

**Welcome address of Dott. Bruno Santi
Director, Opificio delle Pietre Dure - Firenze - Italy**

Civil and academic authorities, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like to thank – on behalf of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure of Florence and of my colleague Cecilia Frosinini, who will be presenting a contribution in this conference – the organizers of this meeting for this most appreciated invitation.

In particular, the illustrious Oxford University and its Italian Studies, the Department of the History of Art and Oxford e-Research Studies; also, the Italian Embassy of Italy in London and His Excellency the Ambassador Giancarlo Aragona, and the Director of its Science Office, Professor Roberto Amendolia.

I would like to precise that my nomination as the person responsible of the Opificio is quite recent; in fact, only since this last April I have replaced Cristina Acidini as its superintendent. However, in these years during which I have covered other roles in the field of the Italian State administration of cultural heritage, I have always been aware of the prestige of this internationally known Institute, achieved thanks to the work of its directors, officers, restorers and scientific researchers, who not only have approved, followed, carried out and realised most important conservative interventions, but have also updated procedures and methodologies, keeping abreast with new technologies finalized towards an increasingly more complete knowledge of the materials and techniques that can ensure the most appropriate intervention on the works of art entrusted to their care.

From the historical laboratory of the Soprintendenza alle Gallerie fiorentine to the present pavilion inside the Fortezza da Basso, the Institute's activity, which in a certain sense originates from the dramatic episode of the Florentine flood of 1966, which caused much damage to the city's cultural heritage, has constantly widened its extent, from its interventions on works of art from the local territory to operations and expertises on an international scale.

The Opificio of today is the result of a fortunate intuition of the first cultural heritage minister, Giovanni Spadolini, and the strong will and determination of Umberto Baldini, formerly director of the Gabinetto di restauro delle Gallerie, which led to the merging of the latter institute with the Opificio founded under the Medici Granducate, which had already addressed its activity towards restoration since the end of the Nineteenth century.

In the Gabinetto di Restauro of the Soprintendenza alle Gallerie, since the 1930's, under the guidance of the unforgotten Ugo Procacci and with the presence of talented restorers with a great experience, such as Gaetano Lo Vullo, Augusto Vermehren, Edo Masini, Vittorio Granchi and others, experimentations were also taking place, in the field of application of technical instruments (even though on an empirical basis) for an evaluation as objective as possible of the conditions and materials of the works of art that were to undergo a restoration intervention.

I believe that one of the very first X-ray radiographies of a work of art was realized in that laboratory, in order to evaluate the conservation conditions of a well known medieval Florentine painting on panel from the Uffizi Gallery.

The development of the scientific laboratory of the Opificio, which had merged in 1975 with the Gabinetto Restauri of the former Soprintendenza alle Gallerie e opere d'arte, strongly sought for by Umberto Baldini (the first superintendent of the renewed Institute), in its multilateral vision integrating the competencies of art historians, restorers and scientific researchers in order to detect the methodologies for the best intervention in favour of the conservation of the work of art, has known over time a significant evolution and a considerable constant renewal, open towards new technologies for all the operations preliminary to the practical restoration itself. All this is certainly due also to the productive collaboration of specialized scientific institutes.

In this context I will not list them all, as I am sure that the participants of this conference are certainly more informed about them than I am.

I would just like to confirm that the Florentine restoration tradition, who founds its historical origins in the considerable richness of its cultural heritage and in the essential need to preserve it (even though the city presently seems to be undergoing a decline and demotivation which are indeed alarming, also in the field that has given the city its worldwide known reputation), has its most complete expression – please forgive my partisan pride – in the activities of the Opificio.

Since long time, in the Institute we consider the most adequate method for the conservation of works of art to lie in the most accurate and complete comprehension of the context in which they are and will be kept, taking into account the deterioration conditions of the materials and the impact of the environment.

Chemists, biologists, physicists, climatology experts collaborate with restorers and art historians with updated technologies, also by taking part in conferences such as this one, which have the undisputed merit of communicating with the many institutions that in various ways are concerned with the conservation of cultural heritage, which results in a useful updating on the techniques finalized towards this aim.

I would therefore like to renew the expression of my gratitude towards the organizers and the sponsors, wishing all the participants of this conference a fruitful and successful work. Thank you.

Bruno Santi