Bricci Painting Restored

Thanks to the generosity of Patrons Bernadette and Karl Schurz, the California Patrons proudly announce the completion of work on Plautilla Bricci’s masterpiece, the Presentation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to God the Father. This piece holds particular interest because of its unusual painter, one of the few women artists employed by the Church during the 17th century. Plautilla Bricci was born in the early 1600s and was a prominent member of the Academy of St. Luca. Well known as being both a skilled painter and architect, Bricci was asked (along with Pietro da Cortona) to decorate the “Villa del Vascello” on the Via Aurelia in Rome. In 1664, Bricci was asked to take care of the decoration of the Chapel of Saint Louis, the French parish in Rome, renowned for its Caravaggio paintings. For this Chapel the artist elaborated a rich decorative scheme, typically baroque in style, enriched with marbles of different colors, gilded surfaces and a clear blue drapery with gilded lily of France which frames the entrance of the Chapel.

The painting of the Presentation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to God the Father, was originally located above a side altar in the Basilica of St. John Lateran, which is the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. It is tempera on canvas, measuring approximately 5 ½ feet high and 12 feet long. It represents an angel offering the

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Molten Bronze, Creamy Brie

World-renowned sculptor Christopher Slatoff hosted some 40 California Patrons in his studio and foundry in Glendale, California on June 5, 2012. Among his many famous works, Chris created the Statue of St. Joseph in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Statue of St. Therese in the Loyola High School Jesuit garden, and the seven foot crucifix in the new USC Caruso Catholic Center. The Patrons wandered through his large studio examining dozens of sculptures in an array of sizes, materials, and themes. Chris spoke movingly of the creative process and how he conceives and creates his works of art. A highlight of the afternoon involved a hands-on demonstration of how a bronze sculpture is actually made. Chris explained the process and walked us through the steps that have remained virtually unchanged for 6000 years. The demonstration culminated with the Patrons moving into the foundry to watch the artisans heat a vessel until the bronze alloy was molten. Lifting the vessel on poles, the men poured the boiling substance into a mold to create part of a bronze sculpture. The dark cavernous room, lit by the fiery furnace and the bubbling bronze, made a dramatic scene.

Following the exciting bronze pour, the Patrons enjoyed a wonderful array of cheeses from the Cheese Store of Beverly Hills, and refreshing glasses of wine and sparkling water, sponsored by Patrons Joel and Anne Lawrence Athey. The delicious brie with honeycomb and St. Augur with cherry preserves paired beautifully with the carefully chosen chardonnay and Bordeaux. After the reception, a couple dozen Patrons joined Patron Melanie Tusquellas at her trendy Silver Lake restaurant El Chavo where she treated us to a wonderful and fun Mexican dinner complete with zesty margaritas.
The Gallery Of The Maps Restoration Is Underway

This summer, scores of California Patrons journeyed to Italy to visit the Vatican Museums and to admire the current restoration projects sponsored by the California Patrons. In particular, visitors were eager to see the Gallery of the Maps, California’s most ambitious project to date. The 120-meter long gallery contains 40 panels, decorated with an accurate map. These maps represented the domains of Pope Gregory XIII, and were created by the famous cartographer Ignacio Danti between the years 1580 and 1583. Each year, millions of visitors pass through this corridor, which is the most direct route to the Sistine Chapel. California Patrons, were astonished to see one area of the Gallery completely covered in scaffolding. This surprise, however, was a welcome one, as it meant that the expected three year restoration process had begun.

Vatican officials are taking no chances with the rehabilitation of the Gallery of the Maps, and have placed Maestra Maria Putska in charge of the entire restoration. Maestra Putska is the painting lab’s Head Restorer, and is highly regarded in her field for the passion with which she pursues her work. She is the first woman to ever hold this prestigious position. Furthermore, Putska has been a key figure in the new effort within the Museum towards introducing new techniques and also new experts to the restoration team. Putska has appointed Francesco Prontero to oversee the day-to-day affairs of the restoration. Prontero is a specialist in the fields of wood and canvas painting, and has handpicked 12 other outside restorers with which to repair the maps.

Work on the Gallery proceeds at a steady pace, as restorers work to not only revitalize the paintings but also to understand the technique with which Danti originally crafted the maps. Besides their aesthetic appeal, the maps also serve as a didactic lesson to art students and beginning restorers, who are invited to observe the techniques and practices used by veteran restorers. In a classic example of the diligence that goes into all Vatican projects, restorers tried four different consolidates to see which one worked best on each map. However, work on these maps is particularly difficult because direct sunlight, humidity, and slowly increasing cracks have caused the colors to lose much of their original luster. Yet, Senior restorer Prontero says that the task, while difficult, is both enjoyable and informative.

With thirteen restorers working to rehabilitate this magnificent corridor, California Patrons can take pride knowing that the prized Gallery of the Maps is in good hands. Sponsorships for individual Maps are still available!
Dozens of California Patrons…

The Olofson Family with guide Romina Cometti and intern Declan Feeley

Loyola High School Seniors in the Cortile della Pigna

The Lumardi Family

Joe Incaudo with friends in the Room of Tears

Margaret Ferry Orem with her daughter and brother-in-law with Carolina Rea

Claire Reiss with Fr. Mark at the papal audience

Traci and Robin Mennis and their nieces with Fr. Mark

Josephine Bennett with the Sayuk Family and intern Alexandra Genord

Fr. Miles Riley and Sara Salvodello

Fr. Mark with Bob and Louise Uphus
Heart of Jesus encircled with the crown of thorns to God the Father. God is holding a sceptre in his left hand, and at his side are some other angels presenting the world and the alpha and omega on the other. This painting is typically Baroque with its crowded and dynamic composition. The elegant layout of the fabrics is evidence of the influence of one of the most important painters of the Baroque period, Pietro da Cortona, with whom Bricci worked.

Surprisingly, for many years this beautiful piece of art lay forgotten in a storage room of the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Only after a chance discovery was the piece once again recognized both for its historical significance and aesthetic qualities. However, years of neglect had caused much of the painting to lose its lustrous colors, with much of its surface oxidized. In addition to this damage, humidity within the storage room had caused the wooden support and frame to warp, causing cracks. This sad state of affairs marked what seemed like an untimely end for such an important representation of 17th century art.

Yet, thanks to the diligent work of the restorers within the Vatican museums painting labs, the piece has once again been restored to its former glory. Marco Pratelli led the effort to resuscitate the painting. Restorers worked for months analyzing, photographing, and cleaning the painting. Their five step process allowed them to first determine the best possible chemical to use on the painting before x-raying and documenting the pigmentation on the canvass. Due to their efforts, the piece is now ready to be returned to St. John Lateran, where it can once again be enjoyed by the public. However, restorers have also been contemplating first creating a special exhibit in the Vatican to highlight the contributions of women painters, in which this piece would hold a prominent place. We are hoping such an exhibition will come to fruition.
Minnesota Patrons Offer October Rome Visit

The California Patrons October visit to Rome and Florence is sold out, but the Minnesota Patrons have space available on their October trip. The experience begins on Tuesday, October 9 with a welcome tour of the Eternal City and concludes the evening of Saturday, October 13 with a day trip to Tivoli. Many lovely Vatican Museum events are planned for the trip. Flights and hotel are not included. If you would like a spur-of-the-moment get away in Patrons style to Rome, please contact Minnesota Patrons chairman Johan Van Parys at chair@vaticanpatrons.org.