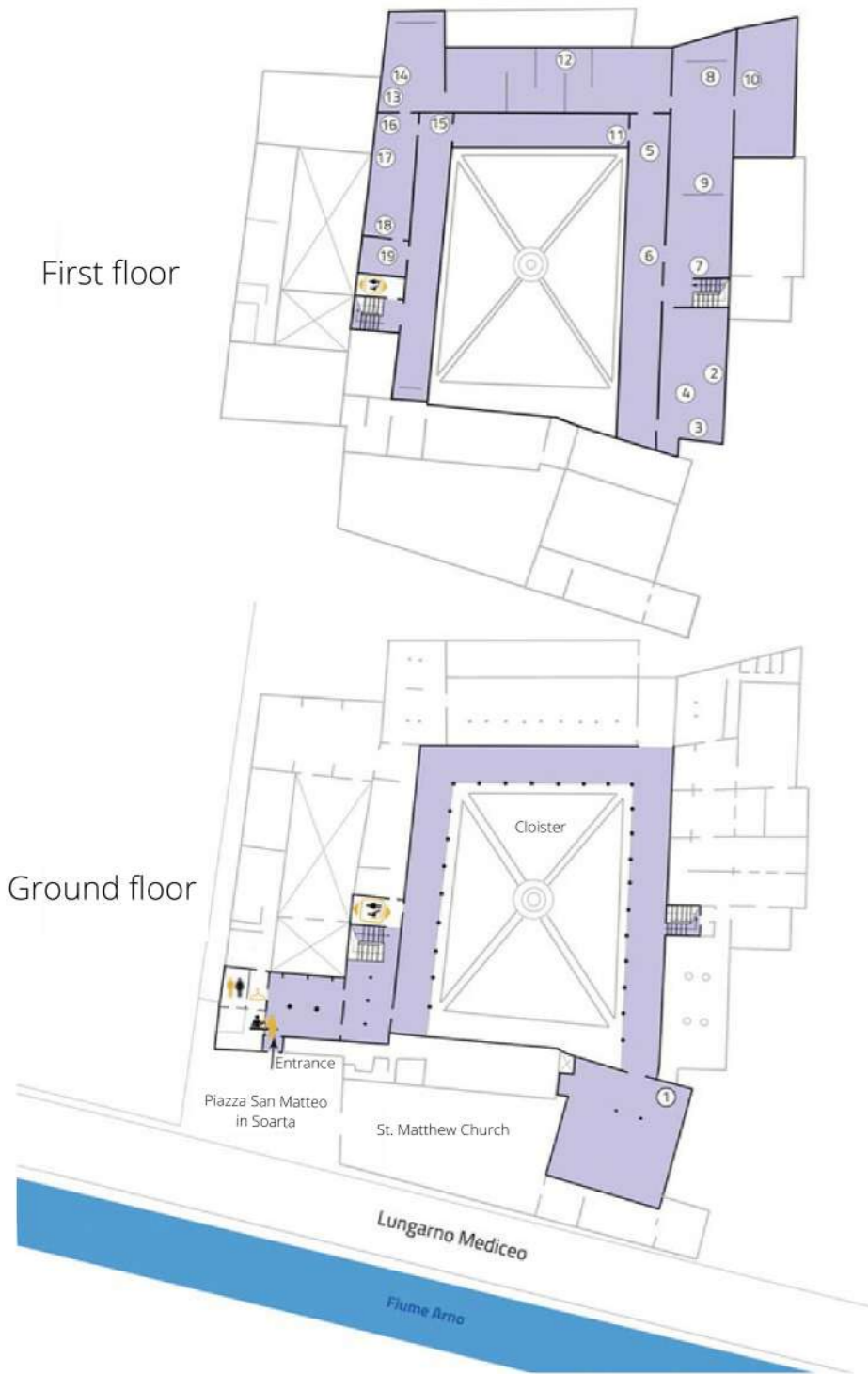


National Museums of Pisa National Museum of San Matteo



MUSEO NAZIONALE DI SAN MATTEO
Pisa, Piazza San Matteo in Soarta, 1
Phone: +39 050 541865
drm-tos.museosanmatteo@beniculturali.it

MUSEO NAZIONALE DI PALAZZO REALE
Pisa, Lungarno Antonio Pacinotti, 46
Phone: +39 050 926573
drm-tos.museopalazzoreale@beniculturali.it

www.polomusealetoscana.beniculturali.it



THE BUILDING

The museum is housed in the former Monastery of Benedictine nuns of San Matteo in Soarta, founded in 1027. The original nucleus consisted in a building parallel to the church; in the 13th century the church backside and the cloister were built, with a colonnade on three sides surmounted by a sequence of mullioned windows; later, in 1559, important renovation works were completed, especially in the colonnade. In the 19th century, after the Unification of Italy, the former monastery became state property and, from 1877, was used as a prison, with great structural changes especially in the cloister. Once the prison was transferred, immediately after the Second World War, the building was turned into a museum location, due to the will of Piero Sanpaolesi, Superintendent for Pisa monuments and galleries; restoration and adaptation works were carried out quickly, and in the summer of 1946 a first exhibition of 14th-century Pisan sculpture took place. Finally, on 13th November 1949, the National Museum of San Matteo opened to the public. In the following decades, various interventions have modified the inner spaces and arrangements.

THE COLLECTION

The museum collection originates from an ensemble of medieval paintings with a gold background, donated in 1796 by the canon Sebastiano Zucchetti to the Opera del Duomo in Pisa. Over time, artworks, objects and relics from churches and monasteries abolished during the Napoleonic and Post-Unification eras are added, together with others collected for educational purposes by the Academy of Fine Arts, donated by citizens or deposited by institutions. After several transfers, the heterogeneous collection is exhibited in the Civic Museum, opened in 1893 in the former Monastery of San Francesco. After the Second World War, the collection becomes state property and the works of ecclesiastical origin are finally exhibited in the new National Museum of San Matteo. Today, the Museum offers a unique view of the artworks made in Pisa by local, Tuscan and foreign artists in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Exceptional assortments are here exhibited: stone, marble and wooden sculptures, monumental painted crosses, polyptychs, paintings with a gold background and ceramic basins of local and Islamic manufacture.

The Collection Highlights



1. Pisan sculptor, *Stories of Constantine and Pope Sylvester*, last quarter of the 12th century



On the stone architrave, 9 non- separate episodes with repeated characters are carved in relief on two vertically stacked panels: it is the rarely depicted story

of the Roman Emperor Constantine (with throne and crown) and his baptism celebrated by Pope Sylvester (with the mitre). Elements inspired by late antique and early Christian sarcophagi join the undefined spatiality and the simplified figures typical of Romanesque art.



5. Egyptian manufacture, *Bowl, metallic lustre majolica*, second half of the 12th century

Made with an Arab technique and adorned with a figure in Oriental clothes, this is a refined example of the museum conspicuous collection of local and Mediterranean ceramic basins used as external decorations for churches and steeples.



6. Giovanni Pisano, *Capital with heads and symbols of the four Evangelists*, early 14th century

At first probably located outside the Baptistery, this capital is an example of the re-evaluation of ancient models initiated by Nicola, Giovanni's father, in the highest season of Pisan sculpture. That is particularly evident in the acanthus leaves and in the powerful features of the four heads.



7. Giunta Pisano, *Saint Francis and six miracles*, mid-13th century

This *reredos* is one of the oldest Italian portraits of a saint, and one of the earliest images of St. Francis. Giunta, Franciscans' first official painter, depicts the full-length Saint in the centre and six of his miracles on his sides, on the model of Byzantine Vita Icons.



8. Simone Martini, *Polyptych of Santa Caterina*, 1320

It is one of the most important and intact medieval polyptychs: 43 figures on 4 registers, each under a trefoil arch, refined decorations and a gold background. This artwork, which brings Gothic painting to Pisa, is signed by the Sienese master and was originally placed on the high altar of the Dominican Church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria.



9. Francesco Traini, *Saint Dominic and stories from his life*, 1345

This is the only work signed by Martini's best Pisan pupil, and faced Martini's *Polyptych* (n. 8) in the Dominican Church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. Traini follows his master's elegance of details, but retains the Saint in the centre and the stories on the sides, which he inserts in quatrefoil panels, typical of *reredos*.



10. Andrea and Nino Pisano, *Madonna del latte*, around 1345

This statue of the Virgin nursing the Child, in marble with gold applications, is a refined example of natural poses and gestures: the union of the two bodies is highlighted by the curved lines of soft drapery and strengthened by the affection in their eyes.



11. Agostino di Giovanni, *Annunciata*, 1321

This wooden statue, dated and signed at the bottom, lacks its Announcing Angel. It has articulated arms, and a slender and unfinished body because, like others, it was moved, dressed and adorned with royal clothes and jewels during sacred representations.



12. Taddeo di Bartolo, *Bandinella di San Donnino*, around 1397

The processional wooden banner of the Confraternity of San Donnino is painted on both sides: one with the crowded *Crucifixion*; the other with the Saint on the throne, the hooded brothers and a man bitten by a dog, a reminder of him protecting from rabies.



13. Gentile da Fabriano, *Madonna dell'Umiltà (Humble Mary)*, around 1423

In this painting, by the international Gothic master, the intimate scene of Mary sitting on a cushion on the ground is embellished with elegant elements, such as rich fabrics and Arabic and Latin writings on the haloes, the mantle and the cloth.



14. Fra Angelico, *Madonna dell'Umiltà (Humble Mary)*, around 1423

This painting, by the Florentine master, was perhaps a wedding gift, as hinted by the two coats of arms on the small pillars. It combines Gothic features, such as the gold background and the richness of the carpet, with others of the Renaissance, such as the volumetric figures and the foreshortened halo of the Child.



15. Masaccio, *Saint Paul*, 1426

This panel, painted by one of the protagonists of the early Florentine Renaissance, is what remains in Pisa of the *Polyptych of the Carmelites*, now split in various museums worldwide. The new centrality given to the human figure is emphasised by the volumes modelled by lights and shadows, which make it emerge forcefully from the traditional gold background.



16. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Sant'Anna Metterza*, around 1468

This tabernacle, still in its original frame, depicts Saint Anne seated with her daughter Mary on her lap and the Child in Maria's arms; below, on a smaller scale, the three donors including a nun; above, God the Father and the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Florentine author, loved by the Medici, was called to Pisa to fresco the Camposanto Monumentale.



17. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Sacred Conversation*, 1479

This artwork, created by the famous Florentine artist during his first stay in Pisa, spreads the new Renaissance model of *square altarpiece* which will replace polyptychs. The serene group of Mary with Child and four saints is symmetrically depicted in a unitary real space, built in perspective and open to the landscape.



18. Quentin Metsys (attributed), *Mother of Sorrows*, around 1520

Arrived in Pisa thanks to the trade with Flanders, this artwork was made with the Flemish technique of oil painting, which makes it easier to create transparencies, light effects and rendering of details, such as for Mary's dress and tears. The gold background is instead rare among Flemish art.



19. Donatello, *Reliquary of San Lussorio*, around 1424

With this gilded bronze bust, conceived to contain a fragment of the head of the martyr, known as San Rossore in Pisa, Donatello reemploys the ancient technique of lost-wax casting and looks to the realism of classical statuary, but with an entirely modern expressive intensity. The artwork arrived in Pisa only in 1591, donated by the Medici.

2. Pisan artist, *Painted Cross*, early 12th century



The *Cross* from the Church of San Paolo all'Orto is the oldest in the museum extraordinary collection and among the first in central Italy, where such iconography spread. Christ is depicted upright, his eyes wide open, with no wounds on his ribs: he is the *divine Christ*, the *Christus triumphans* (triumphant Christ) who does not suffer while defeating death. Scenes and sacred figures are depicted on the side panels, cymatium and terminals.

3. Pisan-Byzantine artist, *Painted cross*, early 13th century



The *Cross* from the Monastery of San Matteo is one of the best examples of the encounter between Western and Byzantine culture. For the first time on a painted cross, Christ is depicted with his head reclined on his shoulder, his eyes closed, his body slightly bent, his wounds bleeding: he is the *human Christ*, the *Christus patiens* (suffering Christ). The *Lamentation* and other scenes are depicted on the side panels.

4. Giunta Pisano, *Painted Cross*, mid-13th century



In the *Cross* from the Church of San Ranierino, signed at the bottom, the master of the Pisan school dramatically emphasises the *Christus patiens*. With just a geometric pattern on the side panels and the busts of two *Mourners* on the terminals, namely Mary and Saint John, the image focuses on the suffering Christ, his tense expression, his body bent in pain, his flesh livid with death.