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Passion for Art and Science Merge in "The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici" on View at the National Gallery of Art March 3 - May 27, 2002

Washington, DC -- The Medici family's passion for the arts and fascination with the natural sciences, from the 15th century to the end of the dynasty in the 18th century, is beautifully illustrated in *The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici*, at the National Gallery of Art's East Building, March 3 through May 27, 2002. Sixty-eight exquisite examples of botanical art, many never before shown in the United States, include paintings, works on vellum and paper, *pietre dure* (mosaics of semiprecious stones), manuscripts, printed books, and sumptuous textiles. The exhibition focuses on the work of three remarkable artists in Florence who dedicated themselves to depicting nature--Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1626), Giovanna Garzoni (1600-1670), and Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648-1729).

"The masterly technique of these remarkable artists, combined with freshness and originality of style, has had a lasting influence on the art of naturalistic painting," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are indebted to the institutions and collectors, most based in Italy, who generously lent works of art to the exhibition."

The Exhibition

Early Nature Studies: The exhibition begins with an introductory section on nature studies from the late 1400s and early 1500s. Plants abound in mid-15th-century art, but portrayals were generally idealized and often conveyed allegorical or symbolic

meanings. Domenico Veneziano's (c. 1410-1461) *Madonna and Child*, c. 1445, depicts a rosebush with red and white blossoms symbolizing the Christ Child's future sacrifice and Mary's purity. Other works show the continued development of botanical illustration in the later 15th century, including Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) pen-and-ink drawing, *Studies of Flowers*, c. 1483, and Perugino's (c. 1450-1523) *The Crucifixion with the Virgin, Saint John, Saint Jerome, and Saint Mary Magdalene*, c. 1482-1484.

Jacopo Ligozzi: The second grand duke of Tuscany, Francesco I (1541-1587), invited Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1626) to join his court. Seventeen of Ligozzi's works are displayed, the largest number ever seen outside of Italy. Among them are the first known drawing of a pineapple from South America, the *American Century Plant* newly brought from Mexico, and *Mourning Iris and Spanish Iris*. Also included is a masterpiece of botanical and zoological art, Ligozzi's *Fig Branch with Exotic Finches*, which shows a common fig branch on which are perched three exotic birds.

Giusto Utens Lunettes: Flemish artist Giusto Utens (mid-16th century -1609) was commissioned by Cosimo di Medici's son, the third grand duke Ferdinando I (1549-1649), to depict the Medici villas in a series of fourteen large lunettes. This unique collection of paintings, created between 1598 and 1599, provides a good sense of what the villas and their surrounding gardens must have looked like during the 16th century. Three lunettes, *The Belvedere with Palazzo Pitti*, *Villa L'Ambrogiana*, and *Villa Poggio*, can be seen in the exhibition.

Daniel Froeschl: Ferdinando I had a passion for gardens and sent botanists on expeditions throughout Europe. He commissioned artists to illustrate the plants in his care, which he collected in large florilegia. The exhibition includes one such commission, that of the German artist Daniel Froeschl (1563-1613), who painted *Sunflower*, a plant that was introduced to Tuscany from Peru in the 16th century. Froeschl renders the sunflower twice, first in a conventional front view and then, perhaps for the first time in botanical illustration, from the back.

Pietre Dure: In the early years of the 17th century, Florence became famous for semiprecious mosaic inlays, or *pietre dure*. A selection of these colorful mosaics is

presented in the exhibition, including *Sunflower* (1664) by Gerolamo della Valle (17th century) and a small panel by an unknown artist, *Parrot in a Pear Tree* (17th century). These mosaic panels were used to decorate the fronts of elaborate cabinets, and larger panels became tabletops. Examples of both are represented in the exhibition.

Flowers of Silk: The art of embroidery blossomed in 15th-century Florence and continued to flourish for several centuries. Botanical themes were uniquely suited to the decoration of rich fabrics used for ceremonial occasions. Several 17th-century examples of botanical embroidery can be seen in the exhibition, including a *Chalice Veil*, a *Baptismal Cover*, and a *Chasuble for the Feast of Santa Reparata*.

Giovanna Garzoni: Under the rule of Ferdinando II (1610-1670), still-life painting grew very popular. Giovanna Garzoni (1600-1670)—one of the most important female artists in the history of Italian art—gained great fame for her naturalistic paintings. Sixteen of Garzoni's works can be seen in the exhibition including two of her many still lifes depicting extravagant bouquets of cultivated flowers, both titled *Glass Vase with Flowers*. Also on view are several still lifes of fruits and vegetables, such as *Chinese Plate with Cherries and Bean Pods*, c. 1620, a favorite subject of Garzoni. *Three Lemons with a Bumblebee*, which portrays two lemon branches bearing fruit and an animated bumblebee hovering above, is another delightful example of Garzoni's work. Several of the Garzoni paintings have never before been exhibited in public.

Bartolomeo Bimbi: Cosimo III (1642-1723), the sixth grand duke, continuing the Medici tradition of patronage for the arts and sciences, lent considerable support to the painter Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648-1729). Bimbi specialized in "portraits from nature," often large-scale scenes of monstrous and odd specimens of fruits and vegetables that grew in the gardens of the Medici villas. The exhibition includes Bimbi's *Citrus Fruits*, which depicts 34 varieties of citrus, and *Pears*, 1699, which shows 115 different types of pears. Both are examples of "inventories" painted for Cosimo III. Among the horticultural "monstrosities" painted by Bimbi are a *Monstrous Cauliflower and Horseradish*, 1706, and a life-size *Sunflower*, 1721.

Curators, Catalogue and Related Activities

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi of the University of Pisa, Italy, and Gretchen A. Hirschauer, assistant curator of Italian paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, co-curated the exhibition. An illustrated catalogue is available for \$40.00 (softcover) and \$65.00 (hardcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Web site at www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm. (<http://www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm>) To order by phone, call (800) 697-9350.

A range of educational programs will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition, including Sunday lectures on March 3 from 2:00 - 3:30 p.m., given by Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi and Tony Willis, librarian, Oak Spring Garden Library, Virginia; and on May 26 from 2:00 - 3:00 p.m., by Gretchen Hirschauer. Both lectures will be held in the East Building auditorium. Further information and a complete schedule of gallery talks, lectures, films, and programs for families are available on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm. (<http://www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm>)

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>).

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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