

Two 17th century tapestries restored in Belgium

by ERIKA BRINCAT



Two pieces from the priceless collection of 29 tapestries belonging to St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, which were sent to Brussels for restoration last year, have recently been returned to Malta, and were yesterday hung for public viewing in the Perellos Hall of St John's Co-Cathedral Museum, situated opposite the Law Courts in Valletta.

The two tapestries are The Triumph of the Catholic Church and The Portrait of Grand Master Perellos. The collection as a whole is the largest set of tapestries and one of the few complete ones in the world.

"All the interventions we have done are documented and we have pictures of each part of the process," said Yvan Maes De Wit from De Wit Laboratories, who explained the restoration process in detail. "Normally two persons at a time work on each tapestry, and to respect the original elements one can still see the difference between the old and the new parts," he added.

The series of tapestries are being restored on the initiative of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation as part of their conservation strategy. The full restoration is a project which will take at least eight years to complete and will cost in the region of one million euros.

The CEO-Curator of the Foundation, Cynthia DeGiorgio said: "The tapestries actually deserve a museum in their own right – you need the length of the nave of St John's Co-Cathedral if you are to exhibit them properly and we are in the process of identifying a space for them. The foundation has future plans to have an appropriate chamber to house the tapestries, with controlled lighting and humidity and temperature control." Foundation president Paul A. Attard was also present for the event.

The Belgian Ambassador to Malta, Thomas Baekelandt said: "The two tapestries are so large that when you roll them up in boxes they are seven metres long, and you need special transport. Thanks to the Belgian Minister of Defence who is keen to support the arts, we managed to take them to Belgium and back using a military transport flight, and we feel this is good promotion of the Belgian military."

Mr Baekelandt has also acquired the sponsorship of one of the tapestries by the King Baudouin Foundation of Brussels. The Belgian government is continuing its support in this project by providing transport for a further two tapestries to Belgium – The Institution of Corpus Cristi and The Triumph of Charity.

The series of tapestries were originally commissioned by the Aragonese

Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful in the late 17th Century, and woven at the Brussels atelier of Judecos de Vos, who was also famous for being the court weaver of Louis XIV of France. They arrived in Malta for the first time in 1701.
