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Restoration works in Grand Master's Palace corridor nearly completed

Restoration works in one of the corridors on the Piano Nobile of the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta are nearly completed. These works are part of the most extensive project that Heritage Malta, the national cultural heritage agency, has ever embarked on. The removal of the first section of scaffolding in the corridor has enabled a first glimpse of the restored soffits and walls.

The news was announced during a visit to the palace by the President of Malta, George Vella, who was given an update on the project and works completed up till now. In a short address, the President expressed his satisfaction with the works conducted and thanked Heritage Malta employees for their dedication and attention to detail as they preserve our cultural heritage.

The restoration of the palace's corridors is part of the initial phase of this ambitious project which, once completed, will offer visitors a totally different experience of the palace to the one enjoyed previously. The project will cost approximately €28 million, with the initial phase being cofinanced by the European Union as part of the European Fund for Regional Development for the sum of €10 million. The subsequent phase, at a cost of around €18 million, is being financed by the Maltese government. The initial phase is expected to be completed by the end of next year, with the entire project being ready by 2025.

At an expense of some €4 million, works on the Piano Nobile corridors include the restoration of the sofffit ceiling painted by Niccolò Nasoni between 1723 and 1725, the walls and the lunettes, as well as as the polychromed marble floors. Unfortunately, the removal of the soffit for restoration revealed extensive structural damage, caused by water infiltration, to the concrete ceiling put in

place after the Second World War, which was now in imminent danger of collapse.

Heritage Malta acted fast and, after securing emergency funds, turned this challenging situation into an opportunity to reinstate the traditional timber beam and stone slab roofing system over the corridors.

The restoration of the soffit paintings was a meticulous process which began by detaching the original canvas from the polystyrene it had been adhered to when the soffit was put back in place after having been dismantled for ptotection during the war. The canvas was then consolidated and conservator-restorers started to remove over-painting and previous interventions to arrive at the original paint layers. Missing areas of the painted surfaces were integrated so that the soffit paintings regained their original prestige.

In the meantime, a new hanging system for the soffit was designed. The system enables conservators to easily handle the artworks for maintenance and future conservation interventions.

The restoration of the corridors also includes the painted walls and the marble floors. With regard to the walls, extensive research was conducted to establish the original colour scheme. As for the floors, which were originally paved with limestone slabs but were covered in marble in the second half of the 19th century, works were carried out with painstaking attention so that materials used in past repairs could be replaced by others which are very similar to the original ones. This could only be achieved through much research and experimentation.

Present for the President's visit were Minister for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, José Herrera; Parliamentary Secretary for European Funds, Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi; Heritage Malta's Chairman, Anthony Scicluna; Heritage Malta's Executive Director, Mario Cutajar; and Heritage Malta's Chief Executive Officer, Noel Zammit.

Ix-xogħlijiet ta' restawr f'wieħed mill-kurituri tal-Palazz tal-Gran Mastru jaslu fi stadju avvanzat

Waslu fi stadju avvanzat ix-xogħlijiet ta' restawr f'wieħed mill-kurituri fil-Piano Nobile tal-Palazz tal-Gran Mastru fil-Belt Valletta, fejn bħalissa għaddej l-akbar proġett li qatt daħlet għalih l-aġenzija nazzjonali għall-ħarsien tal-wirt kulturali, Heritage Malta. Bit-tneħħija tal-ewwel parti mill-armar f'dan il-kuritur, issa beda jinkixef ix-xogħol estensiv ta' restawr fis-suffett u l-ħitan.

Dan tħabbar waqt żjara fil-palazz mill-President ta' Malta, George Vella, li matulha ngħata rendikont tax-xogħlijiet li twettqu s'issa. F'kelmtejn li għamel, il-President esprima sodisfazzjon għax-xogħol li qed jitwettaq u rringrazzja lill-ħaddiema ta' Heritage Malta għad-dedikazzjoni u r-reqqa li qed jaħdmu biha biex jippreservaw dan il-wirt kulturali.

Ir-restawr tal-kurituri huwa parti mill-ewwel fażi ta' dan il-proġett ambizzjuż li meta jkun komplut se joffri lill-viżitatur esperjenza tal-palazz differenti għalkollox minn dik li kellu qabel. Fit-totalità tiegħu, il-proġett hu stmat li se jiswa madwar €28 miljun. L-ewwel fażi tal-proġett qed tiġi kofinanzjata mill-Unjoni Ewropea bħala parti mill-Fond Ewropew għall-Iżvilupp Reġjonali għas-somma ta' €10 miljun, filwaqt li l-fażi suċċessiva, li se tiswa madwar €18-il miljun, se tkun iffinanzjata mill-Gvern Malti. L-ewwel fażi mistennija titlesta sa tmiem l-2022, filwaqt li l-proġett kollu għandu jkun komplut sas-sena 2025.

Ix-xogħlijiet fil-kurituri tal-Piano Nobile, bi spiża ta' madwar €4 miljun, jinkludu r-restawr tas-suffett impitter minn Niccolò Nasoni bejn l-1723 u l-1725, il-ħitan u l-lunetti kif ukoll l-art interzjata tal-irħam. Meta tneħħa s-suffett biex jibda x-xogħol, inkixfu ħsarat strutturali kbar ikkawżati mill-ilma fis-saqaf tal-konkos li kien sar wara t-Tieni Gwerra Dinjija, tant li seta' jisfronda minn mument għal ieħor.

Heritage Malta ħadet passi immedjati u, wara li talbet fondi ta' emerġenza, bidlet din l-isfida f'opportunità biex fis-soqfa tal-kurituri terġa' tidħol is-sistema tradizzjonali tat-travi tal-injam u x-xorok.

Ir-restawr tat-tila tas-suffett kien proċess metikoluż, fejn it-tila kellha tinqala' minn fuq saff ta' ġablow li fuqu kienet twaħħlet meta s-suffett kien reġa' tpoġġa

f'postu wara li kien iżżarma għall-gwerra. Wara li t-tila ġiet konsolidata, beda proċess ta' restawr fejn sar tindif u tneħħew is-saffi żejda ta' żebgħa minn interventi preċedenti biex inkixef is-saff tal-pittura oriġinali. Il-partijiet neqsin ġew integrati biex b'hekk is-suffetti reġgħu ħadu l-prestiġju pittoriku li kellhom dari. Sadanittant tfasslet sistema ġdida ta' kif jitwaħħlu lura dawn is-suffetti. Bis-saħħa tagħha, il-konservaturi se jkunu jistgħu jaħdmu aħjar meta tinqala' l-ħtieġa ta' manutenzjoni jew restawr fil-ġejjieni.

Ir-restawr tal-kurituri jinvolvi wkoll il-ħitan impittrin u l-art tal-irħam. Għall-ħitan, saret riċerka biex jiġi stabbilit il-kulur li bih kienu miżbugħin il-fondijiet bejn il-pilastri. Għall-art, li oriġinarjament kienet taċ-ċangatura iżda li nbidlet f'art tal-irħam interzjat fit-tieni nofs tas-seklu 19, sar xogħol b'reqqa kbira, fejn materjali li ntużaw fit-tiswijiet li kienu saru fl-imgħoddi qed jerġgħu jinbidlu b'materjal qrib ħafna ta' dawk oriġinali. Dan seta' jsir wara ħafna riċerka u esperimentazzjoni.

Iż-żjara saret ukoll fil-preżenza tal-Ministru għall-Wirt Nazzjonali, l-Arti u l-Gvern Lokali, José Herrera; is-Segretarju Parlamentari għall-Fondi Ewropej, Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi; iċ-Chairman ta' Heritage Malta, Anthony Scicluna; id-Direttur Eżekuttiv ta' Heritage Malta, Mario Cutajar; u l-Kap Eżekuttiv ta' Heritage Malta, Noel Zammit.