

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ISABELLA
STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

“Off the Wall: New Perspectives On Early Italian Art at the Gardner Museum”

Special Historic Installation Highlights Three of the Gardner Museum’s Early Italian Masterpieces, Provide New Contexts for Visitors By Art Scholars, Curators, Conservators and Contemporary Artists

October 6, 2004 – January 9, 2005 | On view in the first-floor special exhibition gallery

BOSTON, SEPTEMBER 27, 2004 – In the conception and creation of her museum, Isabella Stewart Gardner sought to create a cultural center where visitors could encounter an inspirational intermingling of the arts and personal connections with great artworks. Her vision led to the acquisition of a collection, remarkable in its own right but also in its unique installations, inspired by the aesthetic rather than artist, period or genre to challenge visitors to look beyond the artworks’ intrinsic value and to discover art on a more personal level. She also included few labels or historical clues. The result is a museum that continues to inspire visiting contemporary artists and visitors. Some crave additional historical context to the collection. For these visitors, the Gardner Museum is pleased to announce a special installation providing added context and explanation – from historical and contemporary perspectives – to three of its great masterpieces.



The Death and Assumption of the Virgin, Fra Angelico, ca. 1432

Art historians’ and scholars’ understanding of individual works of art continues to evolve as new technologies and research uncover new information about artworks and the contexts in which they were created. An art historian might use new evidence about society and culture to reconstruct an artwork’s context. During cleaning and restoration, a conservator may uncover surprising information about how a painting was made or used. Contemporary artists living and working at the Gardner Museum as part of their residencies invite us to view familiar works from unconventional perspectives, expanding the possibilities of personal response.

In the first permanent collection installation of its kind at the Gardner Museum, *Off the Wall: New Perspectives on Early Italian Art at the Gardner Museum* explores these divergent perspectives by bringing three of the Gardner’s most important Early Italian paintings together. The installation places the works alongside historic and contemporary commentary by art scholars, conservators and contemporary artists to provide visitors with new contexts about how the works were created and understood in their own time and how art historians and contemporary artists view them today.



Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple, Giotto, 1320

Giuliano da Rimini’s *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints* (usually on view in the Long Gallery), Giotto’s *Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple* (usually on view in the Gothic Room) and Fra Angelico’s *Death and Assumption of the Virgin* (usually on view in the Early Italian Room) illustrate different aspects of Italian painting from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance. Art at this time was almost exclusively set in the realm of the divine; however, it was also a time when artists began to invent new ways of representing the world around them. The Fra Angelico was among Mrs. Gardner’s favorite and most intimate artworks, like many of her prized paintings, tucked away in a prized corner next to a window where the sunlight would dance on the jewel-like blues and golds. This installation of the painting affords visitors with a rare opportunity to see this – and all three works – in all its glory, at eye level and with accompanying text.



Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints, Giuliano da Rimini, 1307

In 2002, Alan Chong, *Curator of the Collection*, and Gianfranco Pocobene, *Head Conservator* (both at the Gardner Museum) worked extensively on Giuliano da Rimini's *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints* (1307), discovering new information about how the painting was made and the most appropriate actions to conserve it. In 2004, Italian artist, Gardner Museum Artist-in-Residence (2003) and creator of *TV Dinner* (an elaborate pencil wall drawing installation on view earlier this year) Maurizio Cannavacciuolo was taken with Fra Angelico's *Death and Assumption of the Virgin*, delighting in the use of blue to almost trap the viewer in the narrative; he describes the work as "a piece of wood [that] is a tool to make you dream." Stefano Arienti, another Italian painter who lived and worked at the Gardner in 2004 commented, on the two goldfinches in Giuliano da Rimini's *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints*: "the two extraordinary tiny elements...meticulously and naturalistically portrayed [in] a micro-element of intense vitality, such a spontaneous gesture in a strictly structured composition." Arienti works with nature and painting. *Off the Wall* provides these and other commentaries on these three master paintings.

For visitors who love the Gardner Museum but crave additional context and a closer look... this is an installation not to be missed!

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMMING A pair of free daytime talks will help visitors more about this exhibition and its creation. Explore "Creativity and Responsibility in the Early Renaissance" on Wednesday, October 20th and learn more about "Conserving and Considering Images of Piety" on Wednesday, November 17th, both at 12:00 noon. Noontime Gallery Talks are free with museum admission and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Visit www.gardnermuseum.org for more information.

CURATORS *Off the Wall* is curated by Mario Pereira (visiting scholar and PhD candidate, Brown University, and former Gardner Museum *Curatorial Assistant* – one of the youngest co-curators to spearhead an exhibition at the Gardner Museum in recent years) and co-curated with Gardner Museum curators Peggy Burchenal (*Curator of Education*) and Alan Chong (*Curator of the Collection*).

Off the Wall also corresponds with the final few months of the Gardner Museum's Centennial neon installation – *Whistler's Warning (c.c.c.c.c.)* by conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth. The large-scale textual neon work quotes James McNeill Whistler in a critique of the art critic and curator and will remain on view *through December 2004 only!*

Off the Wall is included with regular Museum admission. The Gardner Museum – and the *Off the Wall* installation – will be open for **FREE** on Columbus Day, Monday, October 11th, in celebration of the Fenway Alliance's *Opening Our Doors Day*. Visit www.fenwayalliance.org for more information.

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Modeled after a 15th-century Venetian palazzo, turned inside-out and surrounding an interior courtyard garden, the century-old Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is Boston's only palace – and home to one of the most remarkable art collections in the world, featuring over 2,500 artworks, including master paintings by artists including Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli, Degas and Sargent, and personally arranged by Isabella Stewart Gardner. Contemporary and historic scholarly exhibitions, America's oldest museum music program, ongoing evening and daytime lectures, performances and events, visiting contemporary artists, and innovative school and community partnerships programs continue to enrich the permanent collection and provide ongoing inspiration for visitors old and new.

• 280 The Fenway Boston MA 02115 (617-566-1401) www.gardnermuseum.org • Green Line E train or #39 bus to Museum • Hours: Tue.-Sun., 11 am-5 pm • Tickets: \$10 adults; \$7 seniors; \$5 students; FREE children under 18 and all named "Isabella"

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EDITORS' NOTE: There is NO press or members opening for this exhibition. Please contact the museum at (617) 278-5107 for information and/or off-hour exhibition and curator access.