

Dr Charlene Vella B.A.(Hons)(Melit.),M.A.(Melit.),Ph.D.(Warw.)

Senior Lecturer in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art

Department of Art and Art History

Faculty of Arts

University of Malta

<https://www.um.edu.mt/profile/charlenevella>

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=yoTFkMsAAAAJ>

<https://malta.academia.edu/CharleneVella1>

www.charlenevella.com

charlene.vella@um.edu.mt



Education

Ph.D. History of Art, University of Warwick, 2016

M.A. History of Art, University of Malta, 2010

B.A. (Hons) History of Art, University of Malta, 2006

Professional Appointments

- Senior Lecturer, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta
- Trustee on the Alfred Chircop (1933–2015) Trust since April 2016
- Member of the Planning Authority's Design Advisory Committee since April 2016
- Board member of the Catholic Institute, Floriana, since May 2023
- Scientific Committee of academic journal *Studi Storici Siciliani: Trimestrale di Storia della Sicilia Moderna e Contemporanea*, since May 2023
- Member of the board of administrators of the Notarial Archives Foundation, Valletta, since 12 March 2024

Publications

Books:

- *In the Footsteps of Antonello da Messina: the antonelliani between Sicily and Venice*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2022, 448 pp.
- *The Mediterranean Artistic Context of Late Medieval Malta: 1091–1530*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2013), 240 pp. (winner at the Malta National Book Council Awards 2014).

Edited Volumes:

- *Dynamics of Artistic exchange in the Mediterranean: The Medieval and Renaissance Imprint*, ed. Charlene Vella, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2024.
- *At Home in Art: Essays in Honour of Mario Buhagiar*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2016.
- *Proceedings of History Week 2009*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2012.

Papers:

- 'The cult of the Madonna del Soccorso in Malta and a triptych for the Civitas' Cathedral: attribution and new considerations', in C. Vella (ed.), *Dynamics of Artistic exchange in the Mediterranean: The Medieval and Renaissance Imprint*, ed. Charlene Vella, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2024.
- 'An analytical investigation into two of Antonello da Messina's nephews' workshop practices: insights into Antonio de Saliba and Salvo d'Antonio's paintings on Malta', in Anne Dubois (ed.), *Proceedings of the "Alla Maniera" symposium*, Peeters Publishers, 2024, pp. 97–109.
- 'Identifying one of Antonio de Saliba's "lost" Taormina altarpieces', *Studi Storici Siciliani: Trimestrale di Storia della Sicilia Moderna e Contemporanea*, December 2023, III, 4, pp. 8–15.
- with Jamie Farrugia, 'A Sicilian Renaissance Mary Magdalene pedestal in Rabat, Malta: a recent discovery', *Papireto*, I, 2022, pp. 142–152.
- 'New insights into the painted crucifix attributed to Antonio de Saliba in the V&A Museum, London', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 101, 2021, pp. 269–300. doi:10.1017/S000358152000030X.
- 'Revisiting Antonello Gagini's 1504 *Madonna and Child*', *Treasures of Malta*, Summer 2021, No. 81, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, pp. 12–21.
- 'Out of obscurity: long-lost Renaissance paintings from an Antonio de Saliba masterpiece', *Melita Historica*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 2020, pp. 220–245.

- 'Marriage alliances for the sake of art: the case of Renaissance Messina, Sicily, and the repercussions for the Maltese islands', *Storja 2018–2019* (Journal of the Malta University Historical Society, 2019), pp. 1–24.
- 'Paintings in the Sanctuary of the Virgin, Mellieħa: a selection', in J. Sammut (ed.), *Mellieħa through the Tides of time*, Mellieħa Local Council, 2019, pp. 69–89.
- 'An Antonello School *Madonna and Child* at the Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris: new considerations', in John Azzopardi (ed.), *Tribute to Alain Blondy*, Malta: Fondation de Malte, 2018, pp. 399–433.
- 'Unrecognised paintings by Antonio de Saliba on Malta', *Melita Historica*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, Malta: Malta Historical Society, 2017, pp. 115–48.
- 'Three recently restored Renaissance paintings by Antonio De Saliba in Malta', in C. Vella (ed.), *At Home in Art: Essays in Honour of Mario Buhagiar*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2016, pp. 47–65.
- 'A Late Medieval and an Early Modern Window in the Reserve Collection of the National Museum of Archaeology', in C. Vella (ed.), *Proceedings of History Week 2009*, Valletta: Midsea Books, 2012.
- 'Sculpture in Malta in the Early Post-Muslim Period', in J. Grima (ed.), *60th Anniversary of the Malta Historical Society: A Commemoration*, Malta: Malta Historical Society, 2010, pp. 455–66.
- 'New Light on Petronilla, the oldest bell in Malta', *Melita Historica*, Vol. XV, No. 1, Malta: Malta Historical Society, 2008, pp. 49–54.

Upcoming publications

- with Andrea Luca Bartolo, 'An art-historical and scientific investigation into two Early *Cinquecento* Renaissance polyptychs by Antonio de Saliba (1466/7 - c. 1535) on Sicily and Malta', Proceedings of the 2023 IMEKO International Conference on Metrology for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Rome.

Grants and awards

- Chancellors Award full scholarship for PhD, University of Warwick
- Premio culturale Antonello da Messina 2023 for the section studi antonelliani.

Conferences

- 'An art-historical and scientific investigation into two Early *Cinquecento* Renaissance polyptychs by Antonio de Saliba (1466/7 - c. 1535) on Sicily and Malta', together with Andrea Luca Bartolo, to be presented at the 2023 IMEKO International Conference on Metrology for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Rome, 19-21 October 2023.
- 'Fading Devotion: the case of the Late Medieval cave-church of San Niklaw (ca. 1398 - 1436) in Mellieħa, Malta', together with Michael Zammit, Sebastiano D'Amico and Keith Buhagiar, presented at the 2023 IMEKO International Conference on Metrology for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Rome, 19-21 October 2023.
- 'Antonio de Saliba's 1515 Altarpiece for the Franciscan Observants in Rabat, Malta: an analytical and scientific investigation', together with Andrea Luca Bartolo, presented at XXIII Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, 11-13 January 2024, organised by KU Leuven, Illuminare, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Art, Faculty of Arts, in collaboration with Museum M, Leuven and the Royal Library of Belgium (KBR) Partners: KIK-IRPA, UCL, Brugge Musea.
- 'Antonello's nephews in Bellini's bottega', presented at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference 2023 9-11 March in San Juan, Puerto Rico as part of the 'Art of Renaissance Venice' panel organised by Daniel Wallace Maze from the University of Iowa and Lorenzo Buonanno from the University of Massachusetts Boston and chaired by Patricia Fortini Brown Professor Emerita of Art & Archaeology at Princeton University.
- 'Searching for Gold: a diagnostic investigation and digital reconstruction of Antonello Gagini's Sicilian 1504 *Madonna and Child* for Malta', presented at a symposium on Gold in Renaissance Western Europe was organised in Paris on 9 and 10 June 2022 held at the C2RMF (the National Centre for Research and Restoration in French Museums) in the Palais du Louvre and University Paris Nanterre. It was organised as part of the AORUM project (Analyse de l'OR et des ses Usages comme Matériau pictural / Analysis of Gold and its Uses as a Painting Material in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries), directed by Romain Thomas (HAR, University Paris Nanterre), Christine Andraud (CRC/CNRS/MNHN), Anne-Solenn Le Hô (C2RMF) and Dan Vodislav (ETIS, CYU Cergy Paris Université). AORUM.
- 'An analytical investigation into two of Antonello da Messina's nephews' workshop practices with insights on Antonio de Saliba and Salvo d'Antonio', presented at the Bruges Symposium XXII for the

Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting on the theme of 'Alla Maniera': Technical art history and the meaning of style in 15th to 17th century painting', 28-30 March 2022.

- 'Reframing and presenting Antonello da Messina's nephew's Renaissance altarpieces', presented at 'Reconstruction: Methods and Practices in Research, Exhibitions and Conservation' inaugural conference of the Centre for Visual Culture University of Cambridge, 24-25 February 2020.
- 'From Messina to Venice: Antonello da Messina's nephews in Bellini's *bottega*', presented at "Movement and Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean (6th – 15th centuries)", organised by the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean (SMM) 6th Biennial Conference in Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC), 8-11 July 2019.
- Convener and speaker in "Dynamics of Mediterranean Artistic Interaction in the Late Medieval and Renaissance periods: the second edition", 10 April 2019, Valletta Campus, University of Malta, with a paper titled 'New perspectives on Antonio de Saliba's *Madonna del Soccorso Triptych*'.
- 'Cross-cultural exchanges in the Renaissance in Eastern Sicily: the case of Antonello da Messina and his followers' presented at the "Re-imagining the Mediterranean: Transcultural Networks in the Early Modern World, 17 May 2019, held at the University of Warwick, UK.
- 'The native art of the Maltese islands in the Late Medieval and Renaissance periods' presented at "The Art of the Poor in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance" conference, 14 and 15 June 2018, The Warburg Institute, London.
- Convener and speaker in "Dynamics of Mediterranean Artistic Interaction in the Late Medieval and Renaissance periods", 9 March 2018, Valletta Campus, University of Malta, with a paper titled 'The *Madonna del Soccorso* triptych at the Mdina Cathedral Museum: attribution and new considerations'.
- 'The Renaissance in the South', "New Directions in the Renaissance" conference, 1 and 2 November 2012, University of Edinburgh.

Upcoming conferences

- 7-9 October 2024: co-chairing with Sebastiano D'Amico and Pasquale Daponte the 10th edition of the MetroArchaeo 2024 IMEKO International Conference on Metrology for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, University of Malta Valletta campus.

Invited talks

- 18-19 May 2024: invited as speaker at the *Early Modern Mediterranean Entanglements: Historiographical Problems and Art Historical Perspectives*, which will take place at the El Greco Centre in Rethymno, Crete, convened by Joris van Gastel (University of Zurich) and Yannis Hadjinicolaou (University of Bonn) and sponsored by the University of Zurich.
- 'Malta in 1530 and the Hospitaller legacy', talk presented to members of the Order of St John Historical Society of London, The Phoenicia Malta, 27 October 2023.
- 'Antonello da Messina's Artistic Legacy with a special focus on Antonio and Pietro de Saliba', Oratory of the Immaculate Conception, Jesuits' Church, Valletta, 21 April 2023, organised by the Jesuits' Church Foundation.
- 'L'eredità di Antonello da Messina: Venezia, Messina, e Malta', Church of Santa Maria Odigitria dei Siciliani in Via del Tritone, Rome, 15 April 2023, organised by the Società Antonello da Messina.
- 'Il Rinascimento a Malta: i contatti artistici con Messina e Antonello', Salone delle Bandiere at Palazzo Zanca, Messina's Town Hall, Messina, 8 November 2022, organised as part of the PRIN 2017 project titled "Il Rinascimento nell'Italia del Sud e nelle isole: patrimonio culturale e tecnologie" that involves the Universities of Messina Naples, Cagliari and Palermo. It was coordinated by Prof Roberto Cobiانchi, lecturer in Medieval Art History at the Università degli Studi di Messina's Dipartimento di Civiltà Antiche e Moderne, and held under the auspices of Messina's mayor, Dott. Federico Basile, and that of the Assessore alla cultura, Prof. Enzo Caruso.
- 'Insights into recent conservation and restoration interventions on Renaissance art in Malta', 20th Anniversary **Congress** of the International Academy of Cosmetic Dermatology (IACD), Xara Lodge, rabat, Malta, 2 November 2022.
- 'Antonello da Messina's Artistic Legacy with a special focus on Antonio and Pietro de Saliba', Casino Maltese, Valletta, Malta, 30 September 2022.
- 'Cross-cultural exchanges in the Renaissance in Eastern Sicily: the case of Antonello da Messina and his followers', Rotary Club, Malta meeting held at the Corinthia St George Hotel, 17 June 2019.
- 'Malta in 1530 and the Hospitaller legacy', University of Cyprus, Nicosia (Archaeological Research Unit), 29 January 2018.

- 'Marriage alliances for the sake of art: the case of Renaissance Messina, Sicily', HUMS Autumn Symposium: Women, University of Malta, 27 October 2017.
- 'Antonello da Messina's nephews in Bellini's bottega and beyond', Malta Historical Society, Auberge d'Aragon, Valletta, Malta, 29 September 2016.
- 'Mdina and Rabat before the Knights: the Cradle of Malta's Renaissance', Din l-Art Helwa, Valletta, Malta, 11 December 2014.
- 'The Antonello School and Franciscan Networks of Patronage', Department of History of Art, University of Warwick, 3 May 2014.

Chaired sessions

- 'The Art Historian and Conservation: A future for a prospective generation', Department of Art and Art History and HOASA, 1 April 2021, online conference.
- 'Women in Art & Film', Department of Art and Art History and HOASA Women's day event, 10 March 2021, online conference.
- 'A focus on females in art: film screening and discussion on recent research' in collaboration with HOASA and Advancing Women Artists Foundation (AWA), 6 March 2019, University of Malta Msida campus.

University of Malta board and committee appointments

- Member of the Faculty of Arts' Faculty Board
- Member of the Faculty of Arts' Students' Requests Committee
- Member of the Faculty of Arts' Course Catalogues and Programmes Committee
- Member of the Faculty of Arts' MA in Mediterranean Studies Board of Studies

Other

- January 2024: on site lectures in Malta to students and professors from the Stanford University in Berlin programme.
- January 2024: Luther College, Iowa, student visit on site lectures in Malta.
- Undergraduate Dissertations Coordinator for the Department of Art and Art History (ongoing).
- September 2017 – June 2018: successfully completed a Continuous Professional Development course at the University of Malta.
- Main applicant for UM's RSSD excellence funds in February 2024 for a project on Maltese late medieval cave churches.
- May – June 2023: selected by the University of Malta Rector as an academic with the external review panel members from the External Quality Assurance audit carried out by the Malta Further & Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) as per Subsidiary Legislation 607.03.
- Leading restoration and research projects relating to Late Medieval and Renaissance Art at the University of Malta: overseeing diagnostic tests and restoration of Renaissance paintings by Antonello da Messina's followers on Malta (Antonio de Saliba and Salvo d'Antonio) and the sculptor Antonello Gagini.
- Interviewer for full-time Curator position at the Natural Archives Foundation, Valletta, on 8 February 2024.
- March 2024: overseeing diagnostic analysis carried out on paintings in Malta thanks to a two-week loan from Opus Instruments of the Apollo IR camera.
- 2023 – present: researching and overseeing the conservation and restoration at PrevArti Ltd of a Late Medieval Byzantine icon from Birgu Church of St Laurence, with collaborations with several experts in the field.
- 2023 – present: researching and overseeing the conservation and restoration at PrevArti Ltd of a post-Byzantine painted crucifix and three Early Modern Italian panel paintings from the Parish Church of St George, Qormi.
- 2022 – present: studying several Renaissance sculptures in the church of the Badia in Tortorici (Province of Messina, Sicily).
- 2022 – present: researching and overseeing the diagnostic tests and restoration at PrevArti Ltd of two Renaissance paintings by Antonio de Saliba from a private collection.
- 2021 – present: researching and overseeing the conservation and restoration plans for a private property in Mdina which has within the structure remains of the Church of the Saviour, which was 15th-century Malta's second most important church.
- 2022 – Judge of the first edition of Malta's Premju Fotografija.

- 2018: Member of Jury Panel at the Malta Architecture and Spatial Planning Awards (MASP) for the 'Urban Design Category', organised by the Malta Planning Authority.
- November 2016: Academic Oration at the Postgraduate ceremony held in Valletta.
- Executive committee: Malta Historical Society 2009–2011, 2011–2013.
- Successfully completed a Continuous Professional Development course at the University of Malta held between September 2017 and June 2018.
- November 2023: Assisting the Embassy of Malta in Italy as Artistic Consultant for the 'Willie Apap, a Maltese artist in Rome' exhibition held at Palazzo Valentini, Rome, enabled by the Culture Diplomacy Fund of the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade.
- October and November 2021: curator of the exhibition 'Art Metaphor' with artworks by Anna Galea and Azza al Qubaisi held in Abu Dhabi and Dubai for the Maltese Embassy in the UAE.
- Curator of monthly exhibitions at The Phoenicia, Malta, from January 2022 to present.
- Resident art critic, Sunday Times of Malta, 2008–2018.
- Contributor to Times of Malta.
- Secretary of the Voluntary Organisation Association of St Mary of Jesus, Franciscan Minors, Rabat, Malta, since January 2021.
- Planning and curating an exhibition on the life and art of late artist Alfred Chircop at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta, between September and November 2024.
- Planning and curating an exhibition on the work of international photographer Lorenzo Agius at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta, between September and November 2025.

June 2024