Vatican
Vatican News
Canopy of baldachin seen from below with scaffolding.

This is a view of mount scaffolding Feb. 21, 2024, that is around the 100-foot-tall baroque sculpted bronze canopy, or baldachin, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini over the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in preparation for its restoration. (OSV News/Yara Nardi, Reuters)

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St. Peter's Basilica hired two women to its team of "sanpietrini," the church's specialized artisans and workers, for the first time since the basilica's maintenance office was established 500 years ago.

The Fabbrica di San Pietro, the office responsible for the upkeep of the basilica, has a special team of about 80 people who are in charge of the cleaning, maintenance, surveillance and reception services at the world's largest Christian church. About 60,000 people come through the basilica each day, the Fabbrica said on its website.

The "sanpietrini" are made up of carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, blacksmiths, plasterers, decorators, sculptors, stone cutters, scaffolders and general

laborers.

The two new female hires, who are 26 and 21 years old and from Italy, are recent graduates of the basilica's recently relaunched School of Fine Arts and Traditional Trades where they specialized in masonry and decorative and ornamental plastering, Vatican News reported July 11.

It is the first time in 500 years, since the founding of the Fabbrica di San Pietro, that women have been hired as sanpietrini, Vatican News said.

However, it is not the first time women have been involved in some way with the building or decoration of the present-day basilica, whose first foundation stones were laid in 1506.

Archival documents from the 1500s and 1600s "show we had masons, woodworkers, glaziers, mortar makers and cartdrivers bringing in materials by wagon to St. Peter's who were women," Pietro Zander, who is in charge of the necropolises and artistic heritage for the Fabbrica, told Catholic News Service in 2023.

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Women have also been employed at the Vatican's mosaic studio, which is next to the Fabbrica offices, Vatican News added.

The new School of Fine Arts and Traditional Trades was launched in 2022 and is modeled after the artisan school and apprenticeships the basilica ran centuries ago in which enrollment, including room and board, is completely free.

The school offers six-month programs in woodworking, masonry and plastering, stonework and carving, mosaics and metalworking.

Almost half of the 20 students admitted each year are women.