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Note: Images available upon request

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Indianapolis Museum of Art to complete conservation of 16th century altarpiece in Star Studio

INDIANAPOLIS – On September 4, 2007, the Indianapolis Museum of Art will open the Star Studio Exhibition *Sebastiano Mainardi: The Science of Art* featuring the work of IMA conservators on a painting by the Italian master Sebastiano Mainardi (1466-1513). The exhibition will allow the public to view the conservation treatment of this 500-year-old altarpiece, which is the IMA's most significant example of Tuscan High Renaissance art. This large painting, *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saint Justus of Volterra and Saint Justina*, is considered a major work of Mainardi's from late in his career.

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.

During a period 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. In 1961 its condition was declared "extremely hazardous", and the piece was finally deemed to be "unexhibitable" in 1965. Owing to its fragile condition and the difficulty of conserving it, the altarpiece was held in IMA storage for 40 years.

Various restorers throughout the centuries have made many attempts to reduce the effects of past damage, but some of their methods did not have a desirable outcome. The structure has deteriorated extensively due to an earlier elaborate cradle bracing system constructed for the painting. As part of the current conservation treatment, 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. In addition, the painting will be cleaned and varnished with more sound and reversible methods. Conservators will remove older repainting from past restoration attempts and will fill in areas of significant damage with new inpainting.

David Miller, IMA senior conservator of paintings, recently returned from Florence, Italy, where he studied another version of the IMA's altarpiece as well as other paintings and frescoes by Mainardi in order to better understand the artist's working methods.

"This has been a very complex conservation treatment, requiring considerable research as well as the expertise of several specialists in Italian Renaissance paintings and their preservation. For example, IMA staff conservators are treating the painted surface, and an expert in wood panel treatment was brought to Indianapolis from New York to repair and stabilize Mainardi's extremely fragile altarpiece," Miller explained.

This major restoration project will prepare the work for a return to public display. Visitors can watch the conservators at work, see videos and photos documenting earlier stages of the treatment work on the painting, learn about the tools and techniques used by conservators and create a panel to add to a collaborative artwork inspired by the altarpiece. The exhibition will include information on the artist, history of the painting and its state of preservation.

Throughout the exhibition, IMA conservators will be in Star Studio from 11 a.m. to noon, and 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Friday. Also on Thursday and Friday, they will be in Star Studio from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Conservators will work on the painting from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. The exhibition closes December 30, 2007.

Sebastiano Mainardi: The Science of Art is made possible through a generous donation from Ms. Jane Fortune.

For more information about the exhibition, visit imamuseum.org/mainardi after September 4.

About the IMA

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, IMA connects visitors to its unique and expansive view of art with its Indianapolis Museum of Art, the future Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park and Oldfields–Lilly House & Gardens. The Indianapolis Museum of Art is the fifth largest encyclopedic art museum in the United States and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European, contemporary and decorative art, including paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings and photographs, textiles and costumes.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday -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.

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