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Friends of Florence Videos & New Restorations

| 05/25/2020 |  



The Pala di Bosco al Frati at Florence's San Marco museum, currently under restoration thanks to the Friends of Florence

As Italy emerges from the nationwide lockdown ordered by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte just over three months ago on March 9 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the quarantine measures are being slowly lifted as the nation attempts to ease aspects

of normality back into daily life. One such example is the gradual reopening of cultural institutions, such as museums and libraries; in Florence, state-run institutions are already open – such as such as the **Pitti Palace** complex (May 28), the **Accademia Gallery** (June 2) and the **Uffizi Gallery** (June 3). The Uffizi was also the venue of a costly and complicated restoration paid for thanks to fund-raising by the **Friends of Florence**, of the entire Sala della Niobe, which revealed more than one secret ([see video here](#)).

On the municipality's part, City Councilman for Culture, Tommaso Sacchi, confirmed that the Florence's civic museums will not be reopening to the public until a later date, due to the lack of income they have been suffering since the start of the crisis, as well as the fact that there simply will not be enough tourists present in the city to justify a reopening at this moment in time. As such, this means that some of Florence's most prestigious cultural institutions, such as the Palazzo Vecchio Museum, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Santa Maria Novella, the Brancacci Chapel, the Novecento Museum of 20th and 21st Century Art, Forte Belvedere and others will remain closed for the time being.

With so much art and culture being kept behind-closed-doors or with limited visiting hours for now, the **Friends of Florence** foundation has reacted by launching an initiative entitled **Friends of Florence Stories**. The initiative comes in the form of videos released on the Friends of Florence YouTube account, each of which chronicles a selected conservation project that the organisation has carried out in the past (since 1998) in Florence and other parts of Tuscany. These will provide online "guests" with an opportunity to virtually experience some of Florence and Tuscany's most respected works of art, while also thanking those who made the projects possible.

In the meantime, restorers financed by the Friends of Florence are back at working on the **Pala di Bosco ai Frati**, a project funded by the Friends of Florence. The painting by **Beato Angelico** (1395 – 1455), commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici for the church of the monastery of the same name in the Mugello valley, is now found in Florence's San Marco museum, which contains the largest number of works by the artist and monk who lived there much of his life in the Dominican monastery. The altarpiece, completed after Angelico's return from Rome, offers a blend of the idealized beauty of High Gothic style and early Renaissance trademark naturalism typical of this transition period in the history of art. Although limited public admission to the Opera del Duomo Cathedral Museum, the Duomo (Florence Cathedral), the Baptistery and the Bell Tower is now available ([see article here](#)), the Friends of Florence restoration of the

Michelangelo Pietà in the museum has yet to continue where it was left off during the coronavirus lockdown ([see article](#)) and a video regarding the work carried out.

Founded by Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda and her sister Renée in 1998, Friends of Florence functions as an organisation through which financial support is given to the city's esteemed restoration laboratories, where highly skilled professionals breathe new life into already breath-taking pieces of art, often over 500 years old. Various forms of art, such as sculptures, paintings and elements of architecture have been restored over the years through the financing of Friends of Florence. Being the birthplace of the Renaissance and one of the most culturally rich cities in the world in terms of art and history, Florence is home to an extraordinary array of artworks that, over the years, have been forced to stand the test of time; Friends of Florence thus serves to lend support to Florentine artists hundreds of years after their death, preserving their masterpieces for present and future generations.

One of Friends of Florence's most notable projects was the restoration of the marble statues in the **Loggia dei Lanzi** ([see video in English](#)) in 2001-02. Given its location in the Piazza della Signoria, next to the Palazzo Vecchio and adjoining the Uffizi Gallery, and the fame of the sculptures it contains, such as Benvenuto Cellini's Perseus and Giambologna's Rape of the Sabines, the task of restoring the statues in the Loggia was always going to have an added sense of significance. Through the financial help of Friends of Florence, the Loggia was restored to its original function, when the Grand Dukes of Tuscany intended for it to be adorned with some of the world's most magnificent statues, as it is today.

The restoration of the Rape of the Sabine Women by Giambologna was a crucial aspect of this particular project. The sculpture had remained in its place in the Loggia since 1584, when Donatello's Judith was moved to make way for Giambologna's masterpiece. The statue features three full figures, which the Flemish sculptor managed to carve from a single piece of marble, and was originally produced for the Grand Duke of Tuscany at the time, Francesco de' Medici. Indeed, this combination of three moving figures was an aspect of marble carving that Michelangelo himself had always tried to achieve, highlighting the talent of Giambologna and the importance of restoring his work.

After over 400 years of remaining exposed to the weather at the Loggia, the surface of the statue had become seriously deteriorated, in particular on its north-facing surface, which bore the brunt of the weathering. The degradation was most apparent on parts of the statue where rainwater was able to run off, while dirt had collected on the less-

exposed portions and in the undercuts; below this, however, the marble had retained its original quality and appearance. Furthermore, veins of calcite (composed of a more compact material) had become raised above the underlying surface of marble, such as on the Sabine woman's arm, while her hands had suffered the most deterioration, with fractures in the fingers and the degradation of previous restoration work.

The preservation work carried out on the sculpture included the use of compresses of ammonium bicarbonate, which were placed on areas such as the Sabine woman's right eye, where a considerable amount of dirt had collected. The eye was also later subjected to laser cleansing, which was used to ensure a thorough cleaning of the deepest hollows of the statue. This combination of chemical compresses and laser cleansing was also used on areas such as the hands and foot of the Sabine man, in order to enable restorers to assess any differences and thus choose the more effective form of cleaning. Once all cleaning and preservation had been completed, the statue was re-unveiled to the public on July 18, 2001, largely thanks to the money raised by the Friends of Florence.

Other restoration works that the organisation has financed include the 2018 restoration of the High Altar Chapel of the Crucifix in the **Church of San Miniato al Monte** ([see video](#)), which was completed in celebration of the basilica's 1000-year anniversary. 2018 also saw the restoration of the **Capponi Chapel in the Church of Santa Felicita** ([see video](#)), designed by Filippo Brunelleschi for the Barbadori family in 1422. The project involved restoring all works of art and decorative elements in the Chapel. The full playlist detailing each of these projects are already available to view on the Friends of Florence YouTube account. (*alfie king*)

<https://www.magentaflorence.com/friends-of-florence-videos-and-new-restorations/>