EARTHLY DELIGHTS ABOUND IN GETTY EXHIBITION ON RENAISSANCE GARDENS

In conjunction with exhibition, the Getty Center’s Central Garden will incorporate new plantings of Renaissance-era herbs and flowers

Gardens of the Renaissance

May 28–August 11, 2013
At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center

LOS ANGELES—During the Renaissance, gardens and their flora were used as religious symbols in art, as signs of social status, or simply enjoyed for their aesthetic value. Whether part of a grandiose villa or a feature of a common kitchen yard, gardens were planted and treasured by people at all social levels. In a variety of texts, manuscript artists depicted gardens, and their illustrations attest to the Renaissance spirit for the careful study of the natural world. In Gardens of the Renaissance, on view May 28–August 11, 2013 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center, visitors are given a glimpse into how people at the time pictured, used, and enjoyed these idyllic green spaces.

The exhibition features over 20 manuscript illuminations, a painting, a drawing and a photograph from the Getty Museum's permanent collection, as well as loaned works from the Getty Research Institute and private collectors James E. and Elizabeth J. Ferrell. In addition to the exhibition, the Getty’s Central Garden will be planted with flowers and greenery commonly seen during the Renaissance in Europe, with their care overseen by Central Garden supervisor Michael DeHart.

“This exhibition celebrates the Renaissance garden, which inherited the traditions established by the medieval monastic cloister and provided the foundation for the extravagant gardens of the Baroque period, such as Louis XIV's renowned Versailles,” explains Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. “The exhibition will include a number of exceptional objects from the Museum’s collection that reflect the Renaissance appreciation for magnificent foliage, brilliant color, and landscape design. We are also in a unique position to share with visitors living examples of typical Renaissance plantings through our own garden, which I’m sure will bring the exhibition to life and greatly appeal to the many visitors who come to enjoy our spectacular gardens and landscaping.”

Gardens in Word and Image

During the Renaissance, when gardens were planted in great number, it was only natural that garden imagery permeated the pages of manuscripts and printed books, from popular romances and philosophical treatises to medicinal and devotional texts. As literary settings, gardens were idyllic spaces where lovers met, courtiers retreated from city life, and adventurers sought an earthly paradise. Religious symbolism was common even in floral imagery, as in French artist Jean Bourdichon’s The Adoration of the Magi (about 1480–85), where grapes, roses, blue speedwell, and red anemones all signify some aspect of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.

Although the garden is already represented in art from the Middle Ages, Renaissance depictions show an increased concern for naturalism and the documentation of new and rare plant species. One of the best-known
examples of this is by Flemish artist Joris Hoefnagel who—at the bequest of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II—illuminated a book of calligraphy samples with depictions of plants, animals, and insects. In *Insect, Tulip, Caterpillar, Spider, Pear* (about 1591–96), Hoefnagel painted a pink-and-yellow-striped tulip with spellbinding precision, thus preserving a floral record of species from as far away as modern-day Turkey and Peru.

**Gardens of the Bible**

The story of Christian salvation is rooted in gardens, from Adam and Eve's original sin in the Garden of Eden to Christ's resurrection in the Garden of Gethsemane. Renaissance theologians and adventurers sought to discover the location of Eden, and pilgrims risked the dangers of travel to visit the gardens that Christ had frequented. For most other devout Christians, tranquil manuscript images of Mary in a garden facilitated devotion and prayer. Artists often represented Eden as a verdant orchard with high walls, while the gardens associated with Mary and Christ tend to be smaller and enclosed by a simple wooden fence.

"In a society dominated by the Catholic Church, gardens were integral to a Christian visual tradition," says Bryan C. Keene, assistant curator in the manuscripts department at the J. Paul Getty Museum and curator of the exhibition. "This exhibition offers religious context for much of the exquisite garden imagery seen in manuscript pages and elsewhere in art of the time."

A distinctive engagement of religion and nature occurs in the representation of Christ as a gardener. According to the Bible, after the Crucifixion, Christ was buried on a plot of land containing a garden. His follower, Mary Magdalene, initially mistakes Christ for a gardener, but rejoices when she recognizes him. In an image by Flemish artist Lieven van Lathem (about 1469), Mary
Magdalene kneels before the resurrected Christ, who is depicted holding a shovel to represent her initial misidentification. In a pen and gray black ink drawing of *Christ as the Gardener* (about 1470—1490) by the Upper Rhenish Master, Christ is seen again with a shovel amidst some grass, and offers a gesture as if to tell Mary Magdalene (not pictured) not to hold on to him since he must ascend to heaven.

**Gardens at Court**

What is an Italian villa or French *château* without a garden? In the Renaissance, gardens complemented the architectural harmony of courtly estates through plantings along a central axis and beds of herbs and flowers arranged in geometric patterns. The combination of sculptures, fountains, and topiaries in gardens not only expressed the patron’s control over nature but also expressed the Renaissance ideal that art is shaped by art.

In manuscripts, a courtly garden could serve as a backdrop that conveyed a ruler’s status or as a stage for activities both reputable and scandalous. In Jean Bourdichon’s *Bathsheba Bathing* (1498–99), Bathsheba’s sensuous nude figure seduces not only King David at the palace window but likely also the patron of the manuscript that contained this leaf, King Louis XII of France. The biblical story that inspired this image does not mention a garden, but artists often placed Bathsheba in one because a garden traditionally represented female virtue.

*Gardens of the Renaissance* is on view May 28–August 11, 2013 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center. The exhibition is curated by Bryan Keene, assistant curator in the manuscripts department. The exhibition will be accompanied by the book *Gardens of the Renaissance*, written by Bryan Keene and published by Getty Publications.
RELATED EVENTS

All events are free, unless otherwise noted. Seating reservations are required. For reservations and information, please call (310) 440-7300 or visit www.getty.edu.

LECTURE

*Cultivating Inspiration: Gardens in a Museum Setting*

The J. Paul Getty Museum, the Huntington Library, and the Cloisters house gardens that contribute to their respective renown. In this panel, Michael Dehart (Getty), James Folsom (Huntington), and Deirdre Larkin (Cloisters) discuss the role that their respective institutions' art collections play in conceiving and caring for the gardens, as well as how historical landscape design influenced the creation and development of these spaces.

**Wednesday, June 12, 7:00 p.m.**
Harold M. Williams Auditorium, Getty Center

FAMILY ACTIVITY

*Family Festival*

Celebrate the gardens of the Renaissance in this free daylong family festival. Create a garden of your very own or fashion a floral wreath at one of the interactive workshops. Delight in the sounds of madrigals from the 15th and 16th centuries or listen to tales of distant kingdoms with renowned storytellers.

**Saturday, June 8, 10:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.**
Museum Courtyard, Getty Center

RELATED PUBLICATION

Publications are available in the Getty Museum Store, by calling (310) 440-7333, or online at shop.getty.edu.

*Gardens of the Renaissance*
Bryan C. Keene

Drawn from a wide range of works in the Getty Museum’s permanent collection, this lavishly illustrated book explores gardens of all kinds, from the Garden of Eden to the courtly gardens of nobility to the idyllic green spaces in everyday life. (Hardcover, $19.95)
The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

The J. Paul Getty Museum collects in seven distinct areas, including Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts, and photographs gathered internationally. The Museum’s mission is to make the collection meaningful and attractive to a broad audience by presenting and interpreting the works of art through educational programs, special exhibitions, publications, conservation, and research.

Visiting the Getty Center
The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Monday and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is $15 per car, but reduced to $10 after 5 p.m. on Saturdays and for evening events throughout the week. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

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