

WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

Media Inquiries

Holly Evarts, Director of Public Relations
646-424-9594, hevarts@wmf.org

WORLD MONUMENTS FUND RESTORES VENICE'S FAMED/BELOVED EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI

CELEBRATORY UNVEILING ON JUNE 23, 2006

For Immediate Release—New York, NY, June 22, 2006 . . . The World Monuments Fund (WMF) has completed its three-year restoration of the equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni, one of Italy's most celebrated Renaissance sculptures, after nearly a century of exposure to the elements and airborne pollutants generated by industrial development. Massimo Cacciari, the mayor of Venice, will preside at the celebratory unveiling in Venice's Campo San Giovanni e Paolo on June 23, 2006, together with Bertrand du Vignaud, president of WMF in Europe, and Donatella Asta, WMF's representative in Venice for the Colleoni project, along with senior representatives of the Italian Ministry of Culture.

The late fifteenth-century statue (1488-1496), which was sculpted by Andrea del Verocchio and cast by Alessandro Leopardi after Verocchio's death, is renowned for its innovative representation of natural movement. Riding high above Venice's Campo San Giovanni e Paolo, adjacent to the Grande Scuola San Marco, the equestrian portrait of Colleoni, together with Donatello's Gattamelata (1447-53) in Padua, represents the rediscovery during the Renaissance of monumental equestrian bronzes, inspired by Roman antecedents. The casting of Colleoni fostered a revival of the lost art of bronze casting on a grand scale, a technology that swept through Europe by the end of the 17th century.

A noteworthy and controversial figure in Italian political and social life, Bartolomeo Colleoni was a *condottiere*, or hired mercenary general, from Bergamo, who was given the prestigious appointment of permanent captain general of the Venetian army. He agreed, upon his death in 1475, to bequeath his possessions to the Republic with the proviso that a statue be erected in his honor.

"One of the most significant Renaissance statues in Venice, the Colleoni Monument was in a bad state of deterioration and so was placed on the very first World Monuments Watch list of *100 Most Endangered Sites* in 1996," said **Bonnie Burnham, president of the World Monuments Fund**. "It was losing its beautiful surface detail to corrosion. After a technical study was made, we learned that it would be possible to stop this process. WMF is especially pleased with the decision to keep the monument outside, where it will continue to be enjoyed by Venetians and visitors from around the world. This is thanks to a significant improvement in Venetian air quality, when the city abandoned the use of fuel oil as a result of the catastrophic spill that occurred during the 1966 flood."

“I am particularly pleased to celebrate the completion of the restoration of Verrochio’s masterpiece, this magnificent statue dedicated to Bartolomeo Colleoni, in the heart of Venice where WMF has been very active since its founding in 1965,” said **Bertrand du Vignaud, president of the World Monuments Fund Europe**. “Over its more than 40 years, WMF has supported the restoration of more than two dozen Venetian monuments, many of which bear witness to our organization’s discerning choices and ability to draw together so many generous American and international private donors.”

Centuries of exposure to Venice’s corrosive marine environment and industrial pollutants have erased artistic details and weakened the structural integrity of the Colleoni Monument. Although the sculpture had been cleaned, regilded, and waxed several times over the centuries—the last time in 1919, the procedures did not address larger conservation issues. Following the statue’s inclusion on the 1996 World Monuments Watch list of *100 Most Endangered Sites*, WMF, in partnership with Venice’s Soprintendenza per i beni Culturali, developed a comprehensive conservation plan for the monument.

WMF began work on the statue in September 2003 with the erection of a temporary, protective laboratory in the Campo Santi Giovanni e Paolo that allowed the conservation team, under the supervision of Maurizia De Min, Soprintendente per I Beni Culturali, and led by the renowned restorer Giovanni Morigi, a specialist in bronzes, to disassemble and conserve the statue on-site. The team made a thorough inspection of the Colleoni Monument, documenting its design, analyzing its conditions, and cleaning its surface, which suffered from pitting and channeling from acid-laden rain water. During the last phase of the project, the conservation team discovered a long crack in the right front leg of the horse that has allowed moisture to penetrate the hollow interior, rusting the iron armatures much more severely than originally thought. The team developed a methodology for treating the severely rusted iron armature and strengthening the structural members with stainless steel elements. New iron rods sheathed in plastic have further secured the horse and rider to their stone base, and a monitoring device has been installed inside one of the horse's legs to track the statue's movement and stability.

Support

The World Monuments Fund’s restoration of the Colleoni Monument has been supported by Robert W. Wilson, the Samuel Kress Foundation, Generali Insurance Company, the Antiqua Foundation, and an anonymous French donor. Counterpart support was provided by the Soprintendenza per i beni Culturali.

WMF in Italy

WMF's next project in Venice will be the restoration of the beautiful neoclassical interior of the State Dining Room in the Royal Palace/Musée Correr, which has not been seen by the public for more than 50 years. Work is about to start on this exquisite room, which, along with other state apartments, should be open to the public in 2007. Other important WMF projects in Italy include the recent restoration of the 18th-century monumental façade of the Limonaia of the Boboli gardens in Florence, completed in 2004, and the restoration this past May of Rome's remarkable Romanesque cloister of the church of the Santi Quattro Coronati.

World Monuments Fund

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the foremost private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of endangered architectural and cultural sites around the world. Since 1965, WMF has worked tirelessly to stem the loss of historic structures at more than more than 400 sites in over 80 countries. WMF's work spans a wide range of sites, including the vast temple complexes at Angkor, Cambodia; the historic center of Mexico City; Nicholas Hawksmoor's London masterpiece, St. George's, Bloomsbury, the iconic modernist A. Conger Goodyear house in Old Westbury, New York; and the extraordinary 18th-century Qianlong Garden complex in Beijing's Forbidden City. From its headquarters in New York City—and offices and affiliates in Paris, London, Madrid, and Lisbon—WMF works with local partners and communities to identify and save important heritage through innovative programs of project planning, fieldwork, advocacy, grant-making, education, and on-site training. Every two years, WMF issues its World Monuments Watch list of 100 Most Endangered Sites, a global call to action on behalf of sites in need of immediate intervention. For more information, please visit www.wmf.org.

#