

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Rare Michelangelo Drawings Come to Phoenix Art Museum in January 2016

Michelangelo: Sacred and Profane marks first time Renaissance master's works on view in Arizona

PHOENIX (December 21, 2015) – Phoenix Art Museum will be the site of the first exhibition in Arizona of artwork by Italian Renaissance master Michelangelo beginning January 17, through March 27. The exhibition, *Michelangelo: Sacred and Profane, Masterpiece Drawings from the Casa Buonarroti*, features 26 rare and delicate sketches and drawings, the majority of which are rarely permitted to be displayed outside of Italy. The exhibition will be on view in low light to protect the fragile works in the Museum's Harnett Gallery.

"Phoenix Art Museum is incredibly honored to bring this once-in-a-lifetime exhibition to Arizona, just one year after exhibiting Leonardo DaVinci's Codex Leicester," said Amada Cruz, the Museum's Sybil Harrington Director. "It is part of our ongoing commitment to our community that we continue to make great works of art accessible to everyone."

The exhibition provides a glimpse into the artistic process of Michelangelo, considered to be one of the most acclaimed artists in global history. It also provides insight into a side of the artist that he rarely allowed others to see; before his death in 1564, the artist burned nearly all of his sketches and drawings. These 26 drawings are part of a small number that have survived, many having been given as gifts by the artist to his personal friends and patrons. Scholars theorize that Michelangelo's decision to destroy many of his sketches may have been due to a perfectionist's desire to erase the evidence of his process, the drafts on the path to greatness. Many of the artworks in *Michelangelo: Sacred and Profane* introduce the viewer to Michelangelo in his maturity, coming after the grandeur of his Sistine Chapel paintings, as he sought to surpass his past greatness.

The drawings include a selection of architectural plans for churches and other grand edifices, the majority of which would never, and could never, be built, largely because they were too ambitious to be completed within his lifetime. Examples include sketches for the Medici church of San Lorenzo in Florence, which included plans for a marble grid that would host ten statues sculpted by Michelangelo's own hand. In 1520, two years after the designs were completed, work on the marble façade ceased, the design rejected due to a lack of interest. An affront to the artist's ego and dignity, the church still stands without the finished marble façade that the artist painstakingly designed over the course of two years.

The exhibition also includes a number of compelling figural sketches, many with a biblical theme, including the partially completed *Madonna and Child*, completed in 1524, and *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, circa 1535, which portrays the instant in which an angelic figure intercedes, instructing Abraham to spare his son's life. All of the works in the exhibition are extremely delicate, and the carefully preserved drawings will be displayed in lower light to protect their fragility. Their small size, in marked contrast to the expansiveness of Michelangelo's more famous works, create a more intimate experience for the viewer, and many of the drawings include notes from the artist's own hand, while others feature only partial figures, as if left off abruptly, mid-thought.

The exhibition becomes a study, not of the perfection of an icon, but of the imperfection of a man, revealing his process and his humanity.

Michelangelo: Sacred and Profane, Masterpiece Drawings from the Casa Buonarroti is on view in Phoenix Art Museum's Harnett Gallery beginning January 17 through March 27. The exhibition was organized by the Muscarelle Museum of Art at The College of William and Mary in Virginia, in partnership with the Fondazione Casa Buonarroti and Associazione

Culturale Metamorfofi. Its Phoenix premiere has been made possible through the generosity of The Dorrance Family Foundation and Men's Arts Council, as well as JP Morgan Chase & Co., J.W. Kieckhefer Foundation, Sharron and Delbert R. Lewis Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Kemper and Ethel Marley Foundation, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust Exhibition Endowment Fund, and the Virginia M. Ullman Foundation. Additional support was provided by APS, Cox Communications, BlueCross BlueShield of Arizona, and Friends of European Art. Promotional support has been provided by The Phoenician.

Please Note: No photography will be permitted in the exhibition due to the fragile nature of the works. High-resolution digital images are available on request for all press. For digital images, an exhibition checklist, and/or loaned usage of the exhibition catalog, contact Nikki DeLeon, Marketing and Communications, Phoenix Art Museum, at 480.734.3772 or nikki.deleon@phxart.org.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum's permanent collection of more than 18,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222

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