

A Look Back as the Amici degli Uffizi Celebrate Their 20th Anniversary



Amici degli Uffizi and its sister association Friends of the Uffizi funded the Gallery's new Michelangelo Room.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Amici degli Uffizi, an organization dedicated to preserving the Uffizi Gallery and highlighting its contribution to global art and culture. In the past twenty years, the Amici have contributed to numerous restoration projects to ensure the longevity of what can confidently be called the most distinguished museum in the world.

The origins of Amici degli Uffizi can be traced back to May 27, 1993, when a car bomb exploded in the street adjacent to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. The blast killed five people and blew a hole in the side of the gallery, which destroyed three priceless artworks and badly damaged many others. State and city workers skirmished to repair the museum, yet outrage still grew within the Florentine community, who rallied to protest the act of terrorism

and pressured the Italian government to accelerate the process.

Within two months of the bombing, a group of concerned citizens, including Contessa Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti, rallied together to form the Italian nonprofit, Amici degli Uffizi. They moved quickly to help raise additional funds for the renovation of their beloved Uffizi Gallery, which houses the world's most significant collection of Italian Renaissance art by masters including Michelangelo, da Vinci and Botticelli. Founder Contessa Rimbotti had a personal stake in the endeavor; her Colonna family lineage extended back to Vittoria Colonna, a noblewoman and close friend with Michelangelo, who wrote sonnets in her honor.

Amici degli Uffizi grew quickly as it became apparent that the restoration of artworks

at the Gallery did not end with those damaged by the bombing. Almost all of the art needed some degree of restoration, including famous paintings, sculptures and tapestries. Their efforts in raising funds proved to be paramount in making the restoration a reality, since the renovation process is extremely delicate and expensive, and there are only a small group of trained artisans in Italy capable of working on art with such historical significance.

In 2006, a sister nonprofit, Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, was created in Palm Beach, Florida. The Amici and Friends now work to jointly and singularly fund significant restoration and educational projects, such as the Uffizi's new Michelangelo Room, which opened earlier this year, and the renovation of The Laocoön Group, a replica of the original masterpiece found in the Vatican Museum that was completed in 1525 by Baccio Bandinelli and was commissioned by Pope Leo X de' Medici as a gift to King Francis I.

Under the leadership of Lisa Marie Browne, executive director since the organization's founding, Friends of the Uffizi Gallery has grown outside of Florida, with events held in New York at Sotheby's and in Nantucket, Cleveland and the Hamptons. In 2013, the Friends partnered with the Coral Gables Museum of Art, Norton



The organizations helped restore the famed Laocoön statue in Florence.



Contessa Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti, president of Amici degli Uffizi.

Museum of Art and Frost Museum of Art on educational and outreach events.

Noteworthy advisory and executive board members for the organization include Gordon Lewis, founder of the Fine Arts Conservancy and an internationally recognized expert on art restoration, Peter Weller, former actor-turned-art historian and Scott Diamant, founder of the Palm Beach Show Group, which organizes

multiple fine art, jewelry and antique fairs throughout the United States.

Earlier this month, The Times of London named the Uffizi Gallery the world's greatest gallery, placing it at the top of a list that also included the Prado, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre and National Gallery. Amici degli Uffizi look forward to another twenty years of preserving the greatest gallery in the world.

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