

## Visit to the Uffizi Gallery, Florence

By Francine Birbragher-Rozencwaig PhD

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The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy, is one of the most important museums in the world. The complex includes not only the institution of the same name, which occupies the first two floors of the large building designed and built by Giorgio Vasari between 1560 and 1580, but also the Pitti Palace, connected through the Vasari Corridor built on the famous Ponte Vecchio , and the Boboli Gardens.

The Uffizi building was commissioned in the sixteenth century by Cosimo I de Medici, first Grand Duke of Tuscany, to house Florence's administrative and judicial offices, hence its name "Uffizi", which means "office" in Italian. Centuries later, the Medici family donated its important collection to the city with the condition of being exhibited in perpetuity in said building. Today, the museum is renowned for its collections of sculptures and paintings dating from the Middle Ages to modern times, and in particular for being the repository of masterpieces by artists such as Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Mantegna , Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Artemisia Gentileschi, Caravaggio, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Rubens, and Van Dyck, among others.

In 1993, a terrorist act caused great damage to the museum. Faced with the need to restore the building and works damaged by explosives, a group led by Countess Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti founded the organization Amici degli Uffizi. Since then, the entity has been busy restoring and preserving the museum's artistic heritage. In 2006, the sister organization Friends of the Uffizi was created in Palm Beach, Florida, United States, in order to support Amici degli Uffizi's activities. Since its creation, Friends of the Uffizi has provided funds for the restoration of more than thirty paintings, sculptures and tapestries, the remodeling of several rooms and the recent acquisition of an important work for the museum's collection. Today, the mission of both organizations is to give visibility to the museum, to provide financial resources for the acquisition, conservation and restoration of works, and to sponsor structural and educational projects.

On the occasion of the "Florentine Weekend" organized by Friends of the Uffizi, which took place from October 4 to 8, 2018, the director of the museum, Eike Schmidt, gave a guided tour in which he highlighted various restoration and conservation projects , as well as the new rooms that have been redesigned in recent years. At the beginning of the tour, several sculptures located in the corridors of the second floor could be appreciated, especially a dozen

of Greco-Roman statues whose restoration was financed with funds donated by members of Friends of the Uffizi. He then turned his attention to two recently remodeled rooms: the first one is dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci, and the second one to Rafael Sanzio and Miguel Ángel Buonarroti. The museology of these galleries presents important paintings by the great masters of the Italian Renaissance framed in angular niches equipped with magnifying glasses and illuminated with a novel system that provides natural light. This new display allows more people to appreciate the works and, at the same time, protects the works them from possible damage.

Three works are exhibited in the gallery dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci: "The Baptism of Christ" (c.1475), attributed to Leonardo and his teacher Andrea del Verrocchio, "The Annunciation" (c. 1472-1475), and "The Adoration of the Magi"(c.1481-1482). The latter, an altar commissioned by the Augustinian monks from San Donato to Scopeto in Florence, was recently restored thanks to funds donated by Friends of the Uffizi. The piece, which was not finished by the artist and is now considered his first great work, shows a close-up of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus, forming a classic triangular composition, accompanied by the Magi that appear kneeling in worship sign. A semicircle of complex figures can be seen behind the main characters. In the background, the ruins of a pagan building can be seen on the left, and several men on horseback and a rocky landscape, are depicted on the right. This interesting combination of religious figures and ordinary characters in an earthly space transforms a biblical theme into a historical humanist-type scene.

Another recently redesigned rooms is dedicated to two great masters of the Italian Renaissance: Rafael Sanzio and Miguel Angel Buonarroti. In the central wall stands "The Sacred Family" or "Tondo Doni" (c.1506), the only wooden panel painted by Michelangelo, commissioned by Agnolo Doni to commemorate his marriage to Magdalena Strozzi. In addition to its composition, its bright colors and the sculptural aspect of the figures, the presence of nude figures which stand out in the background of the painting recalls the figures of the frescoes made by the artist in the Sistine Chapel, in the Vatican. Just like in "The Adoration of the Magi" by Leonardo, Michelangelo puts religious figures in front of a pagan environment, highlighting the importance of Christianity in Renaissance Italy. It should be noted that the circular shape that gives the name to the piece "Tondo Doni" symbolizes the marriage of Doni with Strozzi and that the elaborate frame was also made by the artist.

In the same room there are also several important works of Raphael: "The Virgin of the Goldfinch" (c. 1505-1506), which represents the Virgin, the Child Jesus and St. John the Baptist with a bird of red plumage in their hands, and the portraits of Agnolo Doni and Magdalena Strozzi (c.1504-1505), commissioned on the occasion of the wedding of this important patron. The new display of the latter allows the public to appreciate the drawings that were made on the back of the wooden panels.

The visit also included the area of the museum that exhibits the Continua Bonzaccossi Collection, donated by the family in 1974. Opened to the public in February 2018, the collection occupies eight rooms that feature paintings by Bellini, Bramantino and Bernini, among others,

as well as antique furniture and sculptures. The beautiful fresco "The Virgin and Child on the throne" (ca. 1445-1448) by Andrea del Castagno is quite beautiful. The museography of this project was jointly financed by Amici degli Uffizi and Friends of the Uffizi.

Finally, we visited the new rooms dedicated to Caravaggio and 17th century painting, located on the first floor of the building's east wing. The names of each one of the galleries clearly explain what they present: "Reality and Magic," "Caravaggio and Artemisia," "Caravaggio: The Medusa," "Caravaggio: Bacchus," "Nocturne Light", "Rembrandt and Rubens," "Galileo and the Medici" and "Florentine Epic ". The first thing that stands out in this area is the red tone of the walls, inspired by the colors of the tapestries and the fabrics represented in the paintings of the time. The reddish background, achieved through the application of multiple layers of natural pigments used in the seventeenth century, enriches the visual experience and powerfully highlights the realism of the works. The rooms exhibit Italian paintings together with works from other regions, especially Dutch and Flemish, in order to recreate the spirit of exchange that existed in that prolific era of the history of Western art. A painting that serves as an example is "Armida" (ca. 1550-1555), by Cecco Bravo, one of the great masters of the Florentine Baroque. Acquired recently with funds donated by Friends of the Uffizi, "Armida", which represents a woman of Syrian origin, was made by the Florentine artist during his trip to Innsbruck, Austria, considered at that time Northern Europe's Renaissance capital.

The tour of the different galleries made it clear that the Uffizi is today a museum in constant evolution. Those who return periodically not only rediscover paintings, sculptures and restored frescoes, but also have the possibility to make new readings in the context of new installations that enrich and propose other ways of thinking and analyzing the great masterpieces of the history of Western art.

Article by:

**Francine Birbragher-Rozencwaig**

PhD in Latin American history. Miami art historian and art critic. President of ArtNexus Foundation and member of the Board of Advisors of Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. She currently works as a senior curator at the Art Ovation Hotel, in Sarasota, Florida. She writes regularly for specialized magazines. Shee is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA); Latin American Art Association (ALAA); and College Art Association (CAA).