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SATURDAY 07.11.09

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Raphael's La Donna Velata comes to PAM



Renaissance masterpiece, Raphael's Woman with a Veil is coming to Portland in October, in a one painting show. October is going to be one great month at PAM because that is also when the updated China Design Now opens for its only West Coast appearance.

It is a very direct reminder how strong art has a way of transcending both booming and busted economies, focusing us on excellence and contemplation instead of dollar signs. Frankly, I've always liked the way the Portland Art Museum has responded to challenges under Brian Ferriso, a strategy which can be summed up simply as, "High quality art justifies itself"... and bringing this Raphael is no exception. We also like the fact that museum members will not be charged extra to have a viewing and it is nice that the exhibition will have a certain amount of crowd control (limiting 25 viewers at a time) to allow for less congested

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COOLEY  
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 Sept 4 - Dec 5

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viewing (it isn't ideal but better than fighting hundreds for a sightline). In the past decade two other major old master paintings have visited Portland, The Holbein Madonna and Rembrandt's Self Portrait as the Apostle Paul.

Opening October 24, the show was organized by the Portland Art Museum and made possible by the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture and brings one of the most important paintings of the High Renaissance to Oregon for the first time. The oil on canvas painting will be on loan from the Medici collection of the Palatine Gallery, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy and is the result of more than a year of negotiations.

"This is truly a major highlight in the Museum's more than 115-year history," said Brian Ferriso, the Marilyn H. and Dr. Robert B. Pamplin, Jr. director. "It is a significant coup for our institution, city, and region, and an extraordinary opportunity for the public to see, experience, and learn from a painting that captures fully the ideals of the High Renaissance. Given its historical and cultural significance, this masterpiece has rarely left Italy. Unless you travel to Florence, you would not have the opportunity to view this masterwork."

A contemporary of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael was famed as a painter of portraits and altarpieces. He was commissioned to paint several rooms of the Vatican's Papal apartments. Raphael's work as a painter and architect was a major influence of the Renaissance and continues today.

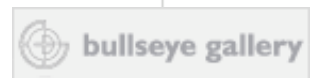
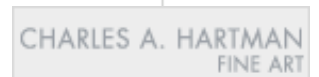
According to Ferriso, The Woman with the Veil's perfect harmony and balance beautifully capture the fundamental principles of the High Renaissance. Specifically, Raphael demonstrates his brilliance at sfumato, an Italian term for a painting technique often associated with Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, whereby lightly applied layers of color are used to capture light and articulate volume and form.

The Woman with a Veil (la velata or la donna velata) was painted in 1516 and depicts a serenely beautiful woman looking intently at the viewer. It is believed that the model for the painting is the same woman depicted in other Raphael works including La Fornarina. Scholars have suggested that the woman, depicted in both paintings, was Raphael's lover Margherita Luti.

Posted By [Jeff Jahn](#) On July 11, 2009 At 16:49 | [Comments \(5\)](#)

COMMENTS

In my opinion, this type of "exhibit" does a disservice to art, and paints Portland and its art audiences as provincial at best. Charging \$17 for a quickie, sideshow-esque look at a this Italian masterpiece – is that really in keeping with the mission of Portland Art Museum? According to statements in the Oregonian from Brian Ferriso, the exhibit strategy is simply a rouse to generate membership revenue. But how many of those folks who ante up for membership so they can see the painting will become long-term supporters / members at the museum? Since DK Row has treated us to a full explanation of this strategy, I hope he will do us the courtesy of reporting back on the success of this effort. At the end of the article Row mentions (almost as an aside) that the museum recently received a \$500,000 appropriation from the legislature. Now that is news! I would have preferred to see a whole story about that, and how the museum plans to leverage those funds. According to the article, they will spend it to "expose the museum's collections to the public." Let's hope that not one dime of that money was spent on the La Valeta boondoggle. And shame on DK Row for dedicating so many column inches to the debacle. With shrinking arts coverage and a growing scene, surely there is something happening that is more worthy of



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editorial space.

Posted by: [birdy1](#) at July 12, 2009 10:08 AM

B, your concern is a valid one, but everything costs money (something that PAM is even more acutely aware of with their recent staff reductions and upper level pay cuts). The real issue is what it takes to provide an exceptional museum experience... and a guest renaissance masterpiece certainly does enhance that experience.

Thus the angle I took with this news was to focus on experience over the dollar signs (newspapers are the opposite) and though I'm not a fan of special exhibition fees I feel what amounts to a \$5 charge on top of the \$12 admission is fair (for non members, members are free)... because it will thin the crowd down in a way that makes viewing the painting a pleasant experience. For comparison, fighting through the throng in the Holbein exhibit was tough the first month or 2. Im certain Ferriso didnt do it lightly and Im equally certain he looked for sponsors to completely underwrite the extra costs (a tough sell in this economy)... though a \$5 surcharge is small for these sorts of special exhibitions.

By keeping the exhibition free for members it ensures they feel they are getting the most for their support of the museum and the added fees will only encourage new memberships. Besides it isnt \$17 just for one painting, you get the rest of the museum for the day... at the same time \$17 insures that the museum wont be so overrun that it ruins everyone's experience. Museums provide a special opportunity for contemplation. At \$17 it will encourage people to get a membership which has become an even better buy with this news.

So no it isnt ideal, but the resulting arrangement is well worth it (much better than no exhibition). In these times I think it is especially important to take a close look at what is worth doing... and how much it will cost... if it is truly excellent we can make sacrifices and the surcharge is that sacrifice. It isnt made lightly but I believe it is fair to both the city, guests and museum members.

(disclosure. I am a museum member despite the fact I can get in free with press credentials)

Posted by: [Double J](#) at July 12, 2009 11:13 AM

Having worked in museums and other nonprofits my entire career, I am well aware of the costs associated with keeping the doors open - I don't quibble with the necessity of being creative when it comes to generating revenue and memberships. You just can't do it at the expense of substantive presentations. I guess what I find most disturbing is that this is being passed of as an "exhibition" - it's not. No scholarship, no context, just an "important" painting, for which the public is asked to spend an extra \$5 to shuffle through to see (it was not clear in the newspaper that the \$17 included general admission to the museum...so I overreacted a bit there...). I visited PAM today and was equally disappointed by the so-called tattoo exhibit....again, lacking in content and scholarship, squeezed into a corridor of the basement. Given the coverage and the hype surrounding this exhibit, I was expecting much more. There is a lot to mine, if one were to present a serious exhibition on the subject. Essentially, there is no "there" there. I am looking forward to a time when PAM can expend funds to present exhibitions that are thought-provoking and engaging. Exhibits that challenge audiences and don't pander to the lowest common denominator.

Posted by: [birdy1](#) at July 12, 2009 07:16 PM

I am pleased there is dialogue and critical thinking around this important presentation. As many of you may know, my core tenants as Director of the Portland Art Museum have been to present and interpret significant

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art, to make that art physically and intellectually accessible, and to be fiscally responsible. This exhibition fulfills all of these tenants. Unfortunately, the fee is a necessity and was contemplated deeply to insure that we are fiscally responsible. Also, to clarify, the "Marking Portland" exhibition, in addition to showing the submitted community images, was an opportunity for our curators to mine the collection to highlight works that depict body adornment, such as our 19th-century Japanese prints, Native American works, and modern and contemporary pieces, such as Robert Rauschenberg's important "Patrician Barnacle" from 1981, among others. There are kiosks and labels in the respective permanent collection galleries that elaborate on the history and context of the tattoo and the works in the collection as well as an interactive component that uses collection objects to serve as virtual tattoos on visitors. I will ask the staff to make sure visitors are aware of these aspects of the show.

Posted by: Brian Ferriso  at July 13, 2009 09:42 AM

Thank you Brian for weighing in; I appreciate you comments. I was not aware that "Marking Portland" was continued throughout the museum. Perhaps there is a way to make that more clear to visitors.

Posted by: birdy1  at July 13, 2009 09:55 AM

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