

**Worcester Art Museum Will Reinstall Its Medieval Galleries
Drawing On Its Exceptional Collection of Arms & Armor**

***Reinstallation Includes Restoration of the Galleries, Interactive Components, and Open Storage;
Will Be the Second Major Presentation Incorporating the Higgins Collection***



Worcester, MA—September 28, 2016—The Worcester Art Museum announced today that it will open its newly reinstalled medieval art galleries on December 17, 2016. Drawing from the extensive Higgins Collection of arms and armor—one of the country’s best collections of this material—the galleries will feature approximately 200 works of art, new interactive elements, and open-storage access to a wide selection of objects. Highlight works include a rare suit of jousting armor, a wooden statue of St. George and the Dragon, and the newly restored tomb effigy of Lady Francesca de Lasta of Naples. The renovations will also include structural modifications, re-opening windows to let natural light back into the space, and improving visitors’ experience of the Museum’s 15th-century Spanish ceiling. The reinstallation is curated by Jeffrey Forgeng, the Museum’s Curator of Arms & Armor and Medieval Art, in

collaboration with Curator of Education Marcia Lagerwey. Support for the project was provided by The Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

According to Jon L. Seydl, director of curatorial affairs and curator of European art, the reinstallation of the Museum’s medieval galleries is the next phase in its integration and presentation of the Higgins Collection, which was acquired by the Museum in 2013. “This reinstallation builds on connecting arms and armor to a broader context of history, storytelling, and art that was begun with the *Knights!* exhibition (March 29, 2014 - November 6, 2016). Now, thanks to our renovated and rethought medieval galleries, we will be telling a more compelling story about these objects, connecting them to our outstanding holdings in medieval art,” he said. In addition, the Museum will begin introducing arms and armor into other galleries, continuing the process of integrating the Higgins collection, and tying it to a larger art historical perspective.

Known for its exceptional collection of European art, the Worcester Art Museum created its medieval galleries in 1953 to highlight the Spanish ceiling that had been acquired the year before. In the 1970s, the galleries were altered to close off the exterior windows and install a series of stained glass windows. A number of these works will remain as part of the renovation, while new ones will be introduced.

“With this reinstallation, we looked for ways to connect these objects from a remote world to the here-and-now,” said curator Jeffrey Forgeng. “Medieval people were different from us in some ways, but also very much like us—they were searching for meaning, order, and human connections in a world that

was in constant motion around them. And in response to visitor feedback about this collection, we have also created opportunities for people to connect physically with the objects and how they were made.”

Highlight works in the new galleries include:

- *Stechzeug* (suit of jousting armor), Nuremberg, c. 1500. This suit of armor could be rented by town residents for Nuremberg’s civic tournaments. Its heavy and highly restrictive design provided maximum protection for weekend warriors who wanted to take part in these knightly sports. Gouges from opponents’ lances can still be seen in the steel.
- Hunting Sword, Austria, c. 1490. This exquisite hunting sword was made by a bladesmith whose clients included the Austrian imperial household. Its spiraling animal-head crossbar is a tour-de-force of the metalworker’s art.
- Paneled Ceiling (*alfarje*), Spain, 1400s. This richly painted ceiling was probably made for a luxurious home, palace, or religious institution. Its coffered construction and geometric and foliate decoration reflect the intermingling of Islamic and Christian cultures in medieval Iberia.
- Relief from the Tomb of Lady Francesca de Lasta, Naples, 1377. This poignant effigy of Lady Francesca, commissioned by her husband Maffei Dopni, evokes the knight’s grief at the premature loss of his wife, noting that “she lived 31 years, 6 months, and 12 days.”
- Byzantine Bracelet, about 500. This hammered-gold bracelet, probably made in Syria, was one of a pair worn by a wealthy and stylish noblewoman at the height of the Byzantine Empire. It depicts an elaborately coiffed woman and bears the inscription *CHARIS*, Greek for “grace.”

The new galleries are designed to be accessible and experiential. The Museum focused particular attention on the needs of families, as well as visitors with disabilities, through features such as improved seating and touch-based interactives. The resulting design will provide an enhanced experience for visitors of all ages and abilities. Special features include:

- Hands-on stations allowing visitors to get a feel of the tools and techniques of medieval metalworking, stone carving, and enameling.
- An iPad exploring the Museum’s Spanish ceiling, which lets visitors get a closer look at its construction, as well as its decorative foliage and heraldry and the stories they tell about Spain in the age of Columbus.
- Open storage in the galleries, through which visitors can see a wide array of arms and armor—from helmets and gauntlets to swords and staff weapons. Visitors will also have a chance to touch and try on reproductions of medieval armor and swords, discovering for themselves the weight and feel of these objects.
- Handheld laminates for visitors who want to look more deeply into the imagery and meanings of the objects.
- Audio descriptions providing detailed narratives and descriptions to help bring medieval objects to life.

Image caption: *Composite Stechzeug* (armor for the “German Joust”), portions by Valentin Siebenburger (German, 1510-1564), about 1480-1540, steel, iron, brass and leather, The John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection, 2014-1164

About the Worcester Art Museum

Founded in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum's encyclopedic collection of 37,500 objects covers 51 centuries of art. Highlights include the Medieval Chapter House, Renaissance Court, and Worcester Hunt Mosaic, as well as the recently integrated John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection of arms and armor. The Museum is internationally known for its collection of European and American art. It was the first in America to acquire paintings by Monet and Gauguin and one of the first to collect photography. As the first U.S. museum to focus on collaborating with local schools, it has been at the forefront of engaging audiences and giving them a meaningful and personal experience.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Friday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and every third Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$14 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$12 for seniors 65+, and \$12 for college students with ID. Members and children under four are free. Parking is free. For more information, visit worcesterart.org.

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