

RED PRINTS *in* VALLETTA



ALEXANDRA PACE is one of Malta's most noted photographers, but also one of the most reserved. She's not into bling, flash or partying, and lives an unassuming life while producing a seemingly endless stream of stunning photography. Now she is using the bare bones of a Valletta house to showcase some of her most recent work in an exhibition called Redprints.

All photography: Alexandra Pace



This is Alexandra Pace.

NUMBER 68, SANTA LUCIA STREET is where Alexandra Pace dreams of living one day. The last people who lived there were her grandparents, and the house has stood empty for the last 30 years. Like many Valletta houses which have not been chopped and changed into several apartments – in the true meaning of the word as a separate dwelling-place within the same house – it sprawls over four storeys and has many flights of steps. Empty of all furniture and furnishings, and stripped down to the bare essentials, it makes an evocative exhibition space for Pace's striking images.

"I had to do a great deal of cleaning, scrubbing, and basic restoration," she says. "The place had been locked up for three decades and you can imagine what it was like after all that time. Apart from that, I didn't touch anything at all. I wanted the elements to speak for themselves. My exhibition is open to the public, and I am as keen for people to see the house as I am for them to see my work." >p123



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>The 19th-century cement tiles are worn but still decorative. The wrought-iron fireplaces in the reception rooms on the second and third floors are still in situ, reminding us of the days when coal had to be hauled by servants up the stairs and fires laid and lit in the colder months – not for lazy Sunday afternoons and to create atmosphere, but every day as the sole source of warmth. Negotiating the steps is a feat and when you come to the bathroom – something which in Valletta houses had to be carved out of existing space, usually

a mezzanine - it is the size of some new-build homes and an eye-popping mix of black and pink.

The ground floor is a showcase for Pace's 'Santa Marija' photographs, taken on that day in August when the interior of the island grinds to a halt and all life is at the water's edge. Pace took her equipment down to the beach and went underwater to shoot this collection – only it's not the kind of underwater photography you would expect. >p125





>There are no fish, no caves and no fingers of seaweed. Children swim up to her like iridescent fish in their brilliant costumes, curious to discover more about the woman holding a big plastic contraption that can't possibly be a camera. They jump and twirl and the sand comes alive and dances with them.

Up on the first floor, things become a little more sombre. The photography is darker. The subject-matter has more gravitas. There are nudes of men and women that turn the body into a piece of gravity-defying sculpture. There are humble vegetables photographed as you have never seen them before – stark still life.

Alexandra Pace is well known for her photography of the human face and body. She prefers to work with what she calls 'normal bodies' – though there are some specimens here which, if they

were normal, would make Malta Perfection Central. Her camera plays with muscle and sinew, the pattern of light making the torso and limbs more like a piece of sculpture than an actual living body. This being Malta, you are drawn to each one, trying to work out who it is, but the bodies are ultimately anonymous. This is an exhibition, but there is no exhibitionism involved.

"I've worked on these studies of the human body specifically for this exhibition," Alexandra Pace says. "It's been a while since I last showed any of my work, and I am interested in seeing how it's going to be received. I hope it will open people's eyes to a different kind of reality, the kind that some photographers see because they are used to looking through their lens and framing things, but which others might miss during the rush through life." ■

ALEXANDRA PACE
00356 9949 5129
www.redprints.com
www.alexandrapace.com
info@alexandrapace.com



Redprints

68 Santa Lucia Street
Valletta

25 October to 11 November

(1000hrs to 1200hrs
and 1400hrs to 2000hrs -
every day of the week)