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NEWS FROM THE GETTY

DATE: May 5, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GETTY FOUNDATION AWARDS €172,000 FOR CONSERVATION OF *THE MYSTIC LAMB (GHENT ALTARPIECE)*

Grant Supports Unprecedented Opportunity to Train Future Conservators as Part of the Getty's Panel Paintings Initiative

LOS ANGELES — A singularly beautiful and a highly complex painting composed of 18 separate oak panels, *The Mystic Lamb* of 1432 by Hubert and Jan van Eyck (the *Ghent Altarpiece*) ranks as one of the most important works of art in the world. Painted for the Saint Bavo Cathedral of Ghent, this complex work of art is showing its age and long history.

The tradition of painting on wood panels was widespread in Europe from the late 12th through the 17th centuries. Panel paintings are among the most significant works in American, European, and Russian museum collections and in religious buildings, including the *Ghent Altarpiece* as well as works by Leonardo da Vinci, Peter Paul Rubens, and Rembrandt van Rijn. Unfortunately, many of these works are now threatened by serious problems due to the warping, cracking, and splitting of the wood on which they are painted, requiring highly specialized care and conservation not only of the painted surface, but also the underlying structure.

It takes years of practice for a conservator to develop the surgical skills required for intervention and treatment. Today, there are only a handful of experts fully qualified to conserve these paintings, and nearly all of these experts will retire within the next decade. The Getty Foundation, Getty Conservation Institute, and J. Paul Getty Museum together designed the Panel Paintings Initiative to ensure that the next generation of conservators is prepared to take their place.

As part of the Initiative, the Getty Foundation has awarded €172,000 to the De Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, or NWO) to plan the conservation of the *Ghent Altarpiece* to ensure the famed work of art is preserved for the future.

The grant to the NWO -- announced during a press conference on May 5 in Ghent, Belgium -- will include a state-of-the-art conservation investigation, a condition assessment, and training for three post-graduate and several mid-career conservators to work with experts under general project supervision provided by Professors Anne van Grevenstein-Kruse and Ron Spronk.

"We are delighted to provide this grant to the NWO," said Dr. Deborah Marrow, director of the Getty Foundation. "The significance of the work on the *Ghent Altarpiece* will afford future panel conservators an unparalleled learning experience under expert supervision, and the project will make a major contribution to achieving the goals of our larger Panel Paintings Initiative."

In the 16th century, the *Ghent Altarpiece* was dismantled and hidden twice for protection from iconoclastic riots and then during the Calvinistic Republic. Two centuries later, it was taken to Paris by French troops as a war trophy. During the 19th century, six panels of the wings of the altarpiece were sold off separately, split lengthwise, and "cradled" – a popular but damaging restoration process of the past that forced the panels to lie straight and flat. The work, reassembled after World War I, subsequently had one panel stolen, and was hidden again during World War II, recovered by Allied forces and finally, brought back to the Ghent Cathedral, where it has since remained. Over the centuries, the large altarpiece (measuring 11 by 14 feet) has undergone numerous cleanings and conservation efforts, the last of which took place in the early 1950s. Despite regular care provided through the Diocese of Ghent, today its paint is lifting and joints are splitting.

"We are very pleased to work with the Getty Foundation and the international team of experts led by Professor Anne van Grevenstein-Kruse and Professor Ron Spronk on this important project," said Dr. Louis B.J. Vertegaal, director of physical sciences at the NWO. "This project brings together art historians, scientists, and conservators to contribute to a more integrated and objective approach to conservation practice and to educate the next generation of multidisciplinary researchers in the field."

Adds Getty Foundation Program Officer Antoine Wilmering, "This initiative would not be possible without the group of international experts with whom we are working. Their commitment to reaching out to the next generation of conservators and passing on their acquired knowledge is essential to the success of the program."

The Ghent project began last month and is slated for completion in December 2010, when the results will be shared with experts and the public through lectures, seminars and workshops, as well as on the Web.

The *Ghent Altarpiece* grant brings the total amount awarded by the Getty Foundation through the Panel Paintings Initiative to nearly €750,000. Previous grants have funded a survey of significant museum collections of panel paintings and of professionals in the field undertaken by the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, and a collaborative project between the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Prado Museum in Madrid that resulted in the conservation of the great *Adam and Eve* by Albrecht Dürer.

The grant comes as the Getty Foundation celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, marking the issuance of more than 5,000 grants for projects that increase the understanding and preservation of the visual arts in more than 180 countries and on every continent.

For more information about the Getty Foundation's philanthropic work around the globe, including the Panel Paintings Initiative, visit www.getty.edu.

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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. Additional information is available at www.getty.edu. 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 Getty Foundation fulfills the philanthropic mission of the Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the understanding and preservation of the visual arts locally and throughout the world. Through strategic grants and programs, the Foundation strengthens art history as a global discipline, promotes the interdisciplinary practice of conservation, increases access to museum and archival collections, and develops current and future leaders in the visual arts. The Foundation carries out its work in collaboration with the Getty Museum, Research Institute, and Conservation Institute to ensure the Getty programs achieve maximum impact. Additional information is available at www.getty.edu/foundation.

De Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, or NWO), located in the Hague, supports interdisciplinary research projects in the Netherlands and throughout the world and is well known for its scientific research funding and ground-breaking research in art materials and painter's techniques.