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**GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM ACQUIRES  
SEMINAL REMBRANDT ENGRAVING**

**Previously Unknown Rembrandt, *Three Crosses*, Rediscovered After 100 Years;  
Impression of the Engraving's Fourth State Considered Among the Best in the  
World**

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., August 27, 2007** – The Grand Rapids Art Museum announced today that it has acquired Rembrandt's *Three Crosses*, an engraving which represents the most profound religious work ever created by the renowned artist and printmaker. The masterwork, dating from 1653-55, describes Christ's crucifixion between two thieves on the hill of Golgotha. The museum has acquired the fourth state of *Three Crosses*, the culmination of four variations (or states) of the image that Rembrandt reworked on a single metal plate.

The engraving, executed in drypoint with burin, was acquired by the museum with support from Sid and Joanne Jansma. The museum has been actively acquiring works for its permanent collection since announcing the creation of its new, \$75 million museum building. Opening October 5, 2007, the new Grand Rapids Art Museum will be the world's first LEED-certified art museum, and will provide the city of Grand Rapids with its first space designed specifically to house works of art.

"We plan to open the museum's new Works on Paper Study and Reading Room December 1, 2007, shortly after the general museum opening on October 5. Due to the fragile nature of works on paper, additional time to acclimatize this space is required," said Museum Director Celeste Adams. "Rembrandt's *Three Crosses* is a centerpiece of the museum's print collection that will continue to grow. This establishes an extraordinary level of quality that we hope to sustain in future acquisitions in all areas of the collection."

The fourth variation, or state, of *Three Crosses* represents one of the most profound artistic depictions of death and redemption in history, and reflects Rembrandt's own meditations on the scripture passage from which the scene was drawn. In the first three states of *Three Crosses*, which Rembrandt produced in 1653, the narrative action is based

upon St. Luke's account of the Crucifixion – when “darkness covered the earth” and Christ committed his spirit into the hands of his Father. Rembrandt's earlier versions of the print focused on the immediate death of Christ, the conversion of the centurion kneeling before the cross, and the figures leaving the scene. Two years later, Rembrandt returned to the metal plate and dramatically altered the composition and meaning of the event depicted, imbuing the work with deeply personal and spiritual connotations.

Richard H. Axsom, Senior Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, and author of numerous catalogues of 20<sup>th</sup> century prints stated, “Rembrandt sought to discover the humanity of the Bible in his own personal terms. Over the course of his life Rembrandt's art moved from a public to a private perspective, an important precedent to the very core of modernism – namely that the work of art is a recording of the artist's individual experience in the world. Pablo Picasso considered Rembrandt the most important influence and inspiration in his own work.”

The newly acquired impression of *Three Crosses* is an exceedingly significant impression, notable for its particular richness of black inks and crispness of line. The work will be displayed in the new museum's Works on Paper Study, which will house works on paper in the museum's collection. The room will open to the public in December 2007, after acclimatization process is complete.

#### **About the Grand Rapids Art Museum's *Three Crosses***

On February 22, 2007 a schoolteacher from Luxembourg walked into the print room of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. He asked the curator, Ger Luijten (pronounced Heir Loughten), if a print that had been passed down in his family for generations was authentic. Luijten was incredulous as he examined the print and realized that it was not only authentic, but certainly one of the finest impressions he had ever seen of this masterpiece. Luijten commented, “This is so rare. Perhaps one in thousands of works that are brought into the museum for review is significant. For something like this to happen is nearly impossible.”

The fourth state of the *Three Crosses* explodes the pictorial space, setting up a powerful contrast between the palpable darkness — into which the surrounding figures are scattered in confusion — and a vertical shaft of light centered on Christ. Rembrandt scraped, burnished, and polished extensive areas of the plate, removing figures, adding new ones, and scratching a dense network of lines that darkened the image. The earlier states of the *Three Crosses* are renderings of the scene in realistic terms; the fourth state is a meditation on inner meaning reflecting Rembrandt's intensely personal reading of the Scripture. In both conception and technique, the fourth state of the *Three Crosses* is a visionary work of art that transcends its moment in time.

Approximate fifty impressions of the fourth state of the *Three Crosses* exist in museums and major private collections. About fifteen have come on the art market since World War II. This impression was completely unknown to scholars and museum curators. Ownership of this print can be traced to Monsieur W. Rommelaire, physician in ordinary to Albert I of Belgium at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rommelaire's son suffered from an

extended illness and was nursed throughout his life by a woman to whom he gave the print in gratitude. The nurse, who never married, gave the print to her godchild, the mother of the schoolteacher from Luxembourg who brought the print to Luijten at the Rijksmuseum. Luijten's calendar shows an appointment at 2:00pm that day. "This is a very early and rich impression of the *Three Crosses*," Luijten continued, "It is one of the finest in the world, surely among the first ten printed from the plate. It is better than our fourth state here at the Rijksmuseum and will be one of the best in the U.S."

Nadine Orenstein, Curator in the Department of Drawings and Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a specialist on Dutch art, reviewed the print personally and stated, "The impressions of the fourth state differ greatly. Rembrandt varied the way that he inked each impression as though he were painting the printing plate. As a result he created a unique work of art each time he pulled a sheet from the printing press. It is marvelous to see this rich impression and wonderful that this new discovery has come to light.

### **About the Grand Rapids Art Museum**

The mission of the Grand Rapids Art Museum is to provide a gathering place where people of all ages and backgrounds can enrich their lives through interaction with works of art in a thought-provoking and creative way. Founded in 1910 as the Grand Rapid Art Association, the Grand Rapids Art Museum's initial collection was assembled and relocated to a Greek Revival residence in 1924 and renamed the Grand Rapids Art Museum. In 1981 the Museum moved into its most recent location in a historic, Beaux-Arts style Federal Building. Construction of the new, LEED-certified GRAM building began in September 2004.

The \$75 million capital campaign to build the new Grand Rapids Art Museum was supported by a \$20 million lead gift from the Wege Foundation, organized by long-time cultural philanthropist and environmental advocate Peter M. Wege. Twelve additional donors made gifts of \$1 million or more, establishing a collaboration of private philanthropy unprecedented in Grand Rapids for a single cultural project. In the first year of the campaign, The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, Jay and Betty Van Andel Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, Fred and Lena Meijer, and Daniel and Pamella DeVos Foundation accounted for \$20 million in gifts.

GRAM's collection consists of 5,000 works of art, of which more than half are works on paper. Major prints by Pierre Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Mary Cassatt, and Winslow Homer are included in the collection. The strength of the painting collection is modern art, which includes Richard Diebenkorn's major early work *Ingleside*, 1963 and Ellsworth Kelly's monumental *Blue White*, 2006 commissioned for the lobby of the new museum. Home to Steelcase, Herman Miller, and Hayworth, Grand Rapids' legacy as a leading center for design and manufacturing is reflected in the museum's growing collection of design and modern craft. GRAM's collection also includes the work of leading artists from the Michigan and Great Lakes area.

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