

## ***Sublime Beauty: Raphael's "Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn"* makes U.S. debut in Cincinnati, San Francisco**



**Image Credit:** Raphael (1483–1520), *Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn*, ca. 1505–06, oil on canvas transferred from panel, 26 5/8 x 20 15/16 in. (67.7 x 53.2 cm), Galleria Borghese, Rome. inv. 371 1

**CINCINNATI/SAN FRANCISCO (Aug. 7, 2015)** — The Cincinnati Art Museum and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco are pleased to announce *Sublime Beauty: Raphael's "Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn."* This focused exhibition features one of Raphael's most beguiling and enigmatic paintings. The masterpiece, presented in the United States for the first time, will come on loan from the Galleria Borghese in Rome, where it was first recorded in the collection in 1682.

***It will be on view in Cincinnati from Oct. 3, 2015 – Jan. 3, 2016 and in San Francisco, Jan. 19 – April 10, 2016.***

*Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn* (ca. 1505–1506) features an unidentified blond sitter who epitomizes the beauty of Raphael's female portraits during his Florentine period. The exhibition will explore the possible identity of this subject, as well as the painting's distinct iconography, including the unicorn she holds in her lap. Scholars believe that the painting was commissioned to celebrate a wedding, and the unicorn, a conventional symbol of chastity, may also offer clues to her familial lineage.

The exhibition also will highlight the stylistic relationships between this masterpiece and Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Leonardo's canonical work, painted in Florence in the early years of the 16th century, had a great impact on the younger Raphael, who also practiced in the city during this period. Raphael's sophisticated adaptation of Leonardo's innovations in portrait compositions may have influenced *Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn*, a painting that shares the *Mona Lisa*'s half-length format, sitter with hands folded in her lap, and setting before a distant landscape.

"The Cincinnati Art Museum is excited and honored to showcase this magnificent work in its U.S. debut. We are grateful to the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture for the partnership which brings this important and highly esteemed treasure to Cincinnati," said Cameron Kitchin, the Louis and Louise Dieterle Nippert Director of the Cincinnati Art Museum. "The painting is revelatory when encountered in person and we look forward to sharing it with our visitors."

"Raphael's *Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn* is a stunning masterpiece of the Italian High Renaissance. When it arrives in San Francisco for the first time, we will greet it with new scholarship as well as a celebration fitting for the blond beauty and her mysterious unicorn," says Dr. Esther Bell, curator in charge of European paintings at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. She is the organizing curator of the exhibition and the editor of the accompanying catalogue. Dr. Bell was previously a curator of European paintings, drawings, and sculpture at the Cincinnati Art Museum,

### **About the artist**

Painter, draftsman and architect Raphael (1483–1520) was one of the most famous artists working in Italy during the period from 1500 to 1520, often identified as the High Renaissance. His paintings are noteworthy for their great beauty and harmony, epitomizing the Renaissance virtues of balance and ideal

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form. His later production exhibits an interest in expressing movement and emotion through narratives. He is best known for religious subjects, portraits, and historical scenes.

## Catalogue

An accompanying catalogue will offer a foreword and material by Dr. Bell, along with essays by Dr. Linda Wolk-Simon, director and chief curator of University Museums at Fairfield University, and Dr. Mary Shay-Millea, an independent scholar of Italian Renaissance portraiture. The essays explore the stylistic relationship between this masterpiece and Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, the link to Petrarch's poetry and popular notions of beauty in Renaissance art. The catalogue examines attributions and the painting's distinct iconography.

## Exhibition Organization

*Sublime Beauty: Raphael's "Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn"* is organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the Cincinnati Art Museum in collaboration with the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture. This presentation at the Legion of Honor is made possible by a lead sponsorship from the Frances K. and Charles D. Field Foundation, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Field.

## About the Cincinnati Art Museum

The Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the generosity of individuals and businesses that give annually to ArtsWave. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as our members. For more information, visit [cincinnatiartmuseum.org](http://cincinnatiartmuseum.org).

General admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is always free. The museum is open Tuesday – Sunday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. and is closed Monday. [cincinnatiartmuseum.org](http://cincinnatiartmuseum.org)

## About the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, comprising the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park and the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park, is the largest public arts institution in San Francisco.

The Legion of Honor was inspired by the French pavilion at San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, which was a replica of the Palais de la Légion d'Honneur in Paris. The museum opened in 1924 in the Beaux Arts–style building designed by George Applegarth on a bluff overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. Its holdings span 4,000 years and include European painting, sculpture, and decorative arts; ancient art from the Mediterranean basin; and the largest collection of works on paper in the American West.

The de Young originated from the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition and became the Memorial Museum. Thirty years later, it was renamed in honor of Michael H. de Young, a longtime champion of the museum. The present copper-clad landmark building, designed by Herzog and de Meuron, opened in October 2005. It showcases the institution's significant collections of American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts from the 17th to the 21st centuries; art from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; costume and textile arts; and international modern and contemporary art.

[legionofhonor.famsf.org](http://legionofhonor.famsf.org)

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