The project proposes that City Lights hosts a programme of artistic events leading up to, and including 2018, to define and help develop the site as a cultural hub and contemporary arts space. A series of exhibitions is proposed, using the empty shops as gallery space and the cinema for screening and performance in the lead up to 2018. It is proposed that in 2018, a group of international artists will be invited to take up a short residency in the space to develop work in-situ in relation to the City Lights site and the surrounding area. Each artist will have an empty shop space to work with.

Dr. John Schofield is collaborating in the project, to develop a pop-up social museum, where members of the public will be invited to share their memorabilia (photographs, posters, letters, items) that tell the history of the City Lights and Strait Street sites. The University of York and Central Saint Martins (CSM) will work together to share methodologies of social mapping across the disciplines of social archaeology and fine art practices. Other significant critical links and approaches are Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project, critical discourses relating to memory, history, forgetting (Ricoeur), the dérive (Debord), film history, social history, previous research by Emma Talbot with the Freud Museum on intimacy and previous research by Mick Finch on Aby Warburg’s technical apparatus. Issues of archival discourses, social archaeology, contemporary fine art practices and site specificity will be addressed through the residency followed by an exhibition of works made on site and a programme of events and talks. The aim is that these events will take place as part of the V18 programme. An Erasmus component to the project is also envisaged.

The former City Lights cinema is a unique site in Malta’s capital, Valletta. The site is an historic place of image production and its close proximity, in St. John Street, to Strait Street brings it into a fascinating and significant part of Malta’s cultural heritage. The present owner is Anton Baldacchino whose family have occupied the property since May 1976, continuing the family tradition of cinematographers after his grandfather Walter Baldacchino who was the proprietor of a number of cinemas including ABC ex Comet in 1963, Capitol (the present City lights) Radio City in 1958, the Odeon in 1952 and the Manoel Theatre for five years starting in 1956. When the house was passed on to the next generation City lights was established in 1977 on the first floor. The garden and lower floors, were developed as a shopping arcade in 1980. The ensemble of the arcade and the cinema became known as City Lights. The cinema, was until 2005, functioning using 1930s Kalee 35mm projectors. It became an adult/erotic cinema and an important site within the larger Strait Street heterotopia. Strait Street is highly significant in Malta’s history serving the British and US fleets who were based there, the British since circa 1800. The British military left Malta in 1979 and this marked a beginning of a marked decline in Strait Street’s function and fortune. City Lights today has the shopping arcade and the cinema in tact. The arcade has fallen into disuse and is now unoccupied but the shop units have facades that date from different eras. The site literally brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s Arcades project. CSM alumna Selina Sciri is the director of the exhibition space and will coordinate the City Lights aspect of the project in partnership with Anton Baldacchino.