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## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### Major restoration projects mark 50th anniversary of Venice and Florence floods

Save Venice and Friends of Florence are collaborating on the conservation of paintings and drawings in the two Italian cities

by [ANNY SHAW](#) | 2 March 2016



Cimabue's Crucifix after it was damaged by the 1966 flood in Florence. Photo: Ivo Bazzechi

To mark the 50th anniversary of the great Venice and Florence floods in November 1966, two US conservation organisations are collaborating on major art restoration projects in the two Italian cities.

The non-profit groups, Save Venice and Friends of Florence, will work together this year to restore a Tuscan egg-tempera painting on panel by the Master of Badia a Isola from 1315; a Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels in the Galleria Palazzo Cini in Venice; and 48 drawings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo from the Horne Museum in Florence.

On 4 November 1966, the River Arno burst its banks, sending dark muddy water thundering into the centre of Florence at 60 km per hour. More than 100 people died in the floodwaters and around 14,000 works of art were badly damaged or destroyed, including Giorgio Vasari's *The Last Supper*. The same day, high tides and rain-swollen rivers filled the Venice Lagoon to bursting. Floodwater raised the canals' level to a height of 6ft 4in, ruining works of art worth an estimated £3.2 billion that was stored in cellars and on ground floors.

Angeli del fango, the "mud angels", descended on Florence from all over the world to help clear up the city, rescuing almost 1,000 paintings, frescoes and sculptures. However, the display of international cultural solidarity also highlighted how unprepared and under-resourced the Italian government was.

"Lessons learned from the floods show that, 50 years on, we still need to do the utmost to preserve our common cultural heritage. The Italian government cannot possibly safeguard all the treasures found here," says Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, the founder and president of the board of Friends of Florence, which is based in Washington, DC. To date, the organisation has raised and donated around \$10m for the preservation of art and architecture in Florence and Tuscany, contributing more than \$900,000 to renovate the Uffizi's Botticelli Rooms last year.

Save Venice, which has its headquarters in New York, was born in response to the floods of 1966 so "it is fitting that we commemorate the anniversary with what we do best—restore cultural treasures", says Frederick Ilchman, the chairman of the organisation.