

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Metal of Honor: Gold from Simone Martini to Contemporary Art Shines at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

***Exhibition Juxtaposes Works by Renowned Renaissance Painter, Simone Martini,
with Celebrated Contemporary Artists –
Titus Kaphar, Stacy Lynn Waddell and Kehinde Wiley***



Simone Martini (c. 1284-1344, Italy), Virgin and Child with Saints, about 1320. Gold and tempera on panel, 131 x 274.3 cm (51 9/16 x 108 in.). Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

BOSTON, MA (October 6, 2022) – [Metal of Honor: Gold from Simone Martini to Contemporary Art](#), on view at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (ISGM) from October 13, 2022 – January 16, 2023, explores how painters across centuries have used gold to honor and commemorate their subjects. The exhibition features rare works by legendary Renaissance master, Simone Martini, juxtaposing his devotional paintings with portraits by contemporary artists – Titus Kaphar, Stacy Lynn Waddell and Kehinde Wiley. These three artists have adopted gold to elevate or memorialize Black men and women, reinventing the techniques and visual rhetoric of early Renaissance devotion

and transforming it into a contemporary honorific language. Additionally, fifteen paintings from [Titus Kaphar: The Jerome Project](#), featuring jewel-like portraits of incarcerated Black men that reveal the same gold ground techniques as his monumental canvases but on an intimate scale, will be on view in the Gardner's Fenway Gallery. The Museum also commissioned ISGM Artist-in-Residence, Stacy Lynn Waddell, to create a public work of art, [Home House](#), for its façade.

[Images for ISGM summer exhibitions can be found in this DropBox](#)

Painter to popes, princes and scions of Renaissance dynasties in his native Siena (Italy) and Avignon (France), Simone Martini (about 1284-1344) transformed Western painting and Christian imagery with his novel compositions and masterful manipulation of gold, unequalled in Europe and well ahead of his time. The Gardner Museum has two masterpieces by Martini in its collection – [Virgin and Child with Saints](#) (about 1325) and [Virgin and Child with Saints](#) (about 1320). Acquired in 1897 and 1899 respectively, these are the first works by the artist acquired in the United States and the largest holding of any museum outside Italy. In this exhibition, the Gardner's works will be displayed for the first time with other paintings by Martini, highlighting his groundbreaking approach to gold. Brought together with contemporary portraits by Kaphar, Waddell, and Wiley, the exhibition shines new light on gold as a metal of honor, a material of virtue, and a commodity of international finance, linking artistic practice and strategy past and present, and unpacking the connections between pioneering Renaissance devotional paintings and portraiture of our era.

“We are delighted to bring together this unprecedented gathering of Simone Martini's work with the more recent accomplishments of three important artists of our time,” shares Peggy Fogelman, *Norma Jean Calderwood* Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. “Together, these exquisite paintings, which shimmer with precious metal, inspire us to ask profound questions about who and what we honor, then and now.”

The Gardner Museum's exquisite devotional painting, [Virgin and Child with Saints](#) (Simone Martini, about 1325) will be joined by four other paintings by the artist on loan from museums across North America — the largest gathering of Martini's oeuvre ever assembled in the U.S. *The Virgin and Child* (about 1320 – 1325, The Nelson-Atkins

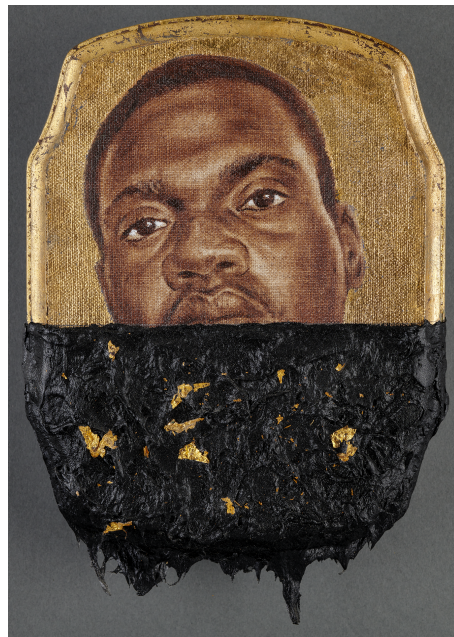
Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO) — the same size and subject as the Gardner Museum's painting and created around the same time — is another example of Martini's groundbreaking use of gold and the sacred symbolism it evokes. In *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (about 1320 -1325, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), Martini's goldwork techniques can be seen in St. Catherine's jeweled brooch and the pommel of her sword, calling attention to the means of the martyr's execution. The exhibition also considers the often overlooked axis of economic relations between Europe and Africa in the fourteenth century, a time when newly discovered sources of gold in the Empire of Mali revolutionized economies on the Italian peninsula. A film exploring the history and use of gold as an artistic medium in Martini's time and today will also be on view.

"This exhibition offers a unique opportunity, bringing together dazzling paintings by the legendary Renaissance artist Simone Martini with artistic legends of our time Titus Kaphar, Kehinde Wiley, and Stacy Lynn Waddell," states Nat Silver, curator of the *Metal of Honor* exhibition. "Masterworks past and present illuminate the allure of gold across centuries, exploring artists of unparalleled technical accomplishment who pushed the boundaries of painting to fashion new languages of honor and indices of virtue."

The Gardner's monumental five-panel [*Virgin and Child with Saints*](#) (about 1320), the largest and only intact example of a Martini altarpiece in an American collection, will be surrounded by eight contemporary portraits. These works by Titus Kaphar, Stacy Lynn Waddell and Kehinde Wiley incorporate innovative uses of gold to commemorate and celebrate their secular subjects. Kaphar, Waddell and Wiley each uniquely reinterpret the techniques and visual language of the Renaissance to elevate and memorialize Black men and women often excluded from the art historical canon. Collectively, their works raise questions of representation and the role of portraiture in the perception of value. Martini's altarpiece, originally created for a church in Orvieto (a small city north of Rome where the Catholic popes spent their summers), juxtaposed with these contemporary works, showcase the artists' creative manipulations of gold to produce captivating images of virtue and achievement, then and now.

Three examples from Kehinde Wiley's (b. 1977, US) *ICONIC* series of Black men depicted as canonized saints, like *The Archangel Gabriel* (2014, Private Collection) will be on display. Inspired by historical precedents, Wiley created these intimate portraits with

gold leaf and oil on wood panel in brilliant gilt frames. Three figurative works by Stacy Lynn Waddell (b. 1966, US) that probe the contradictions and misperceptions of American culture through the allegory of her own personal history are also on view. Using experimental and alchemical processes, Waddell examines beauty and transformation, manipulating gold leaf to play with light, texture and luminosity. Waddell's shimmering sheets of gold revealing figures beneath their surfaces include *The Dawn of Our Kindred Sower of Parable (for Octavia E. Butler) (2020)*. The exhibition also highlights two large-scale portraits by Titus Kaphar (b. 1976, US) – *My Loss (2020)* and *State Number Two (Dwayne Betts) (2019)* – later works from his [The Jerome Project](#) (which expands into the Museum's Fenway Gallery with examples from the original 2014-15 series). Depicting faces of previously-incarcerated men against a background of gold leaf, these works – measuring more than six feet tall – emphasize the physicality and visibility of Kaphar's portrait subjects.



Titus Kaphar, *Jerome I*, 2014. Oil, tar, and gold leaf on panel. 25.4 x 17.8 x 2.5 cm (10 x 7 x 1 in.).
Collection of Noel E. D. Kirnon.

Additional selections from [Titus Kaphar: The Jerome Project](#) are on view in a separate exhibition. When searching for information about his estranged father, the artist discovered prison records and mugshots of ninety-seven men sharing his father's first and last name. *The Jerome Project* in the Museum's Fenway Gallery marks the presence of fifteen of these Black men, and interrogates the absence of imprisoned

persons from the national narrative. Drawing inspiration from religious paintings of centuries past, individuals are depicted against a background of gold-leaf, with faces partially covered in tar, the height reflective of the length of time and impact of incarceration.

"It is an honor to bring this amazing body of work to Boston," says Pieranna Cavalchini, *Tom and Lisa Blumenthal* Curator of Contemporary Art at the ISGM. "There is so much beauty and truth in all these paintings and they challenge us to think about whose lived experiences we consider, whose we forget and whose we erase."

Outside the Museum, ISGM Artist-in-Residence, Stacy Lynn Waddell, has created a new work for the Museum's façade, [Home House](#) (2022). Complementing her portraits of African-American women important to her personal history on view in [Metal of Honor: Gold from Simone Martini to Contemporary Art](#), this work honors the artist's maternal grandmother, Anliza Massenburg Gill, through an archival photograph of her taken as a young woman in New York City. (Anliza and her husband Otis Gill would raise a family of seven that continued to thrive and grow across generations at their home house affectionately called On-The-Hill.) This image reinforces the story-telling power of portraits and the ways in which society *visually* articulates its values and social hierarchies through portraiture in subtle ways.

Public Programs

In conjunction with the ISGM's season of gold, the Museum will present a suite of [public programs](#) on a range of related topics – from artistic techniques (old and new), the history of gold mining and the relationship between incarceration and creativity. For more information on exhibitions and programs and more, please visit [gardner museum.org](#).

Gift at the Gardner

Gift at the Gardner (online and in the Museum's shop) will offer many books inspired by works in the exhibitions. A new publication published by the Gardner Museum, [Simone Martini in Orvieto](#) – the first English-language book on the artist in three decades – explores the history, politics and visual culture of Martini and Renaissance Italy. Edited by Nathaniel Silver, with essays by other leading scholars, including the Museum's chief paintings conservator, Gianfranco Pocobene, the book focuses on the works that the

artist produced for churches in Orvieto (Italy). The book highlights the astonishing novelty of Martini's paintings in terms of their construction, technique, and imagery, and discusses the results of new scientific analysis of the Gardner Museum's works. Other items inspired by works in the exhibitions will also be available – from Kehinde Wiley journals to special tiaras, a collaboration with Loschy Crowns.

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