

PRESS RELEASE

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SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS SAMUEL MORSE'S MONUMENTAL PAINTING OF LOUVRE MASTERPIECES

Samuel F. B. Morse's *Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention*
September 16, 2015-January 10, 2016



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SEATTLE, WA - Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872) is known for his invention of the electromagnetic telegraph and Morse code, but he began his career as a painter, and art making played a part in his technological achievements. His monumental six-by-nine-foot masterwork, *Gallery of the Louvre*, occupies an important place at the dawn of the information age that Morse ushered in with his telegraph. The landmark painting will be on view at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) September 16, 2015 through January 10, 2016 as part of the exhibition *Samuel F. B. Morse's Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention*, organized by the Terra Foundation for American Art, which owns the historic painting and is circulating it nationwide.

"*Gallery of the Louvre* affords us a rare opportunity to view an important painting that has long been viewed as a pivot point between Morse's artistic and scientific careers," says Kimerly Rorschach, SAM's Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. "We are thrilled that the Terra Foundation for American Art has organized this United States tour so we can share this masterpiece with Northwest audiences."

SAM

Begun in Paris in 1831, Morse's ambitious painting was more than the culmination of the artist's study among the works in the princely galleries of Europe; it was his lesson in the noblest art traditions for the benefit of art students at home in the United States and for all Americans in the young nation, who had few opportunities to see great art. Morse created the Louvre in miniature so that Americans could view for the first time Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and great paintings by Rubens, Raphael, Caravaggio, and other of the Old Masters.

"Morse's 'gallery picture,' a form first popularized in the seventeenth century, is the only major example of such in the history of American art," says Peter John Brownlee, associate curator at the Terra Foundation, who led this new, deeply focused study of Morse's crowning artistic achievement. "For this canvas, Morse selected masterpieces from the Musée du Louvre's collection and imaginatively 'reinstalled' them in one of the museum's grandest spaces, the Salon Carré (square gallery)."

Morse's view of the Louvre is a gathering of painstaking copies in miniature of all the paintings that he considered the best instructional examples by the most venerated portrait, religious, and history painters of the past. He copied directly from the paintings, working tirelessly in the galleries of the Louvre every day for a year.

"Morse wanted his painting to provide young American art students with the facsimiles they needed to learn the fine points of color, composition, and expression, but which they lacked in the United States," says Patricia Junker, Ann M. Barwick Curator of American Art for SAM. "The key to the painting's success as an instructional piece, Morse knew, would be his ability to duplicate exactly the painting style of each Old Master, which he did, with the aid, at times, of a *camera obscura*, a box and lens device that allowed him to make almost photographic reproductions. His astonishing ability to let us 'see' the handiwork of the Old Masters is what makes Morse's creation such a tour de force."

Already a respected painter and academic, a founder of the National Academy of Design, Morse included himself at the center of the picture as a teacher, instructing a young woman student as she copies one of the masterpieces before her. And although he added the figures to the painting when he was back in New York, he featured his American friends in Paris. The novelist James Fenimore Cooper, who joined Morse nearly every day that he worked at the Louvre, is shown with his wife, the couple hovering over their daughter, Susan as she works at work at her easel. With the exception of an elegantly hatted French Brittany woman and her child, all of the visitors to Morse's Louvre are Americans, most are artists, and three of the young art students are women.

Morse had high hopes that his panoramic picture of paintings in the Louvre would attract large, enthusiastic audiences as he traveled it from city to city back home, displaying it as a popular entertainment. At SAM, the large canvas will be shown in a similar theatrical setting, approximating the way Morse displayed it in Manhattan in 1833. Gallery visitors will be able to hear a dramatic audio explanation of the painting's subject and history, harking back to the kind of artist's lecture that might accompany such displays in Morse's time.

Gallery of the Louvre was exhibited just twice in the United States during Morse's lifetime. The painting was praised by critics but rejected by the public who had no knowledge of European art and saw little dramatic appeal in Morse's instructional subject. Morse abandoned painting altogether in 1837. By then his other interests had consumed him. He had made successful experiments with the telegraph and would develop the Morse code. In 1839, he introduced the art and science of photography to Americans. The installation includes a group of American daguerreotypes to show examples of the other art form Morse promoted and to suggest the appeal of these jewel-like, transportable images to an artist who had tried so hard to collect exact replicas of the world's great paintings.

Just as he envisioned the telegraph as a means to speed communications across the Atlantic, and saw photography as the way to capture and hold fleeting images for all time, Morse saw his painting of the Louvre's masterpieces as a way to transmit Old World culture to the young American republic.

A hardcover exhibition catalogue published by Yale University Press brings together fresh insights on the painting and the artist by academics, curators and conservators who focus on the work's visual components and its social and historical contexts. A key to the paintings and figures included in the painting is also available in the exhibition gallery.

The exhibition is organized by and with support from the Terra Foundation for American Art. Corporate Sponsor is U.S. Trust & Bank of America. Generous Support is provided by SAM's American Art Endowment.

SAM is the third stop for the *Gallery of the Louvre's* multiyear, nine-venue tour of the United States. Below is a list of the tour cities:

Exhibition Tour

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA
Jan. 24, 2015 - May 4, 2015

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX
Through Aug. 23, 2015

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA
September 16, 2015 - Jan. 10, 2016

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
Jan. 23, 2016 - Apr. 18, 2016

Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI
June 18, 2016 - Sept. 18, 2016

Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA
Oct. 8, 2016 - Jan. 8, 2017

Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, NC
Feb. 17, 2017 - June 4, 2017

New Britain Museum of American Art New Britain, CT
June 17, 2017 - Oct. 15, 2017

Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA
Nov. 15, 2017 - March 18, 2018

Image credits: *Gallery of the Louvre*, 1831-33, Samuel F. B. Morse, American, 1791-1872, oil on canvas, 73 ¾ x 108 in. Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.51. Photography © Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Robert Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of more than 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures and time periods.

Terra Foundation for American Art

Established in 1978, the Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering the exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States. With financial resources of more than \$350 million, an exceptional collection of American art from the colonial era to 1945, and an expansive grant program, it is one of the leading foundations focused on American art, supporting exhibitions, projects, and research worldwide.