

## Intimate Exhibition Presents Major Hogarth Paintings Following Conservation

### *Restoration Discoveries, Made Possible Through TEFAF Grant, Explored in WAM's Jeppson Idea Lab*

Worcester, MA – July 7, 2014 – In an intimate exhibition that explores their recent conservation, the Worcester Art Museum this month presents the first paintings by William Hogarth to enter an American museum collection. On view from July 19 through February 8, 2015, as the next iteration of WAM's Jeppson Idea Lab, *Portraits by William Hogarth* will display the techniques and findings from the year-long conservation process, made possible by a nearly \$35,000 grant from the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund.

Painted by Hogarth in 1744, *William James* and *Elizabeth James* were prominently displayed at the Museum for almost 100 years following their acquisition in 1910. Removed from view for a 2008 gallery renovation, the pendant portraits were long considered to be in good condition before WAM's conservators embarked on this extensive project. The Jeppson Idea Lab, a series that presents single or small selections of objects from WAM's permanent collection to engage viewers in the Museum's conservation, curatorial, and other scholarly work, will explore the conservation process and its findings in depth.

“The Jeppson Idea Lab provides our visitors with insight into the incredible work of curators, scholars, and conservators, without whom the great stories of art history would be lost to time,” said WAM Director Matthias Waschek. “With this remarkable presentation of companion portraits by William Hogarth, our visitors can experience the original palette and brushstrokes of one of the great masters of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and gain a deeper appreciation of the work through learning about the nuances of its conservation. As the first museum to bring Hogarth's works to the United States, we look forward to building on WAM's pioneering legacy by granting visitors unparalleled access to these gems of the Museum's British paintings collection.”

Born in London, England, William Hogarth (1697 – 1764) led a diverse career, working in a range of media to explore issues of modern morality. Initially trained as an ornamental engraver, Hogarth is best known for his satirical caricatures and for popularizing the art market by creating affordable prints for the middle and lower classes. Hogarth was also a skilled portrait painter, infusing the Rococo aesthetic of the time into the depiction of his sitters, as evident in *William James* (1744) and *Elizabeth James* (1744). Notably, Hogarth painted his acclaimed series *Marriage à-la-mode* (1743-1745), which cautions against marrying for money and status, during the same period that he painted WAM's pendant portraits of William James and his young wife.

To shed light on the conservation process, the Jeppson Idea Lab will present video interviews with WAM Conservators Rita Albertson and Philip Klausmeyer. The interviews, along with iPad interactives, demonstrate the cross section analysis used to examine the layered structure of the portraits, which revealed both the paint layers and surface coatings, and show their technical analysis of Hogarth's materials and methods using high-resolution microscopic imaging. The removal of the dirt and grime embedded in the portraits unveiled the sitters' personalities and the vibrant colors of Hogarth's palette, allowing viewers to experience the works as the artist intended. In their reclaimed state, the vibrant treatment of the James's come through—their fashionable clothing is even richer and more aptly reflects their economic status; William also appears notably older than his wife, and the bemused expression on his face becomes more distinct. In addition, the gilded frames also underwent extensive treatment by WAM Conservator Birgit Straehle in another important aspect of this collaborative project.

“TEFAF’s generous grant has been invaluable to reconnecting our audiences with some of the earliest works to enter the Museum’s collection. Still to this day, Hogarth paintings are rarely found among the holdings of American museums, which makes this undertaking even more critical,” said WAM’s Chief Conservator Rita Albertson. “Now that the true colors of the painting are revealed and the artist’s facility for handling paint more evident, visitors can more fully appreciate Hogarth’s original intention. For years, I thought the satin of Elizabeth’s dress was a soft yellow, when actually its original pearly white shade had simply been obscured by the degraded varnish. This exhibition offers a new way of looking at these long treasured works, and allows visitors to engage with the full scope of the conservation process.”

The TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund was created in 2012 to support the conservation of works of art in museums’ collections, and encourage them to share their findings with other museums and the public. The Worcester Art Museum was one of two grant recipients, along with the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford for the conservation of a pair of candelabra by Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

The next Idea Lab, scheduled to open in March 2015, will feature the stunning *Portrait of a Nobleman of 1619* by Anthony van Dyck (1599 – 1641). Recently restored at the Worcester Art Museum, and on loan from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, the exhibition will highlight alterations made to this portrait in response to changes in 17<sup>th</sup> century fashion.

#### **ABOUT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM:**

Founded in 1898, the Worcester Art Museum serves Worcester and the broader region. The Museum houses an encyclopedic collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings, and new media. WAM’s collection has historically been strongest in European Renaissance paintings, but with recent acquisitions and donations, like Veronese’s *Venus Disarming Cupid* and the integration of the collection from the Higgins Armory Museum, it continues to diversify and expand its curatorial and programmatic offerings. Symbolized by the opening of the Salisbury Street doors in 2012, the Museum continues toward its goal of accessibility for all visitors.

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