

# Norton Simon Museum For Immediate Release

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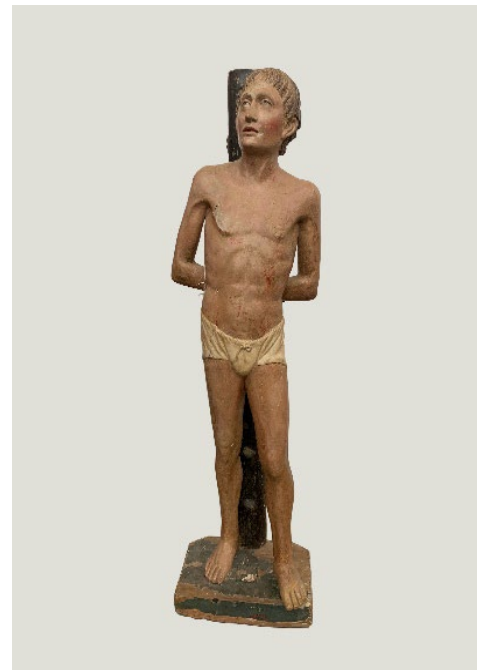
## *Saint Sebastian: Anatomy of a Sculpture*

February 10–July 3, 2023

**Pasadena, CA**—The Norton Simon Museum presents an exhibition dedicated to a single work of art: a 15th-century Italian painted sculpture of Saint Sebastian from the Norton Simon collections. Through historical and scientific research, *Saint Sebastian: Anatomy of a Sculpture* explores the rich life of this previously unstudied artwork from its creation to its arrival at the Museum. Presented in the Museum’s focus gallery on the main level from February 10 through July 3, 2023, the exhibition is a collaboration between Assistant Curator Maggie Bell and Conservator John Griswold.

According to legend, Sebastian was a 3rd-century Roman soldier condemned to death by Emperor Diocletian for his Christian beliefs. He survived this first attempt on his life and was nursed back to health by holy women. His pious endurance and miraculous recovery became associated with salvation from the bubonic plague, which persisted in Europe from the 14th to 17th centuries, inspiring numerous images of the saint in churches, shrines and private homes. Sebastian’s bleeding wounds resembled the sores caused by the pestilence, and in some cases the offending arrows symbolized the disease itself.

The saint is usually depicted in the aftermath of his attempted execution, bound to a tree and bristling from the firing squad’s arrows. In the Museum’s sculpture, Sebastian’s wrists are tied



*Saint Sebastian*, second half of 15th century, circle of Matteo Civitali (Italian, 1436-1501), polychromed wood, 56-1/2 x 16 x 12 in. (143.5 x 40.6 x 30.5 cm), The Norton Simon Foundation

behind him to a tree trunk, though the once-present arrows are now absent, and only drips of red paint mark his injuries. These missing arrows are just a few of the invisible elements of the sculpture that Norton Simon staff sought to study through technical examination, conducted with the Decorative Arts and Sculpture Conservation Department at the J. Paul Getty Museum. X-ray fluorescence analysis revealed the elemental composition of original layers of gesso and pigment, and multi-angle X-ray imaging divulged the sculpture's complex internal structure. Most surprising was the discovery that the saint's torso is adhered to the vertical support with massive metal nails, paralleling the piercing violence in Sebastian's martyrdom. Given the importance of images in 15th-century Christian religious practice, creating such a sculpture would have been a collective labor of devotion.

Retracing the sculpture's journey to the Museum, far from its central Italian home, is the exhibition's final challenge. Like many Italian polychrome, or painted, sculptures, it entered the international art market well over a century ago, and the ownership histories of such objects can be difficult to trace. Archival photographs offer glimpses of its whereabouts prior to Norton Simon's acquisition in 1978.

*Saint Sebastian: Anatomy of a Sculpture* is organized by Assistant Curator Maggie Bell and Conservator John Griswold. It is on view in the Museum's focus gallery on the main level from February 10 through July 3, 2023.

### **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.

**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 [nortonsimon.org](http://nortonsimon.org). **Hours:** The Museum is open Thursday through Monday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. (Saturday to 7 p.m.). It is closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free but limited, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> 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](http://www.metro.net) for schedules. **Planning your Visit:** For up-to-date information on our guidelines and protocols, please visit [nortonsimon.org/visit](http://nortonsimon.org/visit).