

## Avid art lover and internee finally gets due recognition



The newly-opened Vincenzo Bonello Art Library at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Valletta.  
Photo: Chris Sant Fournier.

Almost 70 years have passed but Anne Xuereb can still clearly conjure up the image of her father, handcuffed and being escorted down the stairs by two policemen. "I remember my sister, brother and myself were crying downstairs as he was taken away," she said.

Vincenzo Bonello was one of 43 Maltese interned without a trial by the British and sent to concentration camps in Uganda.

Mr Bonello, who founded the fine arts section within the Museums Department, which later became the National Museum of Fine Arts, spent five years in prisons in Malta and Uganda.

"He suffered from malaria attacks for years after he came back," Mrs Xuereb recalled, adding that her father had lost his job and struggled to raise three children, including Judge Giovanni Bonello, who sits in the European Court of Human of Rights.

The deportees, who included former Nationalist Party leader Nerik Mizzi, were interned in May 1940, shortly before Italy entered the war, because it was claimed that they posed a threat to public safety and national security.

"He suffered a lot," Mrs Xuereb said, adding that he had to keep working until his death in 1969, at the age of 76, because he was not given a pension. However, he never said an unkind word about the British or the Maltese involved in his internment, Mrs Xuereb's husband, Joseph, said.

Her father yesterday finally received recognition when a library named after him was opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Valletta, funded by HSBC as part of €100,000 donated to the museum over the past four years.

"The recognition he was not given in his life is being given to him in his death," a very emotional Mrs Xuereb said.

She recalled her father constantly reading art books: "Whenever we were sick, he used to bring us art books to read rather than comics."

The Vincenzo Bonello Art Library will hold the online public access catalogue and a collection of exhibition leaflets and brochures, journals and inventory cards.

## Comments

Alexander Morana (3 days, 4 hours ago)

And we wonder why the arts in Malta had been neglected for such a long time, even after Independence?

Ad in Memoriam Vincenzo.

Conrad Thake (3 days, 5 hours ago)

Finally a fitting tribute to Dr Vincenzo Bonello ---- a true pioneer in the appreciation and study of art history. It should prove to be an invaluable resource to all art history students, academics and all those interested in the visual arts. We should also spare a thought for later artistic curators/academics such as Mons. Coleiro, Dr Edward Sammut, Adrian Bartolo, Dennis Vella, who all in their own ways contributed to the local art scene.

Jesmond Micallef (3 days, 7 hours ago)

Indeed.

That is a story too.

With my respect.