

## Valmontone Conference on Mattia Preti

A scholarly conference focused on the *Cavaliere Calabrese*, the artist Mattia Preti, was held on Monday 3 November 2014 at Palazzo Pamphilj in Valmontone, around 30 kilometres from Rome. Participants examined the status of research into this artist following the celebrations of the 400<sup>th</sup> centenary of his birth (1613-2013). The event was titled '*Sotto la volta dell'aria. Mattia Preti: Approfondimenti e ricerche.*'

This conference was organised by the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta in association with the Soprintendenza PSAE del Lazio and the Comune di Valmontone. For this purpose an on-site scientific committee composed of Sante Guido, Dora Catalano of the Superintendence of the region, Monica Di Gregorio, director of the museum of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, and Giuseppe Mantella, a leading restorer of Mattia's Preti's works, was set up. The '*Volta dell'aria*' indicated in the title of the conference refers to a fresco on the ceiling of the grand hall of the palace where the event took place, and which was painted in the spring of 1661 for Prince Camillo Pamphilj in the *piano nobile* of his palace. This fresco forms part of a cycle dedicated to the four elements and the four continents, executed by Mattia Preti together with some of his most accomplished collaborators active in Rome: Pier Francesco Mola, Gaspard Dughet, Guillaume Courtois, Giambattista Tassi and Francesco Cozza, the author of a famous painting of the famous Italian philosopher from Stilo, Calabria, Tommaso Campanella.

Sante Guido explained the reasons for the choice of the conference venue as follows: "The *Volta dell'aria* is the last work executed by Preti in Italy, painted between March and June 1661. It is considered by Rudolph Wittkover to be the foremost work of art of the 'second Baroque', introducing new stylistic features leading to the Rococo and to the grand and



extensive decoration of eighteenth-century palaces throughout Europe. Allegorical figures representing the natural elements, such as Day, Night, Dawn, as well as Love, Fortune and many others, adorn this vault. It is important to note that it was during his stay at Valmontone, that Preti planned his entire project for the decoration of the Co-cathedral in Valletta. When he arrived in Malta in the summer of 1661 and proposed to paint the story of St John the Baptist, his designs were ready to be shown to Grand Master Cotoner and obtain his approval.

A number of academics and restoration experts spoke about various historical, artistic and technical aspects of Preti's work. Professor Denis De Lucca, director of the International Institute of Baroque Studies at the University of Malta, explored aspects of Mattia Preti's knowledge and practice of architecture during his sojourn in Malta. For this special occasion, from 3 to 30 November Preti's '*Standardo di San Martino*' was exhibited in the Palazzo Pamphilj - a work on canvas with two scenes depicting St Martin on horseback on one side and the *Ecce homo* on the back. This was painted by Mattia Preti for the jubilee of 1650 for the Pamphilj princes, and is now held by the Benedictine abbey of St Martin at Cimino near Viterbo.