



ROOTS

Dedicated to  
my beloved  
family  
and to one of  
my masters  
the late  
Anton Agius

Sculptures by Mario Agius  
Palazzo Ferreria  
310, Republic Street, Valletta

Public viewing  
29th March - 30th April 2012  
Office Hours 8.30 - 17.00

# Mario Agius - A New Approach

*"Wakening from the dreaming forest there, the hazel-sprig sang under my tongue, its drifting fragrance climbed up through my conscious mind as if suddenly the roots I had left behind cried out to me, the land I had lost with my childhood - and I stopped, wounded by the wandering scent."* Pablo Neruda

**Mario Agius** (b.1956) has manifested a fond inclination to sculpture and design from his early years. He began his artistic studies under the late Mons. Michelangelo Apap (1915-2006) and furthered his studies in wood sculpture under the famous Maltese artist the late Anton Agius (1933-2008). Juginder Lamba, a sculptor of international repute described Mario's works as if they *"oozed with humanity and the human condition in a truly universal sense"*.

The artist has a number of sculptures in private collections both locally and abroad including in London and Switzerland. His finest wood sculptures adorn churches all around the Maltese islands. In 1989 he followed a course of studies in sculpture in the UK at the White Knight Gallery under the tuition of international artist Ian Norbury.

Presently Agius teaches technology and design in wood at Ninu Cremona Lyceum Complex, Victoria Gozo. Mario has been actively taking part in various collective exhibitions including those organised by the Members of the British Woodcarvers Association. In July 2009, Mario exhibited his sculptures at the 'Marzi Art International Galerie' in Hamburg, Germany.

In 2010, *Ballerina*, a sculpture in olive wood, was awarded the silver medal in the 10th Salon International Exhibition organised by Groupemant Artistique Nantes Facade Atlantique (GANFA) in Nantes, France. In 2011, another two sculptures, *Kommunità* and *Il-Hajja*, were shortlisted by the Arti fit-Toroq Competition organised by the Ministry for Gozo. Subsequently Mario was commissioned to sculpt a life size monument in wood of *"Kommunità"*.

**Roots** is an exhibition of quality rather than quantity, in which the artist is showing sixteen of his latest works, in stone, wood and marble. The title of the exhibition is synonymous with Mario who believes that natural materials do not die but remain abandoned until their time to reborn arrives. Mario looks deeply in the

subject matter and explores every detail until he discovers what the particular material is withholding from the naked eyes, and with great love, effort and determination he sculpts his way through until he composes a work of art of infinite beauty.

Agius has since his first personal exhibition in June 2008 which was entitled *Nature Exalted*, changed his style. Instead of highly finishing the sculputres, like in the case of *Approaching* and *Nativitas*, he is now rendering his work more natural by leaving the strokes of the chisel visible. The same can be said for the stone work where his idea is that there should not be any distinction in the state of the stone before and after his intervention. This new approach has also been noted by my friend Prof. Joseph Paul Cassar who said as follows: *"The carving of the Christ you sent me by Mario shows technical competence and promising ideas. I encourage him to keep working since there is a high probability that a genuine original stylistic trend will develop"*.

A very modern approach is easily visible in the exhibit *Venere di Ogigia*, which is very provocative in its natural beauty. The same can be said for the work entitled *Birth of Love* where Agius once again followed the shape and structure of the wood, enhancing the figure and adding the living presence in a red ball. An impressive work of art that can be described as a musical interlude between nature and the artist.

To date Mario Agius has held four personal exhibitions; another one jointly with Italian artist Gino Marsili at the St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, Valletta; and also participated in nineteen collective exhibitions. His work has also been featured in the *Marziart Artists Calendar 2012*, apart from local magazines *Let's Gozo* and *Muzajk* and on local TV stations.

Mario is married to Maria nee' Sultana and has three children: Victor, Graziella and Charlene. He has recently become grandfather to Nina.



## **Collective Exhibitions**

- 'Arti fit-Toroq - Monument Competition' organized by Ministry for Gozo. The sculpture 'Kommunità' and 'Il-Hajja' were shortlisted and subsequently Mario Agius was commissioned to sculpt in wood the lifesize monument 'Kommunità', 2011-2012.
- "Sacred Art Biennale 2011" organized by JP2 Foundation, Cittadel Victoria Gozo, May 2011
- "Eros & Kenosis" – Collective Art Exhibition organised by the ADG group and curated by Mr E.V. Borg at St Julian's Hotel, Malta, June 2011
- "10th Salon International Exhibition organised by Groupemant Artistique Nantes Facade Atlantique" (GANFA) in Nantes, France, the artist was awarded a silver medal, 2010
- "Ferrario Art Competition" organized by Art Academy Gallery. The artist was awarded 1st Prize, November 2010
- "Unity in Diversity" - Collective Art Exhibition curated by Mr E.V. Borg in De La Salle Palace, Valletta 5th May 2010
- "Gozitan Art Exhibition", San Anton Palace, Attard under the patronage of His Excellency George Abela, President of Malta, October 2009
- "The Gozo Fine Art & Sculpture Exhibition", 2009
- Marzi Art International Gallery, Hamburg, Germany, August 2009
- "Rotary Art Exhibition" Cittadella Centre for the Arts, Victoria, September 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011
- "Ir-Rotta ta' l-Arti", Pieta, September 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011
- The Sense of Touch, a joint exhibition with Girio Marsili to mark the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, organized by St. James Cavalier - Centre for Creative, Valletta, August 2008
- "Notte Bianca", Valletta, October 2006, 2007
- "Collective Art Exhibition", Victory Band Club, Xaghra, April 2007
- "Santa Marija u l-Katidral t'Ghawdex", Ministry for Gozo, May 2006
- "Eden Foundation", Victoria, Gozo 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011
- "Gozitan Art Exhibition", Visby, Gotland, Sweden, 2001
- "Ggantija Art Festival", Xaghra, July 1999
- Contributed in the sculpting of sculptures which were put in an installation by Budingen, H, photographed and published in a book entitled: Budingen, Hans et. al (1995) in Gozo
- "Prelude to Summer", Hotel ta' Cenc, July 1994
- "Wildlife in Danger", London, 1992
- Exhibition for the opening of the School of Arts, Gozo, 1991
- Exhibition at the Exhibition Halls of the Parliamentary Secreteriate for Gozo, 1989

## **Personal Exhibitions**

- Natura - recent sculptures in Palazzo Castellania Valletta curated by Mr E.V. Borg, September 2010
- Love In Diversity' art.e Gallery, Victoria Gozo, February 2009
- Nature Exalted – Banca Giuratale, Victoria, June 2008

# ROOTS

Taken figuratively, “roots” could mean *“the fundamental part, or that which supplies origin, sustenance, means of development...”* Through its primordial matter and forms, Nature once again provides the impetus to Mario Agius. Infact, Mario's art generally focuses on specifics of form. His investigative and exploratory instinct drives him to discover forms and life in rejected and discarded material, be it the tangled roots of a tree, an unusual cut-off branch, driftwood, an interesting log, or else a weathered stone honeycombed by erosion.

Very often it is the natural or incidental shape of the material itself which sets the mood, triggers the imagination and determines the final artistic product. Mario Agius is at his very best and displays strains of creativity when he approaches his material with the utmost respect. He is apt to leave an impact when he presents himself as a minimalist, when he sculpts with a certain economy, thus interfering as little as possible with the original shape of the material. In this way, solidity and massiveness as well as varied, interesting and contrasting textures are also authomatically stressed.

At times his sculptures may seem disconcertingly archaic, crude and “unfinished”. But in their very primitive appearance lie their arresting qualities and intrinsic beauty. Their simplicity of concept and form – at times coupled with a certain naïveté – is reminiscent of primitive and popular ethnic art. And as such, Mario's sculptures display modern and contemporary characteristics. The pieces entitled **Sheltering**, **Metamorfofi del Ciclope**, **Entwined** and **The Beauty of Calypso** are typical examples.

Attempts at a certain sporadic naturalism could be a threat to inventiveness and peculiarity of style, besides resulting in possible anatomical distortions or misproportions. A case in point is **Porta Salvezza** – irrespective of its combined symbolic or evocative elements. Once again I stress my belief that Mario Agius

displays acceptable and forceful strains of creativity when he shuns away from naturalistic traits, when he steers clear of attempts at superfluous detail. Attesting examples from the current exhibition are

**Venere di Ogygia**, **Metamorfofi del Ciclope**,

**Birth of Love**, and **Il Ritorno**. The last-mentioned sculpture is an exceptional piece. It is a compact, yet well-organised composition with an overall rhythmic coherence and spacial relationships. **Venere di Ogygia** and **Birth of Love** are abstract compositions, stylistically arresting and definitely open to interpretation.

Mario Agius attains a certain technical excellence when he exploits natural features in his materia prima. Wood knots, natural stains, different grains, bark, abrasions and perforations are turned to advantage.

The current exhibits show that notwithstanding a certain conscious or unconscious eclecticism, Mario Agius is striving at stylistic distinctiveness. His expressionist art mirrors the sculptor and his philosophy: the quiet, humble man who interacts intimately with natural material and transforms it into a vehicle of unpretentious self-expression. For Mario, meaning and the very roots of his art lie within the material itself. This brings to mind Constantin Brancusi's creed. The Romanian artist expressed his belief that *“it is not the outward form that is real but the essence of things...It is impossible to express anything real by imitating the outer surface of things.”*



Joe Camilleri  
Victoria, Gozo



Masinissa, Globigerina Limestone, 44 x 26 x 25 cm



Metamorfosi del Ciclope, Carob tree, 46 x 25 x 40 cm



Venere Di Ogygia, Olive wood, 40 x 16 x 16 cm



Numidia, Globigerina Limestone, 26 x 46 x 30 cm



The Beauty of Calypso, Marble, 50 x 15 x 13 cm



L'Occhiolino del Tritone, Olive wood, 85 x 25 x 48 cm



Zeus, Lower Coralline Limestone, 50 x 28 x 25 cm



Il Ritorno, Olive wood, 35 x 30 x 12 cm



Birth of Love, Carob tree, 25 x 95 x 36 cm



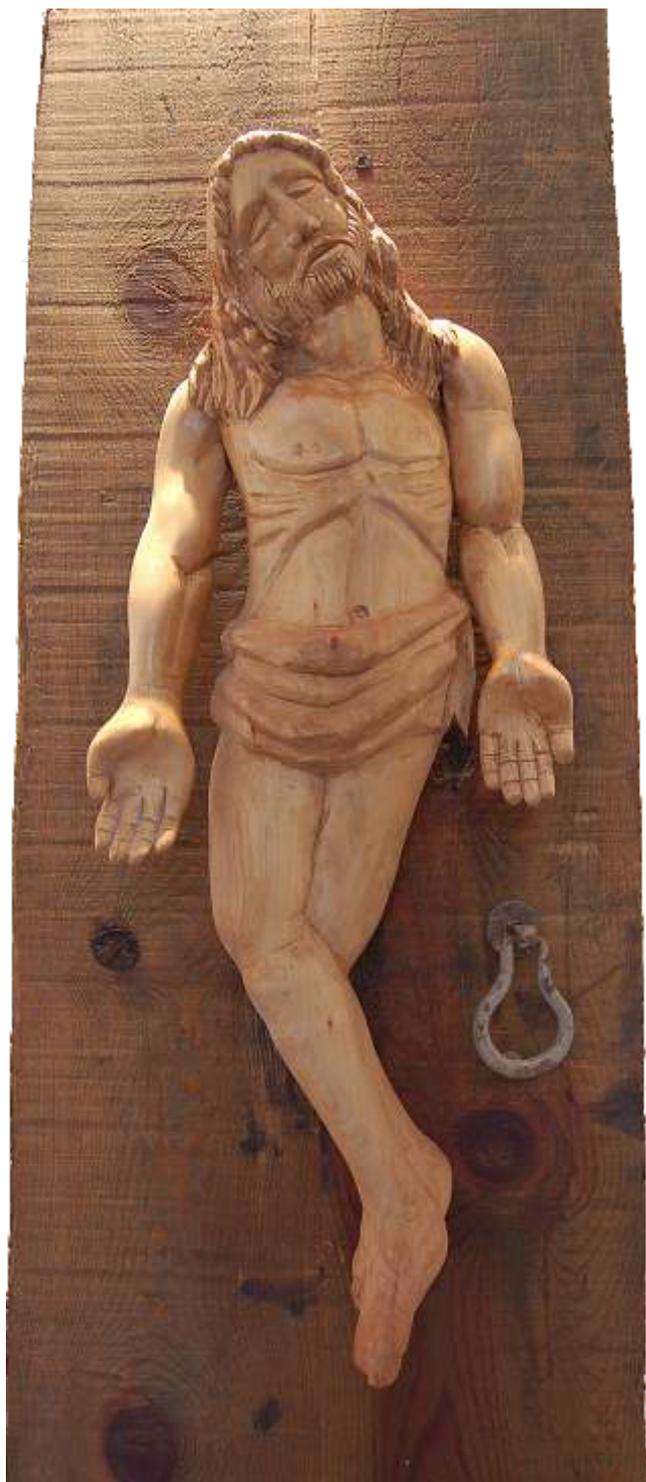
Sheltering, Olive wood, 60 x 30 x 30 cm



Struggle for Survival, Lime wood, 60 x 18 x 18 cm



Porta Salvezza, Lime wood, 90 x 36 x 18 cm



Porta Salvezza, (detail) Lime wood, 90 x 36 x 18 cm



Sudden Arrest, Olive Wood, 40 x 16 x 16 cm



Vanity, Lime wood, 40 x 16 x 16 cm



Entwined, Olive wood, 76 x 25 x 25 cm



The Artist working on  
"Il-Kommunità",  
a public sculpture commissioned  
by the Ministry for Gozo, Eco Gozo  
(January 2012)



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My Family

### Studio

Ġgantija Art Gallery  
John Otto Bayer Street,  
Xaghra Gozo  
Malta

Mobile: 9947 2831

Tel: 2155 2830

Website: [www.marioagius.com](http://www.marioagius.com)

Email: [agiusmario@gmail.com](mailto:agiusmario@gmail.com)

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