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ART INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES \$2.75 MILLION GRANT

FROM ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

Award Will Aid Conservation and Scientific Research on Art Collection

The Art Institute of Chicago has announced the award of a **\$2.75 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. This generous gift will endow a new senior Art Institute position—that of Conservation Scientist within the museum’s Department of Conservation—and provide funds for use over a five-year period to purchase analytical instruments, establish and operate a scientific laboratory for analysis, and conduct research on the museum’s collection. The Art Institute made this announcement on the occasion of the **appointment of Francesca Casadio to the endowed position**.

James N. Wood, Art Institute Director and President, said, “We are deeply grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their far-sighted recognition of the importance of scientific research in the field of art conservation. Moreover, we thank them for making possible the addition of such a qualified scientist to our permanent staff. These are challenging financial times for all museums, and the foundation’s willingness to make this award with a minimal matching requirement has allowed us to proceed. In the years ahead we will be better prepared to both preserve our own priceless collections and contribute our scientific findings to the wider field of research.”

The addition of a conservation scientist to the Department of Conservation staff will greatly enhance the Art Institute’s ability to preserve and study its permanent collection, one that encompasses major works from many cultures, from ancient to contemporary periods, and includes some 250,000 works divided among 10 curatorial

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departments. Since the establishment of the Department of Conservation, in 1962, the Art Institute has developed facilities for the conservation of paintings, works on paper, textiles, photographs, three-dimensional objects, and books.

Currently, the Art Institute has a total of 20 conservators on staff, museum professionals who work in concert with curators in preserving the collection and conducting intensive study of the objects in their care. The results of their research are shared with a variety of audiences—through exhibitions, exhibition catalogues, scholarly catalogues of the permanent collection, articles in the museum’s semi-annual journal, presentations at professional meetings, publication in professional journals, public lectures, and tours of the galleries and conservation facilities.

Frank Zuccari, Executive Director of Conservation said, “By adding a conservation scientist to the staff, the Art Institute is creating a critical new component in this partnership, one that greatly enhances its conservation and research capabilities. We are most grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for supporting this important initiative.”

During the past 20 years, Art Institute conservators and curators have collaborated on a number of fascinating projects:

- The acclaimed *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* exhibition was able to introduce important new evidence that resulted from a four-year study combining technical and archival investigations into the artists’ working methods. For example, analysis of a group of pictures painted on a 20-meter length of coarse jute canvas purchased by the artists revealed important patterns of technical experimentation and helped establish a crucial chronology of their time together. The result was a much broader and clearer picture of how their dialogue unfolded, and the specific ways in which they influenced each other’s art.

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- An intensive 1982–84 study of the materials and techniques used in the painting of George Seurat's *Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* provided for the first time an analysis of changes in specific colors that had occurred soon after the work's completion—changes altering the artist's original intent. The upcoming exhibition *Seurat and the Making of "La Grande Jatte"* (opening June 16, 2004) will afford renewed opportunity to study the artist's working methods using x-ray and IR reflectography images with the assistance of computer technology to facilitate the search for the artist's changes.
- The Department of European Paintings is currently working with the Conservation department on research for a scholarly catalogue of the museum's collection of Netherlandish, French, German, and Spanish paintings before 1600. The supervising curator and conservator are collaborating with a staff microscopist to analyze painting samples, also using an infrared imaging system.
- In 1996–97, the European Painting and Conservation departments worked closely on a detailed study of an 18th-century French painting, the authorship of which was in question. The study yielded convincing evidence that attributed the work to the great Jean Antoine Watteau.
- During a long-term study of Old Master Italian drawings in the Art Institute's collection, a Prints and Drawings Conservator developed an innovative method to reverse the disfiguring effects of lead white oxidation. This approach proved so successful that hundreds of drawings have been treated in this manner, many of which were reproduced in the 1997 catalogue *Italian Drawings before 1600 in The Art Institute of Chicago*.

In addition to the daily activities of collections care and management, the treatment of works of art is a critical aspect of the Art Institute's larger conservation program. Curators and conservators work together to design treatments that will prolong the life of a work, as well as preserve and—if necessary—restore aesthetic appearance. This undertaking is significantly deepened and enhanced by a scientific component in the museum's conservation unit.

Conservation Scientist Appointment

The Museum has also announced the appointment of Francesca Casadio to the newly created and endowed position of Conservation Scientist. Ms. Casadio—who assumed her position July 21, 2003—will fill a critical role for The Art Institute of Chicago in establishing and directing a conservation science program. Her primary activities will focus on conducting analyses of works of art, studying their structural and chemical nature with state-of-the-art analytical instruments to investigate and characterize their constituent materials, both organic and inorganic. Research tools—including Fourier Transform infrared (FTIR) and Raman spectroscopies, Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) with Energy dispersive x-Ray analysis (EDX), x-ray diffraction, and x-ray fluorescence—will be employed in examining a wide range of materials used in the making of works of art. Scientific methods will also be applied to investigate deterioration of works in the collection and to devise conservation solutions.

Scientific research will target the various media represented in the Art Institute's collection: pigments, paint binding media, varnishes, adhesives, textiles, paper, wood, photographic materials, stone, metal, ceramics, glass, and plastics, among other materials. Following a fully integrated approach, information developed from this analytical work, combined with the empirical knowledge of materials and their history already possessed by the Art Institute's Conservation department, will be of value in

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gaining a deeper understanding of these artworks and developing strategies to preserve them. Moreover, the newly established scientific laboratory will allow the Art Institute to join the international network of conservation scientists at other institutions, thus developing partnerships, helping dissemination of results, and maximizing both research productivity and quality.

Francesca Casadio received her Ph.D. (2001) and M.S. degrees in Chemistry from the University of Milan, Italy, and her Bachelor's degree in Arts and Humanities from the Liceo Classico M. D'Azeglio, Italy, in 1992. Her doctoral dissertation was on the investigation of protective treatments applied to stone materials of historic and/or artistic value, focusing on scientific examination of the impregnating behavior and performances of synthetic polymers used in conserving particular art and historical objects made of stone.

Ms. Casadio has published on numerous topics in the conservation science field, dealing with both movable and immovable cultural heritage, including: the use of micro-FTIR and micro-Raman spectroscopy for the characterization of pigments and cross sections; the penetration of protective polymer coatings into stone; analytical study of detaching methodologies for fresco paintings; the investigation of films and patinas on the Istria stone; and the analysis of polychrome decorations on the main entrance portal of the Basilica of St. Ambrogio, one of the oldest churches in Milan. Most recently, Ms. Casadio conducted analytical research for a major conservation project—preservation of the façade of the Duomo, the spectacular famed Gothic church in Milan. Ms. Casadio's work included assessment of the decay and restoration products that are present on the surface, an evaluation of the cleaning tests, and the development of systems for consolidation and surface protection.

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