

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***DIVINE MIRRORS: THE MADONNA UNVEILED, OPENS AT
THE DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER IN WELLESLEY
Nine Centuries of the Virgin Mary in Art***

The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, presents *Divine Mirrors: the Madonna Unveiled* from March 9 through July 9, 2000. Through the unifying theme of the Madonna in art, *Divine Mirrors* explores the relationship between sacred imagery and secular identity. An unprecedented range of paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and photographs of the Virgin Mary from the 13th through 21st centuries have been brought together to examine the changing image of the feminine ideal in art. A contemporary interpretation of the Holy Family by celebrated Boston artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons has been especially commissioned by the museum for this innovative exhibition.

The lives of ordinary women and men, mirrored through the presentation of Mary in art, are revealed in more than seventy works spanning nine centuries. Images of the Virgin Mary become the springboard to consider the problematic role of religious art in a secular society, and the museum's role as a bridge for visitors of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds to engage with a shared artistic legacy. Works of art portraying the major episodes in the life of Mary are accompanied by text considering the evolving image of the Madonna as icon, symbol, and symptom of social and historical change.

Featured works include a rare *duecento* panel painting of *Christ Mounting the Cross*; *Holy Family* paintings by Pintoricchio, Giorgio Vasari, and Lavinia Fontana; illuminated Books of Hours; sculpture from Germany, Italy, and France; and a significant body of prints and drawings by artists ranging from Dürer and Mantegna to Tiepolo and Munch. Special acquisitions have been made to enrich the exhibition, including an 18th century Mexican ex-voto painting portraying Christ as a

dark-skinned native, a photograph by Lola Alvarez Bravo, a multiple by the Harlem artist Meg Henson Scales, and the first painting in an American collection by the major Spanish 16th century artist Gregorio Martínez.

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The exhibition begins with a look at the origins of Mary in religious art, primarily Christian, but informed by Jewish and Islamic parallels. A ‘chapel’ within the gallery explores how devotional art was originally meant to be seen, sited, and used to stimulate prayer. Around this flows the main body of the exhibition, arranged in sections devoted to the Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration, Holy Family, Passion (Crucifixion), Veneration (Sainthood), and Coronation. Each section considers the origins of sacred art in relation to the corresponding moments of secular life. The exhibition closes with a consideration of Mary's legacy in the secular art of the 19th and 20th centuries, and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons’s creation for the 21st century entitled *La Sagrada Familia*, an interpretation of her Afro-Cuban heritage and her American experience through traditional religious imagery.

Through a range of images we explore the original purposes and settings for which these artworks were made, how they were used and understood by their original viewers, and how we may use them today to try to understand past cultures. The Nativity is seen through the guise of medieval theories of human reproduction. Expectations of marriage, parenting, and family relations are discussed in the context of the Adoration of the Magi and scenes of the Holy Family. Images of Mary at the foot of the cross lead to a consideration of poverty, child welfare, and the emotional appeal of scenes of suffering. Focused by theme rather than by chronology or school, the exhibition demonstrates the ability of visual art to inform historical, social, geographic and cultural inquiries.

The imaginative exhibition design creates an atmosphere evocative of the original architectural settings for these artworks. Silk drapes outline a chapel nave and transept in the middle of the gallery, setting off a quiet space in which to experience these artworks with the hushed awe of a medieval or Renaissance citizen at prayer.

Divine Mirrors begins this spring as a special exhibition and moves to the DMCC's permanent collection galleries in the fall, where it will continue as a Gallery Investigation through December 2002. A major symposium will be held in November 2000 to celebrate this second project phase and the release of the accompanying publication, which features an essay by cultural historian Marina Warner, and catalogue entries by Art Department faculty, Davis Museum staff, and Wellesley College students.

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Special programming for this exhibition includes a talk on the *Evolution of Beauty* by New York Times Pulitzer Prize-winning science correspondent Natalie Angier, author of the acclaimed book *Woman: an Intimate Geography*. Ms. Angier speaks Wednesday, April 12th at 7:00 pm in the museum's Collins Cinema. The event is free and open to the public.

Educational programs include "Open Class" sessions, which bring the general public together with Wellesley College faculty and students from the departments of Medieval/Renaissance Studies and Spanish. On Wednesday, March 15, from 9:50 -11 am, Assistant Professor of History Margaret McGlynn discusses "The Renaissance and Reformation in Northern Europe." On Tuesday, April 4 from 8:30-9:40 am, there will be a discussion titled "The Making of Modern Latin American Culture" with Assistant Professor of Spanish Veronica Darer. Ms. Darer will discuss *marianismo*—the cultural emulation of Mary—in Latin American countries, and its implications for all women. The class will be presented in Spanish in the Contemporary Gallery in the Davis Museum on April 4, and in English at Tau Zeta Epsilon House on the Wellesley Campus on Wednesday, April 5, at 6:30 pm.

The Samuel H. Kress Foundation has awarded major funding to *Divine Mirrors* in recognition of its role in making the art of the past relevant to contemporary audiences.

Divine Mirrors: the Madonna Unveiled has been organized by Davis Museum assistant curator Melissa R. Katz. Additional funding from Phyllis Anina Nitze Moriarty (Class of 1969), Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Sandra Cohen and David Bakalar Fund for Art, Judith Blough Wentz (Class of 1957) Museum Programs Fund, and Wellesley College Friends of Art support the exhibition, programs, and accompanying publication. All works on view are drawn from the permanent collection of the Davis Museum, supplemented by loans from Wellesley College Library's Special Collections.

The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, located at 106 Central Street in Wellesley, Mass., is open Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11-5, Wednesday and Thursday from 11-8, and Sunday 1-5. Admission is free and free parking is available. Recorded information about Davis Museum exhibitions, events, and driving directions is available at 781-283-2051. The Collins Café is open to the public for lunch Monday through Friday; new menu daily. For more information about the Café, please call 781-283-3379.

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For further information, photographs, or to arrange a visit or interview, please contact Nina J. Berger at 781-283-2034.