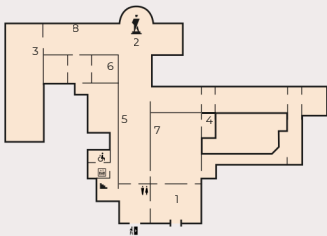


Architectures: the art of building
European Heritage Days
27 and 28 September 2025

ground floor



first floor



Real architecture: the architectural space of the museum

The Habsburg-Lorraine period: the "Quadrilatero delle Arti"



The Galleria dell'Accademia is in the area of Florence known as the "Quadrilatero delle Arti", (the arts district) located within the square formed by the four streets via Ricasoli, via degli Alfani, via de' Servi, and via Cesare Battisti. At the end of the 18th century, Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo of Habsburg-Lorraine transformed this area into an authentic cultural hub. The reorganisation of this urban space began around 1784, when the Grand Duke founded the Accademia di Belle Arti, an educational institution housed in the former Ospedale di San Matteo and in the former Benedictine women's monastery of San Niccolò di Cafaggio – pre-existing buildings that were conjoined and renovated by Bernardo Fallani, Gaspero Maria Paoletti, and Giuseppe del Rosso. Still today, this area of the city is home to important Florentine cultural institutions, such as the Accademia di Belle Arti, the Galleria dell'Accademia, the Conservatorio di Musica Luigi Cherubini and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure.

The vaulted ceiling of the current entrance of the Galleria dell'Accademia is decorated with a spectacular 18th-century fresco attributed to Giuseppe Maria Terreni, featuring the coat of arms of the Habsburg-Lorraine Grand Dukes held aloft by cherubs in a cloud-filled sky and surrounded by allegorical figures. The walls, in contrast, display frames with decorative mouldings, ornamental roundels, shell motifs, garlands, and acanthus leaves in a neoclassical style, elements that also appear in the rooms of the Museum of Musical Instruments. The current exit of the museum used to be the entrance to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure. Founded in 1588 by Ferdinando I de' Medici, the Opificio was relocated here in 1796 by Ferdinando III of Habsburg-Lorraine, who is depicted in the bust above the doorway. Inscriptions and frescoed portraits of the Grand Dukes Cosimo I, Ferdinando I and Francesco I de' Medici celebrate their contribution to the development of the art of hardstone inlay.



The Tribune of Emilio De Fabris: home to the David



After the Unification of Italy in 1861, the Galleria dell'Accademia underwent a radical architectural transformation. The transfer of Michelangelo's *David* from Piazza della Signoria in 1873 and the exhibition organised in 1875 to mark the fourth centenary of the artist's birth, significantly reshaped the museum's space. The architect Emilio De Fabris, renowned for building the neo-Gothic façade of Florence's famous Duomo (cathedral), designed the so-called Tribune: a new semicircular space topped with a glass dome that allows natural light to enter. The *David*, located at the centre, on an

imposing pedestal almost two metres high, is therefore fully illuminated, creating an evocative effect.

The Tribune is accessed through the present-day Galleria dei Prigioni, a long corridor reminiscent of a church nave.

The Tribune was inaugurated on 22 July 1882. De Fabris's intervention also involved other structural changes, such as the opening of the only entrance on via Ricasoli, a change that definitively separated the museum (the Galleria dell'Accademia) from the educational institute (the Accademia di Belle Arti).

The building's 14th-century origins: the Ospedale di San Matteo



The Salone dell'Ottocento (19th Century Hall), which now houses the Gipsoteca (plaster cast gallery), used to be part of the former Ospedale di San Matteo (Saint Matthew Hospital), built between 1386 and 1410 at the behest of the banker Lemmo di Balduccio. After the founder's death, its management was transferred to the Arte del Cambio, one of the city's leading Arts and Crafts guilds. In 1781, the Ospedale was closed and a few years later (1784) Pietro Leopoldo chose the building to house the Accademia di Belle Arti. The current Salone dell'Ottocento was once the women's ward of the Ospedale, as commemorated by the detached fresco by Jacopo Pontormo, painted in green earth and ochre and displayed on the left wall (circa 1513–1514). The scene probably depicts the washing of the feet, the reviving of a little dead girl, and the miracle of the ice – three episodes from the life of Beata Umiltà, a nun of noble origins who founded a monastery in Florence. The painting evokes daily life inside the Ospedale, where the beds with the sick women cared for by the nuns can be seen in the background.

Painted architecture: Public Space and Private Space

The representation of the city of Florence

In mediaeval and Renaissance paintings, the depiction of urban and architectural space is often loaded with symbolic, civic, or religious meanings.



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The buildings of Florence also serve as the backdrop to two panels depicting *Saint Zenobius reviving a Dead Boy* and the *Translation of the Body of Saint Zenobius*, commissioned in 1516 to Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio by the Confraternity dedicated to the holy bishop, which held its meetings at the rectory of the cathedral of Florence. The paintings decorated the altar of the Confraternity together with Mariotto Albertinelli's *Annunciation* which dates to 1510 and is also exhibited in the Galleria dell'Accademia. The detailed view of the ancient church of San Pier Maggiore, destroyed in 1784, closes the square

where the miracle of Saint Zenobius takes place; the transfer of the bishop's body, on the other hand, is set in Piazza San Giovanni, where the Baptistery, the still unfinished façade of the Duomo and Giotto's bell tower are depicted, with the tower of Palazzo Vecchio in the background. The painter also depicts the elm tree which, according to legend, miraculously blossomed in the middle of winter while the saint's body was being transported from the Church of San Lorenzo to the Duomo. The Column of San Zenobius was erected in that place in the 14th century, and still stands there today.



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In the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Jacopo di Cione (1372–1373), Saint Anne is depicted on the left holding a model of the city of Florence surrounded by tall crenellated walls within which it is possible to discern the tower of Palazzo Vecchio and the dome of the Baptistery of San Giovanni. The image has a significance for the city which involves both its politics and its identity, as it recalls the liberation of Florence from the tyranny of the Duke of Athens, which took place in the year 1343 on 26 July, the feast

day of Saint Anne. The painting thus celebrates Anne as protector of the city, alongside seven other saints which include the co-patron saints of Florence: John the Baptist, Pope Victor, Bishop Zenobius, Barnabas and the martyr Reparata. The painting was originally commissioned by the Magistratura della Zecca (mint authority), where the gold florin was minted, and serves as a testament to Florence's economic and political power in the 14th century.

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The depiction of domestic interiors in scenes of the Annunciation

In *Annunciation* scenes, the Archangel Gabriel bursts into the Virgin Mary's home to announce the future birth of her son Jesus Christ. In these paintings, architecture brings an intimate and domestic dimension, with depictions of interiors, loggias, and courtyards that define the space as a meeting place between the human and the divine.



In the Neri di Bicci painting dating to 1464, the *Annunciation* is set inside a Renaissance home.

The artist pays particular attention to the depiction of the portico, which features a large central arch, a blue ceiling adorned with golden decorations, mullioned windows above, and a colonnade. On the right, a room with a bed covered by a red drape can be glimpsed. In the background, a low wall encloses the garden, beyond which a vast wooded landscape unfolds. The enclosed garden, protected and separated from the outside world, symbolises the *hortus conclusus* ("walled garden"), an allegory of the doctrine of Mary's virginity.

At the centre, in the foreground, Neri di Bicci depicts a devotional painted panel known as a "pace", which was placed on the altar table to be kissed by the faithful. In doing so, the artist seeks to establish a direct connection between the real space of the viewer and the painted space of the sacred scene.

Alessandro Allori's *Annunciation* (1578–1579) takes place in a modest yet elegantly furnished bedroom, where a beam of divine light pierces the clouds from above. Here, architectural elements are minimised to make room for domestic details: the sewing basket, the rush-bottomed chair, and embroidered fabrics. In this way, the painter seeks to make the religious episode immediately recognisable and accessible, in an attempt to speak directly to the hearts of the faithful, in line with the artistic guidelines established by the Counter-Reformation following the Council of Trent (1545–1563). There is no absence of symbolic elements, however – such as the many flowers scattered across the floor, alluding to the Virgin's virtues and purity.



Medieval polyptychs: miniature architectural works

Medieval polyptychs are paintings made up of multiple panels joined together and enclosed in frames composed of bases, pillars, slender columns, capitals, arches, and pinnacles, which often resemble miniature architectural works. Each panel is conceived as an "architectural microcosm", where the abovementioned wooden framework forms an essential part of the composition. For this reason, alongside the painters, historical documents often also mention the names of the master carpenters, who built the wooden structure, and of the goldbeaters, who produced the gold leaf for delicate gilding operations. The first-floor galleries of the museum host an extensive selection of polyptychs, some of which still have their original gilded wooden frames.



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The frame of the *Coronation of the Virgin with Saints*, painted in 1401 by Spinello Aretino, Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, and Niccolò di Pietro Gerini for the main altar of the Church of Santa Felicita, is still largely original, although the pinnacles are missing. In the lower section of the polyptych (predella), half-length portraits of saints appear in pairs, leaning out from window-like openings like spectators. Although the gold background lacks spatial references, the spiral columns dividing the various scenes contribute nonetheless to a sense of three-dimensionality.

A striking example for its remarkable state of preservation is the polyptych by Giovanni del Biondo, originally from the cappella Cavalcanti in the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella (circa 1385). The work, a triptych featuring the Annunciation at its centre and flanked by figures of saints, still retains nearly all of its original components. Each panel is intricately decorated, with pinnacles adorned with seraphim and cherubim, topped by leaf carvings that are then echoed in the three smaller upper pinnacles.



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EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS 2025

27-28 September

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Every year in September, the European Heritage Days (EHD), promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Commission and coordinated in Italy by the Ministry of Culture, celebrate the European cultural heritage with two days of guided tours, special openings, and events held in museums and cultural sites across Europe. In 2025, marking the 50th anniversary of the European Architectural Heritage Year, the focus will be on Architecture in its many forms, and the art of building as a living expression of the history, culture, values, and identity of Italian and European communities.