



FRIENDS *of* FLORENCE

Fall 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Florence,

Bentornati! We hope you had a wonderful summer even under these challenging circumstances. We also hope that you are enjoying the Friends of Florence Stories we have been sending to your email boxes. The videos remind us of what we have accomplished together thus far and why the work is so important. They provide context through time-lapse photography as the projects are restored by our extraordinary conservation teams. The before-and-after photography is always surprising even to those of us familiar with the projects. It is a rare experience to watch these sublime artworks and architectural masterpieces be revived as the tolls of passing centuries are mitigated.

We are deeply grateful for you, our partners, and the conservators who take superb care of our treasures. Whether conducted in laboratories or on-site, the projects captured on camera help tell our story. Please feel free to share the magic with friends and family—they are posted regularly to our [website](#).

On to news of our projects, most of which have resumed as coronavirus restrictions have lifted!

News

Michelangelo's *Bandini Pietà* and *David*

Since we began our journey to safeguard Florence's cultural heritage, we have given special attention to the restoration of Michelangelo Buonarroti's (1475-1564) works. Together with the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, we embarked on a fascinating project in November 2019 to restore the *Bandini Pietà*, a true masterpiece the artist sculpted and tried to destroy in his final years. The restoration has restarted in the “open” work site in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo enabling visitors to see the process first-hand.



Restoration of Michelangelo's *Bandini Pietà* at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence. Photo by Claudio Giovannini/CGE, courtesy of the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore.



Restoration of Michelangelo's *Bandini Pietà* (detail).

The project has captured the attention of the press and we were delighted that an Associated Press story was published and reported on by media outlets in Italy, North America, and beyond. NBC-TV produced a story about Florence's efforts to raise funding for conservation projects when the tourism industry is paused. The *Pietà* conservation was featured and I was interviewed along with Timothy Verdon, director of the Museum where it is held, and others. Our hope is that it will heighten awareness of the plight of cultural heritage preservation until travel will once again be possible.

We are grateful for the many major gifts and donors who have made this important project possible for the Pietà Bandini.

We are also pleased to announce that we have renewed our agreement, begun in 2004, with the Accademia Gallery to continue supporting the monitoring and maintenance of Michelangelo's iconic *David* and other works on view in that gallery.

2020 Restoration Award Grant—Fifth Edition

The Salone dell'Arte e Restauro di Firenze, typically held in May, was presented on-line on October 16th. We livestreamed the announcement of the winner of our annual Restoration Award Grant. The 2020 winner of the first prize of €20,000 is **Anna Fulimeni** and her **Restauro Opere d'Arte** laboratory for

the 15th-century *Reliquary Bust of San Miniato*. It is a painted and gilded sculpture located in the Sacristy of the Basilica of San Miniato al Monte. Although descriptions of this work of art have appeared in historical literature, it has never been definitively attributed. It is very likely that the restoration will shed more light on the artist's identity.



Reliquary Bust of San Miniato (15th century). Sacristy of the Basilica of San Miniato al Monte, Florence, Italy. Photo courtesy of Anna Fulimeni.

While participants had to work on their project presentations during the lockdown, there were 41 high-quality projects submitted, eight of which made the shortlist of finalists.

In addition to myself and scores of virtual participants, attendees included Cristina Acidini and Claudio Paolini, Elena Amodei, director of the Salone dell'Arte e del Restauro di Firenze, and Marco Ciatti Superintendent of the Scuola di Alta Formazione ed di Studio of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (all members of the Award Grant committee).

This fifth edition is dedicated to the memory of the president of the Salone, Cavalier Franco Sottani, who worked with us on the Award Grant from the beginning. We are once again grateful to the Salone dell'Arte e del Restauro and the entire judging committee whose expertise was essential in assessing all the submitted projects. We look forward to the restoration being completed by next year.



Update on the 2016 Restoration Award Grant Winner

Studio Ardiglione (Nicoletta Marcolongo and Angela Tascioni with Natalia Materassi) has been working on a painting from the church of Santa Felicità near the Ponte Vecchio. The painting depicts "the miracle of the possessed woman healed by a holy Bishop" also known as "The Ossessa." In 2016, on the 50th anniversary of the great flood, we invited submissions for projects damaged by floods, terrorism, war, and other natural and man-made disasters. Dating from the mid-17th century, the canvas is attributed to Mario Balassi (1604-67). It was almost destroyed in 1966 by layers of mud, soaked in toxic water,

The Ossessa (mid-17th century), attributed to Mario Balassi (1604-67). Santa Felicità, Florence, Italy. Detail after restoration. Photo by Antonio Quattrone. Courtesy of Studio Ardiglione.

and damaged by floating debris and furniture when the Arno breached its banks. The recovery of the painting from near invisibility is itself miraculous.



The Ossessa (mid-17th century), attributed to Mario Balassi (1604-67). Before and during restoration. Santa Felicità, Florence, Italy. Photo courtesy of Studio Ardiglione.

Looking Ahead

Upcoming Educational Travel Programs

Postponed due to Covid-19, we have new dates for our programs with our friends Bill Cook, Ross King, and William Wallace, art historians and members of our Council of Academic Advisors. Dr. King is an independent curator and writer. Dr. Wallace is the Barbara Murphy Bryant Distinguished Professor of Art History at Washington University in St. Louis. Dr. Cook is a medieval historian, author, and acclaimed Dante scholar.

The first program, from October 25 to 30, 2021, commemorates the 700th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's death. We will explore sites in Florence (where the great poet was born in 1265), Siena, Verona, and Ravenna (where he died) with Dr. Cook and Dr. King.

Dr. King and Dr. Wallace will lead the program scheduled from June 13 to 20, 2022. We will travel to sites related to the life of French Impressionist Claude Monet (1840–1926) such as Honfleur and other sites in Normandy, Giverny, and Paris.

Please contact info@friendsofflorence.org for more information.

RECENT AND IN-PROCESS PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Crucifix by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

We are delighted to report that when the past Covid-19 restrictions lifted, more of our projects were able to resume. One is the restoration of the large crucifix by Ambrogio

Lorenzetti (c.1290-1348) painted for the Convent of San Niccolò al Carmine in Siena. We are grateful for the major grant received from the Giorgi Family Foundation for this project and for the cooperation of Stefano Casciu, Regional Director of the Museums of Tuscany; conservator Muriel Vervat; and our colleagues at the Pinacoteca Nazionale museum where it is housed.



Crucifix by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1290-1348), Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, Italy. During restoration. Photo courtesy of Pinacoteca of Siena.

In poor condition and concealed by a layer of overpainting, the cross was last restored in 1953-56 by the Istituto Centrale di Restauro in Rome. As was the practice at that time, color losses were left as is, leaving the wood and the raw linen bases exposed. The current plan includes checking the wooden support and making the whole painting and its details more legible. A series of scientific tests which, in addition to informing the process, make it possible to learn more about the artist's technique—something we strive to achieve with all our projects.

When the restoration is completed, it will be reinstalled in Room 7 of the Pinacoteca along with other works by the artist who is best known for his stunning *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* frescoes in the Palazzo Pubblico in the heart of Siena.



Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece by Fra Angelico (1395-1456) during transportation before restoration. Photo courtesy of Museo di San Marco.

Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece by Fra Angelico and the refurbishment of the Pilgrims' Hospice in the Museo di San Marco, Florence

The restorations at the Museo di San Marco have also resumed. Celebrating the 150th anniversary of the museum's founding, the project includes the restoration of the majestic *Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece* by Fra Angelico (1395-1456) which had been transported to the conservation laboratory in May at the end of the Covid-19 restrictions.

In addition to the painting originally on the high altar of the Dominican church (where the artist was a friar), the Pilgrim's Hospice is being completely refurbished. A room where pilgrims and the impoverished were once received, it is home to the world's greatest collection of panel paintings by the friar painter—a leading artist of the early

Florentine Renaissance. The new interventions include supports for the paintings, lighting, a system for filtering natural light, and information panels. The plans developed by Maurizio De Vita and his studio will bring new life to one of the most architecturally fascinating spaces in Florence.

Fra Angelico painted the altarpiece around 1450, after he returned to Florence from Rome. Cosimo de' Medici had commissioned it for the high altar of the Franciscan convent of San Bonaventura at Bosco ai Frati. The composition is dominated by the Virgin Mary flanked by two angels. In the foreground, to the left are Saints Francis, Louis of Toulouse, and Anthony of Padua. To the right are the Medici saints – Cosmas and Damian – and Saint Peter Martyr. The elegant architectural background references the classical style the artist admired during his stay in Rome and recalls the architectural elements in the frescoes in the Vatican's Niccoline Chapel that Angelico painted for Pope Nicholas V in 1447-48.

This restoration is particularly timely. The painting, marred by dirt and previous restorations, was last restored for the major exhibition in the Vatican (1955) commemorating the 500th anniversary of Angelico's death. That work was done by two legends in Italian art restoration: Leonetto Tintori and Alfio del Serra. The paint surface had been partially damaged because of overly aggressive cleaning prior to their intervention.

Close inspection of the figures and marble floor in the foreground reveal a decrease in the thickness of the paint. The plants beyond the marble enclosure in the background are practically illegible due to dirt and over-painting done at various times. Once the restorations are completed, both scholars and art-lovers will be able to admire, study, and enjoy these Renaissance masterpieces.

The restoration is being conducted by Lucia Biondi and coordinated by Angelo Tartuferi, who took over the management of the museum in early May. Again, we are grateful to Stefano Casciu, Regional Director of the Museums of Tuscany, and Marilena Tamassia who supervised the planning stage of the project until her recent retirement. We are grateful for the major gift for this project by the Peter Fogliano and Hal Lester Foundation.

THANK YOU AND GRAZIE MILLE

The Covid-19 crisis has reminded us that culture is such an essential part of our lives, our identities, and our communities. During the lockdown, art – in all its many forms – not only kept our country united, it brought us all solace during a time of great crisis and will help us recover. Art conservation gives us agency to ensure future generations have access to these extraordinary gifts we inherited. That is the essence of our mission which, now more than ever, we consider profoundly important.

We sincerely appreciate your dedication to sustaining the eternal beauty of Florentine art and architecture—these cultural touchstones and enduring symbols of humankind's past and creative promise.

Saluti,

Simonetta

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda
President, Friends of Florence

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By becoming patrons of the arts, our donors inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations and help to preserve Florence's extraordinary cultural legacy.

