ships in the harbor. It anchors the tents in the ground, which have always had to withstand climatic changes. Unlike the ladder to heaven, they help conquer horizontals. Not to forget: the hooks and eyelets on feminine clothing.



Aaron Bezzina, ARMI L-ARMI, Installation view in Armoury, Birgu.
maltabiennale.art 2024. Photo: Julian Vassalo © Aaron Bezzina

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Can you see the hook?

Aaron Bezzina shows his installation “ARMI L-ARMI, 2024” in the Armoury, the former weapons arsenal in Birgu. As a vertical power amplifier in fishing and naval warfare, the hook is a silent reminiscent of historical sea scapes. The gold-plated brass hook, which is installed in a 5.3 meter high wooden “tower”, is also very material. Blunts at its ends, reminds us of its original function as a weapon. The two mirror-inverted hooks refer to the neutralization through intrinsic reflections. Unlike the church bells in comparable tower constructions in Malta, Bezzina does not refer to the restrictive structures of the time. Rather, he calls for eternal balances of deterrence in political diplomacy. The title ARMI L-ARMI could be understood as a statement about the current world crisis scenarios.

In his written descriptions, Aaron Bezzina reveals how the hook throwing technique once worked: as a throwing anchor that “captured” the rigging, turned the enemy ship on its side and sank it. Placed in the coat of arms of the former Armoury depot in Birgu, the emblem carved in stone refers to the historical defensive strength of the island state. In the overall context of the first Malta Biennale, Aaron Bezzina's installation unfolds a secret code that is connected to other artist statements as if by a common thread. In a fictitious passage, we try to substantiate the archetype of the hook with further project contributions of his colleagues.

Can you see the barbed wire?

In the performative opening of the installation “The Poor Treatment of Migrants Today Will Be Our Disgrace Tomorrow, 2011” by Tania Bruguera and Andreco, the hook provides a very special insight: Andreco was pulling up on a hook in front of the audience to the top of the EU flag on the wall of the Armoury. He connected the yellow stars horizontally with spray-painted barbed wire inscriptions. The installation is referring to the complexity of European migration policy and the inhumane conditions in the refugee camps in Malta. With the date, Bruguera refers to 2011, the year of the political spring movements, which were also noticeable in artistic developments in Malta.

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Tania Bruguera & Andreco, Performance, March, 12, 2024. Armoury, Birgu.
The Poor Treatment of Migrants Today Will Be Our Disgrace Tomorrow, 2011.
Photo: Verena Voigt

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The image shows the end of Andrea Conte's performance "Displacement" at the entrance to Armoury, March 12, 2024, before Andrecos performance. Photo: Verena Voigt

Can you see the end?

The performance "Displacement" by Andrea Conte (March 12) was also full of allusions. For Rembrandt connoisseurs in particular, a reminiscence of the departure of the "Night Watch" (1642) by Rembrandt van Rijn was visible. The historic "take up arms" was translated into a quiet "put your arms down at last" with the entry of the standard bearers into the historic weapons depot. In 2024, complex and nuanced world peace statements, demands for freedom of expression and self-determination have become ambiguously entwined in the former weapons depot.

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Can you find the hooks?

Let's change the location: Fort St Elmo. We don't know whether Ivana Živić in the Serbian Pavilion forgot the three hooks that we found hidden among the information material. We put them together to form an emblem and see ourselves confirmed in the search for clues. We begin to decline interculturality: The hook has crept into the European languages in various idiomatic expressions and metaphors: In German it is the hook that prevents perfection, gets caught in the fabric and makes the surface unpleasant to touch. There is always something hidden attached to the hook; it scratches the flawless image and tarnishes the promise of perfection. In English, however, it is the hook in "It Hooks Me" that describes that particular aesthetic attraction that makes us stay.

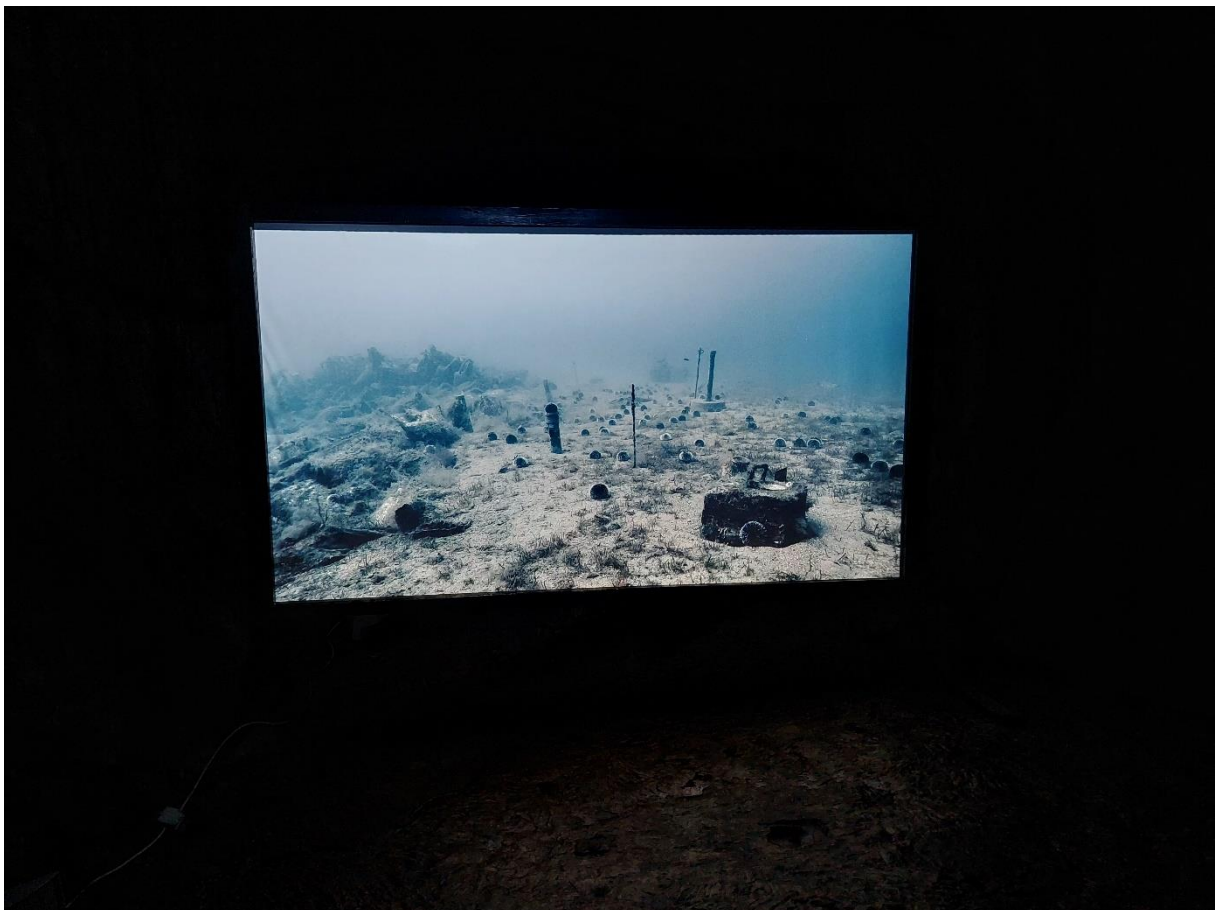


Three hooks in the Serbian National Pavilion in Fort St Elmo, March 14, 2024.
Photographic and edited found footage by © Verena Voigt

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Can you hear the underground?

It is the invisible hooks that could be used to lift the ghosts of the past to the seabed in the video installation “Inside the Outset: Evoking a Space of Passage,” 2021.” The German-Italian artist Rosa Barba shows her installation in the “underground” of Valletta, the historic cistern opposite the Maltese Court. Susan Philipsz staged her sound installation “Who by Fire” here in 2018 in the group exhibition “The Island Is What The Sea Surrounds”. The Leonhard Cohen song still resonates in 2024. Rosa Barba ambiguously stages the now visible control systems on the seabed and formulates a criticism of the tourist diving spectacles around the Maltese Archipelago.



Rosa Barba, Inside the Outset: Evoking a Space of Passage, 2021, Installation view, Underground Valletta, 2024. Photo: Verena Voigt

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Do you want to open the barriers?

The temporarily inoperable lion heads on the barriers in the Auberge d'Aragon, where the sound installation "The Fragiles" by the Austrian artist Barbara Kapusta is shown, also make us think about the casual metaphor of the hook.



9_Auberge d'Aragon, Valletta, photographic and edited
Found Footage (c) Verena Voigt.

"The Fragiles" is a sculpture reminiscent of technical structures, whose arms protrude upwards like hook-shaped tentacles. Speaker boxes are attached to their ends, which distribute the sound throughout the room. Its shape refers to the so-called "Lévy C curve" (after Paul Lévy), which seems to be connected to the lion's head hooks: In Kapusta's installation, the linear vision

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of the future is undermined by repeating structures, similarities and recurring temporalities. The sound piece is based on a fragmentary science fiction story set in a world characterized by isolation, social inequality and migration due to both the climate and the economy.

From an apocalyptic future, the artist looks back at the foundations on which this time is built. She speculates on the technologies of control, data collection and manipulation of interests, preferences and desires and causes temporalities to collide. Interconnections and permeabilities between technology and ideology, politics and built space, between digitality and categorization become clear. It's always about processing complex amounts of data, categorizing individuals and “anchoring” their behavior. Kapuska questions these digital “anchorings” in commonalities and algorithmic connections. She speculates about alternative hybrid constellations that do not have to “hook” into one another, can remain fragmentary, and are able to withstand contradictions and ambivalences. (Quoted from Juliane Bischoff, 2023, Malta Biennale, Barbara Kapusta).



10_Barbara Kapusta, The Fragiles, Auberge d'Aragon, Soundinstallation, 2024. Photo: Verena Voigt

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Do you want to solve the tangles?

With the coding of hook metaphors around the Malta Biennale, hybrid social discourses unfold. Are they perhaps preparing solution horizons? Perhaps it is precisely in these complex socio-economic entanglements that we arrive at the fleeting inscriptions that contemporary visual art holds? Are we called upon to decipher these? For example, in the multimedia installation “S.A.M. (Slaughtering Archival Machine, 2024) by the Italian artist Agnes Questionmark (she), which confronts the viewer with a strange fantasy creature as a negotiating partner on a hook.



Agnes Questionmark, S.A.M. Slaughtering Archival Machine, 2024.
Installation view, Armoury. Photo Verena Voigt

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Do you want to wake up the bats?

The installation “Garden of Scrars, 2022/2024)” by Ibrahim Mahama adds a profound contribution to the meditations on world-historical “entanglements”: The artist, who lives in Ghana, combined gravestone casts from the Oude Kerk (Amsterdam) and those from his home country, to build an extensive concrete-stone installation. In this way, a landscape field of reflection of high intensity was created in the historic temple complex of Ġgantija (Gozo). The material was produced and commissioned for the installation “Garden of Scrars” in the Oude Kerk Amsterdam in 2022.



12_Ibrahim Mahama, Garden of Scrars, 2022/ 2024, Installation view in Ġgantija (Gozo).
Photo: Verena Voigt

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The bats hung on hooks provide another interpretation of the theme “Decolonising Malta: Polyphony is Us”. As ghosts of the past, the traumas seem to be able to come back to life at any time. Ibrahim Mahama explains: „A tombstone is like a scar on your skin; it takes your mind back to a specific moment in time. In a way, it is a kind of teleportation device. While it often looks ugly, I also find a certain beauty in how it allows our minds to travel and access different points in memory“.



13_Ibrahim Mahama, Garden of Scrars, 2022/ 2024, Installation view in Ġgantija (Gozo). Photo: Verena Voigt

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Do you want to hook up?

Let's go back to Aaron Bezzina's installation ARMI L-ARMI, whose hook metaphorology keeps us hooked: the traces left by the Malta-based artist are as complex as the solid foundation he laid for them built in four days: It makes us think about the hooks to which theater sets are attached. The sociological meditation leads to the rise and fall of careers and the staged transcendences of higher powers. Socially engaging or not engaging raises questions. The subtle denial of the monetary under-hook as a symbol of disintegration finds a material reflection in Aaron Bezzina's installation. The gold surface in his installation stands out against the wood of the showcase-like watch tower display. The hook to which the installation is attached to the ceiling of Armoury and the corresponding rope construction on the wall of the historic building refer to the (un)influenceable mechanics of ascent and descent as an artistic utopia and dystopia.



14_Aaron Bezzina, ARMI L-ARMI, 2024
Installation view in Armoury, Birgu.
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Do you see the blind interaction?

Aaron Bezzina comments on his installation with these words: “**ARMI L-ARMI** forms part of the artist’s ongoing research in sculpture, exploring the notion of anti-interactivity within artwork. This notion is interpreted as the antithesis of interactive artwork, not an act of rebellion against this movement, but to ignite the viewer’s attention to evaluate and respond mentally to the work, rather than ‘blindly’ interacting with it.”

BIOGRAPHIE: Aaron Bezzina (b.1991, Malta) first exhibited in 2012 and his international break was in 2015, whilst reading for an MFA in Digital Arts at the University of Malta. He was selected for a residency organised by the European Investment Bank mentored by Darren Almond, a Turner Prize nominated artist. In 2017, Bezzina was also one of the selected artists for the Maltese Pavilion at Venice Biennale. In 2021, Aaron participated in UN/MUTE a NY virtual-residency and the work was exhibited in the ACFNY in Manhattan. In 2022, he exhibited in Istanbul, both at the IV-International-Istanbul-Triennial and the Mahalla Festival Palimpsest. In 2023, Bezzina was selected for the Larnaca Biennale in Cyprus.



Verena Voigt, Can you see the hook? März, 13th, 2024. Seen by Christopher Gillen

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maltabiennale.art 2024 ends on May 31, 2024; it will be presented at twelve historical buildings in Valletta, Cottonera and Gozo. Some exhibition venues such as the Villa Portelli (Kalkara) and the Armoury (Birgu) were redeveloped for contemporary visual art for the first time. The site-specific installations were curated by Sofia Baldi Pighi (Italy) and her team (Elisa Corolla, Italy/USA; Emma Mattei, Malta and Nigel Baldacchino, Malta), the 11 national pavilions by external curator teams. 72 artists are taking part in the first Biennale in Malta, including Tania Bruguera, Zehra Dogan, Rosa Barba, Mel Chin, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Adrian Paci, Cecilia Vicua, Gaia De Megni, Guadalupe Maravilla, Jermay Michael Gabriel, Zazzaro Otto, Agnes Questionmark, Adama Delphine Fawundu, Emile Sahin, Basim Magdy, Franziska von Steglin and others; from Malta take part alongside Aaron Bezzina, Raphael Vella, Laura Besancon, Nina Gerada, Sandra Zaffrarese and Isabelle Borg.

www. <https://maltabiennale.art/>