

Custodians of Beauty – 2017 - 2019

Italy is a country with one of the biggest artistic heritages in the world.

Living in such a rich cultural environment, and having myself studied Fine Art - I graduated in Painting at the *Academy of Fine Arts in Brera* - before I became a photographer, and this has made me feel always concerned about the cultural and artistic richness I was surrounded by.

I often thought that the restorers, the “Custodians” of that beauty, who help us to see this art in its state of conservation are usually hidden from view. We don’t know how they work, we don’t know what the restoration process is, since we just assume it is normal that a Piero della Francesca painting or a Giotto fresco is still there, on the surface on which they were created.

So, drawn by the desire to discover that hidden world of art preservation and its workers, and bring it to light, in 2017, with the support of the *Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro* I started a photographic project about the ‘art’ of restoration and of the restorers themselves - from the education in the school to onsite practice. I discovered that not only the restorers are mostly women (in the proportion of around 9 to 1) but also that mostly very young (around 21 or 22) they start working on important artworks at this age as a normal part of their training.

The questions I asked the students and senior restorers, were: how does all this beauty you are surrounded with impacts the way you see the world and how you interact with it?

My *Custodians of Beauty* project, is an ‘homage’ and recognition to all the restorers, and in particular, to the women restorers, who, thanks to their efforts and dedication keep, art and important cultural artefacts alive.

Beauty, in art as in life, needs to be taken care of, preserved and nurtured, while the skills to keep this practice alive are in a continuous process of development and improvement.

Isabella De Maddalena