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Sunday, 28 October 2007 – issue 416 www.maltatoday.com.mt

17 ADVERTISED, EIGHT EXHIBITED BUT ONLY THREE AUTHENTIC CARAVAGGIOS

THE GREAT CARAVAGGIO SWINDLE



Vittorio Sgarbi: "All the paintings are of course great and beautiful masterpieces, but they're the works of other Caravaggio contemporaries"

KARL SCHEMBRI

CARAVAGGIO is the undisputed master of the chiaroscuro. But 400 years since his eventful visit to Malta, he would be shocked to see some of his greatest works obscured into oblivion – while the limelight is being shone on paintings of shady repute. The capital city is hosting what is being marketed as "an exhibition of original masterpieces" under his name, Caravaggio: Images of the Divine. Of the 17 advertised paintings only eight were

exhibited and only three are authentic Caravaggio masterpieces. Yet, international scholars and art experts are outraged at what they are calling a veritable scam with much wider and sinister implications. Foremost among them is Italian celebrity art critic Vittorio Sgarbi, who speaking to MaltaToday said he was "perplexed" by the fact that the exhibition sells its paintings as Caravaggios without shedding light on the highly controversial attributions. "It is clear there are only a few Caravaggios there,"

Sgarbi said. Although he was invited for the opening, he distanced himself yesterday saying the curators have to answer for the ambiguous nature of the exhibition. "All the paintings are of course great and beautiful masterpieces, but they're the works of other Caravaggio contemporaries," Sgarbi said. The exhibition by Heritage Malta has been advertised here and abroad for months as an impossible gathering of the Italian genius's opus that would have brought more than 17 of his masterworks under

one roof. Works such as The Beheading of St John, The Supper at Emmaus, the Burial of Saint Lucy, and the Adoration of the Shepherds grab the attention of any art lover worth his salt, and the public relations blitz launched by the heritage state agency, with the sponsorship of big government and private corporations, did just that. The catalogue, press releases, website and pre-launch publicity circulated worldwide before the exhibition opened at the National Museum of Archaeology on 30 September

promised the ultimate in the undisputed Caravaggio repertoire, under the patronage of Malta's President Eddie Fenech Adami and his Italian counterpart, Giorgio Napolitano, together with Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, Culture Minister Francis Zammit Dimech, Italian Culture Minister Francesco Rutelli, foreign minister Massimo D'Alema, home affairs minister Giuliano Amato and Italian ambassador Paolo Andrea Trabalza.

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OPINION
Pamela Hansen joins MaltaToday's columnist line-up
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Spiteri, Farrugia question wisdom of Sant's tax-free overtime

JAMES DEBONO

MIMICKING French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Alfred Sant has once again set the country's agenda by proposing that all overtime should be made tax-free. But his proposal has been met with scepticism by former finance minister Lino Spiteri and veteran economist Karmenu Farrugia, who have warned that if overtime taxes are removed, employees will be encouraged to shift in-

come from their basic pay, which will still be taxed, to overtime hours which will become tax-free. But despite these reservations, Sant's proposal already enjoys the qualified support of both major trade unions, the Union Haddiema Magghudin (UHM) and the General Workers' Union (GWU), as well as the Malta Chamber of SMEs (GRTU). "It was the only part of Sant's speech with which I disagreed," Karmenu Farrugia told MaltaToday,

who claims the proposal could lead to abuse. "In small companies many businessmen give a wage to themselves and to their family members. If overtime is made tax-free they would start paying themselves less for normal work hours, while increasing the portion of overtime." He warned that since national insurance is paid on the basic wage and not on overtime, the measure would encourage employers to ask employees to declare

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Gonzi undecided whether to contest two districts

"HE has not decided yet whether to contest on more than one district," sources close to the Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi have told this newspaper about the PM's hesitation over a candidature on two districts. The PN leader will be definitely contesting the second district which includes Bormla, a Labourite stronghold. But he as yet 'says' he is not sure he might contest another district. As prime minister it is

unthinkable that he might choose not to contest another district. But it still has to be seen whether he will be contesting a district to counter Labour leader Alfred Sant, or a district which needs a star candidate. The PM's indecisiveness has meant many Nationalist candidates are reconsidering all possible scenarios for their electoral campaigns if Lawrence Gonzi decides to parachute into their district. It could mean

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