



For Immediate Release
December 19, 2019

ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA'S *TABERNACLE OF THE EUCHARIST* IN SS. APOSTOLI CHURCH RESTORED THANKS TO FRIENDS OF FLORENCE



The Eucharistic Tabernacle after the restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

Florence, Italy... Following meticulous restoration over three months, the *Tabernacle of the Eucharist* (1512) by Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) with his son Giovanni (1469–1529) in the church of SS. Apostoli in Florence has been restored, revealing a masterwork of glazed terracotta. The restoration, funded by the Friends of Florence Foundation, was performed by Francesca Rossi under the supervision of the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Firenze e le Province di Pistoia e Prato.

"This project has allowed Friends of Florence, working in conjunction with the church and the institutions tasked with conserving the city's cultural heritage, to preserve yet another significant example of the della Robbias' distinctive practice," Foundation President Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda said. "Among the variety of projects we support, we continue to ensure the conservation of glazed terracotta because it is one of the distinguishing genres in Florentine art history. On behalf of the entire Foundation, I thank donors Peter Fogliano and Hal Lester, who made the restoration possible; restorer Francesca Rossi; Father Paolo Cerquitella, the

Prior of SS. Apostoli, for his helpfulness; and Soprintendenza area chief Dr. Jennifer Celani for her cooperation and supervision in the course of the work."

Father Cerquitella said, "In my position as the current incumbent of SS. Apostoli e Biagio, I would like to voice my heartfelt gratitude to the Friends of Florence and to the benefactors who have funded the restoration. The church, one of Florence's oldest places of worship, is a minor treasure chest of art in its own right. Its unique architectural harmony triggered the astonishment and admiration of no less a figure than Brunelleschi, according to Giorgio Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*. Home to the flints from the Holy Sepulchre, the church also houses several works of art, including Vasari's oil painting on wood depicting the *Immaculate Conception* (1540–41) and Andrea and Giovanni della Robbia's masterpiece which continues to perform its function as the container of the sacred Host even today, providing a quiet corner for prayer and contemplation. I think that any gesture designed to preserve and restore the beauty of a work of art, a product of the greatness of man's soul, is a gift not only for the city of Florence but for all those who wish to appreciate the beauty of creation reflected in the Creator."



Detail of the Tabernacle after the restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

The Tabernacle

In 1512, in the church of SS. Apostoli, Andrea della Robbia's son Giovanni made the *Tabernacle of the Eucharist* under his father's guiding hand as a commission from the Acciaiuoli family who ranked among the church's most prestigious patrons. Evidence discovered by Sir John Pope-Hennessy in 1979, tells us that the work was commissioned by

Giovanni Acciaiuoli, the son of Piero Acciaiuoli, who had assiduously attended Lorenzo "The Magnificent" Medici's cultural symposia.



The lunette with God the Father and two angels praying after the restoration. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

The graceful motion of the large angels holding back the curtain (mentioned in the notice of payment issued in April 1512) interacts with the liveliness of the putti. The whole piece is harmonious, brought together through the masterful use of color and the perspective centering on the barrel vault of the ciborium. The predella with the

Acciaiuoli coat-of-arms at either end supports the tabernacle beneath a lunette with God the Father and two angels praying. The tabernacle is embellished with classical architectural elements, garlands of leaves and fruit, and cherubs' heads.

It is not known which parts were made by Andrea and which by Giovanni, but the differences between Andrea's more classic and limpid style and the more multi-faceted and sentimental approach favored by Giovanni are both evident.

Condition and Restoration

The tabernacle was made of glazed terracotta using both direct and indirect modelling techniques. The materials and fabrication suggest a succession of different phases of varying



Detail of Tabernacle before restoration, 2019.
Photo by Antonio Quattrone



Detail of Tabernacle during restoration, 2019.
Photo by Antonio Quattrone



Detail of Tabernacle after restoration, 2019.
Photo by Antonio Quattrone

complexity and delicacy during the production process, including the use of heat to trigger the chemical reactions required to create glazed terracotta.

The tabernacle's delicate condition prior to restoration was the result of poor maintenance over the years, leading to the sedimentation of a thick layer of atmospheric particulate, especially around the modelling and its undercuts which naturally tend to retain solid particles over time. Alongside this deterioration, earlier restoration of the tabernacle was responsible for the most important issues encountered by restorers; it had been disassembled and incorrectly reassembled at an unspecified time.

Preceded by a meticulous diagnostic campaign to define every single aspect required for its conservation, the restoration project returned the luminous surface to its former splendor through careful cleaning. The numerous gaps and chips caused by fractures on the surface also prompted the restorers to address the multi-colored features beyond the gleaming white surfaces in the final phase of the restoration. Visitors to the church can now appreciate the masterpiece in its entirety as the artist intended.

Restoration Project:

Tabernacle of the Eucharist by Andrea della Robbia, 1512, Church of SS. Apostoli, Florence, Italy

Donor: Peter Fogliano and Hal Lester Foundation via the Friends of Florence Foundation

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Celani, Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Firenze e le Province di Pistoia e Prato

Restoration: Francesca Rossi

Assistants: Elisa Bartolini, Nicola Ricotta

Scaffolding: Avantime s.r.l di Luca Bellini

Photography: Antonio Quattrone

#

Media Contacts:

In Italy, Elisa Bonini, Friends of Florence, elisaboniniitaly@friendsofflorence.org, +39 333 6729563

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

Image Captions (top to bottom):

The Eucharistic Tabernacle after the restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

Detail of the Tabernacle after the restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

The lunette with God the Father and two angels praying after the restoration. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

Detail of Tabernacle before restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

Detail of Tabernacle during restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone

Detail of Tabernacle after restoration, 2019. Photo by Antonio Quattrone