

## **“THE LOUVRE AND THE MASTERPIECE” EXHIBITION OPENS IN MINNEAPOLIS OCTOBER 2009**

Exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Explores Concepts of “Masterpiece” Spanning 4,000 Years



Georges de La Tour, French, 1593–1652, *The Card-Sharp with the Ace of Diamonds*, 17th century, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Department of Paintings, RF 1972-8, Photo: Gérard Blot. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

### **MINNEAPOLIS, AUGUST 19, 2009**

This October, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) presents “The Louvre and the Masterpiece,” which will explore how the definition of a “masterpiece,” as well as taste and connoisseurship, have changed over time. The exhibition, presented by U.S. Bank, will feature sixty-two works of art drawn from all eight of the Musée du Louvre’s collection areas, spanning 4,000 years. Paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, and drawings will reflect three major themes: the changing historical and cultural definitions of a masterpiece; authenticity and connoisseurship; and the evolution of taste and scholarship. “The Louvre and the Masterpiece” will be on view in Minneapolis from October 18, 2009, through January 10, 2010.

“We are thrilled to present such a magnificent group of works from the Louvre’s collections to Minnesota for the first time, and it is a great opportunity to explore what makes a work of art a masterpiece,” said Kaywin Feldman, Director and President of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

The exhibition comprises three sections, which reflect the three themes mentioned above.

## WHAT IS A MASTERPIECE?

“What Is a Masterpiece” explores the changing historical definitions of the concept of masterpiece through a selection of objects from the ancient Near East through the mid-19th-century. In the ancient world, a masterpiece was defined by an object’s owner and purpose. In contrast, medieval artists achieved technical mastery within specialized guilds. Notable objects in this section include two such inscribed works: a Limoges ciborium (c. A.D. 1200), a vessel used for holding communion hosts, and a Mamluk hammered bronze basin known as the *Baptistry of Saint Louis*, (c. late 13th—early 14th century). The *Baptistry of Saint Louis* was later used to baptize Louis XIII in 1610 and Napoleon III’s son in 1856.

## CONNOISSEURSHIP

The second section will introduce the idea of connoisseurship as a means of identifying works from the past as masterpieces. Displayed in pairs or groups, these objects will provide informative comparisons. The presentation will conclude with the famed *Blue Head*, a forgery from the Louvre’s collection. For years, the glass head was believed to be an Egyptian masterpiece (c. 1400 B.C.). Once displayed in the ancient Egyptian galleries, it was one of the most frequently reproduced works in the Louvre’s collections. After careful scientific analysis in 2001, it was confirmed to be a forgery.

## EVOLUTION OF TASTE AND KNOWLEDGE

“Evolution of Taste and Knowledge” explores masterpieces that were either rediscovered or reattributed based on changing knowledge and perceptions. Included will be ten paintings and sculptures by artists who are well known today but had been overlooked in previous eras. These include Johannes Vermeer’s masterpiece, *The Astronomer*, which has never been seen in North America. Acquired by the Louvre in 1986, it once formed a pair with *The Geographer*, of 1668–69, now in Frankfurt. Together they illustrate Vermeer’s profound interest in scholarly inquiry. Vermeer’s paintings were well known and highly sought after during his lifetime, but because of his extremely limited output (around thirty-five paintings) he fell into obscurity—especially outside of Holland—in the decades after his death.



Antonio Pisanello, Italian, c. 1395–1455?, *Hunting hawk hooded and perched on a gloved left hand*, first half of 15th century, Pen and brown ink, brown wash and watercolor with white highlights, Musée du Louvre, Department of Graphic Arts, INV 2453, Photo: Christian Jean. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY



*The Blue Head*, 20th-century forgery in the style of the late 18th Dynasty, blue glass, Musée du Louvre, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, E 11658. Photo (c) 2008 Musée du Louvre/Georges Poncet.

## BARYE IN CONTEXT

An in-depth examination of French sculptor Antoine-Louis Barye's life-sized bronze *Lion and Serpent* further elucidates the exhibition themes, such as the significance of technical mastery and the creative process, and the impact of the artist's reputation. This presentation will include smaller models and studies based on Barye's masterpiece.

Barye was well known for his realistic depiction of animals, especially those engaged in life-and-death struggles. *Lion and Serpent* was commissioned by King Louis-Philippe for the Tuileries Gardens, and was on display there from 1836 to 1911.

With *Lion and Serpent*, Barye pushed the technical boundaries

of cast-bronze sculpture by using only one bronze pour into a single mold. He reproduced the work hundreds of times in other sizes, which were then sold as collectible objects and used as diplomatic gifts from the French government.

The curator for "The Louvre and the Masterpiece" at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is Matthew Welch, Assistant Director of Curatorial Affairs. A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with essays by managing curators Isabelle Leroy-Jay Lemaistre, Curator of Sculpture at the Musée du Louvre, and David Brenneman, Director of Collections and Exhibitions and Frances B. Bunzl Family Curator of European Art at the High Museum of Art. The hardcover, 224-page catalogue is available in the MIA's Museum Shop for \$35.

"The Louvre and the Masterpiece" is presented in association with *Louvre Atlanta*, a collaboration between the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and the Musée du Louvre, Paris. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

This exhibition is presented at the MIA by U.S. Bank. Lead sponsorship of the local presentation is provided by Fredrikson & Byron, P.A., 3M, the Friends of the Institute, the Curtis L. Carlson Family Foundation and Carlson Companies, and Delta Air Lines, with additional generous support provided by the Huss Foundation and the W. Duncan and Nivin MacMillan Foundation.



Antoine-Louis Barye, French, 1795–1875, *Lion and Serpent*, 1833–36, bronze  
Musée du Louvre, Department of Sculptures, LP 1184  
Photo: Rene-Gabriel Ojeda. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

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### ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the finest encyclopedic art collections in the country, houses more than 80,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history. Highlights of the permanent collection include European masterworks by Rembrandt, Poussin, and van Gogh; modern and contemporary painting and sculpture by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Stella, and Close; as well as internationally significant collections of prints and drawings, decorative arts, Modernist design, photographs, textiles, and Asian, African, and Native American art. General admission is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. Museum hours: Sunday, 11 A.M.–5 P.M.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Thursday, 10 A.M.–9 P.M.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit [www.artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org).

### ABOUT THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

The Musée du Louvre and its continual architectural transformation have dominated central Paris since the late 12th century. The history of this extraordinary structure and the museum that has occupied it since 1793 created universal appeal for more than eight million visitors in 2005. The Louvre's collection spans works of art up to 1848. With 35,000 works of art on display, eight curatorial departments—Near-Eastern, Egyptian, and Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities; Islamic Art; Sculptures; Decorative Arts; Paintings; and Prints and Drawings—are a necessity. Celebrated works in the collections include Leonardo da Vinci's "La Joconde," best known as the "Mona Lisa"; Egyptian antiquities such as the "Seated Scribe," the "Jewels of Rameses II," and the "Code of Hammurabi," and Greek antiquities such as the "Winged Victory of Samothrace" and the "Venus de Milo." For more information about the Musée du Louvre, please visit [www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr).