

17th century Baroque masterwork painting acquired by Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center



Jacopo Vignali (Italian 1592-1664), *The Finding of Moses*. Signed and dated 1625. Oil on canvas, 72 ½ x 82 ¾ inches

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POUGHKEEPSIE, NY.- The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College’s art museum, recently made a major acquisition: *The Finding of Moses*, a Florentine Baroque oil painting by Jacopo Vignali.

“This work of art stands as a perfect example of the gravitas and decorum of the finest art in Florence,” said James Mundy, the Anne Hendricks Bass Director of the Art Center. He also noted some key aspects of the painting. “The grace of the presentation, the fluid concatenation of gestures, the bravura painting performances in the rich, pearl-encrusted

gown of Pharaoh’s daughter and the submerged legs of the attendant, all speak to the mastery of the artist at the peak of his powers,” Mundy explained.

Vignali (1592-1664) was among a group of key artists, including Jacopo da Empoli, Giovanni Bilverti, Agostino Ciampelli, Cigoli, Lorenzo Lippi, Gregorio Pagani, and Il Passignano, who provided church and palace decorations to the Medici and other Tuscan noble families. *The Finding of Moses* is considered among his most important works. “Vignali is one of the unrecognized great masters of 17th century Florentine painting,” said Miles Chappell, professor emeritus at the College of William and Mary, and the foremost U.S. scholar on Florentine Baroque art.

The addition of this work to the museum’s collection is significant for a few reasons. The Art Center was already in possession of one of only two known oil sketches for the painting. The work’s provenance, exhibition and publication history have been clearly detailed; the painting was with the Pucci family of Florence from its commission in 1625 until the 1960s and then it went to a private collection until last fall, thus assuring its authenticity. Also, the Art Center was among the first generation of museums in the United States to take an interest in Baroque art in the 1930s, and this acquisition serves to deepen that commitment. *The Finding of Moses* will be on view through August. Yvonne Elet, assistant professor of art history at Vassar, sees many applications for using this work in the college’s curriculum. “This painting was commissioned to decorate a noble villa and offers interesting opportunities for teaching in art history at every level of coursework, engaging issues from formal and iconographical study to social and cultural history,” said Elet. “Beyond art history coursework, I think the painting will be interesting to students of Italian culture, the history of religion, women’s studies, and costume.”

Elet continued, “Of course, the presence in our collection of both a preparatory oil sketch for the work and the finished painting is a tremendous teaching opportunity. There are significant differences in composition, the number and arrangement of figures, their pose, costumes, and the disposition of colors; these differences will allow for rich comparisons.”

Mitchell Merling, the Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and a Vassar alumnus (class of 1983), also expressed his enthusiasm for his alma mater’s acquisition of this work. “There is no doubt that this is a major painting, with its life size full-length figures set skillfully in a pastoral landscape. It is sure to be a major focal point in the gallery,” said Merling. “The painting, in Baroque terms, brings us both joy and gladness, and causes us to marvel, both at the great deeds of the past and at the painter’s skill at rendering them.”