

**EXPLORING ANOTHER LEONARDO MYSTERY,
WORCESTER ART MUSEUM PRESENTS EXHIBITION
AND NEW RESEARCH ON ITALIAN PANEL PAINTINGS**

Worcester, MA—January 8, 2018—In March 2018, the Worcester Art Museum will present an exhibition revealing the hand of Leonardo da Vinci in two Renaissance panel paintings—the Museum’s *A Miracle of Saint Donatus* and the Musée du Louvre’s *Annunciation*—while reuniting these two panels for the first time since they were separated in the early 19th century. Based on recently completed technical research, ***The Mystery of Worcester’s Leonardo*** will demonstrate clearly Leonardo’s role in creating both paintings. The exhibition will open March 10, 2018 and remain on view until June 3.

“It is precisely because of the incredible skill and beauty of Leonardo’s work that we find such mystery in those with tantalizing but uncertain attributions,” said Matthias Waschek, C. Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum. “For decades, these two paintings have held clues about Leonardo’s style. Now, thanks to this new research by Rita Albertson, the Museum’s Chief Conservator, and her colleagues, we have for the first time a better understanding of—and evidence for—Leonardo’s role as a painter of these predella panels.”

The *A Miracle of Saint Donatus* painting was discovered in 1933 and sold shortly thereafter to Theodore T. and Mary G. Ellis, patrons of the Worcester Art Museum, as a work by Leonardo da Vinci. Like Worcester’s painting, the Louvre’s *Annunciation* has also sometimes been attributed to Leonardo. However, most prior research led to an attribution to Lorenzo di Credi, a peer of Leonardo’s and a fellow apprentice in painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio’s workshop.

The first technical article to compare these works was published in 1952 by the Musée du Louvre in *Radiographies de tableaux de Leonard De Vinci* by Magdeleine Hours. By studying the x-radiographs of both panels, the author identified a number of significant similarities and firmly concluded both panels were from the same altarpiece. More recently, extensive research on Worcester’s painting has been conducted by Rita Albertson, Chief Conservator at the Worcester Art Museum, with contributions by Laurence Kanter, Chief Curator and Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of European Art, Yale University Art Gallery. Bruno Mottin, senior curator at the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF) in Paris, performed equivalent research on the Louvre’s painting, providing a remarkable opportunity for comparative study of both panels.

Using comparative technical information from the Worcester and C2RMF teams, this exhibition will explore the panels’ evolution, from their complex underdrawings to the application of final layers of paint and translucent glazes. The resulting assessment demonstrates that they are more likely to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci, and that Lorenzo di Credi played at best an incidental part in their creation. As such, they are important to understanding Leonardo’s evolving style and skill while in the Verrocchio workshop.

To complement the two predella panels—and to underscore the research findings—the Museum will present a complementary work by Lorenzo di Credi, also entitled the *Annunciation*. By installing the three paintings together, Lorenzo will emerge as a distinct voice in Renaissance painting, and an artist

of real quality, but not the artist of the Louvre and Worcester pictures. Visitors will be able to recognize the work of Lorenzo di Credi and establish a standard against which to contrast the handling of paint in the Worcester and Louvre panels.

“The ongoing debates about these works have raised new and compelling questions regarding both the young Leonardo and Italian Renaissance workshop practices,” said Rita Albertson. “Drawing on new information made possible by technical research, this exhibition shows the complexity of attribution decisions, while encouraging the viewer to make their own slow and careful observations of each work.”

The paintings have long been recognized as the predella pieces—the paintings that make up the lower pictorial elements of an altarpiece—in the Duomo of Pistoia, Tuscany, a documented commission to Andrea del Verrocchio. Leonardo was apprenticed to Verrocchio beginning in the late 1460s and, as late as the mid-1470s, was still connected to his workshop. According to the Renaissance biographer Giorgio Vasari, Verrocchio and Leonardo worked together on the altarpiece of the *Baptism of Christ*, now in the Uffizi, Florence. Vasari wrote that, judged side-by-side, Verrocchio perceived Leonardo’s work to be so far superior to his own that he resolved never to paint again. Centuries later, Vasari’s story continues to confound scholarly efforts to determine what exactly Verrocchio painted, how much of the surviving work associated with his name should be attributed instead to his assistants—including his younger pupil, Lorenzo di Credi—and what role Leonardo da Vinci had in painting many of these pieces.

As with other Verrocchio commissions, the Worcester and Louvre predella panels have been caught up in the vortex of assumptions swirling around Vasari’s story. *The Mystery of Worcester’s Leonardo* is the result of research into both works using advanced imaging techniques on them for the first time, and a collaborative process to share and analyze the findings.

The exhibition will present the central question about Leonardo’s authorship in three ways. The first element focuses on comparative looking and close study of the panel paintings, letting visitors develop their own conclusions. The second part of the exhibition will present the research into each painting, including taking visitors through the physical examination of the Louvre and Worcester panels, along with the technical imaging that reveals the workings of more than one mind and one hand. In addition to being able to view the paintings, the Museum will provide ample seating with additional reading materials, for further study.

The final component will address the original context of the paintings, with an image of the main altar panel in Pistoia, and an exploration of its relationship to the predella panels. *The Mystery of Worcester’s Leonardo* will be presented in a space within the suite of galleries housing the Museum’s European collection, surrounded by the Worcester Art Museum’s rich holdings of Renaissance art providing additional context for the study of these works. Moreover, the research demonstrating the painting’s connection to Leonardo makes WAM only the second museum in North America to own a painting by the Renaissance master (the other is the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., which owns the painting *Ginevra de’ Benci*, c. 1474/1478).

The Mystery of Worcester’s Leonardo is made possible through support from The Robert Lehman Foundation. Additional program support is provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The exhibition is sponsored in part by UniBank.

Related Programs:

Curator's Tour: On Wednesday, May 2 at 11am, Rita Albertson, chief conservator at the Worcester Art Museum and curator of *The Mystery of Worcester's Leonardo*, leads a tour of the exhibition.

Master Series Third Thursday Art Talk

On Thursday, May 17 at 6pm, Laurence Kanter, chief curator and the Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of European Art at Yale University Art Gallery, explores the fascinating story behind the Worcester Art Museum's panel painting *A Miracle of Saint Donatus*. A reception in the Museum's Renaissance Court, with cash bar and live music, will follow the lecture. Master Series Third Thursdays are presented with support from the Bernard and Louise Palitz Fund and are sponsored by AbbVie.

About the Worcester Art Museum

Founded in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum's encyclopedic 37,500 piece collection covers 51 centuries of art. Highlights include the Medieval Chapter House, Renaissance Court, and Worcester Hunt Mosaic, as well as the recently integrated John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection of arms and armor. The Museum is internationally known for its collection of European and American art. It was the first in America to acquire paintings by Monet and Gauguin and one of the first to collect photography. As the first U.S. museum to focus on collaborating with local schools, it has been at the forefront of engaging audiences and giving them a meaningful and personal experience for over a century.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and every third Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$16 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$14 for seniors 65+, and \$14 for college students with ID. (New hours and admission, effective September 1, 2017.) Members and children under four are free. Parking is free. For more information, visit worcesterart.org.

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