

ITALY

Church and Dominican Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie with "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci

Brief description

The refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie forms an integral part of this architectural complex, begun in Milan in 1463 and reworked at the end of the 15th century by Bramante. On the north wall is *The Last Supper*, the unrivalled masterpiece painted between 1495 and 1497 by Leonardo da Vinci, whose work was to herald a new era in the history of art.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1980

Agency responsible for site management

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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i), (ii)

Justification provided by the State Party

(i) The monumental complex of Santa Maria delle Grazie is an outstanding example of Italian Renaissance monastic architecture, crowned by the work of Donato Bramante which, moreover, is a foretaste of the artist's work in Rome.

(ii) Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" is a famous pictorial masterpiece and represents the acme of artistic creation.

(iii) The work has had a considerable influence, even via the copies made of it down the centuries, on the iconographic development of the theme of the Last Supper, which was taken up by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua. It has had a positive influence on all the artists who took up the same theme but never managed to surpass the perfection of Leonardo's composition.

Renowned from its earliest years, largely because of the work of the first art historian Giorgio Vasari, it has been a focus of attention for centuries. It has aroused the admiration of artists the world over, and the emotion of great cultural figures from Federico Borromeo to Goethe and Gabriele d'Annunzio, because of the deep anxiety that has always been felt about it.

King Louis XII of France, who came to Milan in 1515, was the first to think of removing Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" - but even then, the project proved impossible. In 1802, Andrea Appiani again found it impossible to remove in practice. Ten years later, S. Bareffi made attempts to detach it: he had already taken down and removed from the Pelucca villa the Luini frescoes, which are now in Brera. But Bareffi also gave up the idea, and resorted instead to fixing the imperilled colour particles.

Subsequent restoration work as always been aimed at consolidating the painting, which is today less than ever in fit state to be detached from the wall, except at the cost of an irreparable loss.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

[No English evaluation found] Indissociable d'un ensemble architectural édifié à partir de 1463 et remodelé à fin du XV^e siècle par Bramante, le réfectoire du couvent dominicain de Saint-Marie-des-Grâces à Milan conserve, sur sa paroi nord, un chef d'oeuvre incontesté: la Cène de Léonard de Vinci. L'inscription sur la liste du Patrimoine mondial se justifie au titre de critères (i) et (ii).

I) La Cène est une réalisation artistique unique, d'une valeur universelle exceptionnelle qui transcende toutes les contingences historiques.

II) Elle a exercé une influence considérable, non seulement sur le développement d'un thème iconographique, mais encore sur les destinées de la peinture. On rappellera, après Heydenreich, la "superdimension" des figures par rapport à l'espace; on se souviendra aussi qu'il s'agit d'une des premières peintures classiques où se fasse jour l'intention de fixer un instant précis et très bref plutôt qu'une durée indéfinie. Au delà du simple fait que la Cène eut, depuis cinq siècles, l'une des peintures les plus souvent reproduites ou

pastichées, il n'est pas exagéré de dire que son exécution en 1495-1497 a ouvert une ère nouvelle dans l'histoire des arts plastiques.

Committee Decision

Bureau (May 1979): The inscription of this property on the World Heritage List was recommended by ICOMOS. However, the Bureau felt that complementary information was necessary with respect to preservation and restoration plans, and indeed on any plans to transfer the painting. The recommendation on this nomination was deferred until such information has been received. If the property came to be considered as "movable property" it could not be considered to fall within the terms of Article 1 of the Convention.

Bureau (October 1979): Oral explanations will be provided as necessary on reasons for the deferral of nominations.

Bureau (1980): The Bureau was informed of the revised nomination recently received from the Italian authorities who proposed the Church and the Dominican convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie with the "Last Supper" for inscription on the List. ICOMOS was requested to evaluate this proposal for the Committee meeting in September.

- Statement of significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party: The Refectory of the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie forms an integral part of this architectural complex, begun in Milan in 1463 and modified at the end of the 15th century by Bramante. On the north wall is The Last Supper, the unrivalled masterpiece painted between 1495 and 1497 by Leonardo da Vinci, whose work was to herald a new era in the history of art. i - Leonardo's The Last Supper is a unique painting whose universal and outstanding value transcends its particular features and historical setting. ii - Over the years, The Last Supper has exercised an extraordinary influence, not only on the development of the iconographic theme which Leonardo portrayed on the wall of the Dominican convent refectory, but on the future of art throughout the world. For five centuries, The Last Supper has remained one of the most frequently imitated and reinterpreted works, and it is unanimously recognised that its creation, between 1495 and 1497, opened a new era in the history of the plastic arts

- Additional change proposed by State Party for the UNESCO's official description: The Last Supper, which Leonardo da Vinci painted in the refectory of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, is undisputedly one of the world's masterpieces of painting. The unique value of The Last Supper, which over the centuries has had immense influence in the field of figurative art and elsewhere, is inseparable from the architectural complex in which it was created. The complex, including the Church and Convent, was built beginning from 1463 and was after considerably modified at the end of XVth century by Bramante, one of the masters of the Renaissance. The problems arising from the painting's delicate state of preservation, which was already apparent several decades after its execution, have always been at the centre of studies and research, and the object of highly refined restoration procedures (as may be seen from work conducted in the 1980s and 1990s). The Last Supper, in fact, is subject to a punctual action of maintenance and is protected by a technologically highly advanced monitoring system

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: inadequate; the site boundary is currently being defined; a plan of the new perimeter will be submitted in the near future. The site corresponds exactly to the extension of the building complex constituted by the same church and convent, with a total area of about 1.5 hectares
- No buffer zone has been defined. On the basis of preservation orders regarding the surrounding area, but which do not make clear-cut stipulations, a perimeter is being studied which would offer improved access and facilitate the site's management. The definition of a buffer zone is under way in collaboration with the relevant technical departments of Milan Council. The principal criteria to be met are those regarding the protection of the site from traffic and various forms of pollution (e.g. acoustic and atmospheric)

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- The site was badly damaged by bombing in 1943, but subsequently completely restored and renovated. The Last Supper, which miraculously survived the Allied bombing, suffers from other conservation problems which are due, above all, to Leonardo's experimental

technique, and which have long been evident; In Cenacolo, there are records of “restoration” work from the eighteenth century up to the present day, which bear witness to the continuing concern regarding the conservation of this artistic patrimony

- Restoration of the Last Supper, completed at the end of the 1990. Careful treatment of the extremely delicate and considerably deteriorated paint layer restored the work’s hidden colours. Both the church and convent buildings (e.g. the cloisters) have been the object of continuous restoration work from the 1990s onwards following a unified conservation strategy
- Routine restoration work on the buildings is under way at present and has led to new discoveries which further increase the value of the site

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The complex is the subject of a preservation order first made in 1912 under legislation concerning the artistic patrimony. Subsequently (1953), an area of respect around the church was made the subject of an order which limits construction and the modification of building facades nearby. Most recently, an order was made limiting the car park in the piazza opposite the church front (1987)
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Feasibility study of the creation of a buffer zone, in collaboration with council technical departments

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction; Religious use; The complex is a convent and the place of residence of the Dominican Fathers of Santa Maria delle Grazie

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group, set up: 1.1.2003. The committee has the task of defining the guidelines, procedures, programming and periodic monitoring applied to the protection system, which has been established in particular for The Last Supper, and of guaranteeing efficient interaction with the

conservation and maintenance programmes for the entire building complex

- Management by the State Party, under protective legislation; the site is state property and given in concession to the Dominican Fathers, who contribute to the day-to-day administration of the complex with regard to its residential and religious functions. Aspects concerning conservation, surveillance and protection are directly managed by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities
- Site manager with responsibilities added to an existing job
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national; local; the complex is state property and, apart from the Last Supper, is given in concession to the Dominican Fathers of Santa Maria delle Grazie
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Improve the use of the site by increasing the service offered to the public

5. Management Plan

- Management plan under preparation
- Implementation commence: 01/2007
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, Lombardy Regional Directorate for Cultural and Landscape Heritage

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State Budget
- A larger sum destined for the management of the site is required; this would consent the full-time presence on the site of technical and scientific staff and personnel occupied with development activities
- Sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 9
- The authorities responsible for the World Heritage site have specialized personnel available for the planning, supervision and site direction of work of research, recording, development and safety activities

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation
- Good: management, promotion; interpretation
- Average: education; visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- The state intervenes on the site by its Superintendence and has obligations in specialist fields on protection, maintenance, restoration, recording and development; it possesses the necessary personnel and also a technical department, an archive centre, a photographic laboratory, a specialist library and conservation laboratories
- Training needs: a greater degree of communication and coordination between the Superintendence responsible for protection and conservation of the site is needed. This could be achieved through the establishment of a recording and archive centre dedicated to the site (an archive of photographs, maps, restoration work, research, specialist studies and monitoring) which would be accessible to continual updating by the personnel involved
- Training available for stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 319.100 (ticket counting), 2004
- Visitor facilities: Ticket and bookings office, multilingual audio-guides, guides. Visitor reception, information, ticket sales, door keeping, audio-guides, guided tours and educational activities, telephonic information and booking service, themed tours, a specialist bookshop and a gift shop selling art reproductions. Publications, both accessories to visiting the site (guidebooks, brief guides and plans) and specialist studies. Explanatory leaflets and sheets; A brief guide published by the concession-holder is on scale
- The development of a visitor's management plan was determined by the need to safeguard Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, already in a particularly delicate physical condition. It was necessary to reconcile the protection of the work with its public availability. Visits therefore have to conform to procedures designed to preserve optimum atmospheric conditions, obtained by air treatment and limiting visitor access

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment; Studies related to the value of the site; Monitoring exercises; Condition surveys; visitor management
- Studies have been made checks and monitoring and in the field of visitor management, in order to evaluate the maximum number of visitors that would be compatible with conservation requirements. The research provides an indispensable guide for the planning and regulation of conservation and protection measures and is continually updated

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: Greater effort should be made, in collaboration with Milan Council, to raise the level of awareness of the site's uniqueness and importance to the city's historic centre; these initiatives will take concrete form in the definition of the buffer zone
- The Santa Maria delle Grazie complex hosts numerous cultural events during the year (concerts, readings and drama), which are broadly related to its status as World Heritage Site
- The listing as World heritage site has been of great importance for the design and activation of educational and awareness-raising projects, and made a fundamental contribution to the success of promotional campaigns connected with these
- Web site available

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- The recent restoration of the Laster Supper, begun in 1978 and completed in 1999, aimed at the recovery of Leonardo da Vinci's original painting, which had been considerably altered by previous interventions. This meant facing up to the numerous difficulties presented by the

work from the purely aesthetic to, those strictly connected to context, in order to preserve it from future deterioration and afford protection against dust, vapours and humidity, identified as the principal causes of deterioration. To achieve this aim, a sophisticated air filtering system was installed which blocks the entry of pollutants into the refectory and consequently prevents their accumulation with use of the latest scientific knowledge and techniques

- Present state of conservation: Good

Threats and Risks to site

- Environmental pressure; visitor/tourism pressure
- Specific issues: In view of the fragility of the painting, the main environmental risk factors are constituted by any weather conditions which provoke tensions or loss of cohesion in the painting surface or the backing wall. Damage due to human activity (visitors abundance)
- Emergency measures taken: protection for conservation; the danger is at present controlled by regulating the quantity of visitors and the duration of their presence in the refectory by limiting public access to groups of a maximum of 25 persons for 15 minutes and the creation of a waiting room for visitors to reduce the entry of dust into the refectory. With regard to environmental risks and atmospheric pollution, monitoring devices have been installed

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation; increased awareness of the site's value; Increased attention to and interest in the building complex and the work of art; consequent support for projects and high quality conservation work
- Strengths/Weaknesses of management: the specific conservation difficulties, which have led to the installation of highly sophisticated and technologically advanced protective devices and require constant attention and monitoring, in addition to the continual investment of human and financial resources

Future actions:

- Control of continuous monitoring and programmed restoration work on the site; organisation responsible: Lombardy Regional Directorate for Cultural and Landscape and the West Lombardy Superintendence for Architectural Heritage and Landscape. Timeframe: 2006-2007