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# NEWS FROM THE GETTY

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## **GETTY FOUNDATION AWARDS €300,000 FOR CONSERVATION OF *THE LAST SUPPER* by GIORGIO VASARI, SEVERELY DAMAGED IN THE FLORENCE FLOOD OF 1966**

### **Grant Supports Unprecedented Opportunity to Train Future Conservators as Part of the Getty's Panel Paintings Initiative**

LOS ANGELES—It has been almost 45 years since that fateful day when torrents of water mixed with oil, mud, and debris raced through the streets of Florence, Italy, causing human casualties, property damage, and a cultural catastrophe of epic proportions. Thousands of works of art – from frescoes and sculptures to manuscripts and panel paintings– were damaged or destroyed by the flood.

One of the most damaged works of art to survive the onslaught was Giorgio Vasari's *The Last Supper*, a large-scale panel painting (more than 8 by 21 feet) comprised of five major panels, which was commissioned in 1546 by the nuns of the Florentine Murate Convent. It has not been seen publicly since it was severely damaged by the flood in 1966.

The tremendous losses from the flood, including the near-ruin of Vasari's *Last Supper*, spawned among other things, a vigorous movement to professionally conserve historic and artistic treasures like panel paintings. These paintings are among the most significant works in American, European, and Russian museum collections and religious buildings, including works by Duccio di Buoninsegna, Leonardo da Vinci, Peter Paul Rubens, and Rembrandt van Rijn. Unfortunately, many of these works are now threatened by serious problems due to the warping, cracking, and splitting of the wood on which they are painted, requiring highly specialized care and conservation not only of the painted surface, but also of the underlying structure.

It takes years of practice for a conservator to develop the surgical skills required for intervention. Today, there are only a handful of experts fully qualified to conserve these paintings, and nearly all of these experts will retire within the next decade. The Getty Foundation, Getty Conservation Institute, and J. Paul Getty Museum together designed the

Panel Paintings Initiative to ensure that the next generation of conservators is prepared to take their place.

As part of the Initiative, the Getty Foundation has awarded €300,000 to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure e Laboratori di Restauro (OPD in Florence, Italy) so that seven conservators at the advanced, mid-level and post-graduate levels will have the unique opportunity to train side-by-side with leaders in the conservation field, *Ciro Castelli* and *Mauro Parri*, as they work together on *The Last Supper* to ensure it is preserved for the future.

"We are delighted to provide this grant to the OPD," said Dr. Deborah Marrow, director of the Getty Foundation. "The complexity of the work on *The Last Supper* will afford future panel conservators an unparalleled learning experience under expert supervision. This significant project will serve as a model for future grants in our larger Panel Paintings Initiative."

Adds Getty Foundation Program Officer Antoine Wilmering, "This initiative would not be possible without the dedication of the Opificio's experts with whom we are working. Their commitment to reaching out to the next generation of conservators and passing on their acquired knowledge is essential to the success of the program."

The grant to OPD -- announced during a press conference on May 12 in Florence -- brings to nearly €750,000 the total awarded by the Getty Foundation through the Panel Paintings Initiative. Previous grants have funded a survey of significant museum collections of panel paintings and of professionals in the field undertaken by the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, and a collaborative project between the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Prado Museum in Madrid that resulted in the conservation of the great *Adam and Eve* by Albrecht Dürer.

Vasari, the 16<sup>th</sup> century painter and architect, is perhaps best known as the "father of art history" because he originated the genre of artist biographies. The monumental *Last Supper* is among his many paintings in Florence. It was moved several times over the centuries before it was relocated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence.

*The Last Supper* has not been seen by the public since it was damaged during the flood of 1966. Although the painting received emergency treatment after the flood, due to the complexity of its conservation challenges it has never been fully restored. In 2004, the painting was transferred to the Fortezza da Basso for further study and analysis by the OPD.

"The Opificio delle Pietre Dure e Laboratori di Restauro has a long history in the conservation of panel paintings, as well as a long relationship with the Getty," said Isabella Lapi Ballerini, superintendent of the OPD, one of the world's most prestigious art conservation and restoration laboratories. "We share the Getty's concern for the need to prepare future conservators so they have the proper skills to care for panel paintings. We are grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with the Getty in restoring Vasari's *Last Supper* and to make it once again accessible to the public."

The project is scheduled to begin in May and is expected to be complete by mid-2013. The finished result will be shared through a joint exhibition with the OPD and the Opera di Santa Croce Museum, and in a book on the restoration process.

The grant comes as the Getty Foundation celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, marking the issuance of more than 5,000 grants for projects that increase the understanding and preservation of the visual arts in more than 180 countries and on every continent.

For more information about the Getty Foundation's philanthropic work around the globe, including the Panel Paintings Initiative, visit [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu).

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**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. Additional information is available at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu). The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

**The Getty Foundation** fulfills the philanthropic mission of the Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the understanding and preservation of the visual arts locally and throughout the world. Through strategic grants and programs, the Foundation strengthens art history as a global discipline, promotes the interdisciplinary practice of conservation, increases access to museum and archival collections, and develops current and future leaders in the visual arts. The Foundation carries out its work in collaboration with the Getty Museum, Research Institute, and Conservation Institute to ensure the Getty programs achieve maximum impact. Additional information is available at [www.getty.edu/foundation](http://www.getty.edu/foundation).

**The Opificio delle Pietre Dure e Laboratori di Restauro** in Florence, Italy was originally established in 1588 as a workshop for the creation of elaborate, inlaid, hard stonework. Today, the OPD is known as an international leader in the conservation field and is one of two Italian state conservation schools. The OPD maintains a museum of pietre dure artifacts, a specialized library and archives, and conservation laboratories for the treatment of many different types of artwork, including the Paintings Conservation

Department located at the Fortezza da Basso. The panel paintings conservators at the OPD have earned a worldwide reputation for excellence and expertise in their field.