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Contessa Helps to Restore Uffizi Gallery

In 1993, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence suffered a devastating blow when a car bomb exploded behind the building, killing six people and wounding 26 and destroying or damaging dozens of works in the gallery's priceless art collection.

Italians are very proud of their culture, of which art plays an integral part. The ruining of some of the Uffizi's most precious works was a demolition of that central part of Italian heritage. However, Italians weren't just going to sit back and leave these monuments in their deplorable condition.

Almost immediately after the bombing, the Amici degli Uffizi was established in Florence. The Amici degli Uffizi is a private, independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote cultural activities meant to maintain and improve the Uffizi Gallery collections that were damaged by the bombing. The organization encourages public awareness and appreciation through exhibitions, publications and orientation services for the millions of visitors attracted to this unique artistic heritage. To date, the Amici degli Uffizi in Florence has restored approximately 30 works of art.

The current President of the Amici degli Uffizi in Florence is founding member Contessa Maria Vittoria Rimbotti. Born Princess Colonna di Paliano in Naples, Maria Vittoria is a well-respected and influential patroness of the arts in Italy.

The Amici degli Uffizi isn't the only place where the Countess has dedicated her efforts. She is the regional president of Fondo Italiano Ambiente (FAI) Toscana, a national non-profit organization which aims to both protect and restore artistic and natural environments as well as open them up to the general public. Maria Vittoria sits on the board of the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole, one of Italy's well known and respected music institutions. The school is open to children, adults, professional musicians and music amateurs. The school was her late husband's passion, and she continues today to give an award in his name every year to students.

She is also a member of the Steering Committee for the allocation of all non-profit funds at the Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, the foundation behind the Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze. The latter is Florence's historic local savings bank. In addition, she is a member of the Cultural Sub-Committee, which decides which cultural projects to give funding to.

On a day-to-day basis she is responsible for her family's real estate company business developments and special projects. In recognition of her success in this entrepreneurial role, she served as president of the Tuscan delegation of the Italian Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Executives (AIDDA) from 1990 to 1996. From 1996 to 2002, she was national vice president. She is still the honorary president of the Tuscan delegation.

Rimbotti has won many honorary awards, all of which relate to her work in the cultural sector: The title of Accademico D'Onore from the Fine Arts Academy of Florence in 2004; The Salomone D'Oro prize from the University of Florence in 2004; and The Nelli Award to recognize her as a Patroness of the Arts by the Florence Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC in 2006.

For many of us here in the United States, the Uffizi Gallery is a museum we would like to visit when we go to Florence. Even if we were talented enough to lend our help in restoring the many works of art that are still awaiting restoration 16 years after the bombing, going to Italy frequently isn't an option.

So, in 2006, the Friends of the Uffizi was established in Palm Beach, Florida by a local attorney. The organization is a sister organization to the Amici degli Uffizi in Florance, and raises money to help with restorations and the preservation of the gallery. The non-profit organization has an impressive membership, with many donors who host cocktail parties, dinners, luncheons and lectures to promote membership and raise funds.

The Friends of the Uffizi's Executive Director is an art historian and a New Jersey- born Italian Lisa Marie Conte Browne. Lisa Marie has many years of art history experience, making her a natural choice when the organization was looking for its Executive Director. As Lisa Marie says, "I have art in my heart."

Lisa Marie grew up in New Jersey with her Italian American parents who made her feel "like I was born in Italy rather than Jersey City." When she was asked to be the Executive Director, she was honored and elated, knowing that her heritage was coming full circle with her passion for art history.

Her personal mission with the Friends of the Uffizi is to bring as many restorations to fruition as possible. "I have found my niche in life," she said, "and with this work, I am placing my fingerprint on history."

There are many newly restored works in the Uffizi Gallery thanks to the effort and financial support the Friends of

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CONTESSA MARIA VITTORIA RIMBOTTI

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FUNDS raised by the Friends of the Uffizi have gone to the Laocoon Restoration.

LISA MARIE CONTE BROWNE Executive Director in Palm Beach, Florida

the Uffizi Gallery has provided. Their current fundraising efforts are going to the Laocoon Restoration onsite at the Uffizi, under the keen eye of Director Antonio Natale.

Currently, the Friends of the Uffizi are working on an exhibit that will showcase their work from the Uffizi for the first time in the US at the Ft. Lauderdale Museum, planned for December 2010. Browne is also collaborating with a public relations firm in New York City to have a symposium on the works at either the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Morgan Library.

In the next two years, the Uffizi Gallery will open the first floor, with many unseen works of art on display. The Friends of the Uffizi are working to raise funds for the necessary restorations of Renaissance masterpieces that will be on display in the new space. It is the first time the entire first floor will be open to the public.

For more information on the Amici degli Uffizi and the Friends of the Uffizi, please visit www.amicidegliuffizi.it.