



FRIENDS of FLORENCE

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**RESTORATION OF CAPPONI CHAPEL IN CHURCH OF SANTA FELICITA  
IN FLORENCE, ITALY, COMPLETED  
THANKS TO SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS OF FLORENCE**

**Yearlong project celebrated with the reopening of the Renaissance architectural masterpiece on  
March 28, 2018: press conference 10:30 am and public event 6:00 pm**

*Washington, DC*....Friends of Florence celebrates the completion of a comprehensive restoration of the Capponi Chapel in the 16th-century church Santa Felicita on March 28, 2018. The restoration project, initiated in March 2017, included all the artworks and decorative elements in the Chapel, including Jacopo Pontormo's majestic altarpiece, a large-scale painting depicting the Deposition from the Cross (1525–28). Enabled by a major donation to Friends of Florence from Kathe and John Dyson of New York, the project was



Capponi Chapel, Church of St. Felicita before restoration.

approved by the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Firenze, Pistoia, e Prato, entrusted to the restorer Daniele Rossi, and monitored by Daniele Rapino, the Soprintendenza officer responsible for the Santo Spirito neighborhood.



Pontormo's *Deposition* after restoration.

The Capponi Chapel was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi for the Barbadori family around 1422. Lodovico di Gino Capponi, a nobleman and wealthy banker, purchased the chapel in 1525 to serve as his family's mausoleum. In 1526, Capponi commissioned Pontormo to decorate it. Pontormo is considered one of the most

innovative and original figures of the first half of the 16th century and the Chapel one of his greatest masterpieces. After barring everyone, including his patron, Pontormo finished the chapel in 1528, working with his trusted student Agnolo Bronzino.

The restoration project comprised: the dome destroyed in the 18th century; the four Evangelists painted beneath the dome with the aid of a young Bronzino; the Annunciation frescoes on the façade and Pontormo's painting of the Deposition set in a gilded wooden frame carved by Baccio d'Agnolo on the altar.

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, Co-founder and President of Friends of Florence, said, "We are delighted that the restoration has



Detail of Pontormo's *Deposition* during restoration.



*Announcing Angel* fresco during restoration.

been successfully completed and that this magnificent treasure in the heart of Florence has reopened. The interior of the Chapel, ornamentation, and frescoes are now healthy and even more captivating. A highlight of an acclaimed exhibition this past winter at the Palazzo Strozzi, Pontormo's beloved masterwork has returned home for everyone to enjoy in its restored state. We are deeply grateful to Kathe and John Dyson for their support for the restoration of the entire Capponi Chapel. We also thank all of our devoted supporters of our numerous other projects, many of whom are based in the U.S., and the expert specialists at Florence's eminent restoration laboratories."

Among the challenges encountered by the restorers were

previous restorations, architectural interventions, and the precarious condition of the artworks, including two frescoes that were coming away from their wall support. Retouching over the years compromised the original color of the works. Dust and soot build-up hid parts of paintings, marble, and semi-precious stones. Oxidized varnish also dulled some of the figures in the paintings and woodworms had infested some of the frames and panels.



Frescoes and gilded wooden frame for Pontormo's *Deposition* during restoration.

A celebration of the reopening of the Chapel will be observed on March 28, 2018 at 6 pm, to which the public is invited.

### **Capponi Chapel Restoration Project**

With the Chapel rededicated to the Pietà to serve as the Capponi family mausoleum, Pontormo explored the themes of death and redemption when decorating the interior. “On the vaulted ceiling he painted a God the Father, who has about Him four very beautiful Patriarchs,” wrote the art historian, artist, and architect Giorgio Vasari at the time. These were demolished in 1766 to enlarge the grated tribunes (upper galleries). The original dome was replaced by the current one, decorated by Domenico Stagi with trompe-l’oeil coffers and a lantern that were eventually covered with a thick layer of plaster early in the 20th century. The dome was restored to its painted 18<sup>th</sup> century incarnation. The window wall contains a fresco of the Annunciation by Pontormo and a stained-glass window, a copy of the original version created by the French monk Guillaume de Marcillat around 1525, depicting the Descent from the Cross and the Entombment.

Daniele Rapino, Curator of the Museo di Palazzo Davanzati del Musei del Bargello and former Area Official of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio della Città di Firenze in charge of the restoration project said, “The religious and artistic focal point of the Chapel is Pontormo’s panel painting of the Deposition. The composition is surprisingly original and modern, with the figures arranged on a jagged hillside. At the top is Saint John ready to support the grief-stricken Virgin Mary who is encircled by pious women. In the foreground is the lifeless Christ, held by two young figures—perhaps angels—gazing questioningly at the viewer, like the young Pontormo to the right wearing the beret that barely holds his blonde curls. The bright and unnatural colors enhance the figures setting them beyond time or fashion. The panel is in a finely carved and gilded wooden frame made by Baccio d’Agnolo.”

Many interventions over the centuries have altered the Chapel’s original coherence and sense of architectural harmony. Around 1620, a marble reliquary-tabernacle dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo was placed in the center of the wall with the Annunciation. Numerous commemorative plaques and grave markers were added between the 17th and 19th centuries. The work that gave the church its current neoclassical appearance began in 1735. In the 18th century, Florentine architect Ferdinando Ruggieri preserved Brunelleschi’s extant architecture by partially encompassing some of it in the new structures.

Restorer Daniele Rossi said, “One of the aims of the restoration project was to bring the Chapel back to life.” With his expert knowledge of Pontormo’s methods and materials and experience restoring other masterpieces by the artist, Rossi and his team worked on the entire Chapel except for the four medallions of Evangelists Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John that he had previously restored in 2010. Scholars today tend to attribute the images of Luke and Mark to Bronzino, based on Vasari’s records.

Dust and superficial dirt were removed from all the marble surfaces. The Deposition painting regained its brilliant colors after the restorers removed several layers of old, yellowed varnish and other materials that had oxidized over time. The studies that preceded the restoration revealed Pontormo’s techniques. Starting from a drawing on paper, he transferred it to the panel in charcoal in some parts and using a fine stylus in others. The artist painted with tempera mixed with egg whites, not with oils as art historians had thought. A reflectogram analysis also showed some *pentimenti* on the Christ figure’s face and the position of the angel’s leg in the foreground on the left.

Using egg tempera, which had become outdated by the time Pontormo worked on the Deposition, made the colors more vivid and had glazed effects. The entire composition is dominated by blues—the azurite tones of the sky and lapis lazuli of the Virgin’s billowing cloak. The wooden frame, with its thick gold-leaf gilding, was also restored, the gold perfectly conserved beneath a thick layer of dust and grime.

After the catastrophic flood in 1966 that enveloped Florence, the fresco of the Annunciation was detached and transferred to a fiberglass support. However, it separated from the wall and was at risk of falling. During the restoration, the fresco was conserved, reattached, and stabilized. Materials used in previous restorations that had altered over time were removed and paint was retouched to complement the entire composition and make it more legible. A new lighting system was installed to enhance the decorations and liveliness of the colors without distorting them.

The restoration process also led to some interesting discoveries. The study of what remains of the original Chapel made it possible to revisit the idea that Brunelleschi’s architecture was based on an essential purism, with the gray of the bare *pietra serena* stone and the stark white plaster. Traces of blue and gold, the colors of the Barbadori coat of arms, were found on the surviving pilaster strip and Corinthian capital, testifying to an elaborate decorative style. Thanks to the cooperation of the Department of Earth Sciences – Structural Geology at the University of Florence, it was possible to analyze the masonry and find the still extant base of Brunelleschi’s original dome with its herring-bone arrangement of bricks, a prototype of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. This confirms Vasari’s

records that “...in S. Felicita... Filippo had caused that chapel to be vaulted without framework, at the right hand of the entrance into the church.” This was the first attempt by Brunelleschi to build a dome without support scaffolding that was then repeated on a grand scale in the Cathedral.

### **About Friends of Florence**

Friends of Florence is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., supported by individuals from around the world who are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the cultural and historical integrity of the arts in the city and surrounding area of Florence, Italy. To date, the organization has raised and donated \$10 million for conservation projects in the region, including the substantial upgrading and retrofitting of the Botticelli Room at the Uffizi Gallery and conservation of 48 drawings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo from the Horne Museum in Florence.

Friends of Florence provides financial support directly to the city’s restoration laboratories to restore, safeguard, and make available to the public a broad range of art from paintings and sculptures, to architectural elements and collections of smaller objects.

Through educational programs and events and by working closely with local and national partners—including the City of Florence, Italian Ministry of Art, and numerous international committees and organizations—Friends of Florence strives to increase public understanding and appreciation of Florence and Tuscany’s abundant art treasures. [www.friendsofflorence.org](http://www.friendsofflorence.org)

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#### Image captions (top to bottom):

Pontorno (Jacopo Carucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557). *Deposition*, 1525–8. Tempera on panel, 313 x 192 cm. Church of Santa Felicita, Florence, Italy. After restoration in 2017 with support from Friends of Florence. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Capponi Chapel, Church of Santa Felicita, Florence, Italy. Before 2017 restoration enabled by support from Friends of Florence. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Pontorno (Jacopo Carucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557). *Deposition*, 1525–8. Tempera on panel, 313 x 192 cm. Church of Santa Felicita, Florence, Italy. Detail during 2017 restoration with support from Friends of Florence. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Pontorno (Jacopo Carucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557). *Announcing Angel*. 1525–8. Fresco\_Church of St. Felicita, Florence, Italy. Detail during 2017 restoration with support from Friends of Florence. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone

Pontorno (Jacopo Carucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557). *Virgin Annunciate and Announcing Angel* frescos 1525–8, with gilded wooden frame carved by Baccio d’Agnolo for Pontorno’s *Deposition*, 1525–8. Church of St. Felicita, Florence, Italy. During 2017 restoration with support from Friends of Florence. Photograph by Antonio Quattrone