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Two New Acquisitions Continue Building Minneapolis Institute of Art's Strength in Italian Art

The museum has acquired two important works of Italian art with sculpture from the Middle Ages and a Baroque painting by Luca Giordano

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Attributed to the workshop of Anselmo de Campione (Italian), *Lion with Serpent*, one pair of monumental lions with columns and capitals, c. 1210-1220, Red Verona marble (lion and capital); white marble (column). The John R. Van Derlip Trust Fund and gift of funds from Lucy C. Mitchell, 2021.113.2a-c. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art.

MINNEAPOLIS—February 22, 2022— The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) has acquired two important works of Italian art from two distinct, illustrious periods. Luca Giordano's *Christ Among the Doctors* (c. 1685) is a round fresco on a wicker support, executed by the painter when he was in Florence completing his celebrated ceiling fresco in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi. Giordano painted the tondo for his Florentine host, Andrea Del Rosso, and it remained in private collections in Florence for nearly three centuries. The second acquisition is a pair of monumental lions that support columns with capitals: *Lion with Calf* and *Lion with Serpent* (c. 1210–20) are carved from red Verona marble, with white marble used for the columns. Attributed to the workshop of Anselmo da Campione—and similar to a pair of lions on view at the Cloisters in New York City— they were incorporated into the façade of the chateau of Martinvast, in Normandy, in the late 19th century, where they remained until a 2019 sale of objects from the estate.

"These two acquisitions are a study in contrasts, separated by centuries, by size, and even by the intentions behind their creation," said Katie Lubner, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of

Mia

Mia. “A pair of thirteenth-century carved lions are a rarity, and these two are particularly special, showing the lions actively engaged. While we assume these large pieces, with their columns, were intended to be part of the architecture of a larger structure, the fresco by Luca Giordano is designed to be light and easily transportable. Following on the acquisition last year of four Baroque paintings commissioned by the Barberini family, these new objects continue building our exceptional holdings in Italian art.”

Christ Among the Doctors

Luca Giordano (1634–1705) was one of the most prolific, innovative, and successful painters to emerge in Naples in the 17th century. *Christ Among the Doctors* is one of four frescoes Giordano painted on wicker supports, a new type of mural intended to make the works readily movable. Painted in the popular Florentine format of the tondo, or circular painting, Giordano's work features characters with dramatic poses and lively expressions, their attention focused on the well-lit figure of Christ, surrounded by a glittering halo. Known for his fast and fluent manner—his nickname was “fa presto,” or “make it quick”—Giordano created the piece in two days, using confident and energetic brushwork.



Luca Giordano, (Italian, 1634-1705), *Christ Among the Doctors*, c. 1685, fresco on lime on a wicker support. The John R. Van Derlip Trust Fund and gift of funds from Leni and David Moore, 2021.98. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Giordano apprenticed with Jusepe de Ribera, the well-known Spanish painter who spent many years living and working in Naples. Later, after studying in Rome and Venice, Giordano returned to Naples and established himself as a strong painter in the Baroque style. He went on to become the city's leading painter in the second-half of the 17th century, executing countless monumental altarpieces and murals for the churches of S. Brigida, S. Gregorio Armeno, S. Agostino, the Certosa di S. Martino, the Gerolomini, the Gesu Nuovo, and S. Paolo Maggiore, along with commissions from the Viceroy of Naples and other major private collectors. He was also noted for his ability to mimic the style of other artists, making fakes that would fool connoisseurs—even of artists whose work was quite different from his own, such as the German Renaissance painter and printmaker Albrecht Dürer.

“Most of Giordano's frescos are in situ on church walls and palace ceilings, so the appearance of this portable fresco on the market—a type of painting invented in Florence in the seventeenth century—provided a rare opportunity for Mia to add a fresco by the artist to the museum's collection,” said Rachel McGarry, Elizabeth MacMillan Chair of European Art and Curator of European Painting and Works on

Paper at Mia. "As the first Italian fresco to enter the museum's collection, this acquisition strengthens our ability to tell the story of Italian painting while also significantly enhancing the museum's holdings of Baroque art."

Lion with Calf and Lion with Serpent

Unlike many other statues of lions that depict them in a watchful repose, the two red Verona marble lions are animated and engaged. Moon-faced, and with large, almond-shaped eyes and mouths open showing canines, each lion sports a luxuriant mane of wavy locks ending in tight curls that cascade down the back. One lion has subdued its prey, holding the lifeless body of a young calf between its paws, while the second is engaged in mortal combat with a serpent whose teeth are sunk deep into the tender flesh of the lion's neck. The lions, in combination with the columns and capitals rising from their backs, stand 10 feet tall and are among the elaborate figural and architectural features created during a boom in ecclesiastical building that began in the 11th century. Stylistically related to other lions known to have been carved in the workshop of Anselmo da Campione—a native of Lombardy who, with his sons, worked on the cathedrals of Modena and Parma—they are believed to be part of a group of four, two of which are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and on display at the Cloisters.

By 1893, this pair of lions were incorporated into the portico on the southern façade of the chateau of Martinvast in Normandy, which was purchased in 1867 by Arthur de Schickler (1828–1919). After the house was badly damaged during World War II, the lions with their columns and capitals were moved to the garden. In 2019, they were sold at auction in Paris by de Schickler's descendants, along with other contents of the house.

"These animated lions will greatly enliven our presentation of medieval sculpture and paintings, welcoming visitors to the third-floor galleries while also providing a unique opportunity to encounter elaborate architectural features up close," said Ghenete Zelleke, James Ford Bell Curator of Decorative Arts & Sculpture at Mia. "With their scale and endearingly expressive features, we hope they become a beloved part of Mia's collection for visitors of all ages."

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Thursday-Sunday

10am–5pm

Monday-Wednesday

Closed

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