

Exhibition further explores themes America's cultural identity with works from Reynolda collection

WINSTON-SALEM,, N.C. — A long-hidden treasure of American art, “Gallery of the Louvre,” will go on view at Reynolda House Museum of American Art in February. The masterpiece of Samuel F. B. Morse — yes, that Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph and namesake Morse code — will form the core of a new exhibition: “Samuel F. B. Morse’s ‘Gallery of the Louvre’ and the Art of Invention,” Feb.17 - June 4, 2017. The show will include early telegraph machines from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, 19th-century paintings and prints from Reynolda’s own nationally recognized collection and Old Master prints from Wake Forest University. Morse’s monumental painting - also his last - was little seen by the public until recently. Reynolda House is the only venue for this exhibition in the southeastern United States.

Long-distance communication was the shared purpose of both Morse’s “Gallery of the Louvre” and his telegraph. Begun while he was living in Paris in 1831, he conceived the painting as a way to introduce European masterpieces to American audiences decades before the founding of art museums in the United States.

The massive six-by-nine foot canvas pictures 38 Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces, which Morse considered to be the finest works inside the Louvre. He painstakingly copied in miniature Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, and work by Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Rubens, Tintoretto, Titian, and other celebrated artists, then imaginatively ‘installed’ the works in the Louvre’s majestic Salon Carré. His arrangement of the old master miniatures within his own painting was done to demonstrate differences in styles and techniques among the artists.

Morse centers himself in the painting’s foreground as an instructor and, figuratively, as a link between European art of the past and America’s cultural future. He is seen tutoring a young art student as she works on her own copy of one of the masterpieces before her. Morse’s good friend, author James Fenimore Cooper, can be glimpsed with his wife and daughter in the left corner.

“Gallery of the Louvre” was a purely academic undertaking for Morse, befitting his role as painting professor and founder of the National Academy in New York. His plan was to send the painting on a national tour after its completion in 1833. When the tour did not materialize, Morse relinquished his creativity to perfecting his telegraph.

The painting set a record for an American work of art at the time of its last purchase in 1982: \$3.25 million (more than \$8.1 million in today’s dollars). In 2015, a national tour commenced, the much-delayed culmination of Morse’s original intent.

Another highlight of the exhibition will be important works from the collection of Reynolda House Museum of American Art. More than 20 paintings and prints by the 19th century’s leading artists, including William Merritt Chase, Thomas Cole, John Singleton Copley, Edward Hicks, Charles Willson Peale and Gilbert Stuart, serve to explore themes of America’s cultural identity.

Old master prints, among them work by Rembrandt and van Dyck, will be on loan to the exhibition from Wake Forest University’s collection. Prints like these were used in the 17th century in the same way that Morse intended his canvas to instruct and show art two centuries later.

The show's final element, early telegraphs, affirms that Morse was an astute bridge between old and new, cleverly moving from painter to inventor. As the Reynolda House Museum of American Art exhibition will show, he used wooden canvas stretcher bars from his studio to construct his earliest versions of the telegraph.

The museum plans a series of lectures and a symposium to further explore themes presented in the exhibition. An exhibition catalogue and gallery guide will be available for purchase in the museum store. Reynolda House will also offer a ticket package that includes the gallery guide and museum admission. Tickets will be available on the museum's website at reynoldahouse.org/morse.

Samuel F.B. Morse's Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention was organized by and with support from the Terra Foundation for American Art. Reynolda House Museum of American Art is grateful for support of the exhibition from Major Sponsor Wake Forest Innovation Quarter; Contributing Sponsor the Terra Foundation for American Art; and Exhibition Partners Joia Johnson and Jeff and Sissy Whittington.

About Reynolda House Museum of American Art:

Reynolda House Museum of American Art is one of the nation's premier American art museums, with masterpieces by Mary Cassatt, Frederic Church, Jacob Lawrence, Georgia O'Keeffe and Gilbert Stuart among its collection. Affiliated with Wake Forest University, Reynolda House features changing exhibitions, concerts, lectures, classes, film screenings and other events. The museum is located at 2250 Reynolda Road in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in the historic 1917 estate of Katharine Smith Reynolds and her husband, Richard Joshua Reynolds, founder of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. With its centennial in 2017, Reynolda House will celebrate both its history of interpreting and preserving American art and culture, and its future, which promises exciting exhibitions and innovative reinterpretations of the Reynolda Estate. Along with Reynolda Gardens and Reynolda Village, which feature spectacular public gardens, dining, and shopping, Reynolda House offers a unique experience that spans both the past and present. For more information, please visit reynoldahouse.org or call [336.758.5150](tel:336.758.5150). Connect at facebook.com/rhmaa and @VisitReynolda.

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