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The restoration of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua by Francesca

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Almost ten years have passed since the conclusion of the restoration works that have shed new light on the wonderful Scrovegni Chapel, in Padua, one of the most outstanding examples of the skills and modernity of Giotto. The works, which have required the intervention of a team composed by technicians, art historians and restorers, begun in July 2001 and ended in November 2002, with an International Congress of Studies held in Padua.

Thanks to these restoration works, which have been financed by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, the visitors of the new millennium have been given the chance to admire Giottoâ€™s frescoes in all their glory, and to discover also some meaningful details that had been hidden through time, but which are essential to understand the importance of an artist like Giotto. One of the best-known examples is given by the tears running down the face of some mothers in the section dedicated to the massacre of the innocents, which are now visible after the restoration, but we could also speak about the mirrors that decorate the halo of Christ the Judge, more of a technical and scientific device than an artistic one. Thanks to this idea, on the 25th of March, anniversary of the consecration of the Chapel to the Virgin of the Annunciation, the light entering through the window and illuminating the image of Christ is reflected and illuminates also the image of Enrico Scrovegni, i.e. the person that commissioned the work.

But the importance of the work does not only come from these details that the restoration has brought to light: it also comes from the fact that it has highlighted the use of colour and of the â€œmarmorinoâ€• technique that Giotto used to decorate the chapel. Moreover, it has to be pointed out tha the works were necessary not only to restore the frescoes, but also to slow down the deteriorating process of the chapel. For this reason works have included not only the restoration of frescoes, but also some interventions for the adaptation of the environment and the conservation of the building, like the installation of glass screening and the replacement of incandescent light bulbs, without forgetting the most important innovation, i.e. the micro-climatic control unit, a protection system conceived to prevent gaseous pollutants from entering the chapel that had been installed before the restoration works began. It was only after the verification of the effectiveness of the micro-climatic control unit that it was possible to start the urgent conservation works on high-risk areas (consolidating plaster and painted surfaces) and the necessary intervention to smooth unevenness in painted surfaces caused by previous restorations carried out in the late 19th century and in the 1960s. Moreover, restoration works have been accompanied by the creation of a specific webpage, of a database dedicated to the Chapel and of a digital documentation, in order to give everybody the chance to look into the matter and to understand the importance and the objectives of the restoration works.

A detailed and complex work has been made to restore the Scrovegni Chapel, and it is thanks to this work that many visitors have had â€“ and will have â€“ the chance to enjoy the colours and the newly discovered details of an undeniable masterwork.

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