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Matisse, Raphael Coming to a Museum Near You

Art Preview

By Peggy Sue Dunigan



There's no denying the popularity and masterworks of Henri Matisse and Raphael Santi. Although centuries apart, their names signify genius. A pair of exhibitions opening this month at two Midwestern museums affords an opportunity to study their eminent artistic styles.

The Art Institute of Chicago collaborated with New York's Museum of Modern Art to create a fascinating exploration of Matisse's art during a short, prolific period of his career. The exhibition "Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913-1917" (through June 20) presents nearly 120 artworks from this era when Matisse pushed his creative process into more extreme experimentation.

The exhibition includes drawings, paintings and works on paper combined with sculptures obtained from international collections. This includes Matisse's famous *Bathers By a River*, a painting that comes close to Cubism and perhaps reflects the artist's response to World War I.

A lecture titled "Henri Matisse and the Methods of Modern Construction" takes place at the Art Institute on April 8 at 6 p.m. Additional overviews are scheduled at noon on April 13 and May 18.

Four hundred years earlier, in 1516, Raphael painted *La Donna Velata (The Woman With the Veil)*. The High Renaissance painter's magnificent portrait is brought to the **Milwaukee Art Museum** (MAM) in a one-work exhibition titled "Raphael: The Woman With the Veil" (through June 6). Transported to MAM's Koss Gallery from the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, Italy, this temporary acquisition gives Milwaukeeans a rare chance to study Raphael's interpretation of idyllic beauty.

Modern culture may recognize Raphael for the tousled-hair putti staring up into the clouds of his wondrous, widely printed *The Sistine Madonna*. The robust and realistic features in these two cherubic faces translate to the woman in Raphael's later, even more stunning portrait.

The Woman With the Veil is thought to depict the same woman in Raphael's partially nude *La Fornarina*. It's a woman the painter obviously regarded with affection, as demonstrated in the tender placement and rendering of her hand.

The Woman With the Veil, an approximately 2-by-3-foot sensuous depiction of earthly loveliness, demonstrates Raphael's "improvisation on one note," or the multiple gradations of white that appear in the woman's gown and veiling. The embellishments to her bracelet, hair ornament and ribbon pin contain marvelous detail. Surrounded by an atmospheric chiaroscuro that Raphael learned from his contemporary, Leonardo da Vinci, the light and shadow in the portrait exemplify perfection in technique.

Raphael's talent allowed him to become one of the first art celebrities during his short life (he died at 37 years of age). Programming for the exhibition includes a closer look at Raphael's importance to High Renaissance culture with a gallery talk on April 6 and a lecture on April 11 titled "Amore: Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."

MAM will also host its annual "Art in Bloom: A Tribute to Art and Flowers." The grand opening takes place Thursday, April 8, at 5:30 p.m. with a preview of area florists who create their own masterpieces inspired by the MAM's collection. A marketplace and open studio offer a great way for people of all ages to celebrate spring. Some lectures and presentations require advanced reservations. "Art in Bloom" continues through Sunday, April 11.