

**SANTA CROCE AND THE FRIENDS OF FLORENCE COMPLETE RESTORATION OF  
*FREEDOM OF POETRY*, PIO FEDI'S MONUMENT TO GIOVANNI BATTISTA NICCOLINI**

**Replica featured in special exhibition at Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration  
in New York: October 18, 2019–April 26, 2020**

*Florence, September 10, 2019* – The Opera di Santa Croce and the Friends of Florence Foundation collaborated with the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio, to restore the *Freedom of Poetry*, Pio Fedi's (1816–1892) stunning monument to Giovanni Battista Niccolini (1782–1861), a poet, playwright, and statesman during Italy's unification (or *Risorgimento*) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The restoration project is part of celebrations honoring the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Consulate in Florence and diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Tuscany—an independent state when the consulate opened.

Among those attending the ceremony in the Florentine basilica earlier this week were Irene Sanesi, president of the Opera di Santa Croce; Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, president of the Friends of Florence; Claudio Paolini, official of the *Soprintendenza*; Paola Rosa who conducted the restoration with Emanuela Peiretti; and Kathryn A. Rakich, program assistant at the U.S. Consulate General in Florence.

The restoration was financed entirely by the Friends of Florence as were other restoration projects in Santa Croce including the Crucifix by the Master of Figline and the Della Robbia altarpiece in the Pulci Berardi Chapel.

A resin copy of the monument made at Kent State University, in Ohio, using high-definition 3D scanning techniques, will be featured in *Sisters in Liberty*, an exhibition presented in collaboration with the Opera at the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration in New York Harbor, on view from October 18, 2019, through April 26, 2020.

"This restoration is tangible evidence of the results that can be achieved through the cooperation between institutions and private donors who are deeply concerned about cultural heritage," said Irene Sanesi. "We are grateful to the Friends of Florence with whom we share



Pio Fedi, *The Freedom of Poetry*, 1883.

ideals. The organization supported the complex work on a piece that has a great symbolic meaning and was created during the years when, after the unification of Italy, Santa Croce became a repository of the country's history and its collective memory.”

“The restoration of the monument to Niccolini represents the essential bond between Friends of Florence and Italian art,” said Simonetta Brandolini d’Adda. “Our Foundation decided to participate even more actively this year, marking the bicentennial of the American Consulate in the city. This project also embodies the enduring connections between Florence and the United States. Pio Fedi’s sculpture was probably a source of inspiration for the *Statue of Liberty* in New York, which symbolizes freedom and independence—core values of American identity. We are grateful to the Opera di Santa Croce for the opportunity to realize this important project and thank our donors and Paola Rosa, the restorers, and all those who worked with us, enabling the ‘rediscovery’ of the sculpture and its vital civic, artistic, and human message.”

### ***The Freedom of Poetry by Pio Fedi***

The monument, carved from a single block of white Carrara marble, is a classically inspired allegorical figure. In her upraised hand, she holds a broken chain and, in the other, a laurel wreath



Pio Fedi, *The Freedom of Poetry*, 1883. Detail before and after restoration.

and lyre. The lyre rests on a stack of books written by Niccolini. On her head is a radiate crown with nine rays and beneath her foot is another fragment of the chain. The figure stands next to the tomb with a portrait of the poet in a medallion and on the base is the sculptor’s signature: “Pio Fedi immaginò e scolpì”.

Fedi personally addressed the smallest details of the sculpture likely finished by assistants in his workshop. After it was taken to Santa Croce, he evidently reworked the surface, responding to the natural light coming through the large side window of the church. His hand is still recognizable today in the many pencil marks on the eyebrow arches, between the grooves of the curls, and the decorative motif on the crown and drapery.

There are visible similarities between *The Freedom of Poetry*, unveiled in 1883, and *Liberty Enlightening the World* (better known as the *Statue of Liberty*) which French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi created between 1877 and 1886. The similarities—the pose, upraised arm, crown, drapery of their robes, and their symbolic meanings—have long been the subject of critical and scholarly debate. It is more than possible that Pio Fedi's sculpture was the source of inspiration for the French artist. Bartholdi traveled through Italy in 1875-76 and may have visited Fedi's atelier in Via dei Serragli in Florence and seen preliminary drawings and maquettes of the work.



Pio Fedi, *The Freedom of Poetry*, 1883. Detail before and after restoration.

### The restoration

The statue had only been quickly cleaned and the lower part patinated after the 1966 flood that devastated Florence. Now, the thick, compact layer of dust that prevented a proper analysis has been removed. The surface beneath the dust was a dark amber color. It was likely a patina that had been applied when the statue was completed and had darkened considerably over the years.



Pio Fedi, *The Freedom of Poetry*, 1883. Detail before, during, and after restoration.

FT-IR spectrographic analyses revealed the presence of a protein substance—perhaps an animal-based glue with ochre pigment. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that it was the sculptor who had applied the wax found beneath the amber-colored coating. Not yet satisfied with his results, he would have added a patina to give the statue that was not “finished” in the traditional manner a more homogeneous appearance.

After careful dusting, the surfaces were cleaned using a chemical method with different supports depending on the stubbornness of the deposits to be removed. Fillers were only applied where needed between the pieces comprising the marble base.

## Friends of Florence

Friends of Florence is a non-profit foundation supported by individuals from around the world who are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the rich cultural heritage of Florence and Tuscany and conserving irreplaceable artistic and cultural treasures. Friends of Florence identifies significant projects spanning centuries in need of restoration, secures funding, and works in collaboration with local authorities to complete projects.

Since its founding in 1998, the Foundation has raised and donated \$10 million for conservation projects in the region. Friends of Florence works directly with Florence's famed conservation laboratories to ensure restoration is done at the highest level, has the approval of the City of Florence and the Italian Ministry of Art, and is completed on time and on budget.

Through its work, Friends of Florence creates opportunities for the study and appreciation of paintings, sculptures, architectural elements, places of worship, and collections at the Uffizi Gallery, the Accademia, the Baptistery, the Piazza della Signoria, the Museum of San Marco, and dozens of other museums, churches, and public sites.

A model of high-impact, low-overhead philanthropy, Friends of Florence is the primary source of funding for the city's conservators, a respected partner with museums and cultural authorities in Italy and the U.S., and a publisher/producer of publications, multimedia offerings, seminars, lectures, and cultural travel opportunities.

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### Media Contacts:

In Italy, Elisa Bonini, Friends of Florence, [elisaboniniitaly@friendsofflorence.org](mailto:elisaboniniitaly@friendsofflorence.org), +39 333 6729563

In the United States, Lisbeth Mark, Bow Bridge Communications, LLC, NYC, [info@bow-bridge.com](mailto:info@bow-bridge.com), +1 347 460 5566

### Images:

Pio Fedi (1816–1892), *Freedom of Poetry*, monument to Giovanni Battista Niccolini (1782–1861), 1883. After restoration completed in 2019. Carrera marble. H. 348 cm. x W. 170 cm. x D. 145 cm. (Base: H. 266 cm.). Photograph: Courtesy Friends of Florence.

Pio Fedi (1816–1892), *Freedom of Poetry*, monument to Giovanni Battista Niccolini (1782–1861), 1883. Detail before and after restoration completed in 2019. Carrera marble. H. 348 cm. x W. 170 cm. x D. 145 cm. (Base: H. 266 cm.). Photograph: Courtesy Friends of Florence.

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