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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, TO UNVEIL REDESIGNED EUROPEAN GALLERY

**MFA's Grand Koch Gallery, Evoking a Great Hall, Features Old Master Paintings,
Spectacular Silver, and 17th-Century Italian Tapestries**



Design concept for the renovated Koch Gallery.

BOSTON, MA (September 6, 2012)—The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), will unveil on September 8 its newly renovated William I. Koch Gallery, one of the Museum's grandest spaces, evocative of a great hall in a European palace. Masterpieces from 16th- and 17th-century Italy, France, Spain, and Flanders hang on walls covered in red damask, complemented by a spectacular display of German silver and four tapestries from the Palazzo Barberini in Rome.

"The Koch Gallery is the most majestic architectural space in the MFA, and the new installation enhances this effort, with an astonishing display of European paintings and silver, virtually unparalleled in America," said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the MFA, who is overseeing the project and a team of Art of Europe curators and designers.

The iconic Koch Gallery features masterpieces drawn from the Museum's renowned European collection. Among the approximately 40 paintings on view are Nicolas Poussin's *Mars and Venus* (about 1630), Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez's *Don Baltasar Carlos and Dwarf* (1632), Peter Paul Rubens's *Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris* (about 1622–23), and Guercino's *Semiramis Receiving Word of the Revolt of Babylon* (1624). A major conservation effort was undertaken to treat Anthony van Dyck's *Isabella, Lady de la Warr* (about 1638), which was acquired by the MFA in 1930. It was recently rediscovered in storage, badly in need of attention and a new frame. Also featured in the gallery are select loans, including Frans Francken's *Allegory of Man's Choice between Virtue and Vice* (Private Collection, 1635).



Isabella, Lady de la Warr, about 1638,
Anthony van Dyck

The Koch Gallery has showcased Old Master paintings since 1996; previously, it was the MFA's Tapestry Gallery. Measuring approximately 33' wide x 95' long, the space was designed by the MFA's original architect, Guy Lowell, to connect the main building with the newly constructed Evans Wing, which opened in 1915. The nearly 40'-high travertine marble walls of the renovated gallery are adorned with 18'-high panels of rich red cotton damask made by Gainsborough Silk Weaving Company in an historic "Bologna" pattern fashionable in 18th-century English interiors. On this traditional backdrop for Old Master paintings, works are newly arranged and installed in sections along the gallery's expansive walls, divided by four 17th-century tapestries. On the east wall are paintings from Italy hung to the left of a display of German (Hanoverian) silver; while on the right are works from Venice and Spain (El Greco visited Titian's workshop during his sojourn in Venice, before he moved to Toledo). The west wall features paintings from Flanders, Spain, and France. Large doorways to the north and south of the gallery are accented with Corinthian columns, and floors are made of Tennessee pink marble.

A focal point of the gallery is the installation of royal Hanoverian silver from the MFA's holdings, the most extensive collection of its kind in an American museum. Dating from the late 17th to early 19th century, these works are assembled in a tiered pyramid measuring 18' high. Comprising 103 pieces (nearly twice the number previously on view in another gallery at the Museum), the arrangement evokes extravagant displays of silver on state occasions in European courts, from medieval times onward. (It took



Kettledrum, about 1830, Jacob Petersen

conservators approximately five months to polish and coat with lacquer the vast array of silver.) At the center is the monumental fountain and cistern owned by King George II, flanked by livery pots (large flagons), and surrounded by dozens of gold and silver plates, serving dishes, tureens, and candlesticks from dinner services created for the use of the kings in Hanover. Framing the display is a pair of rare silver Baroque trumpets used in royal court ceremonies, on loan to the MFA, along with a pair of kettle drums from the MFA's collection. A short musical passage featuring these Baroque trumpets is included in the MFA's multimedia guide (in the Koch Gallery section).

Four 17th-century tapestries, each measuring approximately 19' high x 4' wide, also are on view in the gallery. Two are hung on the east gallery wall, and two on the west wall, dividing the space into three sections for the display of paintings. These vertical border panels, known as pilasters, originally flanked narrative panels and are part of a larger series, *The Life of Pope Urban VII*, honoring the Pope [Maffeo Barberini (1568–1644) elected to the office in 1623]. The series was commissioned by his nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini. Created from 1663–79 at the Barberini tapestry workshop in Rome, they are the only examples of

Roman-made tapestries in the MFA's collection. The tapestries hung in the Barberini Palace in Rome until the end of the 19th century. They were given to the Museum in the 1950s and have not been on view in more than 20 years. After discovering during provenance research that these works were part of a Holocaust-era forced sale, the MFA initiated a settlement agreement with the heirs. Upon its successful resolution in 2010, the MFA acquired the tapestries. This provenance information is highlighted in the Art with a Past label that accompanies the tapestries.

The redesign of the Koch Gallery, which took place throughout the summer, included improvements to its acoustics, lighting, and visitor amenities. Sound-absorbing batting was placed under the damask wall coverings to reduce noise in the gallery, which also serves as an elegant space for special events hosted at the Museum. New lighting in the gallery, now illuminated solely by LED track lighting and chandeliers, improves viewing, eliminates glare, and enhances the rich color of the damask and chiaroscuro modeling of the paintings. Fixed stanchions lining the long walls feature easy-to-read labels identifying the works of art, and new burgundy upholstered seating is available so that visitors can linger in the magisterial hall.

To enhance the appreciation of the Koch Gallery, the MFA's website includes a dedicated page (**European Painting 1550-1700 and Hanoverian Silver** <http://www.mfa.org/koch-gallery>), which presents a time-lapse video of the renovation process; a listing and slideshow of select works; information about related gallery tours, activities, and publications; and an interactive map of MFA galleries. In addition, visitors can rent an MFA Guide highlighting several works on view, such as the stop for Velázquez's *Don Baltasar Carlos and Dwarf*, which explains the role of dwarfs in royal courts. The MFA Guide now includes video of curators, artists, and historians, as well as images and audio, to expand a visitor's knowledge of works of art in the Museum's collections. It is available at ticket desks and the Sharf Visitor Center for \$5, members; \$6, non-members; and \$4, youths.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND PRESS IMAGES

High-resolution images of select Koch Gallery works are downloadable in the Press Room image library, <http://www.mfa.org/news>. For more information about the MFA, visit www.mfa.org. Join the conversation about the MFA on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/mfaboston> and Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/mfaboston>, and watch MFA-related videos at <http://www.youtube.com/mfaboston>.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), is recognized for the quality and scope of its encyclopedic collection, which includes an estimated 450,000 objects. The Museum's collection is made up of: Art of the Americas; Art of Europe; Contemporary Art; Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa; Art of the Ancient World; Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Textile and Fashion Arts; and Musical Instruments. Open seven days a week, the MFA's hours are Saturday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 4:45 p.m.; and Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 9:45 p.m. Admission (which includes one repeat visit within 10 days) is \$25 for adults and \$23 for seniors and students age 18 and older, and includes entry to all galleries and special exhibitions. Admission is free for University Members and youths age 17 and younger on weekdays after 3 p.m., weekends, and Boston Public Schools holidays; otherwise \$10. Wednesday nights after 4 p.m. admission is by voluntary contribution (suggested donation \$25). MFA Members are always admitted for free. The Museum is closed on New Year's Day, Patriots' Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For more information, visit www.mfa.org or call 617.267.9300. The MFA is located on the Avenue of the Arts at 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.

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