

RESTORATION OF OVER 600 ARTIFACTS IN THE VATICAN GARDENS

The Vatican Gardens have been a place of quiet meditation for the Popes ever since 1279 when Nicholas III (Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, 1277-1280) moved his residence back to the Vatican from the Lateran Palace. Within the new walls, which he had built to protect his residence, he planted an orchard, lawn and garden. The event is recorded on a stone plaque which can be viewed in the "Sala dei Capitani" of the "Palazzo dei Conservatori" on Rome's Capitoline Hill. Created around the hill of Saint Egidio, where the "Palazzetto del Belvedere" and courtyards of the Vatican Museums are located, on the same grounds as Nero's Circus on which the very first early Christians were martyred and St. Peter was crucified, is the fertile ground where the Vatican Gardens sprung up. Tradition says that the site of the Vatican Gardens was spread with earth brought from Golgotha by Saint Helena to symbolically unite the blood of Christ with that shed by thousands of early Christians who died in the persecutions of Nero. The different areas of the gardens reflect the styles of the time period of their addition to the grounds, taking shape along with the Christian community in Rome. The gardens contain medieval fortifications from the 9th century to the present. The site received a major re-landscaping at the beginning of the 16th century, during the papacy of Julius II. Donato Bramante's original design was then split into three new courtyards, the *Cortili del Belvedere*, the *"della Biblioteca"* and the *"della Pigna"* in Renaissance landscape design style. Also in formal Renaissance style,





a great rectangular Labyrinth set in boxwood and framed with Italian stone pines and cedars of Lebanon. In place of Nicholas III's enclosure, Bramante built a great rectilinear defensive wall.

Today's Vatican Gardens are spread over nearly 58 acres covering over half of Vatican territory. This oasis is comprised of lush gardens filled with winding paths, vibrant flower beds and topiaries, green lawns, groves of massive oaks and a 7.4 acre forest, while ancient fountains, sculptures and grottoes proclaim devotion to the Madonna, St. Joseph, St. Peter and other saints.

Beyond aesthetics, there is a deeper reason for the greenery and fountains within Vatican walls. Gardens represent the epitome of harmony and peace in nature complete with birds, fountains, flora and fauna. They remind us of our original status as creatures destined to be in harmony with God, nature and one another. "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" Genesis 2:8. It reminds us of the ideal harmony we seek to build on this earth. These idyllic parks remind us of our eternal home where every fear will be swept away and all of creation will exist in paradisiacal union.

The Vatican grounds represent one of the greatest garden realms in the world because of its landscape born on hallowed ground, sewn with faith and hope. Many popes have prayed surrounded by the shrine of verdant silence. Pope Paul XXIII often reflected in the gardens as he prepared and lead the church through the Second Vatican Council. John Paul II often invited young people to pray the rosary with him at the Lourdes shrine atop the Vatican Gardens. And even now, Pope Benedict XVI prays his rosary here daily.

The gardens also boast countless varieties of plants received from around the world, such as olive trees from the Garden of Gethsemane, cacti from the Arab world, an olive tree from the State of Israel and red oaks brought back by the first explorers. Of course, multiple forms of animal life sneak into this peaceful area to escape the wilds of the city. Restoration of the full collection of artwork located within the Papal Gardens has never before been performed, making this a historic undertaking.





STATE OF PRESERVATION:

Both the Marble and the Metal Restoration Laboratories, along with the General Maintenance team of the Vatican, worked together to monitor the state of conservation of the artifacts present in the Vatican Gardens. In order to do so, representatives visited various gardens around Europe including the gardens at Versailles, to learn what methods they employed. Simultaneously, an inventory and specific report was made on each of the over 600 pieces in the gardens, in order to determine the following information on each piece:

- Age of artifact
- Constituent materials
- Former interventions of reassembly or inserting new stone parts
- Presence of metal pins, old and new
- Location and exposure to the elements

After research and consensus on the state of conservation of the various works of art on the grounds, the unfortunate state of degradation that is occurring on a large number of the sculptures and their general lack of maintenance became very apparent. The fruit of this careful study now fills a three volume work and suggests an urgent restoration project to conserve all the artifacts in the gardens.

Although many of the degradation problems of the works were similar, there were different levels of deterioration between the pieces due to specific factors of corrosion relating to: the placement (major or minor exposure to sunlight and rainfall), constituent materials, the presence of previous restorations and/or the reassembly of fragments or parts of the works.

An initial economic assessment was performed based on previous experience and comparison with other museums where similar problems have been addressed. Over five years we expect to spend € 5 million on this project.

Phase 1 of this project requires a general diagnosis of different pieces, conservation issues and more thorough fieldwork that will further define how to subdivide these costs over the course of the next years. As a result, it is necessary to take full advantage of this important project by creating an initial team of stone and metal restoration experts restoration, as well as using materials and diagnostic support from the Cabinet of Scientific Research of the Vatican Museums. All the equipment and materials necessary for the intervention will be located in a new warehouse for outdoor restoration efforts. Another office for exterior statuary will be set up. This project will require a means of



transport, operators and materials to reach the diverse areas of the extensive 58 acres of the Vatican Gardens.

The economic assessment of this initial phase of work, or the "pilot yard" of the project, amounts to € 260.000,00, although we are looking for a large commitment to give continuity to this first phase over the next 5 years, at an estimated further cost of € 4.5 million.

This first phase cost of € 260.000,00 will cover:

- 4 month contracts for specialized restorations
- 2 month contracts for support workers
- All the infrastructure of the support above
- A means of transportation for the restorers and pieces
- Specific mechanical equipment for outdoor restoration
- The equipment for support of the graphic and photographic documentation of the intervention
- The costs for diagnostics in the yard and laboratory analysis

In this first phase of work, the Restoration Process Includes:

- Locating a "pilot yard": identification of one of the most significant areas of the gardens where a wide variety of different types of degradation is present
- The safe interventions of the worst cases of disintegration identified in the course of this first census
- The identification of the weather most appropriate for the works, future restorations and the successive maintenance of the artifacts
- The creation of a definitive strategy for restoration of the artifacts and archeological pieces in the Vatican Gardens