

Press release

THE QUIRINALE PALACE'S CHIGI GALLERY RETURNS TO ITS FORMER SPLENDOUR

Work has been completed on the restoration of the Pope Alexander VII Gallery in Rome's Quirinale Palace, which, for the 150th anniversary of Italian Unification, has re-discovered one of its most outstanding treasures. The project, directed by Rossella Vodret, Superintendent of the City of Rome's museum department, and Louis Godart, advisor to the President of the Republic for the conservation of Italy's arts heritage, was conducted with the support of the Bracco Foundation, which wished to make a tangible contribution to the restoration and enhancement of the country's historical and artistic heritage.

Rome, 11 October 2011 – One of the finest examples of Roman Baroque art has returned to the light. The Alexander VII Gallery in the Quirinale Palace has been restored to its original splendour. The President of the Republic will open the newly restored gallery on 11 October 2011.

The three rooms of the Quirinale's Sixtan wing were part of a large single gallery (70 metres long), richly decorated in 1656-1657 by a group of painters directed by Pietro da Cortona engaged by Pope Alexander VII Chigi (1655-1667).

In 1812, during the French occupation of the Quirinale, architect Raffaele Stern divided the gallery into the three rooms visible today (the Yellow Room, the Augustan Room, the Ambassadors Room) to create reception halls for Empress Marie-Louise. As a result of the division, the 13 windows overlooking the courtyard were boarded up and, with the exception of the biblical scenes in the upper section of the walls, most of the seventeenth-century frescos were covered up.

The restoration, directed by Rossella Vodret, Superintendent of the City of Rome's museum department, and Louis Godart, advisor to the President of the Republic for the conservation of Italy's arts heritage, has revealed the important decorative wall paintings (a series of *trompe l'oeil* showing trees, animals and greenery between great columns), while the re-opening of the windows has restored the luminosity of the entire gallery, enhancing what was originally a prototype of light and decoration, a model for all subsequent European galleries, beginning with the gallery in Versailles.

For the Bracco Foundation it was a great honour to be accepted by the Presidency of the Republic as a partner in the restoration of such a gem in Italy's art heritage. The project also has an important symbolic value: it enabled the Bracco Foundation to contribute to the restoration of a chapter in the history of the 'house of the Italians' for the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Italian Unification. The conservation and promotion, in Italy and around the world, of the country's artistic legacy, and the divulgation of expressions of

science and art as vehicles to improve the quality of life and social unity are key objectives of the Foundation.

The restoration of the Alexander VII Gallery involved a variety of decisions, ranging from specifically technical issues concerning the actual removal of the fabric and the layers of plaster on the seventeenth-century paintings to the issues involved in cleaning the painting applied over the frescos in later periods.

After the Yellow Room and the Augustan Room, the most recent restoration operations were in the Ambassadors Room, where two different teams – the first active from September 2010 to March 2011 and the second from July to September 2011 – worked on the recovery of the seventeenth-century decorations, the removal of the boarding on the wall overlooking the *Cour d'Honneur* and the consolidation and cleaning of the painting on the partition wall and the great wall tempera, the *Mission of the Apostles*, painted by Tommaso Minardi in 1864, probably with the assistance of Luigi Fontana.

The first step was an investigation into the actual state of conservation of the walls beneath the heavy wall coverings. Performed using a microprobe, the inspection relayed images of the painted decorations beneath the coverings and the existence of the boards over the splays of the windows overlooking the *Cour d'Honneur*.

The seventeenth-century paintings were restored by inpainting with water colours, guided by the composition freed from the plaster overlay, which had survived largely in a good condition.

The restoration of the ceilings involved the consolidation of the areas that had deteriorated and the fixing of the painted surface to the support, the repair of detached areas and the re-creation of some missing elements. Next, the painted surface was cleaned and the lacuna were inpainted. The work on the canvases on the ceiling of the Ambassadors Room included consolidation of sections of the painted surface, and the cleaning and inpainting of the two roundels depicting Wisdom and Justice.

The restoration of the ceiling found many undocumented repairs and retouches to wooden elements, applied after the ceiling was established in its current form during the papacy of Pius IX.

Finally, the removal of the fabrics and of the nineteenth-century boards from the windows and splays has restored the unity of Pietro da Cortona's decorations, flooding the Alexander VII Gallery with light and re-establishing that osmosis between the interior and the exterior that seems to have been an integral part of the great master's project.