Italian architect
to lecture in Malta

by Dr Simon Mercieca

THE Italian architect Giacomo Pirazzoli will give a public lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute in Valletta on Wednesday at 6.30 p.m. The title of his lecture, which is in Italian, is Beni culturali e sviluppo sostenibile: il laboratorio di cooperazione universitaria internazionale del Progetto Albania. He was invited to Malta by the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute.

In the afternoon, he will address history students following the History and IT course, entitled Nel tempo del digitale: la percezione sensoriale del paesaggio. Pirazzoli is one of the emerging contemporary Italian architects. He has received international commissions and his works are now included in international catalogues of architecture. He is a member of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Florence, and is also the former director of the Fine Arts Academy of Florence.

Thus, I was delighted to make his acquaintance, through the director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Anna Maria De Marco, last August. I was struck by Pirazzoli’s particular interest in safeguarding Malta’s artistic heritage, and in his interest in merging old elements with new architectural expressions.

Projects for Cottonera

Architect Pirazzoli immediately fell in love with Malta and its Grand Harbour cities to the extent that he has taken concrete action to help safeguard Malta’s national heritage. In fact, he has been instrumental in helping the archpriest of Cospicua, Fr Joe Mifsud, to restore a painting on the ceiling of one of the side cupolas.

This painting is partly the work of Giuseppe Cali. Pirazzoli has taken an interest in this project and also sent a delegation from the Accademia di Belle Arti to inspect the painting. Furthermore, he has sought the help of the director of the Opificio di Pietre Dure of Florence, then headed by Cristina Alcidini, and Dr Fulvia Lo Schiavo, director of the restoration laboratories of the Archaeological Sites superintendent of Tuscany.

They expressed a genuine interest in this project and the Opificio will be sending a team of restorers to determine what action should be taken to save this painting. During his visit to Malta, Pirazzoli had contacted the archpriest of Vittoriosa, Fr Joe Caruana.

As a result of Pirazzoli’s visit, Professor Vittoria Biasi was appointed co-ordinator of this project on behalf of the Accademia di Belle Arti. A delegation has been sent to Malta and it has drawn up a preliminary report on the Cali work. Moreover, at a meeting that this delegation had with the Parliamentary Secretary Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, other possible interventions on the artistic heritage of the Cottonera area were explored.

Current project

Perhaps the most prestigious commission for Giacomo Pirazzoli came last year. He was one of seven architects commissioned by the Italian Bishops’ Conference (CEI) to design and build a new church. In fact, this commission came as a surprise to him since he had not participated in any competition. The Episcopal Council decided to choose architects, who are currently making a name for themselves, and asked them whether they are interested in designing a new church.

Pirazzoli has to deliver this pilot project to the CEI by the end of March. However, despite his workload, this young architect has still found time to visit Malta to lecture at the University-and to the general public. Pirazzoli is the author of 36 publications, ranging from specialised articles to books on architecture. He has been responsible for various projects, including the restoration of military architecture.

This series of two lectures and the eventual collaboration of the Accademia di Belle Arti and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in cultural projects in Malta thanks to funding from the International Office of the University of Malta as well as the European Union which agreed to support a pilot project in the promotion of culture in the Cottonera area as part of an Interreg Project.