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Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *St. Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, c. 1594-95. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.



Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Interior of a Picture Gallery with the Collection of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga*, 1749. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.

The Masters Make Way to Santa Barbara

Renowned Painting Collection at SBMA Represents Only Western States Venue February 11 – May 28, 2006

November 29, 2005 – Representing its first journey away from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, CT, a prestigious collection of European paintings spanning the 15th through the 18th centuries will make a temporary “home away from home” in Santa Barbara. The exhibition *Renaissance to Rococo: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art* will be on view at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) from February 11 through May 28, 2006.

Internationally renowned for its quality, rarity, and beauty, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art collection is in great demand by museums the world over. Historically, the Wadsworth Atheneum has loaned individual old master paintings to major exhibitions, but in 2004, the museum did what it has never done before, by sending 60 of its best paintings on the road.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art represents the final destination of a two-year tour. It is the only western states venue of this impressive group of works from Italy, Spain, France, Holland, and England, all of which have not been shown together for several years. The paintings represent glorious examples of portraiture, still life and landscapes, and glimpses of everyday life of long ago, allegories, and lessons in morals. Other paintings recount stories from Greek and Roman mythology, the Old and New Testaments, medieval legend and poetry, and the fabled lives of the saints.

The earliest painting is Piero di Cosimo's large yet delicately detailed *The Finding of Vulcan on the Island of Lemnos*, dating from 1490, a rare work by this Renaissance master.

The Baroque is represented by some of the most celebrated and well-known paintings and artists, including Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, dating from 1594-95. Caravaggio is one of the most important and revolutionary artists in the western canon. He reinvented religious painting, using ordinary people as models and light as an instrument of drama and emotion.

Also included are notable works by Dutch and Flemish artists of the era such as Michael Sweerts's dewy-eyed *Boy with a Hat*, from 1655-1660, and Frans Hals' *Portrait of Joseph Coymans*, from 1644, a fine example of the painter's virtuosity.

The exhibition culminates in a blaze of rococo splendor with Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's *The Building of the Trojan Horse*, from 1773-74, Canaletto's *The Square of Saint Mark's and the Piazzetta, Venice*, from 1731, Francisco Goya's *Gossiping Women*, from 1792-96, and Giovanni Paolo Panini's *Interior of a Picture Gallery with the Collection of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga*, from 1749. In the latter, the setting is an architectural fantasy, but the more than 100 paintings were real, and all were owned by the art collecting cardinal.

Renaissance to Rococo introduces people to the outstanding but little-known old master painting collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, one of the best in the U.S. Established in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum is America's oldest public art museum, preceding the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston by three decades. Initially known for its decorative arts objects that came primarily from the bequest of J. P. Morgan, the paintings were purchased individually beginning in 1928. This was made possible by the large legacy of the Sumner family, which came to the museum in 1927, as did the energetic director A. Everett "Chick" Austin, Jr. He launched the Atheneum on a path of creating one of the major collections of old master paintings in America, with a particular emphasis on the Baroque period. Austin's successor, Charles C. Cunningham added substantially to this legacy with various important acquisitions.

Renaissance to Rococo: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art has been organized by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut.

This exhibition in Santa Barbara has been made possible by the generous patronage of Lady Leslie Ridley-Tree.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net