

For Immediate Release

CLARK TO EXPLORE RICH AND DETAILED PAINTINGS BY NETHERLANDISH MASTER IN FALL EXHIBITION

Innovative Presentation Will Encourage Visitor Participation and Response

WILLIAMSTOWN, MA (September 2004) — Richly colored, highly detailed paintings by a mysterious 15th-century Netherlandish master are the focus of an exhibition opening at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, on October 9, 2004. *Medieval Mystery: Who is the Master of the Embroidered Foliage?* will bring together a group of related paintings believed to be by an artist known only as the Master of the Embroidered Foliage. With loans from museums in France, Belgium, and the United States, the exhibition marks the first time these works, which all depict a nearly identical image of the Madonna and Child against different settings, have been examined as a group. The exhibition has been organized by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in association with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, under the auspices of FRAME (French Regional and American Museum Exchange).

“This exhibition is a detective story about some great works of art, bringing to light new information about this artist—if it is one artist,” said Michael Conforti, director of the Clark Art Institute. “We know that our visitors will enjoy the beauty and richness of these paintings. At the same time we hope they will explore the scientific and technical analyses that help us understand how they were painted and who painted them, and be intrigued and enlightened by the questions the exhibition raises.”

The inspiration for the exhibition is the 15th-century oil on panel, *The Virgin and Child Enthroned*, from the Clark’s collection. The painting was part of a major gift from the estate of New York Governor Herbert Lehman and the Edith and Herbert Lehman Foundation in 1968. The gift, which included other early Netherlandish and Italian Renaissance paintings, is one of several important collections acquired by the Clark over the decades, building on the strength of

the original collection of founders Sterling and Francine Clark. The Clark's painting will be joined by *Virgin and Child in a Landscape* from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, *Triptych of the Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angel Musicians* from the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille, and *Virgin and Child Crowned by Two Angels* from the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, Belgium. Rare illuminated books from the Chapin Library of Rare Books and a medieval textile will also be on view.

The Master of the Embroidered Foliage is the name given to a painter active in the southern Netherlands from around 1495 to 1500. The late art historian Max Friedländer chose the name because of the artist's meticulous technique in painting foliage, with small, raised marks that resemble embroidery stitches. While the show will explore the possible identity of the Master of the Embroidered Foliage himself, it will also question whether all four paintings are indeed by the same artist.

The installation will include a "questions room" where various theories and problems will be presented along with scientific analysis and conservation information that reveals new information about the paintings. Visitors will be encouraged to closely examine the paintings and think about these questions for themselves. Throughout the show, curators, conservators, and art historians from the Clark and other institutions around the world, as well as visiting scholars participating in the Clark's renowned Research and Academic Program, will gather to view the exhibition and discuss its themes. In order to take advantage of what is learned throughout the exhibition, a catalogue will be published at end of the show's tour in 2005 in Lille.

"Part of the intrigue of this exhibition is that many of the answers won't come until the show is on view, so the public is integral to this process," said Richard Rand, senior curator at the Clark. "It is only by looking at these four paintings together, and by bringing other experts and scholars in, that we will begin to learn more. As the first venue, the Clark will function as a greenhouse for ideas that will grow into more fully formed theories as the exhibition continues."

The Clark painting depicts Mary, dressed in red robes, seated in front of a tapestry with the Christ child on her lap, leafing through the pages of a large book. On either side of the tapestry, a cityscape background includes finely executed details, such as a trio of angels, a man and a woman peering over a wall, and a sleeping dog. The central figures of all four paintings are virtually identical; however, the backgrounds, settings, and decorative details vary greatly from painting to painting. The possible meaning of each painting changes as the details change. Medieval audiences would have been familiar with the symbolic meanings, such as the practical

healing qualities of the flowers and plants in the paintings. To illuminate this for today's viewers, the exhibition will include a range of information about symbols and iconography.

Medieval Mystery: Who is the Master of the Embroidered Foliage? will be on view at the Clark October 9 through January 2. It will later travel to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (January 22–May 1, 2005) and to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille (May 13–July 24, 2005).

The exhibition is a project of FRAME, a consortium of 18 museums in the United States and France. The group was founded in 1999 in order to promote regional museums in both countries, museums with important collections that are located outside of Paris and New York. The participating institutions share resources and expertise, exchange works of art, and develop joint exhibitions. Participating American museums are: the Clark, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Portland Museum of Art, the Saint Louis Art Museum, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Yale University Art Gallery. French museums participating are the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse; Musée des Beaux Arts de Bordeaux; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon; Musée des Beaux-Art, Rennes; Musée Fabre, Montpellier; Musée de Grenoble; Musées de Strasbourg; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen; and Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

The Clark will also feature a related exhibition, *Albrecht Dürer: Life of the Virgin*, during the showing of *Medieval Mystery*. Drawing from the Clark's exceptional collection that includes a virtually complete representation of Dürer's prints, the exhibition will feature the great German artist's 1511 woodcut series, *Life of the Virgin*.

The Clark

The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is one of the country's foremost art museums and also a dynamic center for research and higher education in art history and criticism. The Clark's exceptional collections of Old Master, Impressionist, and 19th-century American art on display in the museum's intimate galleries are enhanced by its dramatic 140-acre setting in the Berkshires. The Clark is recognized for its special exhibitions, which concurrently advance critical thought and generate popular interest in the arts. Recent critically acclaimed exhibitions, organized by the Clark in collaboration with major European and American museums, include: "*Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!*": *The Bruyas Collection from the Musée Fabre, Montpellier* (Summer 2004), *Turner: The Late Seascapes* (Summer 2003), *Renoir and Algeria* (Winter 2003), and *Gustav Klimt Landscapes* (2002). Forthcoming exhibitions include *A Walk in the Country: Inness and the Berkshires* (Winter/Spring 2005) and *Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile* (Summer 2005).

The Institute is one of only a few art museums in the U.S. that is also a major research and academic center, with an international fellowship program and regular conferences, symposia, and colloquia, and an important art research library. The Clark, together with Williams College, jointly sponsors one of the nation's leading M.A. programs in art history and encompasses one of the most comprehensive art history libraries in the world. Its Fellows and conference programs draw university and museum professionals from around the world.

In 2003, the Clark unveiled designs for its forthcoming building expansion and campus enhancement, designed by Pritzker-prize winning architect, Tadao Ando.

The Clark Art Institute is located at 225 South Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Throughout *Medieval Mystery*, the Clark galleries will be open Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Adult admission is \$10 (free to children 18 and under, students, and members) through October 31, then free November through May. For more information, call 413-458-2303 or visit www.clarkart.edu.

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