

NOTA DE PRENSA

**In preparation for the special exhibition on the artist during the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Museo del Prado**

**The Museo del Prado presents *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico after its restoration**

**Andrés Úbeda, Deputy Director for Collections and Research of the Museo del Prado; Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, President of Friends of Florence, and Christina Simmons, Executive Director of American Friends of the Prado Museum, presented *The Annunciation* yesterday, centerpiece of the exhibition *Fra Angelico and the Rise of the Florentine Renaissance*, after its recent restoration.**

Madrid, May 9, 2019

The generous collaboration of Friends of Florence and American Friends of the Prado Museum, which made matching contributions to reach a total of €150,000 euros, with the Prado Museum has facilitated the restoration of *The Annunciation* and other works not held at the Prado Museum. These will be included in the major exhibition opening on May 28th: *Fra Angelico and the Rise of the Florentine Renaissance*. The extensive presentation, with almost 80 pieces, is curated by Carl Brandon Strehlke, curator emeritus at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



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The centerpiece of the exhibition, *The Annunciation*, was painted by Fra Angelico in the mid-1420s, and is considered the first Florentine altarpiece in the Renaissance style. The artist used perspective to organize space, forsaking Gothic archways in favor of more rectangular shapes, aligned with the aesthetic implemented by the architect Brunelleschi in his innovative approach to the churches of San Lorenzo and the Santo Spirito in Florence.

**The restoration**

The main purpose of restoring the work, conducted by Almudena Sánchez Martín at the Prado Museum Restoration Workshop, was to recover the rich, vivid colors and



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intense light that imbue the scene. Both are characteristic elements of this masterpiece and of the artist's work in general.

Layers of dirt and pollution obscuring the surface were removed and the oil over-paintings performed during historic interventions to the work eliminated. Restorers concentrated on the intersection between two of the four wooden panels on which the work is painted. In the past, the wooden backing developed structural problems as two of its panels separated, opening a crack coinciding with the figure of the angel, and dividing it in two. The instability this caused to the pictorial layer created loss of original paint along the edge of the two panels. Several attempts had been made to repair the damage and preserve the piece. Documented evidence exists only of the most recent efforts which took place at the Prado Museum by Jerónimo Seisdedos between 1943 and 1944.

The purpose of these previous restorations was to repair the damage and ensure the conservation of the work. However, in some of the oldest interventions, in addition to restoring losses on either side of the seam, extensive areas of the original work were painted over, principally affecting the figure of the angel and lapis lazuli mantle of the Virgin. Over the years, these additional layers deteriorated badly, ultimately marring the overall image and understanding of the artist's original composition.

These over-paintings applied to the unstable panel seam completely covered some compositional elements. In the upper area, they concealed an important part of the architecture and, in the figure of the angel, they changed the form of the wing, arm and rose tunic continuing to the bottom edge. The old interventions also modified the angel's front wing by hiding its original form and radically transforming it, leaving an evident asymmetry with its pair. While the back wing was curved, the wing in the foreground seemed straight and sinuous, following the vertical where the gold-leaf had been lost due to the panel fracture.



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Upon removal of the over-painting on the wing, original gold elements were discovered providing the necessary information for its restitution. First, a gold particle appeared that marked the beginning of the base of the wing, and secondly, as the over-painting removal progressed, the original incision in the gold became evident

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to show exactly the curve for the wing designed by Fra Angelico. The discovery and recuperation of the original design for the wing of the Archangel Gabriel constitute one of the most transcendent moments in the entire restoration process due to the importance of the figure in the scene and its location in the center of the composition.

The process of cleaning and eliminating the over-paintings has been possible thanks to the technical and professional resources employed at the Prado Museum. The availability of new methods and the latest research and innovations in the restoration field permitted the cleaning required with the guaranteed protection of the painting. The removal of the dense layer of pollution on the surface was achieved by the use of a silicone gel which acts as vehicle for an aqueous cleaning medium while safeguarding the painting.

The old, oil-based over-paintings required a slow, prolonged intervention, progressively eliminating them until the original painting was fully revealed.

Thanks to the cleaning, the work by Fra Angelico has recuperated its original luminosity, practically unknown until now. With gradations of light, he creates and models the volume of each element of the composition. An almost supernatural light permeates the portico and shines without creating shadows, in contrast to the room in the background illuminated with natural light that enters through the window and reflects on the wall. The removal of the gray veil has also revealed the great master's technique and the marvelous colors in his use of lapis lazuli, red lacquer and green malachite.

The subsequent phases in the restoration consisted of applying stucco in the missing areas to level the surface and recreation of the chromatic loss, first with watercolor and then by varnish with pigments. This process required an extremely meticulous execution given the characteristics of Fra Angelico's technique, elaborated with subtlety and precision.

The process also preserved extremely fragile elements of the composition made with brushes with very few bristles and hardly any paint material, such as the eyelashes of the Virgin and the angel, Adam's beard and the miniscule letters in the book posed on the lapis lazuli mantle of the Virgin.

Along with this masterpiece, other Florentine works included in the exhibition have been restored in Italy thanks to the financial support from Friends of Florence and American Friends of the Prado Museum, including *Virgin and Child* by Michele da Firenze, currently housed in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello; Donatello's terracotta *Virgin and Child*, also featuring two angels and two prophets and owned by the Museo di Palazzo Pretorio; and Gherardo Starnina's *Trinity*, from the Chiaramonte Bordonaro collection.

**The exhibition: *Fra Angelico and the Rise of the Florentine Renaissance***  
May 28 – September 15, 2019

The exhibition will examine the beginnings of the Florentine Renaissance in 1420-1430, focusing on Fra Angelico (Guido di Pietro da Muguello, 1395/1400-1455). Considered one of the great Renaissance masters, Fra Angelico produced some of the

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major artistic achievements of the era, along with painters Masaccio, Masolino, Uccello and Filippo Lippi; sculptors Ghiberti, Donatello and Nanni di Banco; and the architect Brunelleschi.

*The Annunciation* will be a central work in the exhibition, accompanied by another two of Fra Angelico's works recently added to the Museum's collection: *The Funeral of Saint Anthony Abbott* and *The Virgin of the Pomegranate*, both from the Duke of Alba's collection, the former donated and the latter bought.

**Download information and pictures**

<https://www.museodelprado.es/museo/acceso-profesionales>

**American Friends of the Prado Museum**

American Friends of the Prado Museum is a U.S. non-profit organization with the mission of contributing to the knowledge and conservation of one of the most important collections of European art and objective of strengthening the cultural ties between the United States and Spain through the Prado Museum and its artistic, historical legacy.

A group of art patrons from the U.S. created the institution with the aim of fomenting the philanthropic potential existent in the United States with its tradition and culture of supporting worthwhile causes. Of all the international visitors to the Prado Museum, visitors from the U.S. are consistently the most numerous year after year, which makes American Friends of the Prado Museum an excellent means to encourage support for the painting gallery.

To stimulate support for one of the finest painting galleries in the world, American Friends of the Prado Museum offers a diverse Friends program beginning from \$100 per year and includes free entry to the Museum to both permanent collection and temporary exhibits, as well as the possibility of guided visits in English, among other benefits.

Individual, corporate and institutional contributions to American Friends of the Prado Museum, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit institution, may benefit from the fiscal deductions offered by the I.R.S.

**Projects**

Since the beginning of its activity in 2015, it has received William B. Jordan's donation of a newly attributed portrait of *King Philip III* by Velázquez, now on view in the Velázquez galleries of the Museum, edited in English the research publication on its discovery, *Philip III by Velázquez. Donated by William B. Jordan*, and has sponsored the *Bosch and Flemish painting gallery guide* in English for visitors to the Prado.

In the USA, it has co-organized with the Museo del Prado three educational exhibits of "The Prado in the streets" in the cities of Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Las Cruces in the state of New Mexico. It has provided educational material about the Museo del Prado for 130 schools in North America in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy in the U.S.

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### Friends of Florence

**Friends of Florence** is an international non-profit organization founded in the United States in 1998. It is supported by individuals from around the world who are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the cultural and historical legacy of the arts in Florence, Italy, and the surrounding region. Friends of Florence provides financial support directly to the city's restoration laboratories to refurbish, safeguard, and make available to the public a broad range of artworks from paintings and sculptures to architectural elements and collections of smaller objects.

The President is **Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda**.

Friends of Florence is one of the primary sources of funding to the renowned Florentine restoration laboratories and skilled preservation professionals who work to ensure the survival of art and architecture in Florence and Tuscany. Friends of Florence is fully committed to restoring and conserving the rich cultural heritage of the city and its surroundings. Over the years, it has developed close working relationships with many public and private organizations in the field of fine arts.

The restoration projects undertaken and financed are selected by the Board of Directors aided by an Advisory Committee of internationally respected experts and art historians. Friends of Florence also provides support for ongoing post-restoration monitoring of several important works including Michelangelo's *David*, the Renaissance masterpiece. Major projects often include the production and publication of books or multimedia materials such as DVDs containing the history and images, interviews with experts and restorers, and the documentation of the phases of the restoration work.

Friends of Florence also creates unique events. In cooperation with universities, schools, cultural associations, and clubs, it organizes lectures, trips, and experiences with curators and art historians focusing on specific topics or artists in Italy and abroad. Events in the United States have been held at the Chicago Art Institute, the Getty Center, and in conjunction with the Aspen Institute, just to name a few.

### Select projects from 2001 to the present:

**2001-2002:** restoration of all the marble statues in the Loggia dei Lanzi, including Giambologna's Rape of the Sabines, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence. A book, The Statues

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of the Loggia della Signoria in Florence. Masterpieces Restored and DVD documenting the project were produced.

**2004-2006:** restoration of Sala della Niobe (Niobe Room) in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. A book, A Theatre for Niobe, and DVD were published on the history of the room and the restoration.

**2008-2012:** restoration of the Cross by the Maestro di Figline (c. 1320), above the Main Altar in the church of Santa Croce, Florence.

**2009-2012:** restoration of the Tribune in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

**2010-2012:** restoration of three Slaves by Michelangelo, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

**2013:** start of restoration of the entire Chiostro dei Voti (Cloister of the Vows), church of Santissima Annunziata, Florence.

**2014:** restoration of Beato Angelico's Crucifixion fresco in the Museo di San Marco, Florence.

**2015-2016:** restoration of the Annunciation Altarpiece by Filippo Lippi in the Martelli Chapel, Basilica of Santo Spirito, Florence.

**2015:** restoration of the Last Supper fresco by Domenico Ghirlandino and two fresco scenes by Bernardo Rosselli in the refectory of the Badia di San Michele Arcangelo, Passignano (Florence).

**2017:** restoration of the Capponi Chapel and The Deposition by Pontormo in the church of Santa Felicità, Florence.

**2018:** restoration of the Chapel of the Crucifix in the Church of San Miniato al Monte, Florence.

**2018:** refurbishment of the rooms housing the François Vase, the Sarcophagus of the Amazons, and the Greco-Roman bronzes in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.

**For more information visit: [www.friendsofflorence.org](http://www.friendsofflorence.org).**

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Image captions:

1. *Annunciation and Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden* (before restoration), FRA ANGELICO. Tempura and gold on panel. 190.3 x 191.5 cm, 162.3 x 191.5 cm; c. 1425-26. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

2. *Annunciation and Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden* (after restoration), FRA ANGELICO. Tempura and gold on panel. 190.3 x 191.5 cm, 162.3 x 191.5 cm; c. 1425-26. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

3. Detail of the Angel and the vault, before restoration.

4. Detail of the Angel and the vault, after restoration.