

ISABELLA
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MUSEUM

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Fra Angelico: Heaven on Earth

On View: Feb. 22 to May 20, 2018



Fra Angelico (Italian, about 1400-1455), The Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin (detail), 1430-1434. Tempera on panel, 61.8 x 38.3 cm (24 5/16 x 15 1/16 in.) Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (P15w34)

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BOSTON, MA (February 2018) – The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum will be the sole venue for *Fra Angelico: Heaven on Earth*, opening Feb. 22 through May 20, 2018. The exhibition will explore renowned Renaissance painter Fra Angelico's talent for storytelling. For the first time ever, the four newly restored reliquaries – containers for holy relics that were painted for the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence between 1424 and 1434 - will be reunited at the Gardner. Together they picture the life of the Virgin Mary and offer the opportunity to explore his talent for sacred tales.

Fra Angelico (about 1400-1455) was celebrated in his own time as the most famous painter in Italy. With remarkable ingenuity and rare technical expertise, he reconceived popular compositions and infused familiar Christian stories with new meaning. His iconic altarpieces and frescoes – painted for two Popes, members of the Medici family of Florence, and the city's merchant elite – transformed Western art. They secured his place in history and forged the future of painting in Italy.

Born near Florence, Fra Angelico trained in the workshop of the highly accomplished painter Lorenzo Monaco, collaborating with him on small narrative panels and manuscripts. Angelico's admission to the Dominican Order, a religious group devoted to Saint Dominic, transformed his career. Success at their Florentine headquarters of Santa Maria Novella and the church of San Marco led to prestigious commissions outside of Florence including employment at the Vatican Palace in Rome under Pope Nicholas V. Anointed "angelic" by the Dominican Order after he died in 1455, the title gave Angelico stature akin to Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Heaven on Earth brings together choice examples of his narrative art, inviting visitors to experience the wonder of his breathtaking stories up close and in a new light. Two monumental altarpieces, an

intricate series of panels from his Silver Chest (*Armadio degli Argenti*), a precious triptych for private devotion, and nine predella scenes join the four reliquaries in a dramatic installation evocative of their Renaissance context. Many of these works are visiting the United States for the first time from their home collections in Italy.

Unprecedented loans for this exhibition include the three extraordinary reliquaries (Museo di San Marco, Florence) a magnificent altarpiece of *Paradise* (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence) and the jewel-like *Corsini Triptych* (Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Palazzo Corsini, Rome). Also restored for this exhibition is the altarpiece of *The Entombment of Christ* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), which will be on display to the public for the first time in over 40 years at the Gardner Museum.

In 1899, Isabella Stewart Gardner acquired one of the four reliquaries: the mesmerizing *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*. It was the first painting by Fra Angelico to come to America. The other three reliquaries – *The Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi*, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, and *The Madonna della Stella* – reside in Florence. Newly restored to their Renaissance splendor thanks to a special collaboration with the Museo di San Marco, the reliquaries reveal Angelico's mastery of materials and genius for narrative composition.

"Although separated for over 200 years, these four precious painted reliquaries showcase Fra Angelico's peerless creativity and unparalleled technical accomplishments," said Dr. Nathaniel Silver, the Gardner Museum's Associate Curator of the Collection. "The reliquaries, carefully selected altarpieces, furniture panels, and a triptych illuminate the relationship between form and function, revealing how the artist shaped each story for its intended purpose."

"We are thrilled to present the work of this extraordinary Renaissance artist and storyteller," said Peggy Fogelman, the Norma Jean Calderwood Director of the Museum. "Gardner was the first collector in the United States to acquire a Fra Angelico, when she had already begun plans for her boldly conceived museum. It is only fitting that these works be reunited here in Boston for the public to enjoy."

The accompanying exhibition catalogue is edited by Dr. Silver. Nine essays challenge the prevailing view of Angelico as the tradition-bound painter of pious Madonnas, reposition him on the cutting edge of Renaissance artistic developments, and reveal the Dominican networks crucial to his success. Extended catalogue entries offer fresh insights and provide up-to-date bibliography for each work. Contributing authors include William Hood (Institute of Fine Arts), Jeremy Howard (University of Buckingham), Anne Leader (Independent Scholar), Laura Llewellyn (J. Paul Getty Museum), Chiara Pidatella (Tufts University), Gianfranco Pocobene (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), Carl Brandon Strehlke (Philadelphia Museum of Art), Marilena Tamassia (Museo di San Marco), and Beth Williamson (University of Bristol).

Opening in parallel with this exhibition is *Isabella's Relics*, a presentation in the Vaticino gallery of the historic palace. Organized by consulting curator Casey Riley, it features little-known objects, archival material and ephemera collected by Isabella Stewart Gardner, revealing her own fascination with relics both sacred and secular.

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Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum • 25 Evans Way Boston MA 02215 • Hours: Open Daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursdays until 9 p.m. Closed Tuesdays. • Admission: Adults \$15; Seniors \$12; Students \$5; Free for members, children under 18, everyone on his/her birthday, and all named "Isabella" • \$2 off admission with a same-day Museum of Fine Arts, Boston ticket • For information 617 566 1401 • Box Office 617 278 5156 • www.gardnermuseum.org

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