



FRIENDS *of* FLORENCE

Spring 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Florence,

First and foremost, our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid-19 (coronavirus). With our fellow citizens around the globe, we continue to follow guidelines provided by health professionals and public officials and wish everyone the best during these challenging times. Our work with you safeguarding irreplaceable treasures in Florence and the Tuscan region continues, and we are pleased to share news, upcoming opportunities, and updates on a sampling of our numerous current and recently completed restoration projects. Art has the wonderful capacity for bridging divides, stimulating conversation, and uplifting spirits. During difficult times, we appreciate its powers even more.

News

SACI Roman Coin Project

Our Roman coin project with Studio Arts College International (SACI) is underway. SACI is partnering with Friends of Florence for a crucial phase of conservation of a cache of significant Roman coins discovered in Chianti in 2015, part of a collaboration between SACI and Florida State University (FSU). Our objective in restoring these important artifacts is to prepare them for permanent display in the town of Gaiole about the origins of Chianti.



Roman Silver denarius coin portraying Mark Antony (obverse). Struck by mint traveling with Antony, dated to 32 BCE. Photograph: Kenneth Kobre



Roman Silver denarius coin portraying diademed Cleopatra VII (reverse). Struck by mint traveling with Antony, dated to 32 BCE. Photograph: Kenneth Kobre

Discovered by Alvaro Tracchi in 1964 and excavated by FSU since 1973, the site

reveals a historical and cultural layering of more than a millennium. The earliest finds date from the 3rd century BCE—an Etruscan artisan’s quarters and a sanctuary—followed by a Roman villa and spanning through medieval times with the evidence of a *Civitamura*, a walled settlement or castle (12th century ACE) in the Chianti hills.

The 194 Roman silver coins unearthed in 2015 date from 200 BCE to 30 BCE. The coins are thought to be a payment made to a veteran soldier who fought in the battle of Actium (31 BCE) immediately prior to the shift from the Republic to the Roman Empire. Most of the coins are in excellent condition and some of rare typology.

The find has ramifications far beyond Roman history and has the potential to advance our knowledge of numismatics, religion, and metallurgy, too.

Looking Ahead

The fifth edition of our annual Restoration Prize will be now be announced on October 16, 2020, in Florence, as part of the Salone dell’Arte e Restauro—the Art and Restoration Fair. This was to take place in May but the date of the Salone has been postponed due to the coronavirus crisis.



Previous winners of the Friends of Florence - Salone dell’Arte e del Restauro di Firenze Award Grant.

Art historians and members of our Council of Academic Advisors Ross King and William Wallace will lead our trip to trace the life and times of the great French Impressionist Claude Monet (1840–1926) in Paris and Normandy from June 15–22, 2020. Dr. King is an independent curator and writer and Dr. Wallace is the Barbara Murphy Bryant Distinguished Professor of Art History, Washington University in St. Louis. The trip is sold out, but there is a waiting list and we are hoping the dates will not need to be postponed. Please contact info@friendsofflorence.org for more information.

Our February 11–16, 2021 program on Dante Alighieri commemorating the 700th anniversary of his death will take us to Florence (where he was born in 1265), Siena, Verona, and Ravenna (where he died). Please contact info@friendsofflorence.org for more information.

RECENT AND IN-PROCESS PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Michelangelo’s *Pietà* housed in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo



Pietà by Michelangelo in the Opera del Duomo Cathedral Museum (1547-1555 circa). Details before restoration began.
Photographs: Courtesy Friends of Florence

Since its founding 22 years ago, Friends of Florence has often championed the conservation of important and iconic works by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564). Our latest project by the Florentine master is his *Pietà* in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, also known as the *Bandini Pietà*, currently undergoing restoration that began in November 2019, and concluding later this year. A key aspect of this project is that Museum visitors are able to see restorers at work thanks to a specially designed “open” work site. Commissioned by the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, the restoration is led by Paola Rosa assisted by a team of professionals trained at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure. The project is currently paused until the museum reopens.



Restoration worksite of the *Pietà Bandini* by Michelangelo. Museum of the Opera del Duomo, Florence.
Photograph: Courtesy Friends of Florence

The Carrara marble *Pietà* was sculpted by Michelangelo between 1547 and about 1555, on the eve of his 80th birthday. It is one of three *Pietà* sculpted by the great artist. Unlike the other two—his youthful work in the Vatican and the later Rondanini on view in the Sforza Castle in Milan—the body of Christ is supported by Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus to whom Michelangelo gave his own face. It was intended for an altar in a Roman church beneath which the artist wished to be buried.

Not only did Michelangelo not finish the piece, he tried to destroy it in a moment of despair. He gave the damaged work to his servant Antonio da Casteldurante who sold it to the banker Francesco Bandini. It was sold to Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1671. Eventually it was placed in the crypt of the Basilica of San Lorenzo. It remained there until 1722, when Cosimo had it placed in the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. It came to the Museo dell'Opera in 1981.

Tabernacle of the Eucharist in the church of SS. Apostoli



The Eucharistic Tabernacle after the restoration. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Following meticulous restoration over three months, the Tabernacle of the Eucharist (1512) by Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) with his son Giovanni (1469–1529) in the church of SS. Apostoli has been restored, revealing a masterwork of glazed terracotta. Funded with support from Peter Fogliano and Hal Lester, the restoration was performed by Francesca Rossi under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Celani, Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Firenze e le Province di Pistoia e Prato, and the watchful eyes of Father Paolo Cerquitella, the church's Prior.



Detail of the Tabernacle before completed restoration. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone



Detail of the Tabernacle after the restoration. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Among the variety of projects that the Foundation supports, the conservation of glazed terracotta—a hallmark of della Robbia's distinctive practice and one of the

distinguishing genres in Florentine art history—is of particular importance to us.



The lunette with God the Father and two angels praying after the restoration, 2019. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

The Tabernacle's delicate condition prior to restoration was the result of poor maintenance over time, leading to the sedimentation of a thick layer of dirt and grime on surfaces. A key issue was discovered by the restorers: aside from deterioration, the altar had been disassembled and incorrectly reassembled at an unspecified time.

Following diagnostic evaluation, the restoration uncovered the luminous surface through careful cleaning. Gaps and chips on the surface were also addressed including the multi-colored features beyond the gleaming white surfaces. Since completion in December 2019, visitors to the church can now appreciate the masterpiece in its entirety and as the artist intended.



Detail of the Tabernacle after the restoration, 2019. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Verrocchio's *Putto with a Dolphin* returns to restored Juno Terrace in Palazzo Vecchio

On February 28, Simonetta joined colleagues to unveil the newly restored Juno Terrace in the Palazzo Vecchio Museum and the return of Andrea del Verrocchio's (1435–88) *Putto with a Dolphin*. Both the Terrace and sculpture

were restored thanks to Friends of Florence. The *Putto* was featured in the 2019 exhibition *Verrocchio: Master of Leonardo* presented at Palazzo Strozzi and, titled *Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence*, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.



Andrea del Verrocchio, *Putto with a Dolphin*, Palazzo Vecchio Museum, Florence Italy. Restored with support from the Friends of Florence Foundation. Photograph: Nicola Salvioli

At the unveiling, Simonetta noted that the Terrace is a place of rare beauty and enormous historical and artistic importance and thanked Ellen and James Morton for supporting the restoration of the *Putto* and the Foundation’s Board, Barbara and Jon Landau, and Fabrizio Moretti—the donors for the conservation of the Terrace—as well as the City of Florence, the *Soprintendenza*, and the restorers.

The Juno Terrace is one of the “new rooms” that Cosimo I de’Medici ordered built shortly after he moved from the family residence to the building. It was built by Battista del Tasso between 1551–55, and immediately modified by Giorgio Vasari.



Juno Terrace and Andrea del Verrocchio’s *Putto with a Dolphin*, Palazzo Vecchio Museum, Florence, Italy. Restored with support from the Friends of Florence. Photograph: Ottaviano Caruso

Vasari and his workshop created the painted wooden panels, stuccos, and frescoes of mythological scenes. Since the last century, it has been home to Verrocchio’s *Putto*. Lorenzo the Magnificent commissioned the bronze statue for a fountain at a family villa in the early 1470s. It stood in the Michelozzo Courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio until it was moved indoors (between 1957–59). Its current location evokes the never-completed fountain that Vasari planned for the center of the Terrace.



Interior frescos, Juno Terrace, Palazzo Vecchio Museum, Florence, Italy.
Restored with support from the Friends of Florence Foundation. Photograph: Ottaviano Caruso

The restoration project was complex and multi-faceted. The interior frescoes, for example, showed extensive overpainting, numerous attempts at reconstruction, and different types of glues and resins from previous restorations. Surfaces required careful cleaning using a procedure enabling the retrieval of original painting and, while diminishing their visual impact, secure reconstructions of essential portions of the figure of Juno. Tempered glass now protects the frescoes and a new lighting system markedly improves the viewing experience.

Ongoing Projects

In addition to supporting ongoing conservation oversight for Michelangelo's *David* and *Prisoners* (or *Slaves*) in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, the Foundation's maintenance programs continue with the three-year "adoption" of the Cloister of Vows in SS Annunziata (thanks to Board members James and Ellen Morton) and the High Altar in San Miniato a Monte.



Michelangelo's *David* and *Prisoners* (or *Slaves*) under ongoing conservation oversight by Friends of Florence Foundation, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy (2016).

THANK YOU AND GRAZIE MILLE

While we are living in a time of uncertainty, we continue our mission to restore and protect Florence's unique treasures and, as we do, make exciting art historical discoveries and contribute to art historical scholarship. Your generous support helps us employ leading-edge scientific and technological protocols and showcase the results of the meticulous care taken by the conservators—each of whom brings their deep expertise and passion to the profession that benefits us all.

It is especially gratifying to expand our partnerships internationally as with SACI and FSU and the Roman coin trove in Chianti. They help us further heighten awareness and appreciation of Florentine and Tuscan history and culture among a global audience.

We are also pleased to be able to publicly showcase conservation practices with the restoration of Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Museo dell'Opera. As Timothy Verdon, director of the Museo, has written of the *Pietà* "...[it] is the last masterpiece by Michelangelo. And while we talk about it today, as with other sculptures by Buonarroti, as a 'non-finished work,' the wording that perhaps best applies to it comes from the 16th century when they still said: 'infinite work.'" We hope that beautiful idea resonates.

We sincerely appreciate your interest in our work and invite you to join us in safeguarding precious cultural heritage now and for future generations.

Saluti!

To support and learn more

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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.

