

RESTORATION OF THE SACRISTY VAULT OF THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DI MONTESANTO, PIAZZA DEL POPOLO IN ROME



The painting depicting a *Gloria of angels with instruments of the Passion* on the vault of the sacristy in the church of Santa Maria di Montesanto is in poor condition.

The sacristy was built in 1678 by the architect Carlo Fontana thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Girolamo Gastaldi in the role of commissioner and with the supervision of Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

The diminished barrel-vaulted vault is supported by spandrels and springers with painted decorations which simulate plastic partially gilded elements in stucco.

At present we have no information which allows us to ascribe the painting and therefore we need to rely on stylistic observations; critics think that it is by **Giovanni Battista Gaulli** known as Il Baciccio (1639-1709). The painting is not a fresco, it was done in tempera on the wall and is very damaged because it is sensitive to the damp.

Numerous pigmented surfaces are partly detached from the base and are in danger of falling off, while medium-sized and large gaps evidence the deterioration of the work in terms of both the architectural and the figurative iconography.

The deterioration also affects the moulded stucco surfaces, which are visibly abraded and in the worst cases lost.

The aim of the restoration project is to halt the painted surface and its preparation with acrylic adhesives which are compatible with the work. This operation should ensure that the surfaces on the verge of falling off be fixed and made level to the vault again, so that the solid paint film can subsequently be cleaned by removing dust, grease and smoke and the organic and other substances which have taken root on the surfaces in the past. The cleaning will be carried out both *dry* with soft high-density rubbers and *chemically* with non-polar solvents so as to not weaken the tempera painting.

The superficial abrasions and the gaps will be restored with a binder composed of suitably smoothed and treated air mortar which will constitute the base for the restoration.

The touch-up painting will be carried out according to a cultural heritage code which calls for very limited painting restoration, to be decided each time by mutual agreement with the relative government department.