



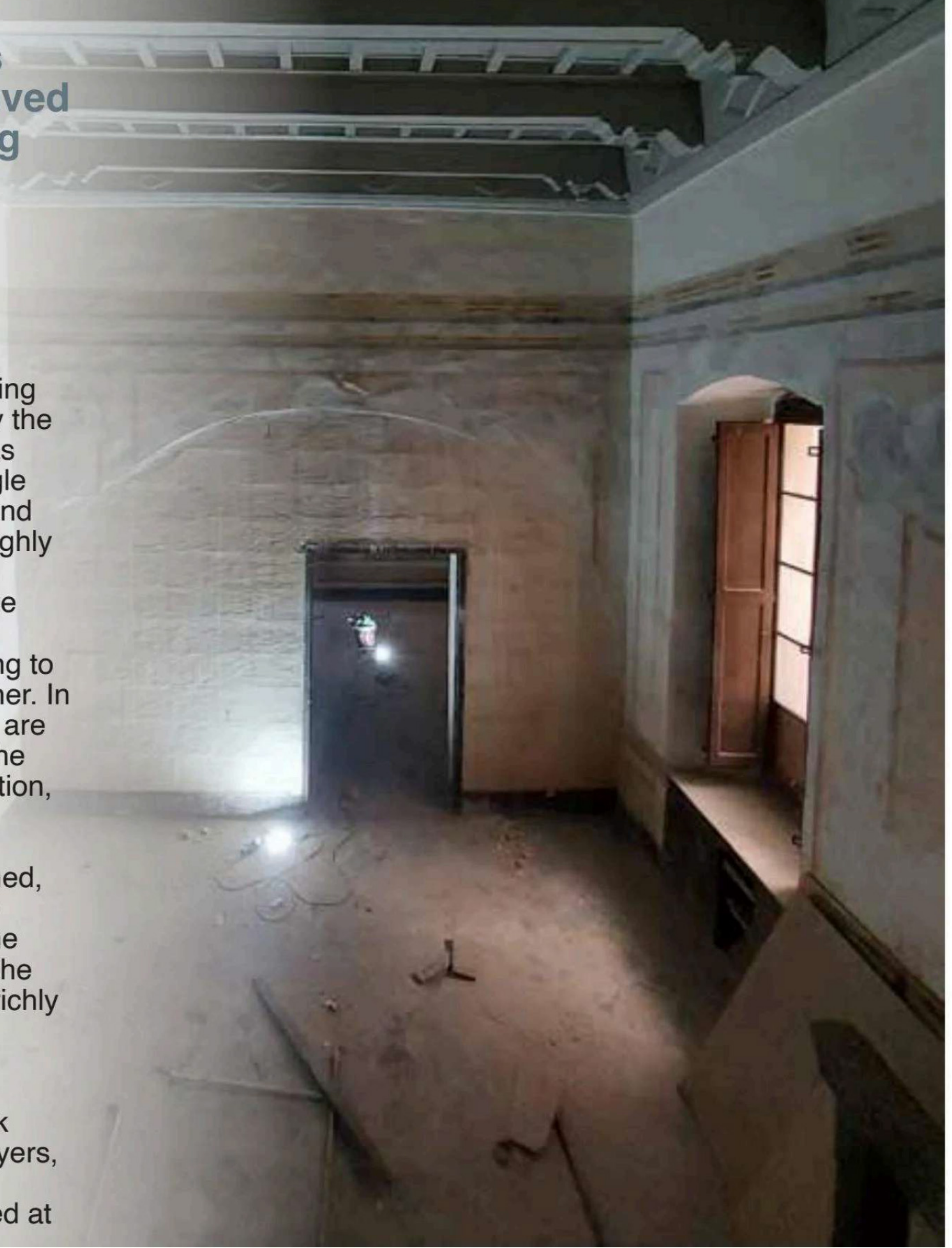
ENCOMPASSING MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS:

Perit Charlene Jo Darmanin and Guillaume Dreyfuss

The restoration and refurbishment of the property at no. 8, Old Mint Street, Valletta, scheduled to become the new Museum of Literature, revealed a building that had undergone several transformations and adaptation over time. The combination of historical research and heritage interpretation exposed the complex layering of rooms and levels discussed in the first part of this article. Site investigations improved the understanding of the building structure and its development, feeding the conservation and design interventions proposed.

The internal masonry walls were rendered in a lime-based paint, with areas evidently severely deteriorated and flaking, exposing other underlying layers. Investigations were carried out to identify the stratigraphy of paint layers, revealing as many as thirteen layers of various block colours on a single wall. The underlying layers of two rooms at ground floor level roofed with timber ceilings, showed highly decorative paint motifs. Overlying modern paint layers were carefully removed, to reveal the state and extent of the wall paintings underneath. The wall paintings in one of the two rooms belong to two distinct periods of intervention over each other. In the second room the two period of interventions are found in different sections of the same space. The wall paintings displayed a frail state of conservation, at times with significant areas of lacunae. An archaeological approach was adopted, and the surviving paintings were consolidated and retained, while the lacunae were filled minimally simply to restore visual legibility without competing with the original paint layers. This was accompanied by the restoration of the timber ceilings, including one richly decorated.

The project also included the restoration of the façade where thick layers of pollutants and black crust had accumulated over the years. These layers, stubborn and proving difficult to remove, were carefully lifted off and the cleaning process halted at




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a conservative level in a cautious approach to ensure that the stone surface is not damaged. The lifting off of these layers revealed a graffiti showing the date '8 October 1884', located at a significant junction just above the ground floor level cornice. Interestingly this date matches the date of one of historical the drawings signed by Galizia and found at the archives. On the lower part of the facade, the cleaning process revealed the original door numbers painted, which have been restored and retained as part of the project.




The conservation strategy adopted allowed for the site discoveries to guide the interventions to be implemented across the building. Understanding the relationship between the different elements of the building contributed to the holistic interpretation of its structure by establishing its historical development, uncovering traces on the façade during restoration, and revealing the internal wall paintings through the stratigraphy. Approach and interventions were adapted to ensure that the values embodied within this heritage structure were retained. The project is scheduled to be completed under the care of the National Book Council and the supervision of AP Valletta in 2026.

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