

Works of art by Ġanni Bonnici in philately

by

Alfred Caruana Ruggier

The Anzac Memorial at the Argotti Botanical Gardens in Floriana, designed by the Maltese sculptor Ġanni Bonnici, features on an Australia Post prepaid postal stationery envelope designed by Sharon Rodziewicz from the Australia Post Studios. It depicts photography of the memorial by Renee Figallo, one showing the complete work while a detail of the bronze figures can be admired on the imprinted postage stamp itself. This franking covers postage to any destination within Australia. A faint overall background image of the former Cottonera Hospital across the cover was provided by Saint Edward's College, Malta.



The rear side of the envelope mentions the inauguration of the memorial on 25th May 2013 and acknowledges Bonnici's work as expressing human pathos during the Gallipoli Campaign in the First World War. At the time thousands of wounded Australian and New Zealand personnel were evacuated to Malta for treatment and convalescence. Many died from their injuries with a good number of bodies being repatriated to their home countries. More than two hundred and seventy soldiers were however buried in Malta.

A full colour photograph of Bonnici's memorial is reproduced as a full page illustration in the prestigious book commemorating the Anzac Centenary 1915-2015 "Malta and the Anzacs – The Nurse of the Mediterranean" by Frank L. Scicluna O.A.M., Honorary Consul for Malta in South Australia.

Credit due to Ġanni Bonnici for his original design is duly given in this book

which provides full information on Anzac Centenary Commemorations through text and images.

Bonnici's design for the memorial was chosen from among six entries in a competition specifically held for its erection. It expresses human suffering without images recalling war or weapons. It is a heroic symbol of those who defended and gave their lives for their countries. This is achieved by a male and female figure in bronze, whose open arms and palms express a pleading struggle for survival and evoke the spirit of glory on attaining victory. The sculptor's use of the arms forming a triangle, the virile marble central pillar emerging behind the three shorter columns of different height all contribute towards an abstract approach to sculpture. All three rest on a three-stepped circular base which bears the names of the Anzac soldiers buried in Malta.

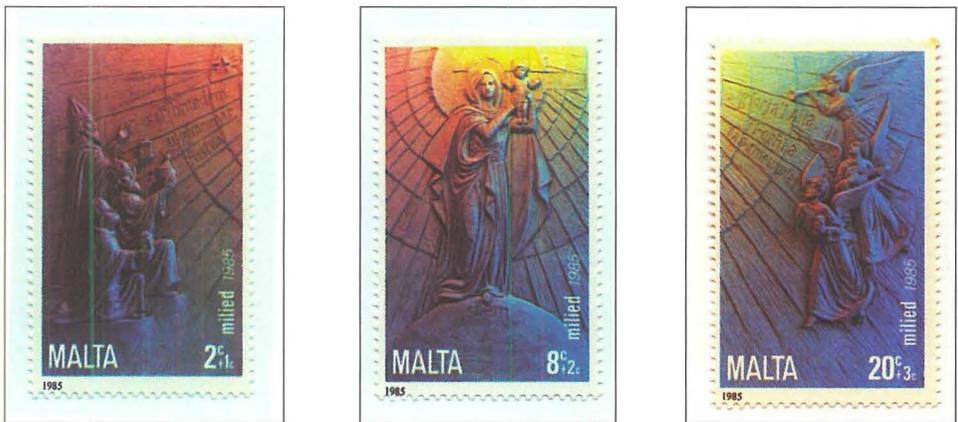


Figure 1



Figure 2

Philatelists know quite well that Bonnici's works have featured on stamps of Malta since 1985. That year the artist's relief ceramic sculpture of the Three Wise Men, the Madonna with baby Jesus and Heralding Angels was the basis used for the three Christmas stamps set.

In 1986 the 8c+2c stamp was voted First in the International Vote-A-Stamp Referendum and Contest while the 2c+1c stamp was voted Third. (Figure 1)

Very few philatelists know, however, that Ġanni Bonnici's 1985 Christmas 2c + 1c stamp showing "The Three Wise Men" was reproduced in 23 carat gold foil (Figure 2) with gummed backing as a legitimate British private local stamp by the owner of Staffa, an island off the coast of Scotland that had no official postal service. They were permissible under British law and used in payment for the service of private delivery from Staffa up to the official Post Office on the island of Mull. They were produced by the London and New York Stamp Company Limited and offered for sale to Cinderella Stamp Collectors through the Calhoun Collector's Society.

Bonnici's bronze Independence Monument in Floriana is shown on the highest value of the 1991 definitive set, the LM2, from paintings by Frank Portelli. (Figure 3)

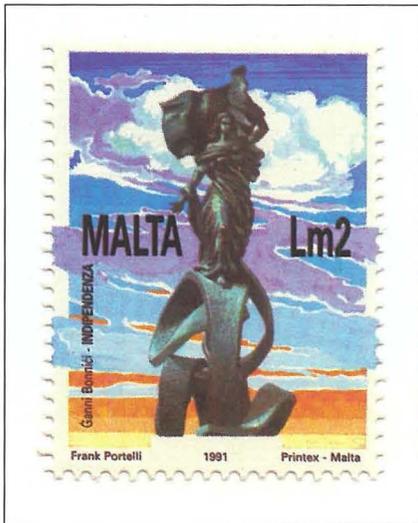


Figure 3



Figure 4

One of his ceramic figures was chosen to represent a contemporary art work and can be seen reproduced, from a photograph by his son Hermann, on the highest value of the 2006 "Ceramics in Maltese Collections" stamp set designed by Alfred Caruana Ruggier. (Figure 4)