



FRIENDS of FLORENCE

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PRESS RELEASE

The restoration commissioned by the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore was funded by the Friends of Florence

Restoration of Michelangelo's Pietà by the Opera del Duomo in Florence begins

The restoration work is open to public viewing

The Pietà's history is legendary:

Michelangelo did not finish the work and, in a moment of despair, tried to destroy it

Florence, Italy... The **Pietà by Michelangelo** housed in the **Opera del Duomo** in Florence, or the **Bandini Pietà**, is undergoing restoration work that began on November 23, 2019, and finishing in the summer of 2020. The public will be able to see all the stages of the restoration thanks to a specially designed "open" work site in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo where the sculpture is preserved.

The restoration work, commissioned by the **Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore** and funded by the **Friends of Florence Foundation** under the supervision of the **ABAP Superintendency for the metropolitan city of Florence and the provinces of Pistoia and Prato**, was entrusted to **Paola Rosa**. Assisted by a team of professionals trained at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, she has thirty years of experience in restoring works by great artists of the past, including Michelangelo.

The *Pietà* at the *Opera del Duomo* in Florence was sculpted by Michelangelo from a huge block of white Carrara marble between 1547 and about 1555, on the eve of his 80th birthday. It is one of the three *Pietà* sculpted by the great artist and expresses his life experiences and human suffering. Unlike the other two—his youthful work in the Vatican and the later Rondanini—the body of Christ is not only supported by Mary but also by Magdalene and the elderly Nicodemus, to whom Michelangelo gave his own face. This detail is confirmed by two biographers, the artist's contemporaries Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi, thanks to whom we know that the sculpture was made for an altar in a church in Rome, beneath which the artist wished to be buried. The *Pietà* of Florence, Michelangelo's masterpiece, "like other sculptures by Buonarroti," said **Timothy Verdon, director of the Museum**, "is considered an *unfinished work*, though the most suitable wording for it would be that of the 16th century when it was still called an *infinite work*."

The restoration will respect the consolidated vision of a visibly "amber" surface on the *Pietà* and will respect the patinas that over time, with their natural aging process, have transformed the original colors of the marble. The initial restoration phase will involve a large diagnostic campaign with the aim of improving the legibility of the work which has been dulled by the presence of deposits and substances that are foreign to the marble surfaces of the sculptural group.

According to the sources, no particular restoration work was carried out in the past, other than that done shortly after its completion by Tiberio Calcagni, a Florentine sculptor close to Michelangelo, by 1565. Over the span of

more than 470 years of its life, during the numerous changes of ownership and traumatic historical events, it is likely that the *Pietà* underwent various maintenance interventions which were not documented because they were considered simple routine operations. Instead, the cast made in 1882 is documented, and the plaster copy can be found preserved in the Gipsoteca of the Liceo Artistico di Porta Romana in Florence. This 19th-century intervention is most likely responsible for the chromatic changes in the surface of the sculpture, mainly due to the alteration of the substances used to make the cast but also to the more aggressive ones used to remove the residues. There is news of the work being transferred to the Accademia Gallery, from 1946 to 1949, to study a better location for it. It seems that the work was subjected to a “cleaning” on that occasion, but the details of it are unknown.

The current intervention will also use the results of previous diagnostic surveys by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure and by ENEA in 1990 and published in 2006 in the book “La Pietà di Michelangelo a Firenze” by Jack Wasserman.

The history of the *Pietà at the Opera del Duomo in Florence* (or the *Bandini Pietà*) is worthy of a novel. Not only did Michelangelo not finish it, but he tried to destroy it in a moment of despair. He gave the damaged work to his servant Antonio da Casteldurante. After having it restored by Tiberio Calcagni, the servant sold it to the banker Francesco Bandini for 200 scudi. Bandini had it placed in the garden of his Roman villa in Montecavallo. In 1649, the Bandini heirs sold it to Cardinal Luigi Capponi who took it to his palace in Montecitorio in Rome and four years later to the Palazzo Rusticucci Accoramboni. On July 25, 1671, the great-nephew of Cardinal Capponi sold it to Cosimo III de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, with the mediation of Paolo Falconieri, a gentleman at the Florentine court. After three more years in Rome, due to difficulties in transporting it, in 1674, the *Pietà* was embarked in Civitavecchia, reached Livorno and, from there, was transported along the Arno, arriving in Florence where it was placed in the cellar of the Basilica of San Lorenzo. It remained there until 1722, when Cosimo III had it placed at the back of the main altar of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

In 1933, the sculptural group was moved to the Chapel of Sant'Andrea to give it greater visibility. From 1942 to 1945, to protect it during the war, the *Pietà* was put in a safe refuge in the Duomo. In 1949, the work returned to the Chapel of Sant'Andrea in Cattedrale where it stayed until 1981, when it was moved to the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. The decision to transfer it to the museum was motivated by the need to avoid having large numbers of tourists disturbing worship and for security reasons (the *Vatican Pietà* was vandalized in 1972). Since late 2015, in the new Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, the *Pietà* has been positioned at the center of the room called the *Tribuna di Michelangelo*, on a base evoking the altar for which it was probably destined.

“The works in the new museum have been undergoing a vast restoration campaign carried out for the opening to the public at the end of 2015,” stated the **President of the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore Luca Bagnoli**. “The *Pietà* by Michelangelo, one of the most iconic masterpieces in the Museum's collection, was still in need of restoration work. The Opera decided to begin this delicate project as well, with the support of the Friends of Florence Foundation, to improve the work's legibility and allow the thousands of visitors who choose to view our monuments each year to better enjoy this extraordinary masterpiece.”

President of the Friends of Florence Foundation Simonetta Brandolini D'Adda said, “Since we, with the Friends of Florence, began the journey to safeguard Florence's heritage—which is humanity's heritage—we have always given special attention to the restoration of Michelangelo's works: from the *David* to the *Slaves*, from the artist's drawings to the *River God*, and the repositioning of Michelangelo's *Christ* in wood in the center of the Sacristy in Santo Spirito. Together with the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, we are now about to embark on a fascinating project to restore the *Bandini Pietà*, a true masterpiece that reflects the tormented soul of the great genius Michelangelo.”

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Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Open every day from 9 am to 7 pm. Closed on the first Tuesday of the month.

Single entrance ticket for all the monuments in the Opera, cost: 18.00 euros. Various discounts are available.

www.grandemuseodelduomo.it

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