



FRIENDS *of* FLORENCE

Fall 2021 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Florence,

With autumn upon us, we want to update you on some of our projects made possible through your generous support. Even during the pandemic and per safety protocols, we were able to fulfill our ongoing mission to safeguard the bounty of Florentine artistic and architectural treasures—some of the most recognized and beloved in the Western canon.

We are delighted to invite you to visit our new website www.friendsofflorence.org designed by our friends at Plethora Design with a video showcasing our work on the home page. We are grateful to Susan Boswell, one of our distinguished board members, for kindly sharing her expertise. Please let us know what you think!



One of our higher profile projects was completed in September: Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Opera del Duomo—the poignant masterpiece the artist intended for his tomb in Rome. Centuries of accumulations and wax were removed in full view of visitors revealing once again the luminous marble surface and details. There were also important—and intriguing—art historical discoveries described below.

The exquisite portrait of Laura Battiferri by Bronzino from the Museo di Palazzo Vecchio was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of its critically acclaimed Medici exhibition this summer. Conserved thanks to a timely gift from Ellie and Edgar Cullman, Jr., the painting drew crowds of admirers including, I'm sure, many Friends of Florence.

On July 1, 2021, I was deeply honored to receive the United States Consulate General's inaugural Award for Cultural Diplomacy, presented by Consul General Ragini Gupta. The award recognizes outstanding contributions by American citizens and those with strong American ties to the cultural and intellectual life of Florence. The honor was especially given in the name of Friends of Florence alongside Maestro Zubin Mehta, former principal orchestra conductor of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and now Honorary Director for Life, in a ceremony at the Consulate in Florence. Thank you for helping the Foundation receive this special acknowledgement.

PROGRESS REPORT



Michelangelo's *Pietà* dell'Opera del Duomo known as the *Bandini Pietà* after the restoration. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Firenze. Courtesy Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore. Photo Claudio Giovannini

Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

The restoration of Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo was completed in September. Begun in November 2019 but delayed several times due to the pandemic, the restoration process provided a unique opportunity to better understand the sculpture's complex history, its creation, and the Renaissance master's techniques. After a comprehensive evaluation and meticulous cleaning, the legibility and beauty of one of the artist's most intense and troubled masterpieces were restored.

As the aging Michelangelo chiselled, Vasari reported that sparks flew, meaning the block was flawed with inclusions of pyrite. Among the discoveries was that the marble was not sourced at Carrara as long believed, but from another quarry in Seravezza owned by the Medici. While it was believed that, in his frustration with the marble's inferior quality, the artist tried to destroy the work with a hammer, no strike marks were found, suggesting he simply stopped working on it.

The "open" restoration laboratory allowed museum visitors to witness the process as it happened. For the next five months only, through March 30, 2022, the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore will leave the workspace in place so that visitors can enjoy the unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience of joining a guided tour to see the restored *Pietà* at close range. We are deeply grateful to all the donors who contributed to this historic project.

Funeral monument of Benozzo Federighi, by Luca della Robbia, Santa Trinita

The funeral monument of Benozzo Federighi, bishop of Fiesole, was created by Luca della Robbia in 1454, and was originally located in the Church of San Pancrazio. Now located in the Church of Santa Trinita, the monument features a floral frame of “opus sectile” (a type of mosaic) made of tiles (tessere) of different shapes in glazed and gilded terracotta. The almost three-dimensional sculpture of Bishop Federighi is placed on an antique-style sarcophagus. Two angels hold a laurel wreath with the name of the deceased carved in Latin. On the back of the niche are depictions in high relief of Christ with the Madonna and St. John on either side.

The restoration consisted of a delicate cleaning process, intensive research, and enhancement of the surfaces to highlight traces of gilding and polychromy to restore visibility and reveal details. The project enabled the conservators to study in-depth the experimental and innovative techniques used by Luca della Robbia in the execution of the frame and thus contribute to our knowledge of the artist's methods and materials.



Luca Della Robbia, Funeral Monument of Benozzo Federighi, Church of Santa Trinita.

IN-PROCESS PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

San Nicola Chapel, Church of Santissima Annunziata

The restoration of the San Nicola Chapel in the church of Santissima Annunziata was initiated this year. With generous support from The Giorgi Family Foundation, the project aims to recover the decorative elements and overall interior of the chapel in the monumental complex and make them more legible and accessible for worshipers and visitors.

Property of the Palagio family since 1353, the chapel was originally decorated by Taddeo Gaddi with frescos depicting scenes of the life of San Nicola. However, during

the first half of the 17th century, the chapel underwent adaptations as did most Catholic churches after the Council of Trent. The redecoration was entrusted to Matteo Rosselli who finished it in 1623, when the new frescos were revealed to the public along with the altarpiece by Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli.

While preserving the 15th century architectural layout, the chapel was entirely renovated with lavish decorations in stucco, gold, and rich polychrome marble. In the rib vaults, the four Evangelists are depicted, Scenes from San Nicola's life and curtain-holding angels (Angeli reggicortina) are profiled in the lunettes. On the two side walls "drapes" are held open by cherubs (putti) revealing niches in marble containing basanite funerary plaques flanked by allegories of the Cardinal Virtues.



San Nicola Chapel in the church of Santissima Annunziata. Before restoration by Friends of Florence.

Restoration of Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition*, Basilica Cathedral of Volterra

In September, we began the restoration of Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition* on the 500th anniversary of its creation. Owned by the parish of the Basilica Cathedral of Volterra the painting appears regularly in European art history textbooks. The restorers began with a preliminary investigation using cutting-edge tools and technology. Their diagnostic inspections and chemical and physical analyses allow them to virtually penetrate the layers of paint with machines that will reveal the secrets concealed beneath Rosso's pure or mixed colors, thus permitting them to look for drawings and any changes he may have made while painting the altarpiece. This research will determine the composition of Rosso's palette and the binding agents supporting the painted surface. At the same time, they will gain in-depth knowledge of the wood and of any movements occurring within the support structure due to earlier restoration

attempts performed over the centuries.

The Rosso Fiorentino room where the painting is displayed will be turned into an open restoration site visible through glass partitions so visitors may watch the process. A video outside the room will tell the story of the painting and illustrate the various phases of the operation. We are grateful to Kathe and John Dyson and The Alexander Bodini Foundation for their donation to this important project.



Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition*, Basilica Cathedral of Volterra. Before restoration by Friends of Florence.

UPCOMING TRIPS

Our Monet program to France is confirmed for June 13-20, 2022. Our dear friends Ross King and William Wallace, esteemed art historians and members of our Council of Academic Advisors, will lead our trip to trace the life and times of the great French Impressionist Claude Monet in Paris and Normandy. 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. Reservations for this trip are now full but there is a waitlist.

Our Dante Alighieri program is now scheduled for February 9-14, 2023, following the great poet's travels from Florence (where he was born), to Verona, Siena, and Ravenna (where he died). Please contact info@friendsofflorence.org for more information.

THANK YOU AND GRAZIE MILLE

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

Saluti,

Simonetta

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda
President, Friends of Florence

To support and learn more

Donate

to Friends of Florence

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.

