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**NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON,
IS SOLE VENUE FOR RESTORED ITALIAN
RENAISSANCE SCULPTURES
TWO OF THREE MONUMENTAL SCULPTURES
TRAVEL FOR FIRST TIME OUTSIDE OF FLORENCE**



View of Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Saint Matthew* (1419-1421), as it was installed before conservation at Orsanmichele, Florence, Italy.

Photo credit: Alinari/ Art Resource, NY

Washington, DC--Three monumental masterpieces of Italian Renaissance sculpture by Lorenzo Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco, and Andrea del Verrocchio will travel to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, to celebrate the completion of the 21-year restoration of the twelve exterior monumental sculptures of Orsanmichele, a renowned 14th-century religious and civic center in Florence, Italy.

The exhibition will mark the first time that Ghiberti's *Saint Matthew* (1419–1421), and Nanni di Banco's *Quattro Santi Coronati* (*Four Crowned Martyred Saints*) (c.1409–1416) will travel outside Florence. In 1993, Verrocchio's *Christ and Saint Thomas* (1466–1483) traveled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for an exhibition marking the completion of its restoration. **Monumental Sculpture in Florence: Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco, and Verrocchio at Orsanmichele** will be on view in the Gallery's West Building, September 18 through December 31, 2005.

"We are delighted to collaborate with our Florentine colleagues at the Soprintendenza for Tuscany and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure on what we believe to be one of the most important exhibitions of Italian Renaissance sculpture in recent memory," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Gallery has a long-standing relationship with Florence that was most recently seen with the exhibition here of Verrocchio's *David* in 2003."

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of an anonymous donor. The National Gallery of Art is also grateful to the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture for its assistance in making this exhibition possible. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Since 1984 the statues from the exterior of Orsanmichele have undergone a much-needed restoration at the prestigious Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence—Italy's premier national restoration center. After painstaking cleaning, the statues have been placed in an interior hall of the church, while replicas are being installed in the original niches on the exterior of the building. Because Orsanmichele

has remained closed to the public during this process, the three statues are able to come to the National Gallery of Art. After the exhibition in Washington, the sculptures will return to Florence for the public reopening of Orsanmichele.

The Exhibition

Situated in the 13th-to-15th century Italian galleries, the exhibition will be supplemented with two works from the Gallery's permanent collection. Giovanni di Balduccio's *Charity* (c. 1330) is a marble relief that was originally embedded in the exterior wall of Orsanmichele and the large panel *Saint Paul* (1333), originally created to be installed on an interior church pilaster, is a painted precedent for the exterior pilaster sculptures of Orsanmichele. The work is by Bernardo Daddi, the artist responsible for the famous image of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* (1347), which is venerated inside the church.

Saint Matthew by Lorenzo Ghiberti

Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) cast the first colossal bronze statues since antiquity for Orsanmichele. His talent as a bronze caster was legendary and in 1419 and 1420 the banker's guild (Cambio) commissioned from him a statue of Saint Matthew. At 8'10" the bronze is a colossus to compete with his earlier *Saint John the Baptist*, executed for the Banker's archrivals, the guild of dressers and dyers of foreign cloth (Calimala). In an attempt to outdo his earlier achievement Ghiberti produced one of the most majestic and elegant of all of the statues from Orsanmichele.

Quattro Santi Coronati (Four Crowned Martyred Saints) by Nanni di Banco

Nanni di Banco (c. 1374) was a great sculptor in his own right though his reputation has been overshadowed by the fame of his contemporaries, Donatello and Ghiberti. For the guild of the wood-carvers and stone masons (Maestri di Pietra di Legname), of which he was a member, Nanni created his most innovative work: the marble group of the four early Christian martyred saints that were the patrons of the guild: the *Quattro Santi Coronati*. Departing from Ghiberti's International Gothic style, Nanni's figures are modeled on Roman statuary and convey the interaction of a real-life group of

men caught in an everyday moment, frozen in time. The *Quattro Santi Coronati* is a key instance of the complex exchange of influences, medieval and antique, that mark this unique moment during the Renaissance.

Christ and Saint Thomas by Andrea del Verrocchio

Verrocchio's (1435-1488) greatest masterpiece, the *Christ and Saint Thomas*, was commissioned in 1466 by the Mercanzia, a supervisory organization that regulated the guilds. After a long somewhat contentious gestation, the bronze group consisting of two interlocking figures, Christ and Saint Thomas, was finally unveiled to much acclaim in 1483. Looking back to the *Quattro Santi Coronati* for the idea of a sculptural group, Verrocchio's statues break free of their niche with Saint Thomas on the lower outside ledge pushing off his right foot, caught in mid-motion as he moves forward to touch Christ's wound. For the first time, at Orsanmichele, there was real narrative and dramatic tension: Christ's open and generous blessing gesture complements and contrasts with Thomas' active skepticism.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Ave. NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the Fourth Street Entrance of the East or West Building to permit X-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. Any items larger than 17 X 26 inches cannot be accepted

by the Gallery or its checkrooms. For the safety of the art work and visitors, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left at the checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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