

Exhibition “Piero della Francesca. The Augustinian Polyptych reunited”



In a unique and unrepeatable exhibition, at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan, with the support of Fondazione Bracco as Main Partner, a masterpiece by Piero della Francesca (1412-1492): the Augustinian Polyptych will be presented-for the first time in history, after 555 years since its creation.

In 1469 the artist finished painting his magnificent polyptych for the high altar of the church of the Augustinians in Borgo San Sepolcro (Arezzo), begun in 1454. The altarpiece, among Piero della Francesca's most committed works, was dismembered and dispersed by the end of the 16th century. Today what remains of the Augustinian polyptych, namely eight panels (the central panel and most of the predella have not been traced so far), is in museums in Europe and the United States, as well as at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, which owns the panel depicting St. Nicholas of Tolentino, one of the four saints who belonged to the central part of the polyptych.

Some museums had previously tried to reunite the polyptych: the Poldi Pezzoli Museum itself in 1996, the Frick Collection in 2013, and the Hermitage Museum in 2018. But, not getting all the loans, they proposed only a “virtual” reconstruction. From March 20, 2024, thanks to collaboration with the major museums that own the surviving panels, the Frick Collection in New York, the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, the National Gallery in London and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, it will be possible to admire all the fragments of the famous polyptych together.

The exhibition, conceived by Alessandra Quarto, director of the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, is curated by Machtelt Brüggen Israëls (Rijksmuseum and University of Amsterdam) and Nathaniel Silver (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), scholars of international standing and the latest to propose a reconstruction of the polyptych in 2013 at the Frick Collection in New York based on investigations to date.

Thanks to the support of the Bracco Foundation, which has always been committed to the enhancement of the relationship between science and art, also realized a comprehensive campaign of non-invasive diagnostic analysis on some of the works in the exhibition, which will be an integral part of the exhibition itinerary and will trace the painter's working techniques and the materials used, as well as the paths of composition, dismemberment and reconstruction of the polyptych.

Viewed up close, the paintings will reveal the master's meticulous attention to luxurious textiles and jewels such as the gold brocade of St. Augustine and the armor of St. Michael the Archangel and, by contrast, the simplicity of St. Nicholas of Tolentino's austere and rough habit. They will also show the play of light that Piero della Francesca skillfully used for each of the panels, revealing a great attention to detail in the ornaments that now dialogue perfectly with the decorative arts in the Milanese museum's collection.

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