

Forged in Fire

On exhibit in Palazzo Pitti the European dimension of bronze sculpture in Baroque Florence

The Florence Dance Festival, an important annual modern dance competition, culminates with an award that is emblematic for Florence: the “Flying Mercury”, a bronze copy of the famous statue invented by Giambologna in the second half of the sixteenth century, of which the renowned version dating to 1580 is today in the Bargello National Museum. Significantly, even the most talented dancers cannot exactly replicate the pose of the feather-light flight Mercury is about to embark upon, defying all the laws of gravity. The dance of these bronzes is an impossible and highly imaginative one that only the elasticity of metal concedes to the fantasy of an artist, explaining in part the immense popularity of this art form in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods.

The fashion for bronzes on a small and medium scale gained popularity in Florence in the Quattrocento as a revival of Antiquity, increasing above all in the late Cinquecento – once again with Giambologna – to reach its peak in the Seicento. It did not wane with the discovery of por-

celain, the so-called “white gold” discovered in Europe in the early Settecento that in the Age of Enlightenment became a collector’s craze as well as a sign of wealth and sophisticated taste. Not in Florence at least, where even the Porcelain Manufactory of Doccia continued to model their creations on

der the Last Medici” that opens in Palazzo Pitti on September 18, 2019, sets out to offer a view of precisely this phase of Florentine art history, crucial to the magnificence of the Medicean Court in the late Cinquecento and beyond. As diplomatic gifts, bronze sculptures determined the affirma-

they additionally created opportunities that led to the transmission of metalworking techniques and the expansion of raw material markets in Europe.

Today Baroque bronzes, especially those of Florentine provenance, occupy a consistent share of the antique art market: and we must not forget that the exhibit in Palazzo Pitti opens in the same period in September as the XXXI International Biennial

Antiques Fair at Palazzo Corsini in Florence; there without a doubt, many splendid examples of this genre will be on display. An exhibit exclusively dedicated to Florentine bronze sculpture had yet to take place despite their importance in past centuries, in recent scholarship

and in the dynamics of contemporary collecting. Consistent but not comprehensive contributions were made during the impressive exhibit held at the Detroit Museum in 1974, put on public view in Florence at Palazzo Pitti with the title “The Twilight of the Medici and the Late Baroque Art in Florence, 1670-1743”; bronzes were again under study in the outstanding exhibit on the Florentine Seicento curated by Mina Gregori held in Palazzo Strozzi in 1986. And the topic was subsequently given space but within a much wider context dedicated to production in all of Europe in the



Massimiliano Soldani Benzi, *Vase with Handles in the form of Swans and Cupids*, 1690 ca., black jasper, gilded silver and bronze. Palatine Gallery, Uffizi Galleries.

the bronze sculpture of previous centuries produced from cast moldings of the sculptures of Giovanni Battista Foggini, Massimiliano Soldani Benzi and their pupils Giuseppe Piamontini and Antonio Montauti, among others. The exhibit “Forged in Fire. Bronze Sculpture in Florence un-

tion of Florentine taste on an international scale; and within a vaster socio-economic network,

Eike D. Schmidt
(continued on page 2)



Giovanni Battista Foggini, *Crucifixion*, bronze. Treasury of the Granddukes, Palazzo Pitti, Uffizi Galleries.

exhibit “Von allen Seiten schön”, shown at the Altes Museum in Berlin in 1995-1996.

This all took place, however, generations ago. In the meanwhile, scholarship has progressed with sensational discoveries and a new definition of the artistic milieu of Baroque Florence and beyond,

that widens the borders to a European scale, multiplying personalities and opening new perspectives on the circulation of works of art, on the figure of the antique dealer, on the unsuspected mediator and contemporary businessmen, on the role of models and

“Forged in Fire. Bronze Sculpture in Florence under the Last Medici”

Curated by Eike D. Schmidt, Sandro Bellesi and Riccardo Gennaioli

Treasury of the Granddukes, Palazzo Pitti, Uffizi Galleries

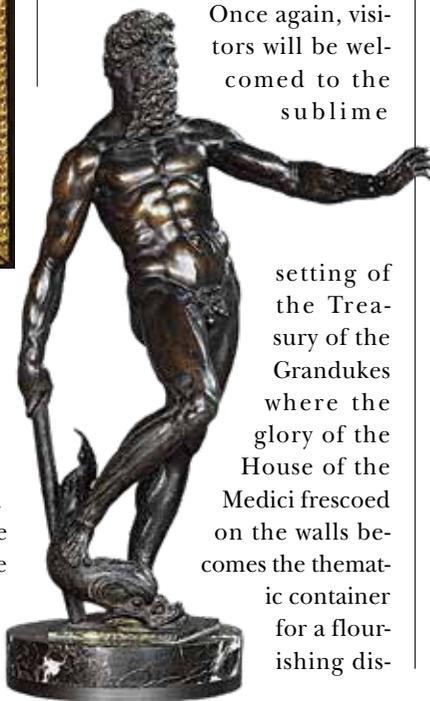
From September 18, 2019 to January 12, 2020

much more. Thus the time is ripe for an exhibit that focuses on this argument, offering new stimulus for future studies.

Once again, visitors will be welcomed to the sublime

play: besides preparatory drawings (many recently purchased by the Uffizi and on public view for the first time), paintings and art objects, it will be the bronzes themselves - more than a hundred - that celebrate with their dancing and lithe poses the creativity and the magnificent cosmopolitanism of Florentine taste.

Eike D. Schmidt



setting of the Treasury of the Granddukes where the glory of the House of the Medici frescoed on the walls becomes the thematic container for a flourishing dis-



Pietro Tacca, *Equestrian Monument of Carlo Emanuele I, Duke of Savoy*, bronze, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel.

Giuseppe Piamontini, *Jupiter*, bronze, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



Giambologna, *Neptune*, 1563-1564, bronze, Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna.

Massimiliano Soldani Benzi, *Urn*, bronze, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



A Refined Interpreter

■ An exhibit at the Uffizi presents a series of art works directly related to the life and works of Pietro Aretino, promoter and friend of the most famous artists of his time



Sebastiano Luciani, called Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1512, Gallery of Statues and Paintings, Uffizi Galleries.

For the modern visitor, an exhibit on Renaissance art centered on a writer like Pietro Aretino might seem a surprising initiative, even a provocation. Especially when the individual in question is a controversial figure first censured by the Index and subsequently by the judgment of moralists, and thus spurned for centuries. What we are proposing here, on the other hand, would have been a most obvious choice for Aretino's contemporaries. Then in fact everyone knew that the writer's home was the meeting place for the most renowned artists and that those same artists and their

patrons held his word in the highest esteem.

Tracing his friendly relations (Raffaello, Giulio Romano, Sebastiano del Piombo, Tiziano, Sansovino, Vasari...), his correspondence (Michelangelo) and commissions (Tintoretto), the exhibit proposes to historically reconstruct and to critically review the events, the context, the moments and the results of a continuous discussion that became a veritable debate on the question of art that lasted without interruption over forty years from the end of the first decade of the Cinquecento to the mid-1550s. This took place in precisely those places that then and from thereafter have always embodied the very idea of the Renaissance: the Rome of Agostino Chigi and the Medici popes, the Man-

Giovan Giacomo Caraglio, *Portrait of Pietro Aretino with Motto*, 1646-1655, burin, Department of Prints and Drawings, Uffizi Galleries.



tua of the Gonzaga, the Venice of the Gritti Doge as well as the Florence of Dukes Alessandro and Cosimo, the Urbino of the Della Rovere, Perugia, Arezzo and Spanish Milan, without neglecting the copious and clear channels by which the word itself came to resound beyond Italy; for himself, certainly, but also as support for the efforts of his artist friends at the courts of Francis I and, above all, Charles V and Philip II.

Therefore, not by chance Pietro's likeness is one of the most frequently reproduced at the time – made known to all in the paintings of Sebastiano and Tiziano, in the prints of Raimondi and Caraglio, in the reliefs of Sansovino and Leone Leoni. And his image appears again in public places like the Hall of

Leo X in Palazzo Vecchio and the door of the sacristy of San Marco in Venice.

This was not the triumph of an individual alone but that of a way of living and speaking about art that gave artists the centrality that shortly thereafter the pages of Vasari would consecrate.

The works on the exhibit, all intimately connected to the life of the writer, are proof that art found in him not only a refined interpreter but also a promoter of great effectiveness; this means that for us that same word can become a key of interpretation that guarantees a more intricate understanding of both that art and that world. ■

Paolo Procaccioli



Tiziano Vecellio, *Portrait of Pietro Aretino*, 1545, Palatine Gallery, Uffizi Galleries.

“Pietro Aretino and the Art of the Renaissance”

Curated by
Anna Bisceglia,
Matteo Ceriana
and Paolo Procaccioli

Magliabechiana
Hall, Uffizi Galleries

From November 27,
2019 to March 1, 2020

A Domestic Environment

■ *Retracing the history of the renowned Vasari Corridor, we learn about its everyday family use on the part of the Grandukes. This is where Cosimo II learned to walk*

Vasari Corridor, named as such after Giorgio Vasari, its brilliant designer and constructor, is an astonishing aerial passageway no less than 760 meters long. Built in nine months in 1565, it joins without interruption Palazzo della Signoria, the first ducal residence hence named Vecchio (Old), to the ‘new’ residence of Palazzo Pitti. Exclusively reserved for the ducal family and their most intimate court members, the corridor follows a zigzagging course across the rooftops of the palaces and shops of Florence, affording astonishingly beautiful views of the city on both sides of the Arno River.

The circumstances surrounding its creation are well known: the marriage between the prince of Florence, Francesco de’ Medici, and the Archduchess Joanna of Austria (1565). The ‘imperial’ wedding was a sensational diplomatic success for Cosimo I, sanctioning the young duchy among the ranks of European powers. Of all the building projects for the urban renewal of Florence, the corridor stood out: an infrastructure on a grand scale, strategic and permanent, but also something built for the

occasion and completed with a rapidity that doesn’t shy in comparison to ephemeral architectural apparatus.

Documentary evidence brings to light the domestic use and the family atmosphere that filled the air of the corridor: not just a mere connector but

Cosimo II) took his first steps. The everyday use of the corridor is also confirmed by the installation of a “bath” in 1598: a small private thermal chamber, located along the passage in correspondence to the archway over via de’ Bardi, destroyed in 1944.



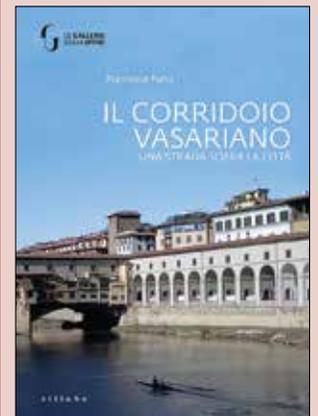
A view of Vasari Corridor from the recent past.

an extension of the private apartments of the two palaces that, through it, became a single residence embracing both parts of the city. Letters of correspondence attest, for example, that precisely within the corridor’s measured and narrow space delineated by two parallel walls, a child could easily be kept under care. It is there that in 1591, in absence of any danger, the young prince Cosimo (born in 1590 and future Grand Duke

And to speed up movement along the lengthy distance of the corridor, we learn that carriages were employed, from a test recorded in 1592 on the capacity and compatibility of some reindeer – sent as a gift to Ferdinando I by the King of Sweden – to pull “one of the Corridor carriages” (ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, 831, c. 645) With the passage of the Duchy from the Medici to the Lorraine, references to the use of the Cor-

FRANCESCA FUNIS

Il Corridoio Vasariano: una strada sopra la città



Edizione Sillabe, Livorno, 2018.

ridor as a container for works of art become more frequent, although the works moved there find their final placement elsewhere. The criteria for the display of works of art in the Corridor in use before November 2016 was very recent and followed the reordering devised by Luciano Berti, Director of the Gallery, in 1973. ■

Francesca Funis

A section of Vasari Corridor along the Arno and over Ponte Vecchio.



■ A completely new setting for the Self-portraits will soon be inaugurated in the west wing of the first floor of the Gallery. Ten rooms dedicated to the extraordinary collection begun by Cardinal Leopoldo in the XVII century

The Faces of Art

From Vasari Corridor to another “corridor”: one within the Gallery itself. A sequence of over ten rooms in the west wing of the first floor of the Uffizi will be the new showcase of the historic and famed collection of Self-portraits initiated by Cardinal Leopoldo de’ Medici in the XVII century, with works arranged on various registers (as seen in the painting of the Room of Self-portraits with the sculpture of Cardinal Leopoldo de’ Medici from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek of Vienna dating to the mid-eighteenth century).

The new layout echoes in a sense the spirit of a walk down Vasari Corridor where the artists’ countenances eyed one along the way, a sensation well known to visitors, Florentines or not, from after the 1966 flood up to just a few years ago; yet again, it suggests what the Tribune of Self-portraits must have been like when Cosimo III devised and created it at the beginning of the XVIII cen-

tury within the Gallery itself, where the Self-portraits now return.

The paintings will be arranged in a chronological and thematic sequence with possible alternations depending on the medium; a few of the rooms will be dedicated to sculpture, like the one crossing via Lambertesca that offers incomparable simultaneous panoramas of the medieval fabric of via Lambertesca with its winding facades and the striking modernity and sundering regularity of the Uffizi imposed upon that preexisting and highly contrasting reality; another room dedicated to contemporaries and mainly to sculpture will be the large oblong hall that runs adjacent to the corresponding length of the back wall of the Loggia dei Lanzi.

Following the same criteria used for the halls of Tuscan and Venetian sixteenth-century painting inaugurated last May, the paintings will be mounted on a background surface made of panels attached to the walls. The paneling – similar in color to cardinal purple in homage to the Cardinal founder of the collection – will not cover the entire wall surface and thus maintain the stereometry of the rooms; in this way, the



A room on the third corridor of the Gallery, used for the Self-portraits of the Uffizi in the second half of the XIX century.

museographic layout will not interfere with the architectural space and the noble container that, as is known, was born for a different purpose than that of an exposition hall. The two spaces will thus live in symbiosis each maintaining their proper distinction. The windows, opportunely screened from direct sunlight here as elsewhere in the Gallery, can be opened to out-

side views; in particular, they frame Vasari’s facade with its metric rhythm of grey limestone against white plaster in tripartite modules.

The artificial lighting on suspended metallic bars directly illuminates the works on display as well as the ceiling vaults. Once again the lighting follows the same criteria used in recent interventions within the Gallery. The rooms with terraced windows have been equipped with oak benches that offer indispensable seating for visitors. ■

A XVIII century representation of the Tribune of Self-portraits in the Uffizi. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Antonio Godoli



A Marvel of Art and Genius

■ An exhibit in the Lemon House of Boboli tells the tale of the technological and artistic enterprise that led to the creation of the famed Trajan's Column

Together with the Colosseum, Trajan's Column is one of Rome's iconic monuments. Not by chance in 1162 – centuries before humanists discovered the value and beauty of the Ancient world – the Senate of Rome decreed to protect the column “for all eternity, until the end of the world, in order to preserve the honor of the City of Rome forever”. Thereafter, antiquarians, artists, historians, aesthetes and archeologists have dedicated volumes of literature to this benchmark of western culture, enough to fill entire libraries.

Never however has sufficient attention been given to this centenary (one-hundred Roman feet high, that is) column as a stupefying product of engineer-

ing nearly forty meters in height at its base. The merit of the Florentine exhibit entitled “Building a Masterpiece: Trajan's Column”, proposed and designed by Giovanni Di Pasquale and put on public view in the Lemon House until October 6, is to re-examine for the first time this authentic marvel of art and architecture from an exclusively technical point of view.

The visitor will be able to retrace the genesis of the column from the moment the nineteen grandiose blocks from which it was constructed

were extracted from the Fantiscritti quarries in the Alpi Apuane to their shipment by an over two-hundred nautical mile sea voyage to the port of Marmorata at the foot of the Aventine.

The movement of these blocks, each weighing up to forty tons, and their placement, one on top of the other, to a height of forty meters, was exclusively made possible by the systematic and able exploitation of powerful machines like the *rotae calcatoriae* and the two or three-



Trajan's Aureus with Column, 113-114 A.D., Gold Coins Collection, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

legged cranes that, using the simple principle of the lever aided by pulleys, were capable of creating this monument symbol of the new and magnificent forum of Trajan. Models up to six meters tall of the machines used by the Romans are on display together with reliefs from the I and II centuries A.D. depicting cranes and construction sites that illustrate in an immediate and tangible way the use and function of these powerful lifting tools. In addition, a series of drawings inspired by the construction of the column by the master draftsman Claudio Capotondi – to whom we also owe some of the ingenious models – constitute a sort of counterpoint to the exhibit itself, a manifestation of the power of inspiration the art of this impressive column has always held in the minds and



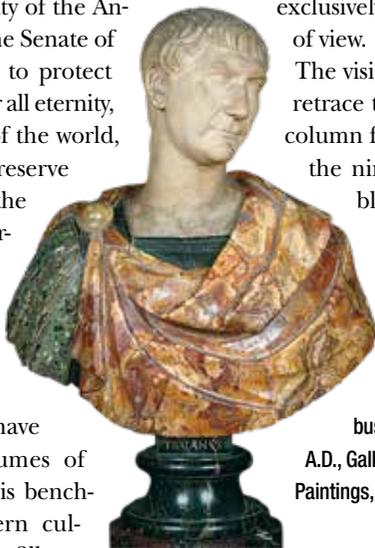
hands of centuries of painters and sculptors.

Unfortunately, we will never know all of the details of the various phases of the technological and artistic endeavor that gave life to this marvel of the ancient world. Nonetheless, we come closer to understanding an aspect of Roman civilization previously overlooked or taken for granted thanks to the attentive examination of the literary, archeological, epigraphic, iconographic and numismatic sources explored in depth in this highly innovative and original exhibit – that boasts remarkable loans from over twenty museums. Organizational efficiency, an effective system of logistics, excellent operative capacities on the part of central and peripheral administration were all postulates of the imperial era that made the movement of massive quantities of precious marbles from one end of the Mediterranean to the other possible, an efficiency unmatched until the beginning of the Industrial Era.

The Florentine exhibit can therefore claim the enormous merit of exploring from a new point of view a previously neglected aspect of ancient Rome whose empire, created through warfare, reigned for centuries thanks to an efficient and capillary administration and to the principle of good government that assured a prolonged period of prosperity and peace for its inhabitants. ■

Fabrizio Paolucci

Claudio Capotondi, Model of the Scaffolding used for the Construction of Trajan's Column, in scale 1:20.



Portrait of Trajan on a modern bust, early II century A.D., Gallery of Statues and Paintings, Uffizi Galleries.

“Building a Masterpiece: Trajan's Column”

Curated by Giovanni Di Pasquale in collaboration with Fabrizio Paolucci

Lemon House of Boboli

Until October 6, 2019

Boboli's Spring

Restorations, re-openings, renovations and planting. The historical garden is truly experiencing its own Renaissance

Just say: "Boboli". No need to add "Garden". For centuries, the name alone has evoked an Eden, adorned with statues, fountains, labyrinths, grottos, places of marvel ordered by artists' hands initially reserved for the pleasure of Princes and later for the enjoyment of the people. And today it is, as it should be, "the Garden of the Florentines", a stargate to their personal fantasies, their history and the true spirit of their city. But not only. Crossing the gates to wander along the pebbled avenues and paths, captivated by the fascinating countryside atmosphere of these 30 hectares right in the heart of historical Florence, is an army of now over 1 million visitors a year. Attracted by the infinite variations within the garden that is also a theater and an oasis of play and fantasy, they discover, as in a game of Chinese boxes, screens of holm oaks, rows of orange trees, green lawns and the charm of encounters with the countenances of ancient sculptures and a variety of earthly and air-born fauna: birds and squirrels, lizards and wasps, pheasants and dormouse that in their fleeting appearance have



Some views of the Boboli Gardens, now undergoing a massive restoration campaign.

always triggered the imagination. It is not by chance that a few decades ago the so-called "mothers of Boboli" went down in history for their battle (won) for free entrance for children and resident families to "their" garden; and, like past generations, students playing 'hooky' from school still today choose this secret world as the setting for their first kisses and love-stories.

Boboli: a monument of architectural greenery, a weave of art and botany, a survey manual for the appreciation of beauty. Born to astonish, as Cosimo I desired: in 1549 he ordered "Tribolo", Niccolò di Raffaello, to create the amphitheater of greenery from the quarry of "macigno" (the sandstone used to pave the streets of Florence); a place of delight for his spouse Eleonora and for

his own enjoyment grafting and pruning walnut, chestnut and cornelian cherry trees, juniper and citrus. It was then put to the genius of Ammannati and Buontalenti to enrich the scenography with grottos, fountains and other garden features. In the Seicento, Giulio Parigi in turn added labyrinths, 'ragnaie' (area of planted



thicket where the hunting of birds took place), the wide "Viottolone" lined with cypress trees that leads to the Isola pool; and again in the 1700s, the Garden of the Ananassi, the botanical gardens, the Kaffeehaus and the 'Stanzone' (large storage room) for the citrus trees.

An oasis within the city that "gifts delights and beauty worthy of a king to everyone", as the old gardener Baccani used to say (I have kept notes, March 20, 1991) as he numbered off by memory the 4,464 trees in Boboli as though they were his own children: 3825 ilex, 328 cypress, 10 cedars of Lebanon, 70 plane trees, 61 linden trees, 71 pines, 8 yew trees, 5 *Ginkgo biloba*, 15 nettle trees, and then oaks, elms, ash trees, magnolias, chestnuts, cork trees... It's true: today Boboli is a fragile open air museum in need of restoration precisely because of the uniqueness of its history and memory, its art and vegetation. It must be preserved intact not only for the dutiful conservation of its historic-architectonic value, but also in homage to its role as an indispensable "tessera" in everyday life and the very identity of the Florentines, without mentioning the enjoyment it gives to each and everyone of its visitors, be they Florentine or not. This is something that Eike Schmidt, the Director of the Galleries, understood well when he initiated the garden's massive restoration campaign, a project of recovery that Gucci endorsed with a donation of 2 million euro, a "Boboli Spring" that underscores the rapport of reciprocity the *griffe* shares with the city of Florence. ■

Works underway

Boboli's Renaissance is already underway with the re-opening to the public of the exotic Garden of the Ananassi (from Monday to Friday 9-13), a hectare of garden beds in the romantic style filled with a variety of aquatic and tropical plants.

Works now underway in the entire park are:

- The installation of 46 new benches in *pietra serena* (local grey limestone) to which 14 more will soon be added.
- Conservation interventions on many statues, on the 4 columns of the Isola, on the historical baths of Annalena and of the Meridiana, on the Fontana delle Scimmie (Fountain of Monkeys).

- Restoration and consolidation of the Camellia Garden (funded by the Region of Tuscany).
- Thanks to Gucci's donation of 2 million euro, the draining of the garden has been continued, terra-cotta vases and basins have been purchased; the Orchid Greenhouse and the pool in the Upper Botanical Garden have undergone restoration; trees have been replanted along the Viottolone and the avenue of Plane trees, for a total of 53 new cypress trees and 25 plane trees.
- The opening of a new Gelateria (Ice Cream Shop) and finally the reopening of the Kaffeehaus as a place for refreshments.

Mara Amorevoli



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Life at the Uffizi

■ A SPECIAL HOMECOMING

After an absence of over 75 years, the famous eighteenth century painting of a “Vase of Flowers” by Jan van Huysum, stolen by the Nazis, has returned to Florence; a special exhibit dedicated to it has been opened in the Music Hall of Palazzo Pitti at the end of which the painting will be returned to the Sala dei Putti in the Palatine Gallery, where up to now it was substituted by a good photographic reproduction that in a recent symbolic ceremony was consigned to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas. The Director of the Uffizi Galleries, Eike Schmidt, has underscored the importance and the historic justice



Jan van Huysum, *Vase of Flowers*, 1720-1730 circa.

of this act that he promoted with great determination, indicating his desire “that this very important restitution is the first in a long line of recoveries of works of art to come”.

■ THE COLORS OF JUDAISM IN ITALY

A highly original exhibit in the Aula Magliabechiana



Wool Carpet, Cairo, Egypt, first quarter of the XVI century, Jewish Heritage of Padua.

of the Uffizi, curated by Dora Liscia Bemporad and Olga Melasecchi, presents fabrics of Jewish manufactory for religious and secular use that take us from the times of the High Priest Aaron right up to the fashions of the 20th century and to modern textile manufacturing; it addresses key themes such as the role of writing as a decorative motif, the use of textiles in the synagogue, embroidery as a secret labor and the role of women. Open until October 27, 2019.

■ ONCE AGAIN ON EXHIBIT

“La Madonna della gatta” by Federico Barocci, restored thanks to the generosity of the Amici degli Uffizi, after almost a decade in the museum deposits has been put on display in the Sala di Berenice in the Palatine Gallery of Palazzo Pitti where, thanks to the new layout, paintings by the same artist have been gathered.

This masterpiece by the artist from Urbino, dating to circa 1598, was the object of numerous copies, including a tapestry now in the Royal Apartments of Palazzo Pitti, created by Pietro Fevère.



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