

An address delivered by Dr. J.H. Mercieca at the monthly meeting of the Malta Philatelic Society, on the 2nd March 1987, on the occasion of a commemorative evening dedicated to the memory of the late Prof. Emvin Cremona.

We have met here this evening to honour the memory of the late Chev. Emvin Cremona, an artist of outstanding ability, and no doubt, one of Europe's most talented stamp designers, who passed away just over a month ago.

He was born in Valletta on the 27th May 1919 and at an early age his artistic tendencies became evident. Already at sixteen years of age he held his first public exhibition, when in 1935 some of his works were included in the Malta Art Association Exhibition. In 1938 he was admitted to the Regia Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome and during his stay in the Eternal City he exhibited at the "Mostra Prelitoriale" where his works were favourably commented upon by well-known critics and the Ministro dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni acquired one of his exhibited works. On his return to Malta he held a one-man Exhibition at the "Ellis Studio" presenting thirty oil paintings, four water colours and six pen and ink drawings, most of which, had been executed during his stay in Rome.

In 1941 Chev. Cremona was conscripted, and joined the K.O.M.R. reaching the rank of intelligence sergeant. Between 1943 and 1945 he participated in several art exhibitions and his works already then attracted the sharp eye of the critics and the connoisseurs as well as the admiration of the public.

In 1945 he was awarded the "Mrs. Schembri Bequest", a scholarship for two years at the famous Slade School College of the University of London under Professor Randolph Schwabe and in 1947, he was admitted to the famous "L'Ecole Superieure des Beaux Arts" in Paris. The experience he gained during these years he spent abroad, sealed his passport to fame. By this time he had established and perfected his style, best described as "symbolic impressionism". On his return from abroad he became a teacher of painting at the Government School of Art, a post he resigned in 1959.

The real scope of this evening's commemoration of Emvin Cremona is principally, not to say exclusively, from the angle of Philately and stamp designing and may I venture to say that Philately in general and Maltese Philately in particular, owe him a great deal indeed, for, by his highly artistic, colourful and original stamp designs, he succeeded in giving a decided boost to maltese philately and also in attracting quite an appreciable number of followers to the ranks of this universal and popular hobby.

Thus, the decision of my Society, to commemorate, this evening, this very well-known and much admired figure in the world of art, was definitely most fit and proper, and with his demise our country has not only lost an artist of very high calibre and repute but also a most worthy and respected citizen, who, by his genius has succeeded in spreading throughout the world not only his name but also that of our dear homeland, Malta.

Chev. Cremona excelled in all branches of the art of painting, attaining great heights by his artistic achievements, not only in church decorations, stage scenes, book covers and interior decor, but just as much, in the designing and painting of trade fair stands, exhibition booths and other forms of Art, all of which he treated with devotion and zeal.

I do feel, however, and this in my opinion is shared by a number of well-known connoisseurs, that of all his artistic activities, stamp designing stands out supreme and he was, as a matter of fact, acclaimed as one of Europe's most talented stamp designers, whose designs reflected his deep sense of patriotism.

The propaganda value of the postage-stamp, which travels throughout the world, affixed to letters and other postal articles, is incalculable and we find that the name and fame of Emvin Cremona gathered momentum with the issue of a number of his sets, which followed one another in relatively quick succession, finding their way to the remotest parts of the globe.

It is thus with valid reason that the 23 year period of stamp-designing by Cremona is looked upon as the "golden era" in the history of Maltese philately.

The first set of stamps designed by Emvin Cremona for the Malta Post Administration, was the first George Cross set of three stamps issued in 1957 and between then and January 1980, when, for the last time, he designed the fourth and last Tapestry set, he was responsible for the designing of no less than 62 sets of stamps, comprising more than one hundred and seventy different original designs.

Chev. Cremona's designs covered a wide range of subjects, including historical events, such as the Great Siege and the Foundation of Valletta commemorations, renowned maltese and foreign personalities such as Maltese Celebrities and Churchill, purely abstract forms such as the Trade Fair set of 1966 as also the Christmas sets issued between 1964 and 1979.

The highlights, amongst this large number of stamps designed by him, were the 1960 set of six stamps, commemorating the 19th Centenary of the Shipwreck of St. Paul, in the designing of which his efforts were considered unique in their grandeur, elegance, originality of concept and mystical effluence; the 1964 set of six stamps, issued to commemorate the grant of Independence to Malta, comprising three different designs, which in their simplicity and symbolism were worthy of the important historic event they were meant to pay homage to, and the set of seven stamps issued in 1965 to commemorate the IVth Centenary of the Great Siege of 1565, in which Cremona depicted episodes of this notable historic event as seen by him in his fertile and creative imagination.

Yet still more worthy of special mention, and which I personally consider as his masterpiece, was the truly elegant and colourful set of 19 stamps issued in 1965, which was the first definitive set since Malta had attained its independence. the designs for this set synthesised four milleniums of Maltese history and Chev. Cremona had at his disposal the wealth of art and culture corresponding to the different periods in the long and glorious history of the Maltese nation. From the many original sketches and drafts emerged a most colourful and original definitive set, much admired throughout the philatelic world and rightly acclaimed by an american philatelic publication as the nicest and most artistic set of definitive stamps, so far ever issued in the world.

The designs for this set were also exhibited at the Crown Agents' stand at the Stanley Gibbons Catalogue Centenary Exhibition, held in London's Festival Hall, between the 17th and 20th February 1965.

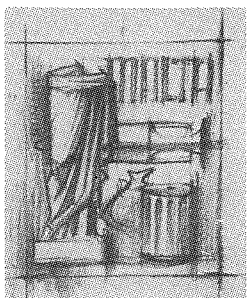
When, at the beginning of the seventies, Cremona was entrusted with the designing of the 15 value definitive set, which was eventually issued in 1973, portraying aspects of industry, culture, folklore and tourism, homogeneously integrated, though the designs were also of a very high standard, he confessed to

me that he had found it impossible to beat the high artistic levels he had reached in the designing of that first definitive set of 1965.

It is impossible to discuss each and every design of the stamps that bear his imprint. Each is a masterpiece by itself, and over the years, Cremona's stamps have reached a stage when the name of his nation "MALTA" could easily be removed from the stamp layout and it would yet still be recognised as a Malta stamp.

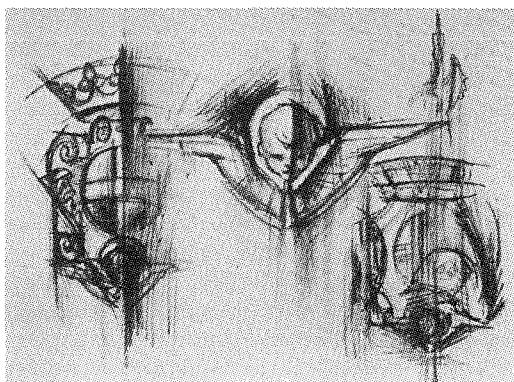
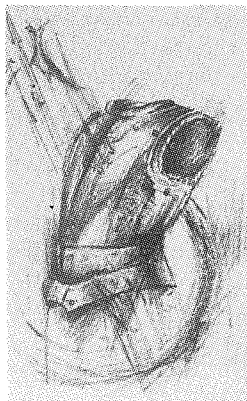
Having cursorily dwelt on Chev. Cremona's special aptitude and outstanding mastery, as one of Europe's most renowned and gifted stamp designers I feel that I have to mention a few of my personal impressions of him, resulting from the seventeen years long regular contact I had with him as a Member of the Stamp Design Advisory Board and also privately.

Malta, 1965 ISSUE



"The Romans"— preliminary study for the 1½d. stamp

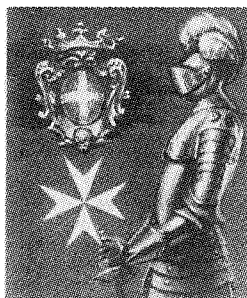
Below—A study of a breastplate from the Armoury at the Palace, Valletta, used for the 4d. value



Above—Background detail for the 4d. stamp

Below left—Preliminary design for the 4d. Knights of Malta stamp; later the composition was completely changed

Below right—The final design used for the 4d.



I first met Emvin Cremona, back in 1957, when I was appointed a Member of the Stamp Design Advisory Board, at the Post Office, and during the seventeen successive years I served on this Board, I had ample opportunity to come to know Emvin from very near and to admire and appreciate his truly outstanding artistic gifts and special aptitude, so essential in the delicate art of stamp-designing.

Over and above his artistic talents, Emvin Cremona, who was a truly perfect gentleman, with a kind and noble heart, was endowed with many fine qualities, outstanding amongst which was an innate pride for his profession, so glaringly evident in him, especially when submitting his artworks at Board Meetings, his great love for his family, his sense of genuine friendship and most evident of all, his remarkably great humility. Besides, the gentleness in his ways and manners and his natural sense of humour were most notable and very favourably remarked upon by all those who, at one time or another, came in contact with him.

Though a complete master of his art, he never minded constructive criticism of his submitted artworks at Board Meetings if he felt convinced that this would enhance the end result. On the other hand in cases where he disagreed with a suggestion, he had a special knack of discarding it, without in any way being discourteous to the person making it.

Apart from his mastery in stamp designing, which he raised to a miniature art form, making art of stamps, Chev. Cremona, as alluded to earlier, made a name for himself and for his country, in all the different branches of painting and his monumental works which lavishly adorn many of our churches and other buildings and establishments, will perpetuate his memory for centuries yet to come, and will for ever stand as a living testimony of his outstanding talents and capabilities with which God had endowed him, and which he also put to good use in adorning and embellishing many of His temples, to His greater glory.

The Philatelic Society of Malta is indeed very grateful to Emvin Cremona, for so exquisitely and artistically designing for over 20 years, the stamps of Malta, thus showering lustre and prestige on them, as amply attested by the hundreds of tributes, received from time to time from connoisseurs in many parts of the world.

However my Society is yet still more grateful and thankful to Chev. Emvin Cremona for the simple yet attractive and symbolic design he had prepared for the cover of its PSM Magazine, which has been in regular use since the issue of its second number, twenty years ago and which will always remind us of him.

Not being endowed with an artistic vein I may have failed to do full justice to the memory and personality of this uncommon genius in the world of Art, as I would have certainly loved to do, in this short appreciation of mine, this evening. Yet my consolation is, that at least I now have the inward satisfaction to have been, as far as I know, the first to publicly render homage to his memory, soon after he has been taken from our midst and do sincerely trust that others, who may also have been lucky in having come in contact with him, in other branches of the fine Art of Painting, will also come forward to extol and make known Cremona's magnificent and copious contribution to the world of Art and thus keep always alive his name and fame.