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Riccardo Matlakas unveils large-scale mosaic artwork at Gozo College Secondary School

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Italian artist Riccardo Matlakas, has unveiled his latest public artwork, *Two Waves*, a striking seven- square-metre mosaic installed on the external walls of the newly built Gozo College Secondary School in Victoria.

Funded by the European Union and supported by the Goethe-Institut, this project reflects a deep commitment to cultural exchange and environmental awareness.

The initiative was part of Art4Sea, an interdisciplinary platform that merges art, science, and technology to promote ocean literacy and marine conservation. By engaging artists, scientists, and digital experts, Art4Sea fosters a broader understanding of marine ecosystems while inspiring communities to adopt sustainable practices.

Matlakas, known for his socially engaged art spanning performance, painting, murals, installations, and mosaics, chose to work with mosaic rather than a painted mural for this project. His decision was driven by a desire to honour Gozo's heritage in mosaic craftsmanship while also using recycled materials, such as discarded tiles from local shops, reinforcing his dedication to environmental consciousness.





The mosaic, Two Waves, is inspired by the Taoist Taijitu, symbolising the relationship between

the resilience of the ocean and the impact of human industrial activity. Three-quarters of the composition are dedicated to the ocean, celebrating its vastness and strength through fluid forms, vibrant contrasts, and intricate portrayals of marine life. This section also incorporates subtle reminders of human impact, such as plastics and discarded fishing nets, highlighting the ongoing environmental challenges.

The remaining quarter depicts industrial activity, represented by factory chimneys releasing smoke -a powerful commentary on pollution and its effects on the natural world. Within this section, Matlakas includes symbolic elements: a single bee and a lone bird, representing hope but also the fragility of biodiversity in the face of environmental destruction. A transitional space connects the two opposing forces, emphasising the potential for harmony and renewal through conscious choices.

Throughout his career, Matlakas has explored global issues through art, with projects spanning Ukraine, where his Pyjamas Party covered a World War II tank in pyjama fabric as a metaphorical invitation for war to sleep, as well as works between South and North Korea and Palestine that have engaged with themes of identity, conflict, and humanitarian dialogue.

The creation of Two Waves was documented by Ana Hastie from Hastie Photography and Josue Bermudez from High Capture in Gozo, capturing the process and impact of the work.

Now standing as a permanent installation at Gozo College Secondary School, the mosaic invites viewers to reflect on the delicate balance between nature and human activity, urging conversations about sustainability and the future of our planet.

Article by Francesca Xuereb; Photos: Joseph P Grima

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