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Arts

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World Monuments Fund's First Project in Vatican City

A five-year restoration of Raphael's Second Loggia launches a new era of WMF collaboration with the Vatican



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



Ceiling vault of Adam and Eve's Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Copyright: Governatorato SCV-Direzione dei Musei

On June 24, less than a month after opening its first office in Milan, the World Monuments Fund announced its first project ever in Vatican City — a major restoration of the west wing of the Second Loggia, the so-called “Loggia of Raphael,” on the second floor of the Apostolic Palace just outside the Papal Apartments, overlooking the courtyard of Saint Damasus.

This \$5.5 million project, begun after the summer and to be conducted over the next five years by the Vatican Museums and the WMF, is funded by the New-York-based philanthropic Stephen A. Schwarzman Foundation and will involve 20 restorers from the Vatican Museums. Past repairs used glues that shrank and damaged the paint, so the restorers will carefully strip away the glue. They will also use hand-held lasers to protect delicate, water-soluble paint layers. Other plans include replacing 19th-century windows designed by Antonio Canova with UV-filtering, heat-reducing glass and installing a new lighting system, which will be paid for by the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums.

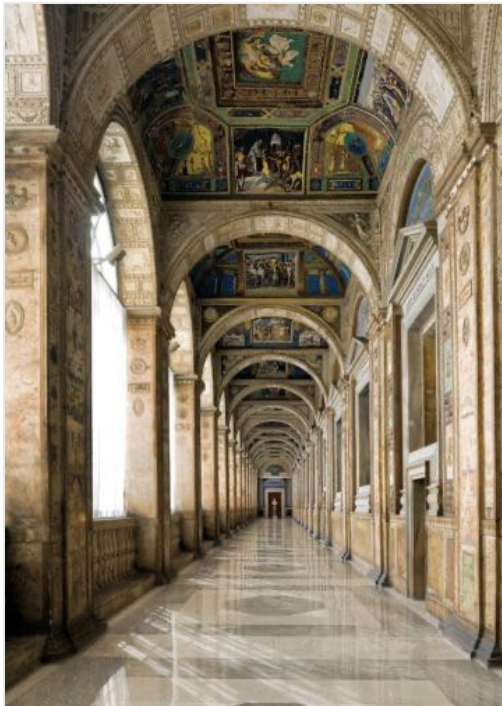
Conceived by Raphael and decorated between 1517 and 1519 by his workshop of some 50 artists for Pope Leo X de’ Medici (r. 1513–21), the Loggia depicts important events during Leo X’s papacy. Its pillar and wall decorations drew heavily from the scenes that Raphael, Michelangelo and other artists of their time had observed in the Emperor Nero’s recently discovered Domus Aurea. One of Raphael’s last major projects — he died in 1520 — it was immediately considered one of the highest expressions of Renaissance art applied to architecture.

The corridor, 213 feet long and 13 feet wide, is divided into 13 bays (another term for ceiling vaults), each decorated with four Biblical stories. The first 12 bays illustrate episodes from the Old Testament: Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses (in two bays), Joshua, David and Solomon. The final bay is dedicated to the New Testament: the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ and the Last Supper.

The chief decorators were Giulio Romano for the Biblical scenes on the vaults and Giovanni da Udine for the botanical elements, some of the grotesques (others have been attributed to Perin del Vaga), and the stuccoes in antique style. “As a passageway (long even now) traversed by cardinals, high prelates and ambassadors visiting the Pope over the centuries,” explained Barbara Jatta, Director of the Vatican Museums, at the project’s presentation, “admired and copied by the greatest Italian and foreign artists, it was also an essential destination of the Grand Tour.” Today the corridor is closed to the general public, but digital archiving during restoration will allow people to view the restored art online.



*A restorer at work. Copyright: Governatorato SCV-
Direzione dei Musei*



View of the interior of Raphael's Second Loggia. Photo by A. Branchetti, 2007. (Copyright: Governatorato SCV-Direzione dei Musei)

In addition to the loggia's restoration, the entire WMF initiative — “The Legacy of Raphael: The Vatican and Beyond” — includes restoration training, digital documentation, dissemination and other ongoing projects in the Vatican, made possible by the remaining \$8,775,000 of the generous \$14,275,000 gift from the Stephen A. Schwarzman Foundation.

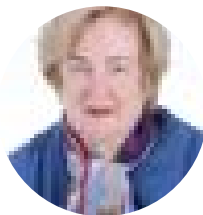
“Raphael's loggia is a magnificent treasure that belongs to all of humanity,” commented Stephen A. Schwarzman, the co-founder of Blackstone, at the project's presentation. “Its restoration will bring back to life one of the highest expressions of decorative art while creating a lasting legacy through the

conservators trained along the way. By training this next generation of experts in the most advanced scientific conservation approaches, we will help preserve not only this extraordinary masterpiece, but also countless other works of cultural heritage around the world for generations to come.”

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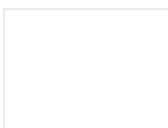


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