Norton Simon Museum Presents an Installation of Vincent van Gogh’s “Self-Portrait,” 1889, on Loan from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum is delighted to announce an installation of Vincent van Gogh’s electrifying “Self-Portrait” from 1889, a highlight of the National Gallery of Art’s 19th-century collection. One of 36 self-portraits by Van Gogh, and among the last he painted, the work was executed as he recovered from a severe breakdown in Saint-Rémy in the summer of 1889. Its installation at the Norton Simon Museum is the first time the painting has been on view on the West Coast, and while Southern California is home to several outstanding works by Van Gogh, none of his self-portraits are in collections here. The loan is part of a special exchange program between the Norton Simon foundations and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., that brought Vermeer’s “A Lady Writing” and Raphael’s “Small Cowper Madonna” to the Simon in recent years.

Says Norton Simon Museum President Walter Timoshuk, “Van Gogh’s artistic skill and creativity long captivated Mr. Simon, and he collected several of the artist’s most impressive works. However, Mr. Simon was never able to purchase a self-portrait. This incredible loan from the National Gallery of Art gives us the opportunity to have such a work in our galleries for a few months, and allows our visitors a rare chance to view a Van Gogh self-portrait on the West Coast.”
Van Gogh’s “Self-Portrait” will be installed in the Norton Simon Museum’s 19th-century wing, near several of the Simon’s own Van Gogh works, including “The Mulberry Tree,” 1889, “Portrait of the Artist’s Mother,” 1888, and others. (The Simon’s “Portrait of a Peasant [Patience Escalier],” also from 1888, will be on view at The Frick Collection, New York, from Oct. 30, 2012 through Jan. 20, 2013.) A series of special events will be arranged in celebration of this special loan.

About Van Gogh’s “Self-Portrait”

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890) is among the world’s most beloved and admired artists, yet he was virtually unknown during his lifetime, and struggled with depression and mental illness. After voluntarily committing himself in May of 1889 to the mental asylum Saint-Paul-de-Mausole at Saint-Rémy, the tormented Van Gogh began the isolated and recuperative process of calming the delusions, paranoid panics and poor health that had plagued him for much of his adult life. Only six months before, he had quarreled with his dear friend Paul Gauguin in Arles and then severed part of his own ear in a fit of desperation and despair. The National Gallery of Art’s jolting, poignant “Self-Portrait” is one of the last renditions of Van Gogh’s penetrating interpretation of his own visage. Only three of his 36 self-portraits depict him as an artist, holding his palette and brushes. With his wounded ear turned away from the viewer, he confronts his own gaunt image, full of introspection and intensity. Unable at this point to confront other patients, or reality itself, he assumes the dual role of model and artist. By September 1889, after creating “Starry Night” (now at the Museum of Modern Art, New York) and painting the wheat fields that could be seen from his rooms at the asylum, he wrote to his brother Theo in Paris about two self-portraits he was painting:

So I am working on two portraits of myself at this moment—for want of another model—because it is more than time I did a little figure work. One I began the day I got up; I was thin and pale as a ghost. It is dark violet–blue and the head whitish with yellow hair, so it has a color effect.

The rapid, almost violent background strokes, painted thickly, shimmer in dissonance and contrast with the artist’s deeply penetrating stare. Emerald highlights in his face, the blue of his smock, and the golden yellows of his hair and beard are all echoed on his palette—pigments that had only recently been ordered and sent as a care package from his brother. The rapidity and repetition of his linear movement belie the amount of forethought and precision that Van Gogh has applied to this composition; it is with utmost restraint that he circumscribes the nose with that bold green outline and calculates the effects of the brilliant yellows and blues. He was known as the redheaded madman by locals, and yet he carefully composed hundreds of moving
letters that demonstrated his love of nature, of man, of literature and language. In 10 short years, from 1880 to 1890, he painted almost unceasingly; more than 850 oil paintings are attributed to him today. One can only imagine his legacy, had he lived beyond his short 37 years.

About the Art Exchange Program
In 2007, the Norton Simon foundations entered a new phase in their history by forming an art exchange program with both the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and The Frick Collection in New York City. Works of art from the Norton Simon foundations are lent to both of these estimable institutions for special viewings and, in return, masterpieces from their collections make their way to the Norton Simon Museum. The exchange is an opportunity to promote the Norton Simon collections to a much wider audience while simultaneously providing Southern California audiences the chance to view some of the world’s most significant and visually compelling paintings.


About the Norton Simon Museum
The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum’s collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the
galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

**Location:** The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open from noon to 6 p.m. every day except Tuesday and noon to 9 p.m. on Friday. **Admission:** General admission is $10 for adults and $7 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 6 to 9 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** The City of Pasadena provides a shuttle bus to transport passengers through the Pasadena Playhouse district, the Lake Avenue shopping district and Old Pasadena. A shuttle stop is located in front of the Museum. Please visit www.cityofpasadena.net/artsbus for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.