

Precious Calì works under attack

David Schembri



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli.

It is a struggle against time and the elements for a set of Giuseppe Calì frescoes at the Porto Salvo and St Dominic parish church in Valletta.

Calì's oil on stone works painted in the 1890s have been considerably damaged by water seeping in through the walls and the ceiling, and conservation works are poised to start.

Salts carried by the water have seeped through the stone and, when the water evaporated, the salts crystallised between the paint layer and the masonry. This created pressure and consequently caused the paint to flake off.

Conservator Fr Charles Vella warned: "If water is going to keep on coming in, more damage is going to be done. Time is the main problem, and as time goes by we can go back to the church in a month's time and find another five pieces missing."

Pierre Bugeja, who is involved in the project, said the aim of restoration was to first try and ensure nothing was lost; following that, salts would be removed and the painting would eventually be restored to its former state - it's a complex process, he explained.

Fr Vella said it was a huge emergency which had to be addressed this year.

However, since funds are not forthcoming, the first step towards restoration, which is to repair the dome, has still not been taken.

A fund has been set up to collect money for the restoration of these precious paintings.

Fondazzjoni Porto Salvo u San Duminku secretary Alfred Grixti said they had appealed to "corporate donors with a budget for heritage to help out this parish in a poor neighbourhood".


Fr Henry Abela OP, the prior of the convent, appealed to everyone to help in any way they could, especially those who counted the parish as their spiritual home.

"So far, all the doors we've knocked on have remained closed," Mr Grixti said.

The foundation is hoping the Prime Minister's visit to the basilica today, to inaugurate the table of the Last Supper, will attract attention to this problem.

Whoever wishes to donate is encouraged to write to The Chairman, Fondazzjoni Porto Salvo u San Duminku - Valletta, Dominican Convent, St Dominic Street, Valletta VLT 1603.


Comments

Ivan Camilleri(1 week, 4 days ago) 

Watching this picture saddens me in no small measure....

As a regular mass attendant in this Basilica, such scenes have been present for a good number of years now. Years have passed without nothing happening, & i'm afraid that unless an urgent approach materializes, more irreparable damage will develop.


As Mr.Williams very well pointed out, other churches have had the benefit of EU funds so i shall make an appeal to those involved to push further towards this direction. To my knowledge all necessary studies have been carried out so once all funds are acquired, the relevant works can start right away.

D. Zammit(1 week, 4 days ago) 


It is really a pity that these works of art are in the risk of being lost.


It is also a pity that many times, the persons in charge of these works of arts do nothing for many years and then they wake up when its too late. Many churches are left to deteriorate and funds are not collected to maintain the building in a proper manner with the consequence that precious works or arts are damaged for ever.

Had the dome and the church roof subject been attacked years ago and sponsors enlisted years ago, this problem would have been much lesser in urgency and risk.


laurence schembri(1 week, 4 days ago) 


It is a little late in the day, I pointed this out some six years ago about the frescos at the Oratorju, glad that someone did wake up at last.


Jesmond Micallef(1 week, 4 days ago) 
This is an extremely urgent situation here !!!

victor pulis(1 week, 4 days ago) 
However, since funds are not forthcoming, the first step towards restoration, which is to repair the dome, has still not been taken.


I have an idea, Why not take the opportunity to ask the Pope to donate a sum towards the restoration of these unqued works of art?

F.Williams(1 week, 4 days ago) 
What about EU funding? Other churches are benefiting from such funds, the latest church to my knowledge was the Cospicua Parish.

E. Portelli(1 week, 4 days ago) 
Hate to let this misinformation pass unnoticed.....
".....set of Giuseppe Cali frescoes" quote by Mr David Schembri. These are absolutely NOT frescoes. These are oil painting on stone works!!!
A Fresco or Buon fresco technique consists of painting in pigment mixed with heat on a thin layer of wet, fresh, lime mortar or plaster, for which the Italian word for plaster, intonaco, is used. (Wikipedia encyclopedia)


Joe Azzopardi(1 week, 4 days ago) 
The government should have a special fund to be used in such circumstances. Here we are talking of saving a major work by one of Malta's great artists. Help should also be forthcoming from VRC, the local council, heritage Malta and Mepa's planning gain fund.

These paintings must be saved!!

maquilina(1 week, 4 days ago) 
Hats off to the Dominican community - with all due respect it is Pierre Bugeja that is the fully academically qualified conservator and not Fr. Charles. Fid-dinja tar-restawr kullhadd ghandu jzomm postu u dan japplika ghall ditti ohrajn Malti in li qed jahdmu f'dan il-qasam mhux jinqdew b'kullhadd anke minn ghandu degree fl-istorja tal-arti li spicca 'conservator'
Ghall min irid jifhem - xbajtu tibilghu progetti b'nies li m'humiex conservators? isthu tippuzaw ghall affarijiet u professjonijiet li ma intomx fihom!! ISTHU u ahjar nieqaf hawn

Rev. Charles Vella(1 week ago)
Jiddispjacini nghid li inti qed tpoggini f'dan id-dawl mhux daqsek Felici! L-ewwel haga ghandek tkun taf li l-inizjattva hadtha jien , u mill -ewwel waqqaft fondazzjoni ghax jghamli min jghamli verament irrid li din l-opra tal-arti insalvaha.. It-tieni kont jien li sejjaht lil Pier Bugeja biex jigi mieghi fil-progett u allura jien mpjegajtu mieghi u jien qed nitkellem ghall progett..u it;tielet jien presenti ghandi it-tiem ta restawraturi qualifikati li jahdmu mieghi. Jien ghamilt l-istudji tieghi fir-Restawr kemm Milan kif ukoll ghadni dejjem naggorna l-istudjo tieghi Firenze Barra minn hekk ismi f'dan l-qasam huwa ga stabilit, u ix-xoghol mpjegat huwa bizzejjed, u jekk qed tkun mwegga

minhabba l-interessi tieghek ha tara aktar Pitturi ta Cali li irrestawrajthom jien u publikati fi ktieb , li qatt ma deheru qabel! It-tiem tieghi u ix-xoghol tieghi huwa bizzejjed u jekk trid tidiskretitani ghidli min int tabilhaq, u toqghodx tinheba taht isem falz! Jekk dan huwa zbal genwin, jew misinformazzjoni, tehux dan bhala offiza personali. Grazzi. Tkun mbierek

david frank bugeja(1 week, 4 days ago) 

well done for taking interest and action to safeguard our heritage.
unfortunately such precarious condition of paintings can be observed in many churches and in other public buildings. i hope that, at least, such situations would highlight the constant necessity of simple masonry maintenance and repairs - such as regular inspections of the building's condition and pointing with lime-based mortar - which would limit the infiltration of water inside buildings that can cause so much irreversible damage to paintings.