

Emvin Cremona—100 years from his birth.

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This year we are commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Emvin Cremona, one of the most prolific Maltese artists of the 20th century. And having an important sample of his artwork in our Stations of the Cross in our new church, I thought you would appreciate this brief article about his life and works. He was born on May 27, 1919, the son of Joseph and Maria Assunta Mizzi. He grew up in Valletta until his family moved to Hamrun. His artistic journey started at the School of Art, finding himself in a class that included Victor Diacono, Anton Inglott, Esprit Barthe, Willie Apap, and Carmelo Borg Pisani.

Emvin married Lilian Gatt on December 26, 1948, at St. Gregory's church in Sliema. They had 4 children, Marco, Anna, Sylvana, and Nadia. Like most of his fellow artists-friends, Emvin ended up in Rome for a course of studies at the Regia Accademia di Belle Arti under Carlo Siviero between 1938 and 1940. He reached Malta with his close friend Anton Inglott just before the war started. In 1945 Emvin was able to proceed to London and Paris to deepen his studies in art. Between 1945 and 1947 he attended classes at the Slade School of Fine Arts and later he attended lessons at the Parisian Ecole Superieur de Beaux Arts under professor Jean Dupas. Emvin returned to Malta in 1948. In 1945 his friend Inglott died suddenly and Cremona was asked to finish the ceiling of the church of St Joseph in Msida, as they had similar styles, and Inglott had just finished the hauntingly-beautiful "Death of St Joseph" in the apse. He continued working at Zebbug, Gozo, and in the 1950s and 1960s, he did the ceiling of the Msida and Għaxaq churches, and later on the Floriana and Hamrun parish churches. Other churches where he left various paintings are: Burmarrad, Balzan, Senglea, St Augustine and St Paul's in Valletta, and smaller churches like St Francis in Birkirkara, Annunciation in Vittoriosa, Our Lady of Lourdes, Paola, besides works at the Malta International Airport, the Emigrants Commission headquarters, the Catholic Institute, at Farsons and even at the United Nations. Emvin Cremona was responsible for 62 sets of stamps, comprising more than 170 different original designs, besides various First-Day cover designs. He started in 1957 and ended his marathon of stamp designs in 1980, leaving a heritage that is easily described as 'Malta's golden age of philately.' One of his earliest impressive sets was the one he designed for the centennial of the shipwreck of St Paul in 1960. The Catholic Institute also has a series of panels he made for the main stage of the same centennial.

The Hamrun parish church is a veritable masterpiece, which is a testament of his artistic legacy. It is obvious that Emvin truly enjoyed working here, creating an extraordinary array of designs, motifs and used a colorful palette that will be cherished for decades to come. Besides the majestic apse that dominates the sanctuary, the entire dome is just as impressive with a purple-pinkish hue that takes you up to heaven, visiting various scenes from Saint Cajetan's life. The ceiling of the main aisle is dominated by the 12 apostles, all painted with a similar background that is seen behind Christ the *Pantocrator* in the apse, adored by St Cajetan, the Blessed Mother, and St Joseph, with the Holy Spirit and a hint of God the Father above. The *Pantocrator* suggest Christ as a mild but stern, all-powerful judge of humanity. Christ sits on a throne with an open book that reads '*Ego Sum Lux Mundi*' (I am the light of the world.) One has to admire also the myriad of angels spread around the entire church ceiling in triangular segments, occupying every square inch, with some of them barely visible but conspicuous nonetheless. Most of them are carrying a flower or plant, including a few of them playing or holding musical instruments. There are also 4 Popes or Bishops above the choir loft, and interspersed among all the paintings are intricate designs and geometric patterns that bring the entire ceiling together as one whole ingenious work of art. Most of them are also highlighted in gold-leaf that make the entire ceiling a truly celestial gift.

Emvin Cremona also designed 2 statues which were then crafted by the Ortisei company in Italy, specifically the Immaculate Conception at Ibrag parish, and the St. Joseph the Worker statue at his parish church in Birkirkara. He also designed various wrought-iron designs (*ferro-battuto*.) These can be found at Saint Joseph's Retreat House in Taga Gap, at the British Hotel in Valletta and the front door of the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Paceville. All these works were crafted by Salvu Borg of Naxxar. He also designed a large wrought-iron image of Saint Paul for the centennial celebrations, which is in the Catholic Institute. He also made many pen and ink drawings, most of which are in private collections. The volume of work Emvin Cremona produced was truly incredible, and many of the local parish churches can claim a piece of his artwork, and apart from the 4 major parish churches mentioned earlier, other smaller churches and chapels are happy and proud to own a painting or two of his. He suffered a stroke which left him incapable of painting anymore, although he did try to use his left hand to paint 4 simple paintings for each of his 4 children. Emvin Cremona died on January 29, 1987. Let us honor him this year, 100 years from his birth.