



CENACOLOVINCIANO
Leonardo's last supper museum

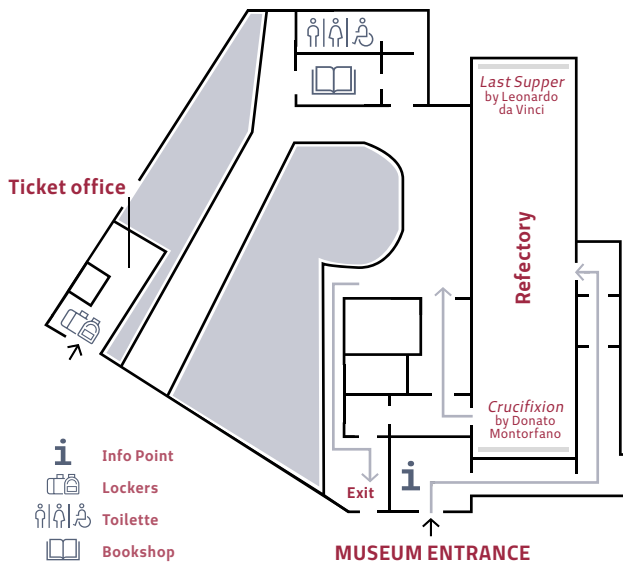
LAST SUPPER MUSEUM AND SANTA MARIA DELLE GRAZIE

The Museo del Cenacolo Vinciano (Leonardo's *Last Supper* Museum) is located in Milan within the Santa Maria delle Grazie complex, made up of the church and convent of the Dominican friars. In 1980, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The church and convent were built between 1465 and 1482, but from 1490 onwards, the new ruler of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, known as "Il Moro" or the Moor, made renovations to the architecture and decorations, bringing in the most innovative artists in the Duchy. Included among these were Donato Bramante for the church's new tribune, and Leonardo da Vinci, to paint the *Last Supper* in the convent's refectory.

The exceptional nature of Leonardo's painting was immediately recognized, and over the centuries it transformed the refectory from a simple space for the daily life of the Dominican community into a place in which to contemplate the painting, a masterpiece.

Today, the refectory, where the *Last Supper* and Donato Montorfano's *Crucifixion* face each other, is the heart of the museum, and can be accessed via a pathway that passes along the western side of the Chiostro dei Morti (Cloister of



the Dead). From here, Bramante's tribune is also visible, emphasizing the lasting bond between Leonardo's painting and the monastic complex.

Leonardo painted the *Last Supper* on the north wall of the refectory between about 1494 and 1498, but the first drawings of the composition date back to 1490. Rather than painting it as a fresco, he used a dry painting technique instead, in order to be able to proceed slowly and thoughtfully as he layered on one veil of color after another.

In the composition, Leonardo captured the moment in which Jesus announced "... one of you will betray me" – in the words of the Gospel – arousing surprise and dismay in the apostles gathered around him. This allowed the artist to accentuate the various psychologies through intense gestures, expressions and postures, visibly embodying what he himself called the "motions of the soul."



Bartholomew James the Younger Andrew Peter Judas John Jesus Thomas James the Older Philip Matthew Judas Thaddeus Simon Zealotes

THE CRUCIFIXION BY GIOVANNI DONATO MONTORFANO

The painter used perspective skillfully to present the scene as an extension of the actual space, so that the viewer becomes a participant in the sacred episode. The light, studied in its naturalistic aspect, is also charged with symbolic meanings: Judas, the only apostle to turn his back to the viewer, is in the shadows, while the head of Jesus, framed by the central window, is surrounded by the glow of the sky, which replaces the conventional halo.

The technique used and the particular microclimate within the refectory caused rapid deterioration in the painting, a process that had been witnessed since the early 16th century. Numerous and repeated restoration operations have been carried out over the centuries in an attempt to slow it down. The most recent restoration work was completed in 1999 and lasted about twenty years. After this, a complex activity aimed at preventive conservation was launched, including filtering and conditioning the refectory's air and limiting the number of visitors.



On the southern wall of the refectory, facing the *Last Supper*, is a monumental fresco by Giovanni Donato Montorfano depicting the *Crucifixion*. Visible at the foot of Christ's cross is the inscription "1495 / Io[hannes]. Donatus / Montorfanus p[i]nxit." Not only is the fresco dated, but it is also the only work signed by the Lombard artist. The crowded composition, populated with sharply delineated rigid images, draws on the iconography of traditional Northern Italian painting, with numerous figures grouped around the three tall crosses silhouetted against the background of an imaginary Jerusalem.

In the extreme lower corners are the almost completely faded figures of Duke Ludovico il Moro, his wife Beatrice d'Este and their two children. Some documents attribute the execution of these figures to Leonardo da Vinci.

Painted on the western wall are plant garlands, portraits of saints and blessed from the Dominican order within oculi, and maxims in Latin, bearing witness to the first stage of decorations in the refectory. The same motifs were found on the eastern wall, but were destroyed by bombing in August 1943, along with the entire roof vault.



Address

Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie 2, Milan

Visiting times

Closed Mondays and on 1st January and 25 December

To ensure the preservation of the painting, entry is limited to 35 people every 15 minutes, with **compulsory reservations** and non-transferable tickets in the visitor's name.

You must arrive at the ticket office approximately 30 minutes before the visit, otherwise you will lose your right to access. The use of a radio guide is compulsory for guided tours.

Reservations can be made through the following channels:

- **Online at the website** cenacolorvinciano.vivaticket.it
- Via the **call centre** at +39 02 92800360
- **For groups, write to** cenacologruppi@adartem.it

For opening hours, ticket prices and other information about visiting guidelines and reservations, go to the museum's official website

www.cenacolorvinciano.org



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