The Unchained Intelligence of Leonardo

The restoration of the “Adoration”, made possible thanks to the generous support of the Amici, restores a true understanding of the artist in a tempest of brushwork expressing the master’s incessant mental activity.

The Amici degli Uffizi have provided an immense gift not only to “their” museum but also to all humanity. In effect, the restoration of the Adoration of the Magi is as important as that of the Tondo Doni by Michelangelo and the Last Supper in Santa Maria delle Grazie, once again by Leonardo. On the contrary, it presented major levels of difficulty because the panel has no settled passages being an image that was never finished, not even in the mind of the artist.

The first step was diagnostic testing: lengthy in procedure, sophisticated, of wide spectrum; next, the epochal decision to proceed with restoration; a courageous decision as the work proves to be one of the most difficult by Leonardo. At the same time, the activities of the curators and technicians, practically their every move in this demanding challenge, underwent the scrutiny of the public: Leonardo is a pop icon as well as a passionate topic among scholars. Certainly, expectations are many and diverse when facing the possibility of “reading” a work that was previously almost invisible; but this restoration has restored a true understanding of the artist that novelistic popularization – especially in most recent times – had somewhat obscured.

A discourse that also holds true for those in charge the restorers, the art historians: because as the restoration of the Adoration of the Magi gradually progressed, not only were sub-

An extraordinary adventure

Now that it is over, it is with great pride that we admire the results of the restoration on the extraordinary masterpiece by Leonardo, the Adoration of the Magi, it has been a long voyage lasting six years and a unique experience in the over twenty-year long history of the Amici degli Uffizi. It was 2011 when the then current director of the Uffizi, Antonio Natali, contacted us as possible patrons for the restoration of the masterwork. We took up the commitment – notable for our forces – with responsible determination and awareness, a privilege that today finds us the truly proud participants of an unrepeatable adventure, studded with many exciting moments along the path of the restoration of this masterpiece that unites absolute beauty with material fragility, the deterioration of which had to be arrested and prevented further.

We are happy to have been partners in this important restitution, in the homecoming to the Uffizi of Leonardo’s “Cosmo Magico”, now completely legible in its admirable iconographic detail. Moreover, the certainty of its conservation for future generations is of inestimable value to us all. And all was made possible here in Florence, thanks to the wealth of skill and expertise that this city of art can boast: from the rally of funding from our fellow members to the diagnostics, testing, study and research and the cleaning and restoration carried out by the staff of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure under the direction of Marco Ciatti. Each step was taken here, and the result of this choral effort empowered us all to fulfill our greatest expectations, right up to the ‘homecoming’ of a work that represents the highest expression of Leonardo’s creative furor.

A celebration that also rewards the unity of intent and sentiment with which the Association of the Amici operates, renewing its faithfulness to the programs and activities of the Uffizi, in full collaboration with the director Eike Schmidt.

Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti
President of Friends of the Uffizi

Eike D. Schmidt
Director of the Uffizi Galleries

(cont.d page 2)
lime passages of painting discovered but also new avenues opened in comprehending the staggering, unchained intelligence underlying it all: on the painted surface in fact, beyond the main representation, various texts and subtexts came to light, in a play of brushwork expressing the incessant mental activity of the artist. If we consider the Uffizi a living body, and the works within it the body’s limbs, then the Adoration of the Magi is the most highly sophisticated organ, the brain; and each brushstroke is a pictorial synapsis. It is as though Leonardo unveils to the observer his most intimate thoughts: and now, with restoration complete, how natural it comes to stand for longer moments examining the painting, to discover previously concealed intricacies and drawings of figures, animals, landscape details that multiply the interpretive combinations.

It took time, prudence and, above all, the intelligence of a small army of experts, from the moment Antonio Natali commenced the restoration together with the former Superintendent Cristina Acidini. Since my arrival, a year and a half ago – which coincided with the very delicate phase of the final cleaning – I have made many decisions on how to proceed, together with my colleagues from the Opificio. In some cases (I refer for example to the dark marks in correspondence to the head of the Christ Child), we essentially decided to take no further action, deferring the eventual removal to a time in the future when more sophisticated means will probably be capable of identifying materials with greater certainty.

I would just like to add a few words to say how lucky we are, how lucky the whole world is, to have been able here in Florence to call on the intelligence, expertise and experience of two restorers like Roberto Bellucci and Patrizia Kitanò, both from the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, who represent the highest level of competence in contemporary restoration, Italian and international; to which I add the admiration due to Ciro Castelli and Andrea Santacesaria for their inventiveness and expertise in wood construction and consolidation. It can surely be said that the Opificio delle Pietre Dure is the only institution that can guarantee to the world today a result of this aesthetic and cultural significance.

On your part, dear Amici, we have received all that a museum can desire from its supporters: not only unprecedented generosity, but also unconditioned trust and infinite patience without which we could not have completed this project, one that will remain exemplary in the history of the Uffizi, in the history of restoration, in the history of Leonardo.

Eike D. Schmidt

Encounter with a masterpiece

The history of the Adoration of the Magi by Leonardo, commissioned for the high altar of the church of San Donato a Scopeto. The extraordinary novelty of its complex composition

The Adoration of the Magi was commissioned to Leonardo in 1481 by the Regular Canons of Saint Augustine for the high altar of the church of San Donato a Scopeto, once located on a hill outside Porta Romana in Florence. The commission was suddenly interrupted when Leonardo left for Milan, a departure determined either by his own will or one prompted by Lorenzo de’ Medici. In any case, the large painting was left unfinished and it is almost certain that it was never placed on the altar for which it was intended. The Augustinian monks of San Donato in Scopeto waited several years for the artist to complete the work until in the early 1490s they decided to commission another painting of similar size and subject to Filippino Lippi who fulfilled the commission in 1496.

The church and convent of San Donato a Scopeto, Romanesque in origin, was destroyed prior to the siege of Florence in 1529 like other convents located outside the city walls to assure that the sieging armies could not use them as shelters. This fact unfortunately leaves us with no architectural points of reference to support a hypothetical reconstruction of the configuration of the painting by Leonardo or its frame.

Records do instead give account of the painting’s various locations during the decades and centuries to follow, beginning with Vasari’s mention of the work in his biography of Leonardo in the second edition of his Lives (1568). There he states – using a past tense verb – that the Adoration of the Magi “was in the home of Amerigo Benci opposite the loggia of the Peruzzi”; and

Leonardo da Vinci, Adoration of the Magi (Gallery of Statues and Paintings of the Uffizi). The painting prior to restoration carried out by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure with the support of the Amici degli Uffizi.
other documents in effect confirm a certain familiarity between Leonardo and the Benci family. In 1621, archival registers record the work in the Casino di San Marco among the possessions bequeathed by don Antonio de’ Medici to his son Giulio upon whose death in 1670, the painting entered the ‘Guardaroba Medicea’ (Medici collections). From there, it arrived at the Uffizi where it has been up to the present, except for a brief interim in the second half of the 18th century when it was removed to the villa of Castello.

In the context of Florentine painting in 1481, the work was extraordinarily groundbreaking for its innovative and complex composition, for the multitude of figures circulating around the biblical protagonists, for their varied poses and expressions, anticipating the “modern” manner in painting whose birth Vasari attributes to Leonardo himself.

Moreover, beyond the story of the Epiphany and the visit of the Magi, other content makes the work rich in complex iconological themes according to the very convincing interpretation of Antonio Natali who traces the significance not only to the writings of Saint Augustine, but also to the prophecies of Isaiah who possibly can be identified with the pensive figure seen in the extreme left-hand foreground. It follows that the tree, whose roots emerge from the rock near the Christ Child, assumes a forceful symbolism and, not by chance, constitutes the perspectival point of convergence of the entire composition likewise corresponding in its placement to the golden mean along the width of the painting. The background, finally legible in all of its depth, permits a reading previously possible only with diagnostic instruments; it is clearly divided into two sectors with a battle scene on the right and a group of people intent on rebuilding a temple on the left. In this astonishing painting, Leonardo appears to foreshadow many figurative inventions adopted in the years to come: the group of the Madonna and Child seated on a large stone before an open space anticipates the solution found in the two versions of the Virgin of the Rocks in Paris and London; the head of the bald old man on the right returns in the Saint Jerome of the Vatican Pinacoteca; the skirmish of horsemen brings to mind the Battle of Anghiari, and so forth. An unfinished masterpiece dated 1481 that looks to the future and is the foundation of the painting for a century to come.

Marco Ciatti
Superintendent of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure
Following an agreement between the Opificio delle Pietre Dure and the ex-Soprintendenza Speciale of the Florentine Polo Museale, in November 2011, the large painting by Leonardo representing the Adoration of the Magi was transferred with grand spectacle from the Uffizi Gallery to the Restoration Laboratory of the Fortezza da Basso. This initiated a period of study, research and diagnostic testing aimed at exploring a series of elements connected to both the material structure and the artistic significance of the work. An adequate knowledge of these two facets was in effect the necessary point of departure in elaborating a conservation project aimed at an even greater in-depth understanding of the masterwork. Fundamental in this process was the patronage of the Amici degli Uffizi who with their unwavering support made the entire operation possible.

There were two major factors that prompted our decision to proceed with intervention on the famous masterpiece: marked alterations of the non-original surface materials and structural problems, visible to the naked eye, stemming from the separation of the support beams with damaging effects reaching to just beneath the painterly surface. Moreover, the surface alterations obscured the internal spatiality and many other details to the viewer. Besides the breaks in the wooden supports, initial stages of a superficial tear in the pictorial surface had been provoked by the accumulation of numerous layers of materials applied to the pictorial surface as a result of restoration methods adopted over the course of centuries by the Grand ducal Galleries.

The conservation project was devised by a team created expressly for this operation following the characteristic methodology of the Opificio after an extensive campaign of diagnostic testing. The results, along with reflections on the historic-artistic significance of the masterpiece and the data regarding the history of its conservation, determined the guidelines for the cleaning process carried out by Roberto Bellucci and Patrizia Ritti and for the consolidation of the wooden supports carried out by Ciro Castelli and Andrea Santacesaria, with the collaboration of Alberto Dimuccio.

The cleaning removed the non-original materials, such as varnishes, glues and patinas that had been layered on the unfinished surface of the painting during periodic interventions of conservation over the course of time. The various films were removed gradually and separately depending on the specific conditions of every single area and every figure. Equally important for the future conservation of the masterpiece was the consolidation of the supports and the system of transverse battens (cross-beams) using a method that allowed for a more adequate structural support while still respecting the historic techniques of construction.

The results of the restoration are thus manifold: a better conservation of all the constitutive materials and a clearer reading of the extraordinary expressive values. Not only are all of the figures and details more legible, but the exceptional internal spatial construction of the painting now reveals a perspectival and atmospheric vision typical of Leonardo, especially the background obscured up to now by a veritable patina. It moreover seems evident that in a manner unusual for his time, Leonardo elaborated his formal research directly on the panel instead of on paper.

Thanking the Amici degli Uffizi, the Uffizi Galleries and all those from the Opificio who contributed to this result, I am happy to give back to the public this truly “rediscovered” masterpiece.
An exhibit at the Uffizi inaugurates a series of exhibitions dedicated to women artists. It explores the little known work of Plautilla Nelli who headed a workshop with pupils within the Convent of Santa Caterina in Cafaggio in Florence.

A small exhibit opens an innovative series of great interest within the Gallerie degli Uffizi. For me this is of the greatest importance with regard to the monographic exhibit on the painter Plautilla Nelli (1524-1588) inaugurated March 8. I would tend to discard celebrative and gendered stereotypes in rereading the singular life of this artist “the first Florentine woman painter”, as Vasari emphasizes in his Lives, also considering that despite her talent and inclinations, her artistic vocation was not a free choice but the fruit of constant and assiduous devotion typical of the cloistral life to which Plautilla was relegated at 14 years of age, taking her vows in 1538 in the Convent of Santa Caterina in Cafaggio in Florence.

As Eike Schmidt, director of the Uffizi Galleries, declared, the visibility given to her quite notable artistic production, characterized by the reform and spirituality of Savonarola, marks the meaningful beginning “of a series of exhibitions dedicated to women artists, including Maria Lassnig whose show opened on March 25”. Welcome then to further study and exhibitions on protagonists who have been up to now relegated to the sidelines or simply ignored. Welcome to critical research and archival investigations like the one carried out by Fausta Navarro on Plautilla, also thanks to the support and patronage of the Advancing Women Artists Foundation.

As Jane Fortune, the founder and president of AWAF, underscores “the works by women artists that we have traced and catalogued in the museums and churches of Florence are over 2000, an ‘invisible’ side of the history of art that needs to be restored to the public”.

The exhibit “Plautilla Nelli. Art and Devotion in the Convent in the Footsteps of Savonarola” tells the tale of this forerunner, active in the convent near San Marco with her own workshop and pupils. And, besides creating works – in Vasari’s words – “that she copied from others … she shows that Plautilla the sister painter she would have done marvelous things if she had enjoyed, as men do, advantages for studying, devoting herself to drawing, and copying living and natural objects”. Yet, despite these constraints, Plautilla was a pictora esteemed for her artistic talent and for the moral virtue that she expressed in a series of devotional works.

The works on exhibit, including five recently restored paintings and two manuscripts decorated with her illuminations, shed light on her corpus still in the course of definition. In effect, just ten years ago, only three important works by her were known: the Lamentation over the Dead Christ today in the Museum of San Marco, the Last Supper housed in the refectory of the convent of Santa Maria Novella and currently under restoration, and the Pentecost in the Church of San Domenico in Perugia. Now other paintings, drawings and miniatures attributed to Plautilla and her workshop have been identified and are on display. Thus, the sister-priorexpainter appears to have found her rightful place, not only for the creation of sacred and devotional images, but also as a fully acknowledged artist: the beginning of what we hope will be a long line of other women protagonists.

Mara Amorevoli

“Plautilla Nelli. Art and Devotion in the Convent in the Footsteps of Savonarola”

curator Fausta Navarro

Gallery of Statues and Paintings of the Uffizi

Until June 4, 2017

Plautilla Nelli (attributed to), Initial A: the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple with Two Nuns, circa 1545-1567, tempera, gold leaf on parchment (Florence, Museum of San Marco).
The Department of Drawings and Prints has opened the first monographic exhibit on Giuliano da Sangallo with a display of the artist’s drawings, projects and experimentations in sacred, civic and military architecture.

This first monographic exhibition on the part of the Uffizi Galleries Department of Prints and Drawings dedicated to Giuliano da Sangallo not only presents the entire corpus of drawings within the collection unquestionably by the hand of the artist alongside other comparable works, but also includes a limited number of artistic creations – such as the wooden model of Palazzo Strozzi – chosen precisely to illustrate the versatility of the master and the multiple implications of his interests in architecture, as well as the activity of his workshop.

The first section focuses on the debated issue of Giuliano’s figure drawings, analyzing a limited nucleus of figurative drawings passed down through tradition as works by Giuliano or Antonio Sangallo the Elder in late 19th century inventories, and attributed to one or other of the brothers by the first commentators of the early 20th century up to the late 1930s. What emerges is an artist who knows how to renovate a narrative mode deriving from antiquity, giving life to scenes all’antica and participating actively in the cultural phase that witnessed the passage from imitation of antiquity to its assimilation.

The printed catalogue undertakes a linguistic analysis and comprehensive evaluation of Giuliano’s graphic production, clarifying: chronology, places and patrons in his activity as a designer; his compositional research and typological experimentations in sacred, civic and military architecture; the aim and function of his antiquarian studies and his notebooks; his relations with his brother Antonio the Elder, his nephew Antonio the Younger and his son Francesco, in the codex and presentation drawings by more than one hand; the practice of the copy and the circulation of architectural and antiquarian knowledge.

The exhibit is part of a wider research project related to the Department of Drawings and Prints’ vast collection of architectural drawings that have been the focus of various exhibits in the past (Bramante e gli altri, 2006; Bernardo Buontalenti e Firenze, 1998; Disegni di architetti fiorentini 1540-1640, 1985; L’edificio a pianta centrale, 1984; Disegni di fabbriche brunelleschianee, 1977; Mostra di disegni di Bernardo Buontalenti, 1968), but that still today await further studies.

“Giuliano da Sangallo: Uffizi Drawings”
curators:
Dario Donetti, Marzia Faietti, Sabine Frommel.

Florence, Uffizi Galleries
Department of Drawings and Prints
Edoardo Detti Room and the Room of the Fireplace
From May 16 to August 20, 2017
A revealing restoration

The interesting technical details revealed during the restoration of the triptych of Nicolas Froment and its precious frame

The triptych depicting the Resurrection of Lazarus was signed and dated 1461 by the French master Nicolas Froment, painter of Renée d’Anjou, active principally in southern France. As Daniela Parenti has fully explained in the April 2016 issue of this journal, the triptych was commissioned by Francesco Coppini, a bishop originally from Prato and papal legate of Pope Pius II to Flanders and England.

The painting arrived at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and subsequently the Uffizi in 1841 from the Convent of San Bonaventura at Bosco ai Frati in the Mugello region, following the suppressions of the Napoleonic government. The restoration which took almost a year to complete has recovered and made evident the painting’s chromatic splendor and that of the carved wooden frame, bringing to light many points for comparison and study with regard to the pictorial technique of Froment.

The construction

The panel s and the frames that compose the triptych are made of oakwood.

The gilded and carved upper gothic fretwork (tracery) is fastened to the central panel by pins as are the small pilasters with capitals in the center panel, the gilded crowning and the moulded base.

The frames of the side panels are fastened to the painted very fluid calcium carbonate-based preparation over which a coating of lead white priming in an oily medium was applied.

Among the pigments adopted, those that stand out for the beauty of their enameled finishing are the redder and carmine based reds, copper resinate based greens and indigo for the architectural backdrops surrounding the Virgin and Child and the patron on the backside of the wings of the triptych.

The restoration

After opportune solubility testing on substances present on the surface – glues and organic material and heavily yellowed and oxidized varnishes – the cleaning process was divided into two distinct phases: the first phase was the removal of the varnish and the second the thinning of the proteinic patina, largely found on the reverse side of the wings of the triptych.

Following the process of stucco fillings on the paintings and the frames, a gouache undertone was applied as a base for the pictorial restoration conducted in transparency, resulting in a reduction of the negative effects of a widely diffused crazuretta, above all in the purple and red mantels.

The gilding was integrated with gold leaf and powder using gum arabic.

A final spray-varnish was applied in order to make uniform the painterly surface and the frame, protecting and conserving not only the original painting but the restoration materials as well.

Nicolas Froment, Resurrection of Lazarus (1461), detail after restoration (on the right the work after restoration, sponsored by the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery).

The interesting technical details revealed during the restoration of the triptych of Nicolas Froment and its precious frame

With restoration of the triptych depicting the Resurrection of Lazarus by Nicolas Froment complete, a publication furnishes documentation on the restoration and delineates the history of the work, of the artist and the patron, the prelate from Prato, Francesco Coppini. The volume, edited by Silvana Publishing House and made possible by the generous support of the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, contains essays by Daniela Parenti, editor and director of the restoration, by Dominique Thiébaut, curator of the Louvre and specialist in French painting whose contribution retraces Froment’s activity, and of the historian Veronica Vestri, who delineates a clear profile of the patron Francesco Coppini. The publication provides a detailed account by Lucia and Andrea Dori of the restoration process, the unexpected discoveries and the difficulties encountered, concluding with the results of the diagnostic investigations undertaken by Gianluca Politi, collaborator from the University of Bergamo.

Daniela Parenti

Lucia and Andrea Dori
Life at the Uffizi

A RECOGNIZED TALENT

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653), one of the most notable and appreciated woman artists of the 17th century, has always been upheld as a symbol for her success in affirming herself and being recognized for her talent in an epoch in which this was not at all common for a woman. An exhibit in Rome at Palazzo Braschi, open until May 7, retraces the various phases of the truly notable career of this intellectually gifted and strong-willed woman. Her career began in the workshop of her father Orazio, a skilled painter and follower of Caravaggio, and proceeded to Florence where Artemisia took refuge, as is well known, to escape the scandal after the disclosure of the incestuous relationship that she had with her Maidservant Abra. In Florence, her talent was so recognized for her talent in an epoch in which this was not at all common for a woman. An exhibit in Rome at Palazzo Braschi, open until May 7, retraces the various phases of the truly notable career of this intellectually gifted and strong-willed woman. Her career began in the workshop of her father Orazio, a skilled painter and follower of Caravaggio, and proceeded to Florence where Artemisia took refuge, as is well known, to escape the scandal after the painful episode that marked her youthful existence, sexual assault on the part of the painter Agostino Tassi. In Florence, her talent was so well recognized that she was called to be a member of the prestigious Academy of the Art of Design in 1616. Thus, gaining her proper standing within the cultural milieu of the city, she was able to overcome the numerous difficulties that stemmed from the violence she had undergone and from economic troubles. At Palazzo Braschi some of the masterpieces from the collections of the Uffizi Galleries are on exhibit including "Judith Beheading Holofernes" (both from the Palatine Gallery) and the extraordinary "Judith Beheading Holofernes" (1620-21, from the Gallery of Statues and Paintings of the Uffizi). emblematic paintings, that draw inspiration from episodes in which the protagonists are courageous and suffering women, like other biblical and mythological figures that, not by chance, struck the imagination of Artemisia and were immortalized in her paintings. M. N.

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Supporting the Amici degli Uffizi means becoming a patron of culture and a contributor to the conservation and donation of works of art to the Gallerie degli Uffizi.

Your membership includes:

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- Free, unlimited and priority entrance to the Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture degli Uffizi and all of the museums of Palazzo Pitti
- A subscription to our triannual "Il Giornale degli Uffizi"

How to join:

- At the Welcome Desk – Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture degli Uffizi, Entrance 2, Tel +39 055 737871 info@amicidegliuffizi.it
- Directly on our website http://www.amicidegliuffizi.it/diventa_socio.php?pg=8&ln=it