

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AiA Art News-service



Painting is 'without doubt' original Mattia Preti, Heritage Malta insists

Critics insist it's a replica



A print of the painting - the part in colour is the one acquired by Heritage Malta.

Studies carried out on a 17th century painting confirmed it was an original Mattia Preti painting, Heritage Malta said today, defending its purchase.

Senior curator Sandro Debono and art restorer Anthony Spagnol maintained that the one-third of a painting purchased by Heritage Malta was “without doubt” an original.

The other two sections survive – one at Ariccia in Italy, the other in a private collection.

Mr Spagnol said that according to an analysis of the painting he had conducted, he was absolutely 100 per cent certain that the piece Malta bought used to form part of the original.

“Paintbrush strokes, the preparatory work prior to the painting stage and the actual canvas all pointed towards this being an original piece by Preti,” he said.

Mr Debono quoted several books which explained how the part Malta purchased was part of a larger work of art painted by the Calabrian master painter himself.

Heritage Malta purchased the painting from a public auction by Artcurial in Paris following “extensive research” by Heritage Malta. Malta paid €75,000 for the artwork.

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Heritage Malta’s claims today contrasted with the opinions expressed by, among other, Keith Sciberras, head of the Department of History of Art at the University of Malta, [who had insisted the painting was part of a replica by Preti’s workshop.](#)

“Just to clarify, Mattia Preti’s autograph original of the Apelles painting Campaspe in front of Alexander the Great is in a private collection in Spain,” Prof. Sciberras had said.

But Mr Debono insisted that, while everyone was entitled to their opinion, Heritage Malta's evidence contrasted with Prof. Sciberras’s opinion.

“From all the evidence we have, the investigations prior to the purchase and the investigations conducted on the piece when it arrived, what we have is an original,” Mr Debono said.

He was also asked to comment on remarks made by renowned Italian art critic Vittorio Sgarbi who concluded that it was “certainly the work of a member of his bottega (workshop)”.

Mr Debono said that Mr Sgarbi had not made the same remarks on the third part of the three-part painting which he had concluded, in a 2013 book, that it was a Preti original.

Heritage Malta CEO Kenneth Gambin said the auction house is bound with a two-year guarantee that the painting, which it offered in its auction as a Preti original, is usually what it said it is,

“because the repercussions on an auction house of its stature would be great.