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**GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS**

**GIOVANNI BELLINI: LANDSCAPES OF FAITH IN RENAISSANCE VENICE**

*Includes masterpieces by one of the most celebrated painters of the Italian Renaissance, many on view for the first time in the U.S.*

**At the Getty Museum, Getty Center**  
**October 10, 2017 – January 14, 2018**



Christ Blessing, about 1500, Giovanni Bellini, tempera and oil on wood panel. Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

**LOS ANGELES** – One of the most beloved and influential religious painters of the Italian Renaissance, Giovanni Bellini (Venice, about 1435-1516) was also a master in depicting landscape. His paintings of religious scenes often featured evocative natural settings that were as important and affecting as their human subjects.

On view October 10, 2017, through January 14, 2018, *Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice* presents 12 paintings and one drawing that explore the poetic role played by the natural world in the artist's religious compositions. The exhibition includes several masterpieces that rarely travel, making this an exceptional opportunity to experience the artistic beauty and iconographic complexity of Bellini's art.



Sacred Allegory, about 1500-1504, Giovanni Bellini, tempera (?) and oil on wood panel. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali / Art Resource, NY.

"Giovanni Bellini skillfully employed natural and built features in his imagery to complement religious subjects and enhance the contemplative, meditative potential of his paintings," said Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "Thanks to the loan of a number of masterpieces from generous institutions in Europe and the United States, our visitors

will be able to experience directly the poetic beauty that made Bellini one of the greatest masters of the Renaissance, and has kept him on the list of the most admired and coveted artists ever since. The exquisite beauty and delicate charm of these paintings have an aesthetic and spiritual power way beyond their modest scale. As a focused experience of sublime beauty in the service of devotion, this exhibition is as good as it gets. Not to be missed is a gross understatement."

Giovanni Bellini was one of the most illustrious artists of the Italian Renaissance, admired for his accomplishments in all genres of painting practiced in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Venice, including religious subjects, mythological scenes, and portraits. He began his career painting small pictures intended for private devotion, later creating emotionally intense portraits as well as innovative altarpieces. Toward the end of his long life he added mythological and secular allegory to his repertoire. He was also one of the artists who championed the shift from painting in egg tempera, traditional in Italy, to painting in oil, a technique pioneered in the Netherlands. He operated a busy studio in Venice and trained many younger artists, including Giorgione and Titian. A standout among great artists both in his family and in his

community, Bellini was one of the key figures who elevated the Venetian school to international repute.

"The devotional components of Giovanni Bellini's pictures, such as a sole crucifix in a landscape or an image of Saint Jerome reading in the wilderness, are always infused with a refined sensitivity to the natural world," said Davide Gasparotto, senior curator of paintings at the Getty Museum and curator of the exhibition. "Bellini's paintings feature expressively charged interpretations of sacred characters and symbols immersed in a realm of lived experiences in a way that was entirely unprecedented in Italian painting. Through this poetic use of landscape, Bellini elevated the devotional work of art to an object of worthy aesthetic admiration, thus ushering in a new chapter in the history of European painting."

In some works, it is the figure that dominates the picture, with the landscape as a secondary but important element. For example, *Christ Blessing*, about 1500, depicts Christ after having risen from the tomb, strikingly close-up and gazing straight at the viewer. In the background, the sun is rising in the hills, the sky is tinged with tones of orange, yellow and blue, and the three Marys hurry toward the tomb that they will find empty. The icon is fused with a narrative which evokes the landscape of the Venetian mainland, familiar to the contemporary viewer.

*Sacred Allegory*, about 1500-04, shows a mysterious cast of characters in an unusual landscape. The composition is divided by a marble terrace in the foreground and a resplendent landscape in the background. A clothed boy that may be the Christ child sits on a cushion shaking a tree that may be the Tree of Life. The Virgin Mary sits enthroned with her hands in prayer. Other figures in the picture include unidentified male and female saints. The picture was likely made for a sophisticated art lover who was able to understand the complex meaning of the scene and at the same time to appreciate the supreme skill of the artist, possibly the Marchioness of Mantua Isabella d'Este, one of the most celebrated collectors of the Italian Renaissance.

The exhibition also includes one of Bellini's earliest surviving works, *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*, about 1455, which depicts the saint as a penitent hermit blessing a lion. He reads in a cave that dominates the picture's foreground, while a broad, deep landscape opens out into the background. Rather than evoking the Syrian desert of the fable, the scenery recalls the gentle slope of the Venetian mainland, a feature of many of Bellini's paintings.

This exhibition is presented in conjunction with Sacred Landscapes: Nature in Renaissance Manuscripts (October 10, 2017 –January 14, 2018) at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

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*Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice* is accompanied by a publication of the same name, published by Getty Publications.

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