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Museum of the Cathedral, Florence, Florence, Italy



Art history comes alive with light: ERCO in the Museum of the Cathedral in Florence

- Client: Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence / Italy

- Lighting design: Massimo Iarussi, Florence / Italy
- Photography: Dirk Vogel, Dortmund / Germany
- Place: Florence
- Country: Italy
- Website: www.museumflorence.com

The Museum of the Cathedral in Florence, which recently reopened after a huge expansion project that doubled its dimensions, hosts the world's greatest collection of sculptures of Florentine Middle Ages and Renaissance. Its architecture and artworks are perfectly staged thanks in no small part to ERCO light enhancing their artistic quality.

Officially known as "Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore", Florence Cathedral is one of the most iconic and popular tourist attractions in Italy. Every year, around 1.4 million people visit the "Duomo", which was built between 1296 and 1436 and includes the adjoining Baptistry. As well as these two monuments, the cathedral complex today includes the Museum of the Cathedral, or "Museo del Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore", founded in 1891. Devoted to the history of the Florentine landmark, its design and interior bear the signatures of great Italian artists such as Giotto, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Donatello and Michelangelo, whilst giving as much attention to the many sculptures made specifically for the cathedral.



The centrepiece of the Florentine Museum of the Cathedral, the "Salone del Paradiso", is dominated by a spectacular, full-scale model of the Cathedral's medieval façade.



The model integrates many well preserved statues in their "original" location. The diffused natural light is complemented by accent light from Parscan projectors focused on the sculptures.

Florentine sculpture in ERCO light

After two years of intense restoration and enlargement, managed by Florentine architects Guicciardini & Magni Architetti, the beautifully refurbished museum is today a major tourist attraction and another feather in the cap of the Tuscan art metropolis. This is thanks in no small part to another artist, Massimo Iarussi, who left his mark with a skilfully executed lighting design that does justice in every respect to the world's greatest collection of sculptures of Florentine Middle Ages and Renaissance on display here. His sophisticated lighting concept is based on ERCO lighting tools that once more demonstrate brilliance, precision and efficiency. To present close to 750 works covering nearly 6,000sqm of exhibition space in just the right light, the museum's 25 halls were equipped with a total of 1,500 ERCO lighting tools in 50 different configurations. The main protagonists are spotlights from the Parscan and Pollux ranges, used with different wattages and a variety of light distributions. In some places, Iarussi deployed Quintessence and Skim downlights, Optec and Pantrac spotlights as well as Lightscan outdoor projectors. All luminaires emit warm white light at 3000K.



The hall, which extends across three floors, is filled with natural light from several skylights, evoking an outdoor environment that befits the displayed works.



Several Parscan projectors illuminate individual or groups of sculptures from different angles to avoid harsh shadows.

Individual lighting, differentiated by context

Director Monsignor Timothy Verdon explains the significance of light in his museum this way:

“Lighting is a major component to the overall experience of artwork in any museum. But when your collection consists almost entirely of sculptures, light management is absolutely critical to the presentation. Because whilst paintings invariably require uniform, glare-free illumination, the three-dimensions and shadow zones of statues and reliefs call for differentiated lighting influenced by the periods in which they were created, their artistic style and their original context.”

The wisdom of his point is brought home particularly well by the centrepiece of the presentation, the breathtaking “Salone del Paradiso” (Hall of Paradise), which extends across three floors and is illuminated with light coming from the skylights. The spectacular dimensions of this light-infused interior evoke an outdoor environment that makes it ideal for the presentation of artwork originally created for the exterior, such as the celebrated bronze doors of the Baptistry, designed by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the first half of the 15th century. However, the hall is dominated by a spectacular, full-scale model of the Cathedral’s medieval façade, which was never completed and ultimately dismantled. Faithfully reconstructed, many of the preserved statues and reliefs were integrated into the model and returned, as it were, to their original location. The diffused natural light in this space is complemented by accent light from powerful Parscan projectors focused, from different angles, onto the object and the individual sculptures.



Illuminated sensitively and effectively, the poignant sculpture of Mary Magdalene is one of the most expressive of Donatello’s works.



A separate hall is dedicated entirely to Michelangelo’s “Pietà Bandini”. The light coming from above directs attention onto the central element of this group of figures.



Whilst producing a homogeneous overall appearance, the lighting emphasises the unique aspects of each individual sculpture.



Light from different angles is used to accentuate the artistic quality of the sculpture.

Light directs attention

Meanwhile, the lighting in the “Sala della Maddalena”, another masterpiece of the museum, is entirely different. Here stands Donatello’s poignant sculpture that once graced the interior of the Cathedral, the Penitent Saint Mary Magdalene. In the darker room, the statue is contrasted with directional light, to further emphasise its dramatic features. A similarly evocative concept is found in the room dedicated as “Tribuna di Michelangelo”, where the only exhibit is the unfinished Pietà Bandini, a late work by the legendary Renaissance master. Here, the height of the room is exploited to simulate a “divine light” coming from above to illuminate the sculpture, urging the visitor to focus on the central element of this group of figures, the body of Christ.

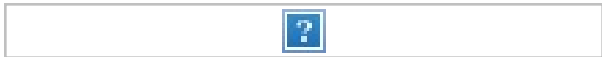


Perfectly executed lighting turns the huge model of the dome into a compelling eye-catcher whilst making a point of its striking design.



The lighting sets off the ornamental frieze on the wall from its dark surroundings with almost surgical

precision.



The light directs the attention and urges the visitor to read the stories carved in stone.

The potential of modern lighting design

Throughout the museum, the designers installed highly creative lighting solutions, each precisely crafted to enhance the dramatic effect of the exhibits, whilst reinforcing in compelling detail the harmony of form and content, with emphasis on their aesthetic and didactic values. Light in the Florentine museum, more than elsewhere, creates an experience that demonstrates in an exemplary fashion - without detracting attention from the exhibits - the potential of modern lighting design. The wide variety of ERCO lighting tools, designed to enable combination in any configuration, provided a solid base for implementation of this sophisticated lighting concept. At its heart, however, it derives its compelling character from the brilliance of ERCO light and the precision of ERCO LED technology, to the delight of experts and the public alike.



An exemplary exhibition arrangement combined with precise lighting design gives voice to the exhibits.



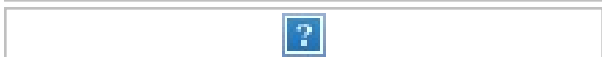
Even less prominent objects draw interest thanks to coherent lighting that emphasises aspects such as the face of Christ.



The exquisite chest, lavishly adorned with imagery and ornaments, appears to shine from within.



ERCO lighting tools virtually seem to bring this dead stone to life. Precisely arranged lighting encourages the visitor to explore the remarkable wealth of detail of the statue.



About the author: Mathias Remmele works in Berlin as a freelance publicist and exhibition curator for topics relating to architectural and design history. As a critic he focuses on contemporary developments in these areas. He is also a lecturer at the School of Art and Design in Basel.

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