



FRIENDS OF THE
UFFIZI
GALLERY

NEWS



Issue no. 20 - December 2014

A GENEROUS YEAR

2013 had been a milestone for the Amici degli Uffizi, marking our twenty years' activity side by side with the Gallery. Not only did we celebrate the important anniversary with a series of events, but also we renewed with greater momentum the alliance with our museum, so much so that this past year has witnessed a most successful continuation of our art patronage. Therefore, along with our usual year-end greetings, we can outline the positive balance of a generous year, despite the hard economic times. In fact, we could bring several projects to fruition thanks to the unfailing support of our members and true friends, both domestic and foreign, always ready and willing to embrace the undertakings proposed by the Gallery's management. Among the successfully accomplished projects were the refurbishment of Hall 1 housing the Tuscan Primitives – for which the Amici had specifically funded the restoration of the two painted crosses and the Berlinghieri diptych - the arrangement of the new green rooms and the restoration of many of their ancient marbles, and, thanks to the generous contribution of the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, the restoration of the monumental marble group *Hercules and the Centaur Nessus* and of another two statues, *Aphrodite* and *Ariadne*. Moreover, the self-portrait collection was enriched by the donated works by Emilio Isgrò, and important steps were made in the restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece *The Adoration of the Magi*. The coming festivities are therefore an opportunity for us to reaffirm our pledge to support the Uffizi, to continue on our twenty-year-long path of shared affection and common intent.

I thank all our Amici and Friends for generously standing by our commitment of collective patronage and take the opportunity to wish the Gallery's Director and every cooperator all the best for the holiday season and for a peaceful 2015. Lastly, I would like to express all the Amici's appreciation and best wishes to Cristina Acidini, who has recently left her position as Superintendent of the Polo Museale Fiorentino and whom we thank for affectionately sharing ideas and projects for many years.

Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti
President Amici degli Uffizi and Friends of the Uffizi Gallery



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"PRIMITIVE" AND IMMUTABLE

Russian Icons coming from various Florentine museums are now on display at the Sala delle Reali Poste of the Uffizi Gallery, for the traditional Mai Visti (Never Seen Before) exhibition. Attested in the inventories as far back as the House of Lorraine period, these works were already on exhibition in the Galleria in the 18th century and then went to other museums. Now they have returned within Vasari's walls, thanks to new space provided by the Nuovi Uffizi project.

The now-traditional Christmas event of the *Mai Visti*, offered by the Amici degli Uffizi, will exhibit this year the collection of some 80 icons belonging to various Florentine museums, representing the most ancient corpus of Russian icons outside the Orthodox world.

In various dimensions and themes, the icons date to different periods between the end of the 16th and first half of the 18th centuries, when the largest number of works was created. The years 1728 and 1733, appearing respectively on the icon of the *Madonna of Tichvine* and of the *Mother of God, Joy of All the Afflicted*, are important dates for establishing when they entered the collections of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, where they are documented for the first time in the Lorraine period. Pietro Leopoldo's re-organization of the Galleria degli Uffizi entailed the moving of entire sections of the Medici collections and transferal of many masterpieces from the Pitti Palace to the Uffizi; these icons too arrived at the Galleria and were settled, between 1780 and 1782, in the Gabinetto delle Pitture Antiche, once located in the present Sala 43.

Together with the paleo Christian gold-glasses and the mosaic of *Christ the Redeemer*, now in the Bargello, the icons were the only attestation of the rediscovery of Christian antiquity and of the earliest painting, and they lead the way to Tuscan gold-background paintings, as well as to the early-Renaissance masterpieces by Fra Angelico and Paolo Uccello, up to Botticelli. At the end of the 18th century, the Russian icons were brought to the Villa di Castello, where they remained until the 20th century. After journeys to the Palazzo Pitti and then to the Galleria dell'Accademia, they now return again to the Uffizi, as a result of the increase in space from the Nuovi Uffizi project.

The aim of the exhibit, then, is to showcase this group of works, conveying their importance within the area of Christian Orthodox faith and liturgy, their function, and their technical and artistic qualities. Likewise important is their historical relationship to the museum, summarily evoking the reconstruction of the Cabinet of Ancient Painting and their subsequent transits in the Florentine residences of the Houses of Lorraine and Savoy.

An abridgement of the article "Primitive" ed immutabili by Daniela Parenti - Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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THE BEAUTY, SPIRITUALITY AND ART OF ICONS

As an essential element in Orthodox-rite churches, in the eyes of believers icons were, and still are, portals to the Kingdom of Heaven. The “Byzantine” iconographic canons led to the development of a Russian pictorial language, less hieratic and made even more vivid by the emphatic use of color.

Still venerated today by millions of the faithful in various eastern Christian churches, icons give rise, in western observers, to contradictory sentiments. Some see them as products of an art that is austere, repetitive, and emotionless, while a growing number of people consider the panels as artworks in every sense of the word, a kind of ideal “relics of time.” In fact, both positions are based on premises not easily dismissed, and it is quite possible that the key to understanding the beauty, the spirituality, and the artistic value of icons--in particular those from Russia--can be found halfway between these two diametrically-opposed views.

For the believer, icons were, and still are today, a gateway leading into the Heavenly Realm, a privileged entrée to the spiritual world through prayer, so much so that these paintings enjoy an essential place in Orthodox churches, also playing a fundamental role in the liturgy.

Even when no particular celebration is taking place, the icon dominates the church, since the believer always has the iconostasis in view. In addition to the icons for public use, there are a large number of works meant for private devotion. The icon accompanies the Russian believer on every important occasion of his life. An icon of one’s patron saint is given at birth, of the same height as that of the newborn; when leaving one’s home, the mother’s blessing is given with an icon; and *Our Lady of Kazan*, one of the almost 260 representations of the Mother of God (present in the Uffizi collection), is the icon of marriage, given to the newlyweds at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony and the first to enter, along with the couple, their new home, as “Lady of the new hearth”. Finally, an icon leads the funeral procession and is often placed on the chest of the deceased inside the casket.

The opportunity to see together for the first time all of the icons preserved at the Uffizi Gallery offers an extraordinary key to understanding the religious aspect, the culture, and the history of the Russian people.

An abridgement of the article "La bellezza, la spiritualita' e l'arte delle icone" by Vincenzo Gobbo - Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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FORCEFULNESS AND CRUDENESS OF A YOUNG ARTIST

Starting in February, the Uffizi will stage the first-ever exhibit dedicated to Utrecht artist Gherardo delle Notti, who was active for a decade in Italy. Esteemed by Cosimo II, he left five of his canvases to Florence including the Adoration of the Shepherds, which was tragically damaged in the 1993 bombing.

The exhibit in the Galleria degli Uffizi, 10 February-24 May 2015, is the very first show to focus on the great Utrecht artist Gerrit van Honthorst, better known in Italy from the 17th century as Gherardo delle Notti, for his nocturnal scenes. No such one-man exhibit has been organized up to now, neither in Italy, where he worked for some ten years, probably from 1610-1611 up to 1620, nor in Holland, where he worked for the remainder of his career, until his death in 1656.

The period of Gherardo's activities in Italy is his best and stylistically most innovative. His absorption of the Caravaggio revolution was almost immediate, and his first paintings display the forcefulness and rawness of a youthful northern artist swept away by Caravaggio's naturalism. Prestigious collectors were soon searching out his works, such as Grand Duke Cosimo II and *marchese* Vincenzo Giustiniani, for whom Gherardo painted his masterpiece *Christ before the High Priest*, now in London's National Gallery as well as in this exhibit. It is because of Cosimo II's passion for Gherardo that Florence gained four of his finest canvases,

three of which center around themes of conviviality, *The Wedding Supper*, *The Good Luck*, and *Supper with a Lute Player*, all of them of decisive importance for the development of this genre in Italian and northern circles. Piero Guicciardini, too, the Medici's ambassador in Rome, commissioned Honthorst, in 1619, to create a painting for the main altar in his chapel in Santa Felicita, his great *Adoration of the Shepherds*, with its night-time candle lighting, which notoriously fell victim to the 1993 Mafia attack. Honthorst's Italian oeuvre is accompanied in the exhibit by a selection of works he executed in Holland during the decade following his Italian years; they document the evolution of his style towards a "lighter" palette. His celebrated *The Happy Violinist*, on loan from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, played an especially influential role. Enriching the exhibit still further is the presence of a Caravaggio, *The Tooth Puller*; its early appearance in the Medici Court exercised fundamental influence on the origin and development of Gherardo's convivial genre scenes.

An abridgement of the article "Forza e crudezza di un giovane artista" by Giovanni Papi - Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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THE GOLDEN MARBLES

For several years now, a project has been underway at the Uffizi to discover traces of pigment applied to ancient statuary. To date, five cases of gilding have been identified among the works in the Galleria.

Beginning in 2011, the Galleria degli Uffizi's Department of Classical Art, with the collaboration of the Department of Chemistry of the University of Modena and Reggio, has been conducting a systematic study designed to distinguish traces of coloring on ancient statues.

Thanks to the invaluable assistance of Prof. Pietro Baraldi of the University of Modena and Reggio, five instances of gilding have been found. Among them are some of the most celebrated marbles in the grand-ducal collection, such as the *Medici Venus* and the reliefs of the Thrones. The evidence uncovered is extremely useful for re-constructing the original appearance and meaning of ancient works.

Aware that an accurate appreciation of an ancient statue presumes knowledge of its original coloring, we thought about how to convey the discoveries of this important study to visitors. Conventional display methodologies seemed too limiting, so recourse was made to the supervision and coordination of Dr. Cristiana Barandoni, and she developed a QR technology-based interactive system. The resulting itinerary, given the name "Gold unveiled," gives the visitor the possibility of appreciating the problems posed by the coloration of classic statuary.

For each individual work, the user can access customized profiles, which provide photographs that show the discovered traces of gilding, a mapping of the work showing the point where the traces were found, and a conjectural reconstruction of the areas originally gilded.

In its first month of operation, the interactive itinerary which comprises nine works, has already attracted more than 700 visitors and constitutes the first step in increasing enjoyment of the Galleria's works through utilization of novel technologies.

An abridgement of the article "I marmi d'oro" by Fabrizio Paolucci - Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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THE RESTLESS ASPERTINI AND THE REVOLUTIONARY LIPCHITZ

Two new shows organized in coming months by the GDSU will showcase the drawings of Bolognese artist Amico Aspertini and graphic works donated by the heirs of Lithuanian Jacques Lipchitz. The exhibits are the results of the Gabinetto new efforts to catalogue and digitize its rich collections.

L'AMICO RIVISITATO

DISEGNI DI AMICO ASPERTINI E DI ALTRI BOLOGNESI

AMICO REVISITED

DRAWINGS OF AMICO ASPERTINI AND OTHER BOLOGNESE ARTISTS

curated by Marzia Faietti

Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

12 December 2014 – 8 February 2015

JACQUES LIPCHITZ A MONACO E A FIRENZE

DISEGNI PER SCULTURE 1910-1972

JACQUES LIPCHITZ IN MUNICH AND FLORENCE

SKETCHES FOR SCULPTURES 1910-1972

curated by Marzia Faietti and Giorgio Marini

Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

2 March - 4 May 2015



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AN EXCEPTIONAL GIFT

Thanks to the generosity of Jean Luc Baroni, Jacopo Ligozzi's magnificent painting, The Allegory of Virtue, is now part of the Uffizi collection, an eloquent example of the allegorical motif of his oeuvre.

In the brilliant final years of the reign of Francesco I de' Medici, around 1585, Jacopo Ligozzi created for his patron this large-size canvas (345 x 228cm), in which he represented, in the center of a rocky wall bathed by fountain-fed waters, the personification of *Virtue*, youthful and semi-nude, who is struggling with *Ignorance*, a woman with donkey ears, and with *Prejudice*, who grasps her arm and pushes her with her knee. The victim is saved by a small *Amore* in flight, who supports her from above, with a strip of cloth. Just like a holy martyr, the young woman gazes heavenward, where she touches the hand of the *amorino*.

The painting resurfaced in 1765 in the Galli Tassi family palazzo, and the family displayed it, two years later, in the Accademia del Disegno exhibit, held in the Santissima Annunziata. In 1863, it entered the collection of the Arcispedale di Santa Maria Nuova, only to be sold in 1865.

Thanks to the generosity of modern patron Jean Luc Baroni, exquisitely sensitive to the beauty and preservation of our cultural heritage, Ligozzi's *Allegory* now enters the Uffizi.

An abridgement of the article "Un dono d'eccezione" by Francesca De Luca - Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

Year-end festivities; a season for well-wishing and book-balancing. Undoubtedly a positive balance for the Gallery: the year 2014 has been marked by the fortunate accomplishment of numerous undertakings, many of which achieved thanks to the Amici degli Uffizi. New rooms have been opened, remarkable artworks have been restored, important exhibitions have been organized, high-quality volumes have been published, and the Nuovi Uffizi project has been continuing without the museum ever closing its doors to visitors.

As for good wishes, this year we especially dedicate them to our country's history, culture, art heritage and dignity. We are going through tough economic times hampering prospects and dimming consciences, with a distortion of collective values that can be nearly as harmful to our heritage as longstanding neglect. May therefore the light, symbol of Christmas, shine in our hearts and deeds.

An abridgement of the article "La luce del Natale" by Antonio Natali– Il Giornale degli Uffizi no. 61, December 2014.



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LIFE AT THE UFFIZI

NEW TACTILE PAINTINGS

Following the “Uffizi da toccare” (Uffizi to Touch) project, which since 2009 has dedicated to the blind a museum itinerary characterized by panels in Braille and the “tactile” reproduction of Botticelli’s *Venus*, the Uffizi has now received as a gift from the Liceo Artistico di Porta Romana five new tactile paintings, created by the school’s students, under the direction of Professors Gianfranco Terzo and Antonella di Ludovico. Their project, *Pittura in punta di dita* (Painting at your fingertips), with the support of Prof. Quatrato, President of the Unione Italiana Ciechi (Italian Union of the Blind), will make it possible for the museum to increase its offerings to visually impaired students and visitors, with particular attention to the iconographical theme of the Madonna and Child, such as the *Master of the Bigallo Madonna* and Raphael’s *Madonna of the Goldfinch*.