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Pope Paul VI at inauguration of Vatican Museums' Modern and Contemporary Collection in 1973



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POPE PAUL VI

POPE FRANCIS

50 Years of Vatican Museums' Modern & Contemporary Collection

The Vatican celebrates 50 years of the Vatican Museums' Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art since its 23 June 1973 inauguration by Pope St. Paul VI.

By Deborah Castellano Lubov

The Vatican is celebrating 50 years of the Vatican Museums' Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art.

Commemorating the anniversary as a significant moment for the museum's youngest collection, the Holy Father met with world-renowned artists in the Sistine Chapel. Addressing them, he praised - like his predecessor Paul VI - the beauty of art, saying it inspires a desire for God, and renders glory to Him.

Saint Paul VI inaugurated the Collection on June 23, 1973.

According to the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, the original collection consisted of some 1000 works.

Now, the collection consists of about 9000 paintings, sculptures, graphic art production, installations and other artistic creations, donated over the years by artists, collectors, and public and private entities, thanks to donations, acquisitions, commissions, and exhibition promotion.

This Modern Collection composes a large section of the Vatican Museums' itinerary, the Museums' website notes.

It is one of the largest collections of contemporary sacred art on the international scene today. The "Salette" of the *Borgia Tower* is hosting a complementary exhibition with a historical-photographic character. It reveals the faces of the personalities involved in the formation of the Collection, the leading artists, the history of the museum displays and exhibition events, and more generally the evolutionary path and the goals achieved in these first 50 years of activity, inside and outside the museum spaces.

The 50th anniversary is also honoured by the publication of a new and substantial Italian volume soon to be published by *Edizioni Musei Vaticani*: "The Vatican Museums' Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art 1973-2023. Origins, History, Transformations" edited by Micol Forti, with Francesca Boschetti and Rosalia Pagliarani.

Pope Paul VI's wisdom

The majority of the donations resulted from contacts established by Paul VI through his address to the art world, in an encounter on 7 May 1964 in the Sistine Chapel. In that discourse, he underlined the effective distance between the Church and contemporary art, compared with the close and fruitful link of the past, in the hope of bringing them closer to one another.

To celebrate the Collections' 50-year birthday, the Vatican Patrons have made a proposal "to share and comingle these modern and contemporary works from the last fifty years with the other departments of the Museums. It will be an opportunity to highlight the link between past and present, preservation and creation, the vision of history, and present participation."

More information can be found on their [website](#).

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The selection displayed to the public, along an itinerary that goes from the Borgia Apartment up to the Sistine Chapel, offers visitors a rich overview of twentieth-century Italian and international art.

Collection of works by important artists

It includes works by artists such as Van Gogh, Bacon, Chagall, Carrà, de Chirico, Manzù, Capogrossi, Fontana, Burri and Matisse.

An entire room dedicated to the latter was inaugurated in 2011, housing a valuable collection of works relating to the genesis of the Vence Chapel, which joined the Vatican collections in 1980, thanks to an extraordinary donation by the artist's son, Pierre Matisse.

Emerging from Paul VI's desire to reestablish a dialogue between the Church and contemporary culture, the Collection covers a time span from the end of the nineteenth century up to the early twentieth century, and "enables the visitor to view unexpected masterpieces of the variegated artistic panorama of the twentieth century."

Commemorating 50 years

To celebrate this special anniversary, the Department of 19th Century and Contemporary Art of the Vatican Museums, through the Curator Micol Forti and Assistants Francesca Boschetti and Rosalia Pagliarani, conceived a 'diffuse exhibition', set up in the various sectors of the Pope's Museums, with the intention of weaving a dialogue between past and present.

Ten works are scattered throughout the museum, chosen from those recently added to the Collection and created by artists of international calibre: Anatsui, Bravo, Fleischer, Gioli, Giuliani, Hadzi-Vasileva, Paladino, Ruffo, Strazza and Vukadinov.



Commemorating 50 years of the Vatican Museums' Modern and Contemporary Art Collection, Pope Francis meets artists in Sistine Chapel