



FRIENDS of FLORENCE

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**MAJOR RESTORATION PROJECT AT THE
BASILICA OF THE SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA, FLORENCE
COMPLETED BY FRIENDS OF FLORENCE**

Renaissance frescoes and artwork by Florentine masters restored in the Cloister of the Vows

Washington, DC...Friends of Florence and its partners celebrate the completion of a four-year restoration project at the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence of twelve superb lunette frescoes, architectural elements, and marble statues

in the Cloister of the Vows funded by the organization. The frescoes are by Florentine Renaissance masters Alessio Baldovinetti (1424–99), Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530), Andrea Feltrino (1477–1548), Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540), Franciabigio (1482–1525), Pontormo (1494–1557), and Cosimo Rosselli (1439–1507). The sculptural components include columns, portals, and coats of arms as well as a bas-relief depicting the *Madonna*



Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy (after restoration)

of the Snow attributed to Luca della Robbia (1400–82) and a bust of Andrea del Sarto. The Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata was built between 1444 and 1477, based on designs by Michelozzo (1396–1472) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72). It is considered the mother church of the Servite Order and was consecrated in 1516.

Del Sarto's *Arrival of the Magi* (1511) and Rosso Fiorentino's *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (1517) were the first two lunettes to be restored in 2013, followed by Pontormo's *The Visitation* (1516). They were featured in the exhibition *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino, Diverging Paths of Mannerism* at Palazzo Strozzi in 2014.



Andrea del Sarto, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1514
(before restoration)



Andrea del Sarto, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1514
(after restoration)

Restoration of the Cloister of the Vows was enabled by a major donation through Friends of Florence (please see supporters below). The comprehensive restoration project, under the auspices of the Comune di Firenze and under the supervision of the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale e PSAE di Firenze, was conducted by the fresco restoration team of Gioia Germani and S.A.R. Restauro Snc with Cristiana Conti and Alessandra Popple.

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, co-founder and president of Friends of Florence, said, "This extensive restoration project at the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata has been one of our most demanding and satisfying jobs for the restorers who have returned the Cloisters of the Vows to its stunning glory. The public now has an opportunity to experience the beauty of the paintings and decorative art work as they were conceived by the original artists. We remain eternally grateful to our devoted supporters, many of whom are based in the U.S., and the teams of specialists at Florence's esteemed restoration laboratories."

The Cloister of the Vows (*Chiostrino dei Voti*)

The Cloister serves as the entrance atrium to Santissima Annunziata, one of the most important churches in Florence. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo designed the four-sided portico, sustained by columns with Corinthian capitals and cross vaults. The atrium is decorated with marble reliefs and twelve wall

paintings by major Florentine artists.

The painting of the lunettes began in 1460, thanks to numerous patrons and devoted followers of the church. Sixteen years elapsed between the creation of the first lunette, Baldovinetti's *Nativity*, and the second, Cosimo Rosselli's *Vestition of S. Filippo Benizzi*, but work accelerated in 1509 with Andrea del Sarto completing five scenes in two years. Del Sarto continued the scenes with stories from the life of the Virgin Mary: *The Procession of the Magi* in 1513 and *The Birth of the Virgin* in 1514. The following year, del Sarto assigned the two remaining lunettes to his best pupils: Pontormo painted *The Visitation* in 1516, and Rosso Fiorentino painted *The Assumption of the Virgin* in 1517.

The decoration of the four upper walls above the portico was completed between 1510 and 1514. Andrea Feltrino painted the backgrounds with coats of arms and motifs in which six medallions with Old Testament prophets were inserted, as well as two walled-in windows that depict a friar gazing out onto the Cloister and a majolica vase with lilies.

Restoration Project

The frescoes of the Cloister were originally painted in an outdoor atrium leading into the Basilica subjecting them to weather conditions, temperature and humidity fluctuations, and wear and tear from being in a highly trafficked public space. Measures had been adopted at different times over the centuries to curb their deterioration. Grand Duke Leopold II paid for the spaces between the columns of the atrium to be sealed in 1833, while an inner door and skylight were put in place in 1913 (and the wood and glass enclosures of 1833 removed). However, these efforts proved ineffective in protecting the frescoes.

It was common practice to display ex-votos (offerings given to fulfil a vow) of all kinds in the Basilica with their oil lamps and candles. An initial, systematic transfer of the ex-votos and frescoes from the atrium to the main cloister in the Basilica began in 1630, leading to its being renamed the Cloister of the Vows. Most of the ex-votos were moved to an unpainted lunette, next to an altarpiece by Fra Angelico that hung in the space at that time.

The shift meant that the custom of lighting votive lamps moved into the Cloister causing the frescoes to become darker from exposure to smoke. They suffered additional alterations caused by the insertion of hooks on the frescoes to hang lamps. The custom became so damaging to the frescoes that Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo ordered that all ex-votos be removed and burnt in the square outside the Basilica in 1785.

The Basilica's religious importance and the quality of the paintings ensured that efforts were made to conserve and protect them, but without lasting effect. The succession of restorers periodically called in to "refresh" the frescoes using organic substances to contain the whitening and



Alessio Baldovinetti, *Nativity*, 1460
(before restoration)



Alessio Baldovinetti, *Nativity*, 1460
(after restoration)



Pontormo, *The Visitation*, 1514-16
(before restoration)



Pontormo, *The Visitation*, 1514-16
(after restoration)

blurring caused by rising humidity and condensation, led to the saturation of the paint which became increasingly vulnerable to peeling and deterioration.

The cast iron and glass skylight installed in the early 20th century to provide a protective covering did not resolve the conservation challenges. In the late 1950s, the frescoes suffered their most traumatic experience with the detachment of all the lunettes, the tondos with prophets painted by Andrea Feltrino, and the paintings attributed to Alessio Baldovinetti in the windows in the upper part of the Cloister. A considerable number of frescoes and painted objects had reached alarming levels of deterioration at that time largely due to atmospheric pollution which, when combined with previous restorations, forced authorities to commission urgent restorations that proved even more damaging.

The first four lunettes, detached in 1957, were del Sarto's *Birth of the Virgin* (1514), Fiorentino's *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (1517), Baldovinetti's *Nativity* (1460), and Pontormo's *The Visitation* (1514–16). The frescoes detached in 1965 were Franciabigio's *Betrothal of the Virgin* (1513), Rosselli's *Vestition of St. Philip Benizi* (1476), and del Sarto's *Arrival of the Magi* (1511) and *St. Philip Benizi Healing the Leper* (1509–10). The

remainder of the *Stories of St. Philip Benizi* were detached in 1969 after Florence's catastrophic floods.

Friends of Florence began the restoration of the frescoes and the Cloister's stone work in 2013, completing the project in fall 2017.

To view a video of the restoration project, click [here](#).

About Friends of Florence

Friends of Florence is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., supported by individuals from around the world who are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the cultural and historical integrity of the arts in the city and surrounding area of Florence, Italy. To date, the organization has raised and donated \$10 million for conservation projects in the region, including the substantial upgrading and retrofitting of the Botticelli Room at the Uffizi Gallery and conservation of 48 drawings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo from the Horne Museum in Florence.

Friends of Florence provides financial support directly to the city's restoration laboratories to restore, safeguard, and make available to the public a broad range of art from paintings and sculptures, to architectural elements and collections of smaller objects.

Through educational programs and events and by working closely with local and national partners—including the City of Florence, Italian Ministry of Art, and numerous international committees and organizations—Friends of Florence strives to increase public understanding and appreciation of Florence and Tuscany's abundant art treasures. www.friendsofflorence.org

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Images (top to bottom):

Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy (after restoration 2013-17). Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Andrea del Sarto, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1514 (before restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Andrea del Sarto, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1514 (after restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Alessio Baldovinetti, *Nativity*, 1460 (before restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Alessio Baldovinetti, *Nativity*, 1460 (after restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Pontormo, *The Visitation*, 1514-16 (before restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Pontormo, *The Visitation*, 1514-16 (after restoration). Cloister of the Vows, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

Friends of Florence Lead Donors for Cloister of the Vows Restoration:

Bill & Julie Ballard: *Nativity*, 1460, Alessio Baldovinetti

Jim & Janet Dicke II: *Arrival of the Magi*, 1511, Andrea del Sarto

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda: *Birth of the Virgin Mary*, 1514, Andrea del Sarto

Aspen Chapter: *Betrothal of the Virgin Mary*, 1513, Franciabigio

John & Kathe Dyson: *The Visitation*, 1516, Pontormo

Susan Boswell: *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, 1517, Rosso Fiorentino

Ellen & James Morton: *Miracle of the Saint's Relics*, 1510, Andrea del Sarto

Ellie & Edgar Cullman Jr.: *S. Filippo Benizi death*, 1509–10, Andrea del Sarto

Ellen & James Morton: *The possessed woman saved by S. Filippo Benizi*, 1509–10, Andrea del Sarto

The Jay Prizker Foundation: *Punishment of the blasphemous men*, 1509–10, Andrea del Sarto

The Jay Prizker Foundation: *St. Filippo Benizi Healing the Leper*, 1509–10, Andrea del Sarto

The Jay Prizker Foundation: *Child restored to life*, 1509–10, Andrea del Sarto

Stacy & Bruce Simon: *Vestition of S. Filippo Benizi*, 1476, Cosimo Rosselli

Bob & Kathy Craine: *Aquasantiera*, Antonio Susini, 1615

Brinkerhoff/Driemann/O'Brien: *Tondo raffigurante Noè*, Andrea Feltrino, 1510–14

Brinkerhoff/Driemann/O'Brien: *Tondo raffigurante Giona*, Andrea Feltrino, 1510–14

Ellie & Edgar Cullman Jr: *Tondo raffigurante Daniele*, Andrea Feltrino, 1510–14

Additional Friends of Florence Donors Contributing to the Project:

Jim Dicke, Jici Gao, Lila E. Yawn, Sarah Mullen, David Canepari, Jurgen Hoffmeister, Ann M. Stevens, Jamie C. Nicholls, Randall Hatcher, Verl & Sandra Pudry, Philip & Lauren Hughes, Carbonary Family Foundation, Jim & Nancy Greenleaf, Barry & Jody Turkus Foundation, Hester Diamond, Friends of Florence, Ann Jackson & Kendrick Wilson, Nathalie Chevereau, Sonia & Paul Tudor Jones, Tom & Laurel Barrack, JP Morgan, Rob & Ann Krebs, Ann O'Brien, Rudy & Sally Ruggles, Ragnar Horn, Kevin & Dorothy Rivette