



## FRIENDS *of* FLORENCE

### *Spring 2021 Newsletter*

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Dear Friends,

As Florence cautiously reopens its cultural institutions, [Friends of Florence's](#) work safeguarding the city's artistic and architectural treasures has continued, albeit at a slightly slower pace per Covid-19 protocols. Thanks to our outstanding conservation experts, partners, museum directors, Soprintendenza of Fine Arts, the Regional Director of Tuscan Museums, and you—our stalwart supporters—we currently have more than *twenty* active projects. In this edition of our e-newsletter, we want to update you on several and mention upcoming activities that we hope will be of interest.

But before we “depart” for Tuscany, we are excited to inform you about an exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art opening June 25, *The Medici: Portraits and Politics 1512-1570*. A highlight of the presentation is Agnolo Bronzino's 1552 portrait of the esteemed poet and intellect Laura Battiferri from the holdings of the Museo di Palazzo Vecchio. In February 2020, we received a proposal from Keith Christiansen, John Pope-Hennessy Chairman of European Paintings at the Met, regarding support for the restoration of this masterwork so it could travel and be safely installed. Ellie and Edgar Cullman, Jr. generously agreed to provide the funding. Everyone involved in this special project is deeply grateful for their generosity (and speedy favorable reply!). Mark your calendars—the exhibition of 90 works across mediums and the stories behind them promise to be fascinating.





## PROGRESS REPORT

### Exhibition of Roman Coins on View in the Santa Maria della Scala Museum, in Siena

We are delighted that the exhibition “Treasure of Chianti: Silver Coinage of the Roman Republic” will be on view from May 29 to September 2, 2021, in the Santa Maria della Scala Museum, in Siena. The centerpiece is a cache of 194 silver coins (177 denarii and 17 quinarii) found at an archeological site in Cetamura del Chianti. It is believed that the cache was buried by a veteran soldier of the battle at Actium (31 BCE) when Mark Antony and Cleopatra’s fleet was overwhelmed by Octavian’s navy. One coin minted in 32 BCE depicts Antony’s profile on one side and the Egyptian queen facing a ship’s prow on the other, predicting a different outcome.



Silver denarius coin portraying Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra VII. Struck by mint traveling with Antony, dated to 32 BCE.



Globular ceramic that contained the cache of coinage of the late Roman Republic

The discovery was made in 2015 by a team from Florida State University directed by Dr. Nancy de Grummond, in collaboration with Ichnos: Archeologia, Ambiente e Sperimentazione from Montelupo Fiorentino. It was transferred for micro-excavation and conservation to the archaeological laboratory at Studio Arts College International (SACI) in Florence. During the pandemic, the coins were transferred to the Santa Maria della Scala Museum’s laboratories for completion. A catalogue of the most important coins is in process.

In addition to advancing our knowledge of numismatics and metallurgy, the identity of the soldier who buried the coins may yet be discovered as the excavation continues.

We are grateful for the important support of our donors who sustained this effort and to all the institutions, scholars, and researchers who helped realize this fascinating project.

Following this exhibition, the coins will be on view in the newly designed museum of Gaiole in Chianti.



## Michelangelo's Bandini *Pietà* in Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

In the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, the restoration of Michelangelo's Bandini *Pietà* is progressing well. Commissioned by the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, the project is led by Paola Rosa assisted by an excellent team that includes the Soprintendenza, project heads from the Opera del Duomo Foundation including the museum director Mons. Timothy Verdon, and others.



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.

A key aspect of this project is that visitors, pre-pandemic, were able to see restorers at work thanks to an “open” work site and follow the meticulous conservation methods. Work resumed in various phases per safety protocols, and we anticipate completion this year.

The *Pietà* was sculpted by Michelangelo between 1547 and about 1555, on the eve of his 80th birthday. It is one of three *Pietà* he sculpted. Unlike the other two—his youthful work in the Vatican and the later *Rondanini Pietà* in the Sforza Castle in Milan—the body of Christ is supported by his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus to whom Michelangelo gave his own visage. It was intended for an altar in a Roman church beneath which the artist wished to be buried. However, it eventually was purchased by Cosimo III de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. After being transferred to several locations, it came to rest in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in 1981.

### Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in the Church of San Miniato al Monte

The restoration of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in the Church of San Miniato al Monte is now almost completed and will be formally presented after the present lockdown. It includes the marvelous Della Robbia pieces in the vaulting, the panel painting of the Annunciation by Alessio Baldovinetti, and the copy of the Pollaiuolo altarpiece (the original



was brought to the Uffizi in the late 1800s). The funeral monument with its extraordinary sculpting and gilding has also been cleaned and restored along with the mosaic flooring, stained glass roundel windows, and frescoes of saints and prophets.

We are grateful to the late Professor Jon Cherubini for his bequest. This complete restoration of the entire Chapel was made possible by his generosity.



Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, altar with the Annunciation by Baldovinetti, before restoration. Photo Antonio Quattrone



Alessio Baldovinetti, during the cleaning, detail of one of the prophets. Photo B. Ciccone





Luca della Robbia. Vaulted ceiling, before restoration.  
Photo Antonio Quattrone



Luca della Robbia, The Fortress, after restoration.  
Photo Antonio Quattrone

## RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

### *New Michelangelo Projects*

#### Michelangelo's early masterpieces at the Museum of Casa Buonarroti



Michelangelo Buonarroti, Battle of the Centaurs. Photo Antonio Quattrone

Since its founding, Friends of Florence has supported the care and preservation of works by the polymath Michelangelo—native son and prodigy; leading figure of the Renaissance; and prolific genius. We are delighted to report that we have added two important works to the list. They are on view in the Museum of Casa Buonarroti, his family's residence for centuries. Analysis has begun on the exquisite marble relief, *Battle of the Centaurs* (1490-1492), executed when he was a teenager. Created for Lorenzo the Magnificent, work on the relief ended with the death of the Medici's great patron in 1492, leaving it unfinished with visible scalpel marks but no less beguiling.

The work has never left the property. Michelangelo the Younger installed it in the Gallery on the second floor in 1614. While the subject matter continues to be debated—Vasari described it as the battle of Hercules with the Centaurs—it is believed by some that the young artist was less interested in a mythological representation than in conveying masculine strength, dynamic action, and combat.

Work on the exquisite relief *Madonna of the Stairs* (c. 1490) installed in the same



room, and also created when the artist was a teenager, will begin soon.

## ***Two projects presented at Friends of Florence's 2020 Restoration Prize at the Salone di Restauro have begun***

### **Della Robbia Lunette in the Accademia di Belle Arti**

Andrea della Robbia glazed terracotta lunette in the Loggia of the Accademia di Belle Arti depicts the Madonna and Child with St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ursula and was made for the former Convent of Sant'Orsola, in Florence.



Andrea della Robbia, *Madonna and Child with St. Francis of Assisi*. Glazed terracotta lunette. Loggia of the Accademia di Belle Arti.

Work began in April 2021 in conjunction with Professor Claudio Rocca, Director of the Accademia di Belle Arti, and Dr. Jennifer Celani, resident Art Historian with the Soprintendenza dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio.

Inspection has begun to evaluate its condition and level of deterioration. Surface dirt has now become concretionary and there are surface areas cracking. Early restoration attempts have now deteriorated, too. The conservators will restore the distinctive luminous surfaces and colors for which Della Robbia is celebrated.

### **Hondius Celestial Globe in the Galileo Museum**

We are delighted to report that we have support for eight projects that were presented last year, including the above mentioned Della Robbia lunette beneath the loggia of the Accademia di Belle Arti, and the stunning Hondius Celestial Globe dated 1618 from the Galileo Museum.

The globe—made of papier-mâché covered in plaster and seated in a four-legged wooden base—is dedicated to the rulers of the United





Provinces of Belgium and shows the stars recorded by Tycho Brahe whose portrait is visible under the constellation Cetus. The stars in the southern hemisphere were recorded by Frederick de Houtman.

Hondius Celestial Globe, 1618. Galileo Museum

Preliminary observations show the globe's surface is dark and yellowed due to earlier, unrecorded restoration attempts. The surface is chromatically uneven and so badly stained that it is virtually impossible to read the prints, inscriptions, or watercolored areas. The purpose of the restoration, in addition to being as non-invasive as possible, is to reduce deterioration and to restore the globe to an acceptable level of readability and to minimal working order. Prior to hands-on restoration, a photographic inspection will be conducted along with x-rays to learn more about its internal structure and construction.

Based on those results, study of the construction technique data and microscopic observation, restoration is now underway. We are grateful for the support from Catharin Dalpino for this fascinating project.

It is interesting to note that the globe is depicted in portraits by Dutch master Johannes Vermeer, one held by the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the other by the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt.

We look forward to reporting on progress and findings as these and other projects get underway.

## UPCOMING CULTURAL PROGRAMS

### **Literary Salon with Ross King on May 19 at 5:00 pm EDT (U.S. and Canada)**

Join us virtually for a [Zoom webinar with Dr. King](#) who will discuss his bestselling book *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture* and his new book *The Bookseller of Florence: The Story of the Manuscripts that Illuminated the Renaissance*.

### **Upcoming Trips**

Our planned Dante program due to be held in October 2021 is now postponed due to the pandemic.

Our Monet program is confirmed for June 2022 and there are still some spaces available.

## THANK YOU AND GRAZIE MILLE

Thank you for your ongoing interest in Friends of Florence and our work!

Saluti,

**Simonetta**

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda  
President, Friends of Florence

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