

16th-Century Altarpiece Returns to Indianapolis Museum of Art Galleries Following Extensive Conservation Treatment

After More Than 40 Years in Storage, Newly Restored Sebastiano Mainardi Painting is On View at the IMA beginning June 23, 2009

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, June 23, 2009—The Indianapolis Museum of Art's most significant example of Tuscan High Renaissance art will again be on view in the IMA galleries after being held in storage for more than 40 years due to its fragile condition. After a complex conservation treatment begun in fall 2007, the altarpiece *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saint Justus of Volterra and Saint Margaret of Antioch* by Sebastiano Mainardi (1466–1513), will again be available for public viewing in the IMA's Clowes Courtyard beginning June 23, 2009.

Despite being in storage for decades, the 500-year-old painting is already familiar to many recent IMA visitors, as it was featured in the Star Studio Exhibition *Sebastiano Mainardi: The Science of Art* in fall 2007, which allowed the public to watch IMA conservators as they treated this painting. More than 29,000 visitors witnessed a portion of the conservation treatment during the exhibition. The conservation treatment, exhibition, reframing of the altarpiece and forthcoming publication *Saint Margaret of Antioch* were made possible through a generous donation from Ms. Jane Fortune.

"Because of the completed conservation of this altarpiece, we are again able to share this magnificent work of art with our visitors," said Maxwell L. Anderson, The Melvin & Bren Simon Director and CEO of the IMA. "It's also a milestone for the IMA's conservation program as we move forward with establishing a conservation science laboratory, which will allow us to harness scientific research to increase our contributions to the fields of conservation, collections care and art history."

Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saint Justus of Volterra and Saint Margaret of Antioch is considered a major work of Mainardi's from late in his career. Created in 1507 during the height of the Italian Renaissance, the 63.5- by 61-inch painting was commissioned to adorn the altar of a church. The altarpiece has significant provenance, having belonged to popular American novelist and Indianapolis native Booth Tarkington. It was donated by Mrs. Tarkington in honor of her late husband in 1951, and was displayed at the John Herron Museum of Art.

Upon entry into the IMA collections, the work was already in precarious condition and its appearance had changed drastically since 1507. At some time in its history, long before it entered the museum's collection, the wood panel suffered serious insect infestation. Fluctuations in temperature and humidity in the church where the painting was originally displayed also contributed to its poor condition.

Various restorers over the centuries had made many attempts to reduce the effects of past damage, but some of their methods did not have a desirable outcome. The structure had deteriorated extensively due to an earlier elaborate cradle bracing system constructed for the painting. In 1961 its condition was declared "extremely hazardous," and the piece was finally deemed to be "unexhibitable" in 1965. Owing to its increasingly fragile condition and the difficulty of conserving it, the altarpiece was then held in IMA storage for more than 40 years.

"The conservation treatment begun by IMA conservators in 2007 required considerable research as well as the expertise of several specialists in Italian Renaissance paintings and their preservation," said David Miller, conservator-in-charge and senior conservator of paintings at the IMA.

Miller traveled to Incisa Val d'Arno, Italy, where he studied another version of the IMA's altarpiece as well as other paintings and frescoes by Mainardi in San Gimignano and Florence in order to better understand the artist's working methods and typical 16th-century Florentine framing conventions. As part of the conservation treatment at the IMA, following reattachment and stabilization of the very fragile layers of paint, the cradle was removed, cracks and splits in the wood panel were repaired, and a new support system was attached with adjustable springs to better stabilize its structure by a specialist in the conservation treatment of panel paintings. IMA conservators were then able to clean the painting, removing dirt, discolored varnishes and older repainting from past restoration attempts, before varnishing, and filling in extensive areas of significant damage with new inpainting using more sound and safely reversible methods. .

"Although the altarpiece was extremely damaged, the extensive and complex conservation treatment successfully stabilized its fragile structure and recovered Mainardi's brilliant colors and composition," Miller said. "The painting's appearance is also greatly enhanced in a new, historically appropriate 16th-century Florentine Tabernacle-style frame. The glowing and beautifully reframed altarpiece will now go on permanent display in Clowes Courtyard as a prime example of Tuscan High Renaissance art."

For more information about the conservation of this work, including digital videos about the conservation treatment, visit imamuseum.org/mainardi and artbabble.org/search/abvideo/mainardi.

History of IMA Conservation

Earlier in its history and in recent years, the IMA has been a leader in museum conservation. In 2007, the IMA became one of the first U.S. art museums to acquire a digital X-ray unit, which has led to a discovery about the internal structure of African Songye figures that was previously unknown to specialists working in this field. The museum's professional conservation efforts started in the 1940s with the museum contracting well known first-generation American conservators such as Sheldon Keck, James Roth, and Louis Pomerantz to preserve some of the museum's finest paintings. The museum became a charter member of the Intermuseum Laboratory in 1952 and incorporated a small, custom-designed conservation laboratory into the new Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1970. In 1975, the appointment of a Chief Conservator led to the implementation of the American Institute for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works ethics and standards for practice and a preventative program for collections care.

The conservation department, now occupying 7,700 square feet, currently has a staff of six conservators (in paintings, paper, objects and textiles), two conservation technicians, and a half-time digital imaging technician to care for the museum's collections. Additionally, since 1977, more than 220 institutions or public collections and more than 300 individual collectors have been clients of the Regional Services Program at the IMA, which works to help conserve artworks that are not a part of the Museum's collection. IMA conservators have done other work, such as facility surveys, collection surveys or on-site mural conservation including the Thomas Hart Benton mural cycle at Indiana University.

IMA Conservation Science Laboratory

In October 2008, the Indianapolis Museum of Art announced plans to establish a state-of-the-art conservation science laboratory to complement its existing expertise in the care and treatment of the works of art in its collection. Through the addition of this laboratory, the IMA aims to create an internationally recognized conservation center, which will enhance the IMA's capability to conduct art historical research through science technologies. The laboratory also will augment the IMA's potential as a resource for training and professional development, and it will help the IMA to foster partnerships with universities and corporations involved in central Indiana's growing role as a hub of the life sciences industry. In recognition of these efforts, Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded a \$2,613,450 grant to the Indianapolis Museum of Art toward the creation of the laboratory. Additionally, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a \$1.75 million challenge grant to the

IMA to establish an endowment for the position of a senior conservation scientist. This grant must be matched by \$1.5 million within three years.

The IMA's newly expanded conservation resources will support research and publication by museum conservators, scientists and curators to continue to build the IMA's reputation as an industry leader through contributions to the fields of conservation, collections care and art history. Once equipped and fully staffed, the lab will join an esteemed group of labs at four other leading art institutions in the United States: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Gallery of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Getty Conservation Institute. The IMA will appoint a Scientific Advisory Committee including leaders from Indiana's growing life sciences industry. This committee will act as a resource for fostering collaboration and community involvement.

For a full press release about the IMA's intention to establish a conservation science laboratory, visit: <http://www.imamuseum.org/sites/default/files/Conservation.pdf>.

About the Indianapolis Museum of Art

The Indianapolis Museum of Art offers visitors an inclusive view of creativity through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from across the world's continents. Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the IMA is among the 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States, and it features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Through its new articulation of the interconnectedness of art, design and nature, the IMA welcomes its visitors to experiences at the Museum, in 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park, which will be the largest contemporary art park in the United States when it opens in spring 2010, and at Oldfields–Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate on the IMA's grounds.

The IMA completed a \$74 million expansion project in May 2005. The construction added 164,000 square feet to the Museum and includes renovation of 90,000 square feet of existing space. In order to present major exhibitions of its own and to accommodate major traveling exhibitions, the expanded Museum was outfitted with new 10,000-plus-square-foot Clowes Special Exhibition Gallery on the Museum's first level. In November 2008, the IMA opened the renovated 600-seat Tobias Theater. Nicknamed, "The Toby," the theater is a venue for talks, performances and films.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

Note: Photos of altarpiece before inpainting and after treatment are available upon request. Please e-mail lpinegar@imamuseum.org.

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