

For Immediate Release: February 26, 2007
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Blanton Museum of Art Presents a Summer of Masterworks

**Special exhibition brings 19th-century European masterpieces to Austin
from an acclaimed New York collection**

A Century of Grace: 19th-Century Masterworks from the Dahesh Museum of Art
on view from May 18 to August 5, 2007

Austin, Texas—Celebrating the first anniversary of its new building with a summer of masterworks, the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin hosts its first major exhibition of nineteenth-century European masterpieces. *A Century of Grace: 19th-Century Masterworks from the Dahesh Museum of Art, New York*, opens May 18 and features paintings, sculpture and drawings by such beloved artists as Adolphe-William Bouguereau, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Antoine-Louis Barye, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and Frederic Leighton. The exhibition is organized by the Dahesh Museum of Art in collaboration with the Blanton Museum of Art.

Blanton Director Jessie Otto Hite states, "It will be an honor for the Blanton to present an exhibition of such high quality and aesthetic beauty as we celebrate the completion of our hugely successful first year in our new building. We are fortunate indeed that the Dahesh Museum has agreed to share some its finest treasures with the Austin community and the Central Texas region. This is a wonderful example of the kind of major, broadly appealing exhibition we are able to present in our expanded facilities."

The Dahesh Museum in New York City houses an acclaimed collection of nineteenth-century traditional European paintings. This exhibition of some fifty works explores nineteenth-century ideals of beauty as embodied in realistic depictions of the human figure, and the ways in which traditional artists fought to sustain these ideals in the face of the revolutionary style of impressionism and other modern styles. Grand in scale, rich in detail and highly finished, the objects on view at the Blanton provide an expanded view of nineteenth-century art, which in the minds of many art lovers has become synonymous with impressionism. Exhibition curator Cheryl Snay explains, "The nineteenth century is a rich and varied period of art history. Working with the Dahesh Museum, whose mission it is to

provide a fresh appraisal of the role of traditionally trained artists in the development of modern art, is a perfect opportunity to give our visitors a new look at an era fraught with contradictions and complexities."

Among the highlights of the exhibition are such classically inspired paintings as Gérôme's *Working in Marble* (1890) and Alexandre Cabanel and Adolphe Jourdan's *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1864); Alma-Tadema's haunting classical scene *The Staircase* (1870); and Bouguereau's striking portrait of *The Water Girl* (1885). Powerful bronze portraiture, such as Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier's *A Sudanese in Algerian Costume* (1856) and Jean-Jacques Pradier's *Standing Sappho* (c. 1851) are also included in the exhibition. All of the works are selected to demonstrate the power and beauty of the human figure and its importance in nineteenth-century art.

***A Century of Grace* Background**

As early as the mid-1700s with the publication of the *Encyclopédie* (a systematic dictionary of the sciences, arts, and crafts, and focused on Enlightenment ideals), drawing the human figure convincingly was considered the chief objective of an aspiring artist. Philosophers of the day insisted that the science of drawing was entirely contained in the study of the human figure. This view persisted until the middle of the nineteenth century when artists shut out of the state-sponsored art schools and exhibitions expressed their rebellion in their art. Critics chastised Eduoard Manet for his figures, which were "flat as playing cards." Commentators warned visitors to the impressionist exhibitions that they could almost smell the rotting flesh of Auguste Renoir's female nude sitting in dappled sunlight under a tree through his painting. In response to this challenge to academic tradition and values, some artists became ever more emphatic about the integrity and grace of the human figure. These battles of artistic style took place at the annual art exhibitions in England, Germany, and France. The Salon in Paris was among the most important exhibitions of painting and sculpture in the nineteenth-century world. For French artists, it was imperative to be shown there as it was the way to visibility and financial success. Many of the artists shown in *A Century of Grace* were indeed superstars of the Paris Salon as well as the annual exhibitions held by the Royal Academy of Art in London (Alma-Tadema, Leighton, etc.). As many as 500,000 visitors flocked to the Salon in Paris where thousands of works were displayed during its two-month run, far outpacing many "blockbuster" exhibitions of today.

The Renowned Dahesh Museum

The Dahesh Museum of Art opened to the public in 1995. Its permanent collection originated with Dr. Dahesh (1909-1984), the pen name of Salim Moussa Achi, an influential Lebanese writer, philosopher, and connoisseur, in whose honor the museum is named. In the short time since its opening, the museum has established itself as a major contributor to the field of nineteenth-century studies with its bold acquisitions and seminal exhibitions, such as *Napoleon on the Nile* and *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier, Ethnographic Sculptor*. The Dahesh is respected for its scholarly publications, most recently *Fantasy and Faith: The Art of Gustave Doré*. Cheryl Snay notes, “As a university museum committed to connecting art and ideas in new and intriguing ways, the Blanton could not have asked for a more apt partner than the Dahesh Museum of Art.”

Public programs and events

The Blanton will offer a wide range of programs in conjunction with the exhibition. Offerings will range from lunchtime concerts featuring period music to free public lectures by Dahesh Curator Lisa Small and Blanton Assistant Curator Cheryl Snay to a four-week course exploring the nineteenth-century art scene. For more details, see the museum's Web site at www.blantonmuseum.org

Summer of Masterworks also features master drawings from Yale

The Blanton's Summer of Masterworks also includes the special exhibition *Master Drawings from the Yale University Art Gallery* June 1-August 12, 2007. The exhibition features a rich array of European drawings from the late fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century by such masters as Gian Lorenzo Bernini, François Boucher, Edgar Degas, Guercino, and Jean-Antoine Watteau, among others. The exhibition was organized by the Yale University Art Gallery. The presentation of the exhibition at the Blanton Museum of Art is made possible by the Inman Foundation.

The Blanton Museum of Art

The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is one of the foremost university art museums in the country, and has the largest and most comprehensive collection of art in Central Texas. The museum welcomes and engages all visitors by offering personal, extraordinary experiences that connect art and ideas, reaching within and beyond The University of Texas campus to stimulate the thriving, creative community that is Austin, Texas, and beyond. The Blanton's permanent collection of more than 17,000 works is recognized for its European paintings, an encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, and modern and contemporary American and Latin American art.

Located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue, the museum is across the street from the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum and is adjacent to downtown Austin. The museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10-5, Thursday 10-8 (free admission day), and Sunday from 1-5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders and children under 12, \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors, and \$3 for youth (13–25). For information call (512) 471-7324 or visit www.blantonmuseum.org.

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