



FRIENDS *of* FLORENCE

Spring 2022 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Florence,

Our restoration team and partners have been very busy since our last newsletter. We would like to update you on a recently completed project and highlight a few in process.

Finally, our trip to France (postponed due to the pandemic) is taking place June 13-20, 2022. Our dear friends Ross King and William Wallace, art historians, authors, and members of our Council of Academic Advisors, will lead the way as we explore the life and times of the eminent French Impressionist Claude Monet. Follow our path from Paris to Giverny with stops along the way on Facebook.

COMPLETED PROJECTS



Michelangelo's *Madonna of the Stairs* and *Battle of the Centaurs*

The restoration of two exquisite marble sculptures that Michelangelo Buonarroti created when he was a teenager training in the Garden of San Marco in Florence—*Madonna of the Stairs* (1490) and *Battle of the Centaurs* (1491-1492)—was completed in March. They are again on view in [Casa Buonarroti](#), the charming museum devoted to the Renaissance master that was once his home. The project included the refurbishment of the “Room of Marbles” where both works are displayed.

The striking new installation enhances the experience of these powerful works portending Michelangelo's mature genius.



We are extremely grateful to Patricia and Marshall Geller, who supported the refurbishment of the room and restoration of *Battle of the Centaurs*, and to the Maher family for their contribution to the *Madonna of the Stairs* project.

Michelangelo carved both reliefs during his apprenticeship in the Garden of San Marco, where artists and intellectuals of Lorenzo the Magnificent's circle would gather. He worked under the guidance of Bertoldo di Giovanni, Donatello's last pupil and assistant, who died in 1491.

The artist was just fifteen when he created *Madonna of the Stairs*. Although the technique for bas-relief carving was essentially developed by Donatello, the depiction of the staircase was Michelangelo's innovation, producing an illusion of greater depth.

The carving remained with the family after Michelangelo's death in 1564, but his nephew and heir, Leonardo, reluctantly gave it to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, along with other unfinished works. In 1616, grand duke Cosimo II returned it to the artist's grand-nephew, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger.

The unfinished *Battle of the Centaurs* is an eloquent example of the young artist's skill carving marble. From the almost full figures to the delicate reliefs of fighters in the background, his control depicting the interlocking bodies is extraordinary.

These two projects were presented at the fifth edition of the Friends of Florence Award Grant at the *Salone dell'Arte e del Restauro* in 2020. Daniela Manna and Marina Vincenti restored the works under the direction of Casa Buonarroti and supervision of Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Firenze e le Province di Pistoia e Prato.

When next in Florence, we hope you will take time to see these sublime works in a new light (literally) and the many other treasures on view at Casa Buonarroti.

IN-PROCESS PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Restoration of the Brancacci Chapel frescoes



We are delighted that access to this project currently underway in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine is open to the public. Visitors may reserve a time slot to walk along the restorers' scaffolding in small groups for a first-ever close-up look at Masaccio, Masolino, and Filippino Lippi's early Renaissance masterpieces depicting Biblical stories and chapters from the life of Saint Peter.

This project and unique opportunity are made possible thanks to support from Dan Pritzker of the Jay Pritzker Fund, who is a member of our Board, along with fellow board member Jim Dicke II, who with his wife Janet, have been supporting our projects for 23 years. We are also grateful to Peter Fogliano and the Hal Lester Foundation, active donors for more than 15 years, for their generous support.

The Brancacci Chapel, a magnet for visitors for over five centuries, was last restored in the 1980s. The inspection conducted in November 2020 revealed some critical conservation issues. In January 2022, in cooperation with the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Firenze e le Province di Pistoia e Prato, and the National Research Council, the conservation team began monitoring the "health" of the Chapel.

The team is conducting an in-depth diagnostic evaluation using the latest technologies and the renowned skill of local conservators. The non-invasive techniques make it possible



to learn about and understand the artists' techniques, the materials they used, and the alteration-deterioration phenomena.

The imaging campaign is underway, taking high-definition photographs under visible, raking, ultraviolet, and infrared light to identify areas with anomalies or problems that cannot be seen by the naked eye. The process will continue until all the

findings are interpreted, thereby providing the basis for proper restoration and ongoing monitoring.

The Chapel was founded by the Brancacci family in the late 14th century. Felice Brancacci, a wealthy merchant, commissioned the frescoes with scenes from the life of Saint Peter in 1423. Masolino and Masaccio worked on the paintings together but when they left the city in 1427, the works remained unfinished.

The Brancacci were exiled in 1436 because of their anti-Medici stance. The friars had the portraits of all those with ties to family "deleted" and renamed the chapel for the *Madonna del Popolo* in 1450. Between 1481 and 1483, Filippino Lippi restored and painted missing scenes. Although the Chapel was damaged by a 1771 fire that devastated the interior of the church, the frescoes survived.

The Riccardi family acquired the Chapel in 1780, restoring the altar and floor. Neglected for centuries, the frescoes were dusted in 1904. The restorations done in the 1980s made it possible to retrieve the beautiful painted decorations. The project is expected to take approximately 16 months to complete. When you are next in Florence, take time to marvel over the frescoes' details at eye level.

Rosso Fiorentino's Deposition

In September 2021, we began a major, multi-phase project to restore Rosso Fiorentino's Deposition, a stunning composition depicting the grief-stricken figures of Mary, Mary Magdalen, and an apostle as the crucified body of Christ is lowered by laborers. The painting is well-known to art history students and admired by scholars as a seminal example of early Mannerism popularized by Fiorentino, Pontormo, and some of their contemporaries.

This project commemorates the 500th anniversary of the painting's completion in 1521. The 12-foot-high altarpiece is on view in the Pinacoteca Civica Museum in Volterra, a town southwest Florence. Daniele Rossi and wood conservation expert Roberto Buda are leading the restoration team. We are grateful for the support from Kathe and John



Dyson and the Alexander Bodini Foundation for this important project.

As with all projects, they began with meticulous, non-invasive diagnostic inspections and analyses to allow them to virtually penetrate the layers of paint to reveal secrets concealed beneath Rosso's pigments and binding agents. They are also gaining in-depth knowledge of the wood and support structure which suffered from compression and earlier restoration attempts performed over centuries.

The room housing the painting has been turned into an open worksite visible to visitors through glass. Visitors are able to watch the restorers work, while a video-diary tells the story of the painting and illustrates the various phases of the operation. We expect the project, to be completed in December 2022, will disclose more insights into the artist's techniques and materials.

“Sala della Guardaroba,” or Geographical Maps and Danti’s Terrestrial Globe and Map Room, Palazzo Vecchio



Begun in spring 2021, the multi-part restoration of “Sala della Guardaroba,” or Geographical Maps and Danti’s Terrestrial Globe and Map Room in Palazzo Vecchio is nearing completion.

As the newly elected Duke of Florence, Cosimo I de' Medici's was eager to establish his legacy. The notion of representing in a single room the whole of the world as it was known in the mid-16th century reflects his desire to project himself as lord of the universe, his very name from the Greek word "kosmos."

He engaged Vasari to retrofit the palace to meet the needs of his ambitions, including the addition of the “Guardaroba” designed and constructed between 1561 and 1565 and lavishly decorated and furnished. The duke desired an imposing space to accommodate the precious Medici collections and one that would serve as a space to study cosmography and the world complete with a globe of the earth. In 1563, Ignazio Danti, gifted priest, mathematician, and mapmaker, was employed by Cosimo to complete the

vision of the grand hall of maps including the massive globe.

At 220 cm in diameter, it is the largest, surviving antique globe in the world. We look forward to welcoming visitors back into this singular space and introducing them to technological, scientific, artistic, and historical context providing deeper insights into the construction, design, and preservation of this unique collection.

UPCOMING TRIPS

Our Dante Alighieri tour is 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

This is a perfect season to revisit Sandro Botticelli's iconic *La Primavera* (c. 1482)—the artist's exuberant ode to spring's promise of renewal. It was restored as part of an expansive project in the Uffizi Gallery completed in 2016, thanks to your generous support. While nothing can replace standing before that superb masterpiece, you can see it virtually on the [Uffizi's webpages](#) and a video on our [YouTube channel](#).

We sincerely appreciate your ongoing interest in Friends of Florence and our work! Mille grazie!

Saluti,

Simonetta

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda
President, Friends of Florence

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