

## Mattia Preti

b. 1613 d. 1699



National Library of Malta

“The immortality of Preti as an artist is secure in the delightful blending of Convent and Cathedral which is St. John’s.” On 15 September 1661, shortly after his arrival in Malta, the artist submitted his plans for the decoration of the entire vaulted ceiling of the “Westminster Abbey of the Order”. Work started in October that year and was completed on 20 December 1666. It had been Preti’s most challenging commission. The elaborate, sumptuous frescoes, depicting the life of St. John the Baptist and key episodes in the history of the Order, have been described as “one of the finest decorative exploits of Baroque painting”.

Besides St. John’s, Preti’s mature “Maltese” period has bequeathed to us a rich legacy of artistic masterpieces, scattered all over the island.

Preti spent the formative stage of his career in Rome where, at 17, he took up residence with his brother Gregorio, “a noted painter”. Here he studied under Domenichino and Pietro da Cortona. His works betray profound influences of the School of Caravaggio – especially evident in his dramatic luminism – of the Venetian masters – Veronese, Titian and Tintoretto – and of Rubens whom Preti had met in Flanders. Before settling in Malta, Preti spent a few years (1656–60) in Naples, where his style is known to have matured considerably.

Mattia Preti, “Painter and Knight”, was born in Taverna, Calabria – hence *il Calabrese* on 24 February 1613. He died in Malta on 3 January 1699, six days after he had made his will. His grave in St. John’s bears the inscription *Magnum Picturae Decus*.