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The Artistic Journey of Fra Angelico on Exhibit in Florence's Palazzo Strozzi

Running from September 26, 2025 to January 25, 2026, the show is the first major exhibition in Florence dedicated to the artist in 70 years

*Italian Hours*

Lucy Gordan



The San Marco Altarpiece Photo credit: San Marco Museum

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A blockbuster exhibition celebrating Fra Angelico (c.1395-1455), better known as “Beato (Blessed) Angelico”, will be held from September 26, 2025 to January 25, 2026 at two locations. *Palazzo Strozzi*, a Renaissance palace, since 2006 has been the location of Florence's major temporary art exhibitions; the San Marco Museum is the former Dominican convent where this friar-painter, the founding father of Renaissance art in Florence, lived and worked. Today it's home to the world's largest collection of his frescoes and of his paintings, these all displayed in their own newly-opened room.

As the press release explains, this complex “represents a crossroads of religious devotion, culture, and political power in 15th-century Florence”. For Fra Angelico's artistic vision was deeply rooted in religious devotion. Moreover, Cosimo the Elder de' Medici (1389-1464), the omnipotent banker/politician and lover of the arts, commissioned the architect Michelozzo to build the complex, thereby becoming Fra Angelico's devoted patron.

“Fra Angelico” is curated Carl Brandon Strehlke, Curator Emeritus of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with Stefano Casciu, Regional Director of Tuscany's National Museums, and Angelo Tartuferi, the former Director of the recently-reopened San Marco Museum. It marks the first major exhibition in Florence dedicated to the artist exactly 70 years after 1955's monographic show. Thus, a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



The Annunciation fresco Photo credit: San Marco Museum

The more than 140 works-of-art include paintings, drawings, sculptures, and illuminated manuscripts are on loan from some 70 leading museums and cultural institutions. Among them are the Louvre, the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, the Metropolitan, the National Gallery in Washington D.C., the Vatican Museums, the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and numerous libraries, churches, and collections in Italy and internationally.

During the four years of “Fra Angelico”'s preparation several of the paintings were meticulously restored and many of the altarpieces that had been disassembled and dispersed over 200 years ago were reunited for the first time. All these works

explore Fra Angelico's artistic development and his relation to other contemporary painters such as Lorenzo Monaco, Masaccio, Filippo Lippi, and Jan van Eyck, who introduced him to the Flemish practice of depicting detail, as well as to sculptors like Lorenzo Ghiberti, Michelozzo, and Luca Della Robbia.

Renowned for his unmistakable style of harmony, light, and spirituality, evolving from a late Gothic legacy of gold-leaf backgrounds and one-dimensionality, while embracing the principles of the emerging Renaissance: three-dimensionality, greater detail, *chiaroscuro*, and anatomical accuracy, Fra Angelico created paintings celebrated for their mastery of perspectival space and light.

At *Palazzo Strozzi* several of Fra Angelico's masterpieces will explore his artistic development, his innovations, his extraordinary attention to detail, his influence on and collaborations with other artists as well as his relationship with Cosimo de' Medici and with numerous Florentine institutions, both religious and lay. One innovation which proved to be a turning point in Italian painting is his early examples of the "Sacra Conversazione" where he's painted the Virgin and saints in a unified space or scene, thus no longer separated by frames. One example here is the "San Marco Altarpiece".

Instead, the San Marco Museum is the exhibition's spiritual home. Here, the painter's frescoes, around 50 in number, laid the foundations of the Florentine Renaissance, in which spirituality and artistic vision coalesce. They're immediately visible in the overdoors of the cloister and in the Chapter House, and then upstairs in the corridors of the friars' dormitory and in each one of their cells. Each different, all of them were painted by Fra Angelico himself or under his direct supervision.

At the top of the stairs leading to the dormitory is Fra Angelico's "Annunciation", one of the iconic images of Renaissance art and certainly one of his best-known works.

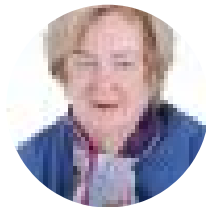
This "Annunciation" isn't Fra Angelico's first painting on that theme nor his only one in the convent. This fresco wasn't intended just for aesthetic purposes. Running across the loggia at the bottom of the fresco there's an inscription that instructs the viewer: *Virginis Intacte Cum Veneris Ante Figuram Pretereundo Cave Sileatur Ave*. It means that, when you stand before the image of the Ever-Virgin, take care that you don't neglect to say Ave, thus a reminder for the monks to pray.

His other frescoes, also intended for contemplation by the friars, depict religious scenes primarily from Christ's life and the New Testament. The Museum's galleries, besides the Fra Angelico Room, contain other works of exceptional historical value: the "Last Supper" by Ghirlandaio, panel paintings by Uccello and Fra Bartolomeo, as well as glazed terracotta sculpture by the Della Robbia family.

To book tickets in advance, click on www.palazzostrozzi.org for the exhibition located in *Palazzo Strozzi*, open daily from 10AM -8PM, on Thursday until 11 PM. To book the San Marco Museum, click on www.ticketsflorence.com, open Tuesday-Friday 8:15 AM to 1:45 PM, Saturday 8:15 AM-6:50 PM, Sunday 8:15 AM-7 PM, closed Monday.



Silhouetted Saint Francis of Assisi Photo credit: The Philadelphia Museum of Art



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