

'Florence at the Dawn of the Renaissance'

**J. Paul Getty Museum
Los Angeles**

This exhibition would have been a significant event if all it had to offer were seven paintings by Giotto di Bondone, the largest group of the influential Italian master's work ever shown in North America. But that was merely one fascinating aspect of this expansive investigation of artistic production in 14th-century Florence. Subtitled "Painting and Illumination, 1300–50" and organized with the Art Gallery of Ontario, the show of 98 objects addressed the development of narrative religious art and workshop practices in the great Italian city, and explored the relationship between paintings and illuminated manuscripts.

Relatively large panel paintings, including Giotto's magnificent Peruzzi Altarpiece, *Christ Blessing with Saint John the Evangelist, the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Francis* (ca. 1309–15), and Bernardo Daddi's triptych *The Virgin Mary with Saints Thomas Aquinas and Paul* (ca. 1335), had commanding physical presences. In both, bold images of individual figures against

gold backgrounds attracted viewers, who could discover surprisingly naturalistic details and emotional nuances in faces and gestures upon approaching the works. Paintings such as these, which were made for churches and family chapels, appeared alongside smaller, more delicate pieces created for individual devotional study and daily guidance, illuminating art's prominent place in Florentine life.

The last section of the show was devoted to the *Laudario of Sant'Agnese* (ca. 1340), a luxurious manuscript, which was known as the most exquisite and ambitious book of its kind, illuminated by Pacino di Bonaguada and the Master of the Dominican Effigies. Its parchment leaves, commemorating feasts of the liturgical year, were eventually dispersed for sale. But here, for the first time, 24 of the surviving 28 leaves and fragments were reunited—a suitably grand finale for a remarkable exhibition.

—**Suzanne Muchnic**

Scott Fraser

**Jenkins Johnson
San Francisco**

Many fastidious realists have too few ideas; Colorado-based painter Scott Fraser may have too many. The 33 pieces in "Outside the Box" burst with jokes, allusions, and other marks of pictorial self-consciousness, but these qualities reward the sustained attention that the high craft of Fraser's work implicitly demands.

The graphite drawings included in the exhibition—most of them preparatory studies for the paintings on view—and a time-lapse video of the artist producing the large oil on canvas *Reign* (2012) illuminated the care Fraser puts into his canvases. *Reign*, the show's centerpiece, depicts a still-life setup on a white table, with arrows raining down from above in parallel lines, like the bowler-hatted men who shower René Magritte's paintings. The arrows pierce the table-top, break a cup and saucer, and impale a sneaker. Various reflective objects and a skull on the floor demonstrate Fraser's



Scott Fraser, *Reign*, 2012, oil on canvas, 84½" x 79". Jenkins Johnson.

representational skill, and put into relief his wry subversion of still-life conventions. Though the work seems to be an open declaration of Fraser's admiration for Magritte, the artist explains in the video that the arrows symbolize modernism's shattering effect on pictorial tradition. That sentiment was echoed in a series of watercolors with punning titles, in which the artist expressed his anti-modernist sentiments as freely as a cartoonist might.

Several smaller paintings on view referred overtly to Edwin Dickinson's 1924–26 *The Cello Player*, a masterpiece of eccentric realism. But Fraser's most appealing pieces were simpler, such as *Catenary Kiss II* (2011). In this oil on canvas, foil-wrapped chocolates rain down from above to form an all-over graphic composition, with an almost subliminal parabola—the catenary curve—threading through the array. But for all the devices on display in Fraser's art, the work finally owes its magnetic effect to the dedication Fraser brings to it.

—**Kenneth Baker**

Dorothea Tanning

**Gallery Wendi Norris
San Francisco**

Titled "Unknown but Knowable States," this exhibition featured Dorothea Tanning's paintings, sculptures, and works on paper from the 1960s and '70s, when she left behind the narrative surrealism



Pacino di Bonaguada, *Laudario of Sant'Agnese* (detail), ca. 1340, tempera and gold on parchment, 17½" x 12½". J. Paul Getty Museum.