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Elvehjem Museum of Art

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The Elvehjem Museum of Art *artscene*

University of
Wisconsin-Madison
Volume 3, Number 4

In the May/June 1986 issue of *Artscene* (Vol. 2, No. 3), the Elvehjem announced the initiation of an extensive conservation project involving the transfer of the painting *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* by the Italian Renaissance artist Defendente Ferrari (active ca. 1510–35) from its original wood panel to a new and stable support system. As reported then, this painting had suffered from the recurring problem, over at least the last half century, of its paint and gesso layers lifting away from the wood panel in the form of “tents” and blisters, and sometimes flaking off entirely. These problems are due to the shrinkage of the panel, which is nearly 500 years old. Several remedial treatments had been applied to alleviate the problem, but without satisfactory results. Finally, with the generous support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the decision was made to take the extreme step of transferring the painting from its dry and brittle wooden panel to a non-porous, humidity- and insect-immune aluminum honeycomb panel.

At the time the treatment was announced, the painting had been prepared and shipped to the Chicago Conservation Center under the direction of Barry Baumann. To begin the treatment, the surface was first secured by reattaching all existing blisters, tents, and flakes to the gesso with sizing; then the whole surface was faced with several layers of tissue and linen to provide an auxiliary support during the transfer.



Defendente Ferrari, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*, after treatment

JULY/AUGUST

Exhibitions

Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman

Hollywood Glamour, 1924–1956: Selected Portraits from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research

Recent Acquisitions

Edward Weston's Color Photography

The Vinland Suite

Artworks of the Month

Frances Myers, *Ikons*

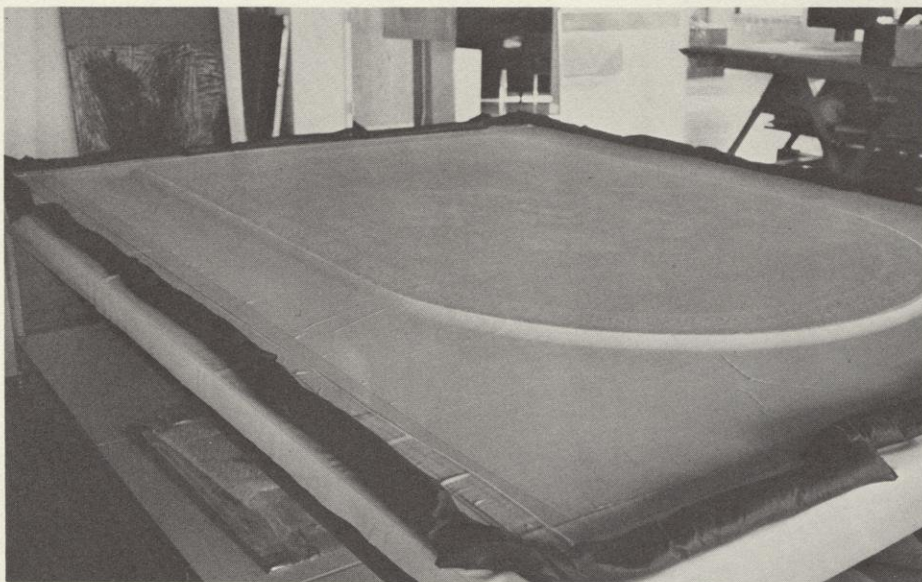
Barbara Hepworth, *Impression*

Lecture

Edward J. Sullivan, “Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman”

Concert

Concert to celebrate the exhibition *The Vinland Suite*



Defendente Ferrari, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*, facing material being applied to the painting surface



Defendente Ferrari, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*, the wooden panel partially removed, revealing incised underdrawing

continued from page 1

The conservators then placed the painting face down on an elaborate track system and gradually removed the wood from the back—first an auxiliary support of redwood batons and end-grain balsa wood blocks applied in the 1960s, then the actual panel, initially with planes and routers, ultimately with dental drills and picks—until the reverse side of the gesso layer was exposed. That was a fascinating stage of the operation, revealing much of the incised underdrawing the artist had made in laying out his composition.

Because of irregularities in the gesso, where old losses had been filled in or where crevices in the wood panel had resulted in unevenness in thickness, a new gesso layer was painted onto the reverse to establish a smooth surface to be attached to the new panel. This new panel, comprised of two sheets of polished aluminum, separated by honeycombs of aluminum, provides

a stable and impermeable support for a painting once threatened by changes in moisture, insects, and the aging process. The transfer was carried out on a heat-and-vacuum table, with the painting face up, which enabled a firm bond to be established between the painting and the new support, with no alteration to the surface. In fact, the only visible change in the painting is that before the transfer, the wood panel had adopted a 1/2 to 5/8 inch curvature from the center to the sides; once the panel was removed, the layers of paint and gesso relaxed into a flat plane, thus restoring the painting to its more natural perspective.

Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints by Defendente Ferrari will be featured as Artwork of the Month in September, along with some additional in-process photographs and explanatory labels. Artworks of the Month for July and August are *Ikons* by Madison-area artist Frances Myers and *Impression* by the late British

sculptress Dame Barbara Hepworth.

Frances Myers has won considerable acclaim over the past quarter of a century as a printmaker, particularly in the medium of aquatint. For several years she has been experimenting with different printing techniques, including color xerography and, as in the case of *Ikons*, the monoprint. *Ikons*, 1985, is a monumental (63×60 inches) tribute to the pop-culture heroine Wonder Woman. According to Myers, "Instant recognition of the Wonder Woman character and all the qualities associated with her allowed me to lead my audience quickly and surely to the emotional response I hope for—to the realization of the human dichotomies which this feminist, but universal, ikon represents: strength/fragility, action/reflection, certainty/doubt, courage/fear."

The faces of the two half-length figures are nearly identical and derive from African sculpture, suggesting an affinity on Myers' part with German Expressionism, as does the bold color scheme. The dichotomies to which Myers refers are apparent in the figures themselves, the one to the left being elevated on a classical pedestal, her bodice decorated with a stylized bird (the dove of peace?), while the right-hand figure vibrates on a twirling platform, her bodice disintegrating in flames, thus contrasting classical repose with primal energy.

In August, the carved marble sculpture entitled *Impression* by Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) will be featured. Hepworth was a contemporary of Henry Moore and, with him, is credited with raising British sculpture to preeminence in the first half of this century. Whereas Moore maintained a human reference in most of his sculptures, Hepworth, once retreating to the relative desolation of St. Ives in Cornwall, began to explore more universal and abstract motifs such as megaliths, seashells, and basic geometric forms. The void (or hole) in a solid object became one of her trademarks, and the spiral emanating from this void suggests a tension between space and solid, known and unknown. *Impression* was one of Hepworth's last works, executed in 1972, just a few years before her tragic death in a fire in her Cornwall studio. The sculpture is on loan from the collection of Mrs. Alexander Hollaender.

The Elvehjem

From the Director

The Elvehjem, I am happy to announce, has again been awarded one of the highest honors a museum can receive: accreditation by the American Association of Museums. Accreditation certifies that a museum operates according to standards set forth by the museum profession, manages its collections responsibly, and provides quality service to the public. Of nearly 5,000 museums nationwide, only 650 have been accredited.

To ensure that a museum continues to meet institutional standards, its accredited status is reviewed every five to ten years. The Elvehjem first achieved accreditation in 1976 and with this current reevaluation is one of only 291 museums to have reaffirmed their accredited status.

The accreditation process itself was rigorous and demanding, requiring almost a year of preliminary self-study. Beginning in the early Spring of 1986 and based on guidelines provided especially for this purpose, all of the Elvehjem staff worked very hard to develop written reports and supporting documentation on virtually all aspects of the Museum's operations. These documents, which were then submitted to the American Association of Museums for review, formed the framework for a subsequent on-site evaluation which was conducted by a Visiting Committee of experienced museum professionals. This team, composed of directors from several peer institutions, visited the Elvehjem in March of 1987 and thoroughly examined all of the Museum's facilities, reviewed its policies and procedures, and interviewed staff members, museum volunteers, and university administrators.

The Accreditation Commission is especially concerned about the care of museum collections. For the purposes of accreditation, "care" is defined as "the keeping of adequate records pertaining to the provenance, identification, and location of the museum's holdings, and the application of currently acceptable methods to their security and to the minimization of damage and deterioration." In a time of concern for increasing the size of audiences and developing ever larger mass appeal, it is too easy to lose sight of the fact that one of a museum's prime purposes is to build, protect, and safeguard its collections for future generations.

Accreditation is one of several programs offered by the American Association of Museums to help museums achieve standards of quality and professionalism. The American Association of Museums is a national organization, based in Washington, D.C. that has served the museum profession for over 80 years.

All of us on the staff hope the students, faculty, and staff of the University and the citizens of Madison share our pride in having earned this prestigious honor.

Russell Panczenko

Dame Barbara Hepworth,
Impression, 1972, marble, Lent by
Mrs. Alexander Hollaender



Frances Myers, *Ikons*, 1985, monoprint, Juli Plant Grainger Endowment Fund purchase



The Elvehjem

EXHIBITIONS

For museums such as the Elvehjem, which actively acquire works of art produced in a wide range of historical periods and styles, the opportunity to display each new acquisition in an appropriate context may not quickly occur. *Recent Acquisitions*, which opened in June and which will run through August 16, provides such an opportunity to see forty-five works from among those acquired during the last two-and-one-half years, but which have not been previously on view.

Among the important nineteenth-century works of art in the show are a selection from a group of forty-five lithographs by Honoré Daumier, thirteen etchings by Francisco Goya from his series *The Disasters of War*, Théodore Géricault's masterful lithograph, *The French Farrier*, 1821, and a charming painting of a man at a workshop vise, dated 1882, by Wisconsin artist Theodore Robinson.

Twentieth-century works include John Marin's *Pont-Neuf, Paris*, 1905, an untitled etching and serigraph by Robert Motherwell, a drawing by David Smith, and Warrington Colescott's whimsical etching of the opening reception for the 1986 UW-Madison Department of Art group exhibition here at the Elvehjem, *The Night of the Artists*. There are also color photographs by Eliot Porter, from a recent portfolio entitled *China*, and large black-and-white photographs by Elliott Erwitt from volumes one and two of his *Master Prints*, works since 1950.

Earlier works in the exhibition include *Christ Presented to the People*, ca. 1604, an engraving with etching by Nicholaes DeBruyn, and the



Théodore Géricault, *A French Farrier*, 1821, lithograph, Mark H. and Katherine E. Ingraham Fund purchase

painting, *A Man at a Window*, attributed to the French artist Martin Drolling (1752-1817).

The exhibition also includes works by Mortimer Menpes and Felix Buhot as well as John Linnell's oil sketch of *Lady Torrens*, ca. 1820, a preliminary study for Linnell's painting *Lady Torrens and her Family*, which the Elvehjem acquired in 1984.

The Vinland Suite, 1984/85, is a collection of 24 linocuts by Norwegian artist Jarle Rosseland illustrating the Viking discovery of "Vinland"—America. Born in 1952 in Bergen, Rosseland has traveled widely, including a period in the early 1970s when he studied and worked in Connecticut and New York. The prints in the series focus on the saga of Bjarni Herjolfsson, who in 986 A.D. became the first European to sight the North American coastline. There are also references to the travels of Eirik the Red and of Leif Eiriksson. Each print is a lyrical interpretation of a point in the story. Rosseland has simplified the landscape and the Viking longships into broad expanses of color, punctuated by small areas of detail. The exhibition is circulated by the Nordmanns-Forbundet (The Norsemen's Federation).

The Elvehjem will open three exhibitions on August 29 to inaugurate the academic year. Each will be discussed more extensively in the next issue of *Artscene*.

Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman is the first in a series of major annual exhibitions which the Elvehjem will organize to showcase the work of outstanding foreign artists not well known in this country. Although Bravo's work is widely col-

lected and he has had a significant influence on an entire generation of painters, there has never been a critical examination of this Chilean artist's oeuvre. The Elvehjem exhibition will consist of sixty-two works drawn from European and American collections. The exhibition will run through October 18, after which it will travel to the Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University and to the Duke University Museum of Art.

The Hollywood glamour photograph is a fascinating but little-studied type of portrait photography. With large budgets and lavish working conditions at their disposal, studio photographers were able to refine the techniques of portraiture to a high degree. *Hollywood Glamour, 1924-1956: Selected Portraits from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research* will present sixty examples from Wisconsin's nationally recognized film archive. The exhibition will be on view through October 25.

Edward Weston's Color Photography reveals another dimension of an artist primarily known for his black-and-white photographs. This exhibition, which will be on view through October 25, includes thirty-two modern color prints made from Weston's 8 by 10 inch transparencies.

Edward J. Sullivan, Guest Curator of *Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman*, will present a lecture on the artist and his work on Sunday, August 30 at 2 p.m. in room 160 of the Elvehjem. Professor Sullivan is the artist's biographer, having written *Claudio Bravo*, published in 1985 by Rizzoli.



Warrington Colescott, *The Night of the Artists*, 1986, etching, Gift of the Wisconsin Foundation for the Arts

The Elvehjem

JULY

4 Saturday

Museum closed in observance of Independence Day.

5 Sunday

Exhibition, *The Vinland Suite*, opens in the Whyte Gallery and runs through August 17.

Artwork of the Month, *Ikons*, by Frances Myers, on view through July 26.

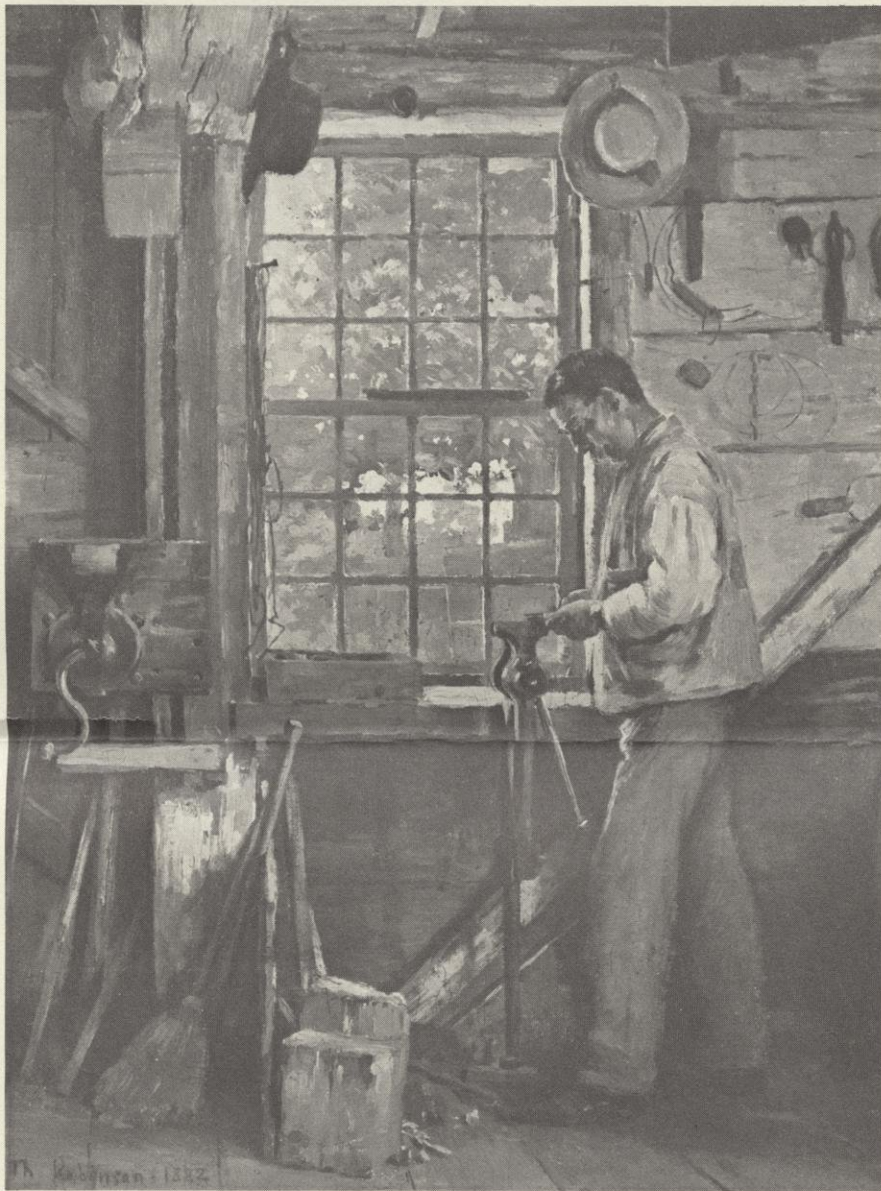
12 Sunday

Concert and reception in honor of *The Vinland Suite*, sponsored by the Mayor's Office, City of Madison. Concert begins at 1:30 p.m., Gallery V; reception follows in Paige Court.

19 Sunday

Exhibition, *Alvin Langdon Coburn: A Retrospective*, closes.

Theodore Robinson, *Man in a Workshop*, 1882, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Bullard



On Thursdays Docents will lead drop-in tours on the collections and exhibitions. The tours, given by Docents Jean McKenzie (July 2 and 9), Jane Pizer (July 16, 23, and 30), Susan Stanek (August 6), Catherine Bertucci (August 13), Sue Niemann (August 20), and Evelyn Groh (August 27), will begin at 11 a.m. in Paige Court.

Every Sunday at 3 p.m., Docents will give ten-minute talks on the Artwork of the Month: Jean McKenzie (July 5 and 12), DeEtte Beilfuss (July 19 and 26 and August 2), and Diane Tietjen (August 9 and 16).

AUGUST

1 Saturday

Artwork of the Month, *Impression*, by Dame Barbara Hepworth, on view through August 30.

16 Sunday

Exhibition, *Recent Acquisitions*, closes.

Exhibition, *The Vinland Suite*, closes.

29 Saturday

Exhibition, *Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman*, opens in Gallery IV and runs through October 18.

Exhibition, *Hollywood Glamour, 1924–1956: Selected Portraits from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research*, opens in the Mayer Gallery and runs through October 25.

Exhibition, *Edward Weston's Color Photography*, opens in Whyte Gallery and runs through October 25.

Preview Reception for the Claudio Bravo, *Hollywood Glamour*, and Edward Weston exhibitions, Paige Court, 6–9 p.m.

30 Sunday

Lecture by Edward J. Sullivan, "Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman," room 160, 2 p.m.

Jarle Rosseland, *Exploration*, from *The Vinland Suite*, 1984/85, linocut



The Elvehjem

EDUCATION

Gallery Labels

Museum curators, educators, editors, and designers deal with many issues concerning gallery labels interpreting works of art. How should they be written and edited, designed and produced? Who reads them and how effectively do they serve to enhance the visitor's understanding and appreciation of the art on display?

Carlton Overland, Curator of Collections and Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, and eighteen staff members from other art museums convened at the Toledo Museum of Art for three days in May to find some answers. Entitled "Interpretive Labeling in Art Museums," the workshop was sponsored by the Kellogg Project of the Smithsonian Insti-

tution Office of Museum Programs. Each participant received a scholarship from the Kellogg Foundation, a philanthropy which supports continuing education projects in museums.

In addition to the Elvehjem staff members, teams of two museum professionals were selected from the Carnegie Museum of Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dallas Museum of Art, Dayton Art Institute, Denver Art Museum, San Antonio Museum Association, J. B. Speed Art Museum, The Walters Art Gallery, and the Whitney Gallery of Western Art.

From studies at the Toledo Museum of Art and elsewhere, it is now understood that the visitor is more likely to read the whole label if it is short, printed in large type, and comprised of one completed idea

in short sentences. Surveyors also found that visitors wanted labels to give them biographical information about the artist, his or her sources of inspiration, and the medium; all wanted the work of art placed in time and to know its historical antecedents. Clearly, effective label writing is a challenge! Accordingly participants spent an intense three days and evenings together attending lectures and demonstrations, taking part in label writing exercises and critiques, and discussing every phase of label preparation.

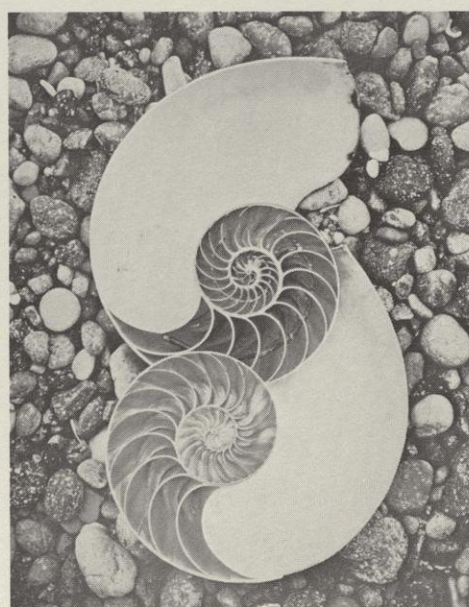
The Elvehjem "team" felt the workshop was very valuable and expects to incorporate some suggestions from the advice and experience of our colleagues into future gallery labeling.



Robert Richee, *Veronica Lake*, photograph, (from the exhibition *Hollywood Glamour, 1924-1956: Selected Portraits from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research*)



Claudio Bravo, *Messaoud et son fils*, 1976, oil on canvas, The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York (from the exhibition *Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman*)



Edward Weston, *Nautilus Shells*, ca. 1947 (from the exhibition *Edward Weston's Color Photography*)

The Elvehjem

MEMBERSHIP

Sarah Farwell is New League President

The Elvehjem is pleased to welcome Sarah Farwell as the new President of the Elvehjem Museum of Art League. The League currently has approximately 100 members who volunteer their time and expertise promoting the Museum and its functions. Sarah continues to stress the importance of the League's varied responsibilities: organizing and hosting exhibition opening receptions, assisting with the Museum's annual membership drive, conducting trips to various Midwestern museums, serving tea at the Sunday Afternoon Live recital series, and staffing the Information desk and the Christmas Shop.

A 1976 graduate of Mt. Holyoke College, Sarah spent her junior year



in France and returned to receive her Masters degree in French Literature from Middlebury College in 1978. She and her husband moved to Madison from New York City in 1981. Since joining the League in 1983, she has been one of its most enthusiastic members, helping in its wide range of support for the Elvehjem.

"I am enormously flattered to have been asked to lead this group of talented and dedicated women," she says, "and I am confident that this year will be as successful and rewarding to all concerned as was last year. Supporting the Elvehjem by volunteering one's time, interest and knowledge is a remarkably fulfilling job, as I am sure every member would agree. I know I can count on my committee chairs and co-members to help me maintain the high standards of our League's work."

Staff Notes

The Elvehjem is pleased to welcome LaDue (Dewey) Rowin, who became the Museum's new Security Officer Supervisor in May. He has been with the University's Department of Police and Security for sixteen years, ten years as a supervisor. The staff of the Elvehjem looks forward to working with him in the months ahead.

While we welcome Dewey Rowin, we also congratulate Carol DePagter, who has been promoted from her position as lead officer at the Elvehjem, to a supervisory post elsewhere on campus.



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Membership Program
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The Elvehjem



Claudio Bravo, *Still Life with Paint Tube*, 1983, oil on canvas, photo courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc. (from the exhibition *Claudio Bravo: Painter and Draftsman*)

Elvehjem Museum of Art
800 University Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53706



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Sunday 11 a.m.–4:45 p.m.

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Admission is free

artscene

July/August 1987

Important Dated Information!