

# ANTENNA AUDIO

## *High Museum of Art*

### *Louvre Atlanta Year 3:*

### *The Louvre and the Masterpiece*



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## 101 Introduction Michael Shapiro-Henri Loyrette

MICHAEL SHAPIRO—Hello, this is Michael Shapiro, the Nancy and Holcombe T. Greene, Jr., Director of the High Museum of Art. I want to welcome you to our third and last year of *Louvre Atlanta*.

This year is devoted to masterpieces—looking at them, learning to recognize them, and seeing them in context. These are subjects that my friend, Louvre Director Henri Loyrette, has thought about a lot.

*HL: Well, I think the essence of a masterpiece is really a question of quality, the quality that distinguishes it from its environment, which enables it to transcend the passing fashions, and which ... surpasses the works of other artists of any given period.*

MS: So let's get started. Today, you're going to hear from David Brenneman, the managing curator of *Louvre Atlanta* from the High Museum, and many of his colleagues from the Louvre. We thought you'd enjoy beginning with the large sculpture of a lion here in the lobby. Please walk over to it now, and press 102 on your player. If you need help using your player, press 99 now.

## **99 Second level: Player instructions**

NARRATOR: As you walk through the exhibition, look for audio icons accompanied by a number next to selected works of art. Just enter the number onto your player's keypad, and wait for a message to begin.

To pause your player at any time, press the red button. To resume play, press the green button. Every now and then, your player will pause automatically, and I will prompt you to press the green button to hear some additional information.

Use the volume controls to raise and lower the volume.

**102 Antoine-Louis Barye, *Lion with Serpent*, 1832-1833**

NARRATOR: Director Michael Shapiro fell in love with, and even wrote about, this masterpiece by Antoine-Louis Barye some thirty-five years ago, when he was in graduate school.

*MS: And now, ...being able to bring that work of art here -- to have it leave France I think for the first time...! And what's relevant in this discussion is, my feeling about it as a masterpiece is absolutely unchanged.*

NARRATOR: In early nineteenth-century France, the realistic fierceness of this sculpture was revolutionary. When it was first on view at the Paris Salon exhibition in 1836, sensitive viewers ran away in fright.

Antoine-Louis Barye, was obsessed with portraying the forces of nature as authentically as he could. Isabelle Lemaistre is Senior Curator in the Sculpture Department of the Louvre Museum.

*IL: He had drawn a lot of lions in the zoo. But you know that lions in the zoo are not so lively, are not so strong. So he had to imagine those poor lions from the zoo and make this very strong and powerful lion.*

NARRATOR: This bronze, created from Barye's original wax model, is so finely cast that you can see traces of his sculpting tool on the lion's back.





### 103. Antoine-Louis Barye, *Lion with Serpent model*, 1832, and other models

NARRATOR: The sculptures all around you are also by the artist Antoine-Louis Barye. By looking at these models, we get a deeper understanding of Barye's working process. Isabelle Lemaistre of the Louvre.

*IL: ...It is a practice, a usual practice of the Louvre, to collect pieces which can explain, or enhance I should say, a masterpiece, explain how it has been made by the drawings, by the different sketches in different materials....*

NARRATOR: Most of the models are directly connected to the larger work of the lion and serpent.

*IS: It's not only a... reduction of the big piece....we show as well near the Lion and the Serpent...pieces which are in different materials to show how Barye was working...*

NARRATOR: Barye used terracotta, plaster and wax for his models. Look for the pale terracotta model of a lion attacking a bull.\*\*

*IS: In this piece, you can see how Barye with his fingers was modeling the clay. So that's very interesting because we know he was using this material when he was thinking of something new...*

NARRATOR: Look for the panther attacking a deer. This is a plaster model. \*\*  
Barye could adjust the plaster by adding wax so he could chisel and mold it into  
the shape he wanted. These models are like a backstage peek into how an artist  
brings his ideas into reality.

**104 Iran, Susa, Worshipper carrying a goat, ca. 1500-1200 BC**

NARRATOR: This gold statuette is small in stature. But it is a technical marvel, full of poignant detail. It's more than 3,000 years old and was discovered at the Acropolis of Susa, in what is now Iran.

David Brenneman is Director of Collections and Exhibitions and Frances B. Bunzl Family Curator of European Art at the High Museum.

*DB: When French archaeologists found this object in the late 19th century, they found several other similar objects made out of lesser metals...So these little objects were made as offerings to these ancient gods. ...And...they're remarkable in terms of their detail.*

NARRATOR: The figure holds a baby goat as an offering. His other hand is held up in reverence. The style of his fringed garment and braided hair may indicate he's a royal figure. Also, look for the religious star tattoos across his chest, and his delicate facial expression. These exquisite details are part of what makes the work a masterpiece.

*DB: You know, the artist who made it didn't think of it as a masterpiece. Didn't think of it as...something that he would ultimately benefit from. But at the same time, he must have known that he was making something really extraordinary.*

NARRATOR: David Brenneman has more to say about the ancient view of a masterpiece. Press the green PLAY button to hear him.

**1042 Iran, Susa, Worshipper carrying a goat Level 2**

*DB: First of all, it's important to know that the term masterpiece...only arises...during the European middle ages. And...prior to that time, the concept of masterpiece and ...certainly the term masterpiece did not exist. But something like the masterpiece, that is an object that is in a higher special category of production because the artist has created something exceptional, ...that type of object did exist.*

*...And so in the exhibition what we try to do is to show several objects from ancient times that represent artists going above and beyond to make works of art that are...virtuoso efforts...*

*...So here you have an artist who's making this, who is probably straining and stretching all...of his technical abilities to make this little piece that he's then going to offer to the gods. And so that's really why this work of art is in the exhibition.*

105 Greek, *Aryballe*, end of 7th – 1st half of 6th c. BC

NARRATOR: This tiny work cast in bronze is a masterpiece from ancient Greece. One of the things that makes it extraordinary is the careful writing etched onto its surface.

The inscription is in the first person, as if the artwork itself was speaking to us. It says: “Chalkodamas dedicated me to the gods as a very beautiful object.” Chalkodamas means “tamer of bronze.” Sophie Descamps is Curator in the Greek and Roman Department at the Louvre Museum...

*SD: ...He was very proud of what he made, what he manufactured. So he was known as the best at that time, which was the first half of the 6th Century B.C. And of course when we look at it and the way that the object is made in one single piece, it is a tour de force... It was the very beginning of the processes of hollow casting....*

NARRATOR: Chalkodamas’ signature could be the oldest signature of an ancient Greek work in bronze. But the signature is more a dedication than an effort to claim a personal connection.

*SD: ...People were not creating for themselves. They were creating for the gods. So of course an object who was supposed to delight the gods was a true masterpiece...*

## 106. Muhammad ibn Al-Zayn, *Basin called the "Baptistery of Saint Louis"*

NARRATOR: This copper basin with elaborate details and medallions of gold and silver is considered a masterpiece of Islamic art. It's in impeccable condition and is a flawless example of Mamluk art, a style that flourished during the Islamic Empire between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

But all of that is just part of this artwork's story. What's more unusual, and elevates it to higher regard, is the fact that the artist signed the piece *six* times. His name was Muhammad ibn Al-Zayn. Pieces like these were not typically signed even once.

He placed one signature of inlaid silver under the rim. The other five are difficult to see because they're so small. The multiple signatures were probably an indication of how proud he was of this exceptional accomplishment.

Look at the intricate details of the images. You'll see men engaged in military exercises and hunting scenes. There are animals and birds within the leaves of foliage. On the inside is an image of a pond with frogs, turtles, and even people swimming.

The basin came to France during the Middle Ages. Two French coats of arms have been added on the inside. It was used as a baptismal font by French royalty, and prized as a masterpiece by the monarchy through many generations.





### 107. Limoges (Alpais), *Alpais Ciborium*, ca. 1200

NARRATOR: The exquisite elegance of this ciborium from the Middle Ages resonates in any age. It was used to carry the sacred host, or wafer, for Holy Communion. Its perfect state of conservation makes it difficult to believe it was crafted eight hundred years ago.

The metal- and enamelwork portray apostles and angels. Glass and enameled beads and semi-precious gems adorn the gilt and engravings.

And the artist signed this work, which was rare in the thirteenth century and gives the ciborium another special attribute. But more unusual still is the signature on the inside of the lid. It reads: *Master G. Alpais from Limoges made me*. It's as if the artwork had its own voice.

In the guild system of the Middle Ages, this work was considered flawless and superb, just as it is today. David Brenneman:

*DB:...To be part of the guild you had to submit an example of that work of that field that would pass muster with all of the other masters who were already members of the guild, who would then accept you into the field after you had presented ...and the work had been accepted...your master piece.*

**108. François Boucher, *Rinaldo and Armida*, 1734**

NARRATOR: In the early eighteenth century, the painter Francois Boucher was intent on becoming a member of the Royal Academy of Art. This painting was Boucher's reception piece – the painting he hoped would gain him acceptance. It's a tour de force incorporating every Academy requirement. David

Brenneman:

*DB: And the idea of the reception piece is that you would show all of your technical skill, but beyond that you would show that you had a very sound knowledge of history. So of biblical history, of mythology, of world history. And so the reception piece would demonstrate that knowledge of history...Making art was not just about the skill, the hand, but it was also about the mind.*

NARRATOR: Boucher's painting shows off his mastery at portraying architecture, drapery, clouds, waterfalls, flowers, and, of course, the human figure. And the subject is from the allegorical poem *Rinaldo and Armida*, about a beautiful woman who kept a warrior from fighting in the Crusades.

Boucher did gain admittance to the Academy, and went on to be the first painter to King Louis the Fifteenth.

To hear David Brenneman tell us more about the workings of the Royal Academy, press the green PLAY button now.



**1082 François Boucher, *Rinaldo and Armida*, 1734 Second Level**

*DB: Well, in the 17th century, King Louis XIV and his ministers created a Royal Academy for Fine Arts. And the idea of the Royal Academy was in part to train artists to work on all of the public projects, all of the palaces, and to produce all the works of art that the king would need to show the glory of France and to glorify himself...But they also wanted to break the grip of the medieval guilds, which were still in power...because there was also a commercial element...*

*...So throughout the subsequent reigns of Louis XV and XVI and through the 18th century, the Academy was set up to teach students both how to make works of art but also taught history and language so that the students who graduated would have this very basic training and would be able to excel in all of these areas.*

**109. Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1816-1819**

NARRATOR: This early nineteenth-century painting is a study for a much larger work. The artist, Theodore Géricault, was interested in a lot more than demonstrating his skill and mastery of his subject. David Brenneman:

*DB: By the time you get to the early 19th century and the Romantic period, artists are looking for something that...goes against the rules. That comes out of your mind like a torrent. It can't be controlled. It's something that simply has to get out.*

NARRATOR: The huge size of the completed painting was also groundbreaking. It measures over twenty-three feet long.

*DB: So in a way...Géricault's painting is one of the first modern masterpieces, because it shows...the artist as a genius, as someone who doesn't have to follow the rules.*

NARRATOR: Two aspects in particular set this work apart. The subject is a departure from the Academy-required historical or mythological themes. Géricault chose instead a contemporary, controversial event – an actual shipwreck that resulted in many casualties.

*DB: If you look at the composition from left to right, you go through a series of kind of emotional states. So on the left you see this incredible figure who's holding...what appears to be a dead body, just in complete despair. And then as you move across to the right you see the figures who are kind of reaching out. They're trying to signal this ship in the distance...*

NARRATOR: To hear more about how this new art conflicted with the Academy, press the green PLAY button now.

1092 Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa* Second Level

NARRATOR: Géricault's painting rose above the Academy's idea of what makes great art.

*DB: It marked a huge departure, and, you know, really created...this notion of the artist as romantic genius.*

NARRATOR: ...and that creating art is not just about learned skills.

*DB: ...which of course...sort of goes against the Academy, because their...premise is that you can teach all of these things....and the Romantic concept of masterpiece is that it can't be learned. Genius cannot be learned. You either have it or you don't have it.*

**110. Greek, *Levy Wine Jug (in the “wild goats” style)*, ca. 640-630 BC, and other three for comparison**

NARRATOR: These four wine jugs, are all from ancient Greece, yet only one of them is the true masterpiece. Which one, and why?

The large jug predates the other three. Here the artist incorporated influences from other cultures and other media. Sophie Descamps is Curator in the Greek and Roman Department at the Louvre Museum.

*SD: His inspiration was very special and very, very large. But then he created this single object, which can speak of many different trends and many different sort of models, metal, tapestries, the orient... In a way, the Levi Jug is telling us how skillful and clever the artist was...*

NARRATOR: The larger jug is known as the Levy jug, because it was owned by a painter of that name in the mid-1800's. *It* is the masterpiece of the four, while the other three try to imitate this artist's style.

Look closely at the Levy jug. In the top row of animals it seems the artist ran out of room, and improvised a charming solution by turning an animal's head to the side.



*SD: So he felt free to add whatever he wanted just to organize the décor. He was not a kind of slave to a special motif. So this is the difference. The others were not very confident maybe. They were not drawing the same way...*

NARRATOR: The other three repeat the motifs of the Levy jug more by tradition than by inspiration. On those the animals are much bigger, making short work of a more detailed original.

*SD: A true artist...is not anxious because...he can just do what he wants. He has not to copy. He...feels free.*

**111 Islamic (Turkey), *Platter with Peacock*, 1540-1555, and other two for comparison**

NARRATOR: Which of these three Turkish plates before you is the true masterpiece?

Connoisseurship in art is both straightforward and complex. Art historians and critics are aware of art throughout history and apply that knowledge from one piece of art to the next. For the connoisseur, choosing the masterpiece among these three is easy.

Take a look at the platters. Does one of them impress you more than the others? David Brenneman tells us how a connoisseur might see them.

*DB: It's sort of like...you have a little computer in your head, and you have a mental database of images and knowledge. And, you know, your brain works really quickly...when you see something, you're immediately comparing lots of information that you have stored up there with what you're seeing. And you can come to a decision -- most connoisseurs come to a decision very, very quickly.*

NARRATOR: All of these platters are from the mid-sixteenth century. By now, you may have guessed that the masterpiece is the platter with the peacock in the center.

DB: *This particular work of art is not just really good; but it's truly magnificent.  
It's truly the best of its kind.*

NARRATOR: To hear more about *why*, press the green PLAY button now.

**1112 Islamic (Turkey), *Platter with Peacock*, 1540-1555, and other two for comparison**

*DB: Some art insiders will say, well, you'll know a masterpiece ...when you see one. But I think for most people it probably is a little bit of a guessing game. And so what we want to do in this section of the exhibition is provide visitors with concrete examples where they can compare works of art.*

NARRATOR: Because of the Louvre's incomparable collections, we're able to group together works so you can compare masterpieces with good, but lesser works.

*DB: If you compare the peacock platter with the other two platters, one of the things that I see right away is that the peacock platter has a much more complicated design. It's much more complex. And so you have these wonderful, swirling blue leaves that are made of both dark blue and light blue.*

NARRATOR: Now look at the other two dishes. Notice how the flowers are more symmetrical, a little stiff. The artists don't express the same exuberance and freedom.

*DB: In the peacock platter it's almost like...the artist is creating this little world... and you kind of get into the world and the different layers of the plants and leaves and flowers and then ultimately the wonderful playful peacock.*

**112. Roman artist, *Aphrodite with Pillar*, 1st or 2nd c. AD, and other for comparison**

NARRATOR: A good deal of what we know about ancient Greek statuary comes to us through ancient Roman culture. These two sculptures are Roman copies of an original Greek statue called *Aphrodite in the Gardens*.

The Romans were great admirers of Greek art and often copied their artworks.  
Sophie Descamps:

*SD: They were living maybe six centuries after the original was created. So you can understand how far it was from their own time. So we can understand that sometimes...they were just copying for Roman collectors. But then sometimes they were true artists on their own ....*

NARRATOR: One of these statues stands out as a masterpiece.

*SD: When you stand in front of the two copies, and you have to look precisely at some details and then you understand which is the best...*

NARRATOR: Compare the pillars that the figures lean on. At the side of one pillar is a crow and a laurel branch. The other pillar is missing these details.

Also, each figure wears two garments – a kind of tunic and a kind of coat. In the statue with the crow, the two garments are easy to tell apart. In the other, the two garments blend together. One is a more sensitive copy and one is less so.

*SD: But then who made the truly faithful copy? We don't know. Who made the best? We can tell.*

NARRATOR: This brings up the issue of connoisseurship. How do we know a masterpiece? Please press PLAY now, and look around this part of the exhibition while you listen to Henri Loyrette, Michael Shapiro, and David Brenneman talk about this topic.

## 1122 Aphrodite second level: Connoisseurship

HL: *When you discover a masterpiece, you discover it among other works of art. ...For example, when you go through the gallery of archaic Greece you see many, many different works of that time, and suddenly you discover among all these works, which could seem similar in a way, something which is, not different, but something which is more important, more beautiful.*

MS: *The question to me would be, well, if you saw the Venus de Milo or the Winged Victory or the Mona Lisa in an art dealer's store, or in an archaeological setting, ...would one have recognized it as a masterpiece?*

DB: *One of the things that I like to compare connoisseurship to a little bit, for example, is, if you're someone who ... has played baseball, you've played Little League baseball, maybe you've played a little high school ball, maybe you've even played college ball, but then you go to a professional game and you see those guys playing. ...That person, when they see a professional game, and they see a great play, ...they immediately know it. They immediately understand it. Because they know what it is to have tried to do that. They've seen it thousands of times. They've tried to do it thousands of times. ...So I think that's ...part of what goes into connoisseurship. You know this stuff. You've seen this stuff. So when you see something great, you know it.*

**113 Michelangelo Buonarotti, *Ideal head of a woman*, 1515-1520, and *Head of a Satyr*, 1520-1525, and Giulio Clovio, *Cleopatra*, 16th c. for comparison**

NARRATOR: Two of these three drawings are by the great Renaissance master Michelangelo – the *Ideal Head of a Woman*, and the *Head of a Satyr*. The third drawing, *Cleopatra*, is by Giulio Clovio, and is a copy of a Michelangelo. Carel Van Tuyl is head of the department of Prints and Drawings at the Louvre

CVT: ...*Rather than being a study for an altarpiece or for a sculpture, for a fresco, whatever... these are drawings that were made as drawings...to show how well Michelangelo drew. ..and since he drew magnificently...these are masterpieces of masterpieces...*

NARRATOR: Look at the *Head of a Satyr*. It's drawn on top of another head, a female head. This earlier attempt was probably drawn by one of Michelangelo's students.

CVT: ...*You can still see underneath the satyr's head a large part of the headdress of the plaits of ...her coiffure...but it's almost tempting to think that Michelangelo was sort of watching him making a fairly inept copy of a wonderful drawing and saying no, no, no, this is not the way you should do it, and sort of taking it away from the pupil and start to draw himself...*



NARRATOR: Michelangelo's Satyr is quite the opposite of ideal beauty. Perhaps it's his ideal of ugliness.

Now look at the drawing titled Cleopatra.

*CVT: ...This is a very beautiful copy of a wonderful drawing, but it is a copy.  
p4...In a copy you're always aware of somebody checking constantly to see if he's  
following the original carefully enough, if he doesn't deviate from the original....  
which results in a certain hesitation. There's a sort of woodenness in the drawing.*

NARRATOR: If you'd like to hear more about Michelangelo's masterful technique, please press the green PLAY button now.

**1132 Michelangelo Buonarotti, *Ideal head of a woman*, and *Head of a Satyr*, and Giulio Clovio, *Cleopatra* Second Level**

NARRATOR: Carel Van Tuyll tells us about the technique Michelangelo used in making *The Ideal Head of a Woman*.

CVT: ...*It is in a way the technique that makes it a masterpiece. If you look closely at how he has used a piece of red chalk, which was just...a bit of chalk...the mineral that they found in the dolomites... And they were put in holders and you could draw with them. You could sharpen them. You could wet them. You could achieve different effects with them. In this one drawing Michelangelo uses the red chalk in very different ways.*

NARRATOR: In the head of the satyr, the master engages in another technique, this time using pen and ink.

CVT: ...*It's a much more linear technique than chalk. ...so you can basically compare ...his treatment of the quill with that of the chisel. And it's more, almost more sculptural in a way than pictorial. Michelangelo always thinks as a sculptor...that's his basic trade, and even when he makes drawings -- wonderful drawings -- he is still thinking in terms of three dimensions.*

**114. Greek, Female figure, called the "Lady of Auxerre," 1841**

NARRATOR: When art historians first studied ancient Greek art, they were impressed by the classical period as exhibited by the Parthenon. They weren't much interested in the art of earlier periods.

The primitive style of this statue, known as the *Lady of Auxerre*, was overlooked for centuries. It predates the classical age. Sophie Descamps:

*SD: And when The Lady of Auxerre was discovered by a French professor from the Sorbonne in the beginning of the 20th century, he was one of the few scholars to have understood how important these beginnings of Greek sculptures were and that they were not only primitive but they were just the first step of a big adventure, a big evolution.*

NARRATOR: The statue had an adventurous journey before reaching the Louvre. It was for sale at an auction, had a stint as a prop in a theatre, and was a hat stand in a small museum!

Since its discovery and newly valued status, more pieces from this period have been found at Greek archeological sites.

*SD: You know, archeology is not a dead field. Every time there is a new excavation, every time there is a new object to come, to be brought to light, and this happened every year, every month. Many studies can be changed.*

**115 French, *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, 6th c. and beginning of 12th c.**

NARRATOR: Art styles go in and out of fashion from decade to decade, and century to century, making art a story that ebbs and flows. Little about it is straightforward or – excuse the expression – carved in stone.

This marble sculpture, from the Romanesque period of the twelfth century, slipped into obscurity. As Romanesque art fell out of favor, this architectural capital ended up in the Abbey Church of Saint Denis near Paris, serving as a base for a more modern sculpture. It was later banished to a storeroom until its discovery in 1881 by a Louvre curator.

Even in the late nineteenth century Romanesque art was out of favor and considered primitive and unappealing. But in the second half of the twentieth century, a new respect for this art returned, and this sculpture is now considered a masterpiece.

The capital depicts the story of Daniel from the bible. Daniel, thrown into a den of lions because of his religious beliefs, emerges unharmed. We can appreciate the sincere expression on the figure's face, calm in his faith. And the lions seem to serve as protective sentries.

116 Lorenzo Lotto, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, 1526

NARRATOR: This work from 1526, by the revered Venetian artist Lorenzo Lotto, was not discovered until the 1980s. It sat, unnoticed, covered in years of grime, in the attic of a convent. How is it possible for a great work to be overlooked for so long?

David Brenneman tells us how the evolution of knowledge can affect artworks in unusual ways.

*DB: Maybe a collector buys it and gives it to a church, and the church hangs it for...a few hundred years and then it gets kind of dirty and then the church is redecorating and no one quite knows what this work is but it's kind of dirty and, you know, let's put that aside or maybe get rid of it. And somebody comes along and cleans it off and says, oh! He's amazing. This is a brilliant masterpiece!*

NARRATOR: Such was the case of this masterpiece.

*DB: And what's really fascinating is the person who found it discovered what he thought was a great work, offered it to the Louvre....and the Louvre initially declined to buy it because normally museums deal with...dealers that they know or they buy from auction houses.... And now it hangs in the same gallery as the Mona Lisa...*

117 Desiderio da Settignano, *Saint John the Baptist*, 15th c

NARRATOR: For many decades, art historians thought the great Renaissance artist, Donatello, had sculpted this tender image of Saint John the Baptist.

Saint John the Baptist was a popular subject in the mid-fifteenth century, and many artists made their own versions. But Donatello's reputation overshadowed his contemporaries, and his legacy has remained vibrant to this day.

But even in Donatello's genius, he didn't create every sculpture of his time. As it turns out, this sculpture is by one of Donatello's disciples, Desiderio da Settignano, who is notable in his own right. Desiderio worked in Donatello's studio, and while this bust expresses the emotion and grace associated with Donatello's work, it is Desiderio's own voice and style.

The shift in attribution came about because another work of Desiderio's was compared to this one. The similarities were striking enough to change the mind of scholars.

The figure's melancholic expression and delicate features were so well liked that many copies have been made, further contributing to its significance as a masterpiece.

**118 Jean-Simeon Chardin, *House of Cards*, 18th c. and Guillaume Voiriot, *Woman Holding a Booklet*, 18th c.**

NARRATOR: These two paintings were both thought to be the work of artist Jean Simeon Chardin. You might imagine why people thought so. The paintings are similar in style and have similar quiet moods. Each captures a moment in the everyday lives of the sitters.

Yet although both are French and date to the eighteenth century, only one is by Chardin. It's the man at the table, titled *House of Cards*. The other, *Woman Holding a Booklet*, is now attributed to Guillaume Voiriot.

Knowing this, look a little more closely. Chardin's brush has a more subtle delicacy. You can see this in the muscles and flesh of the young man's hands, and in the shadows that play across his face. His gaze is actively engaged in his pastime in a way that convinces us this is a captured moment, and not a pose. In contrast, Voiriot's painting is a little less nuanced. The sitter's creamy skin and satin clothes, while skillfully rendered, don't quite convey the sensitive atmosphere of Chardin's painting.

How do paintings become incorrectly attributed? In this case, it was most likely an art collector who assumed both of these were by Chardin. He was known for his sensitive images of everyday people in their daily lives. The two artists' nearness in time may have contributed to the mistake. Voiriot's painting is only now being rediscovered, and newly valued.





**119 Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, *Character Head*, 1770-1783**

NARRATOR: When this sculpture was first exhibited in the late eighteenth century, it was considered the freakish work of a crazy artist. There were 69 heads like these in the series.

It's a self-portrait of the artist Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. In the prime of his career, Messerschmidt taught at the Imperial Academy of Vienna, and became the portrait artist of the Austrian royal family. Then, a mysterious mental illness struck him, and he was forced to leave his work. His illness tortured him. He believed ghosts pursued him, which made him contort his face in anguish. Trying to capture his pain, he created sculptural self-portraits. He'd watch himself in the mirror and sculpt the grimaces he saw.

Opinions about these self-portraits changed in the early twentieth century with the growing interest in psychology. Suddenly, these works were seen in a new light. Instead of curiosities, they were prized as a uniquely candid window into the psychological state of an artistic genius.

You may notice a peculiar strap over the mouth. Messerschmidt knew the famous Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer, who believed that magnets could control what he called our "cosmic fluid." The strap may be an experimental magnet. Dr. Mesmer's work gave us the term "mesmerize."

This head is the only one in the Louvre collection. It was first titled *The Ill-Humored Man*, and has come to be considered a modern masterpiece.

120 Jan Vermeer, *The Astronomer*, 1668

NARRATOR: This painting, *The Astronomer*, is one of the most outstanding works by the great Dutch artist Jan Vermeer. Blaise Ducos is curator of Dutch and Flemish painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at the Louvre. He tells us what's special about this painting.

*BD: ...It's the capacity of bringing the spectator into a subdued atmosphere...I mean, some remote place where nuances...are the most important things...there's no deep, violent contrast in this painting. It's very much fused. And there's a kind of mellow impression about it all.*

NARRATOR: An astronomer studies a celestial globe, perhaps working out an astrological chart. Daylight filters through a window and bathes the room in the contemplative atmosphere so typical of Vermeer's work.

Vermeer did a masterful thing with this composition. If you located the painting's geometrical center, about at the astronomer's raised arm, you would see that this is also the vanishing point—the exact point where all the angles in the painting converge. This precision may express Vermeer's faith in both a moral and a physical harmony in the universe.

Vermeer's genius was overlooked for centuries, and only rediscovered in the nineteenth century. To hear about it, press PLAY.

**1202 Jan Vermeer, *The Astronomer* Second Level**

NARRATOR: Nineteenth-century French art critic Theophile Thore wrote a monograph on Vermeer.

*BD: The outcome was that...this French book he wrote in 1866 was the very beginning...of the glory of Vermeer. And this glory has never faded.*

NARRATOR: Thore was an art critic who fought against the French Empire and had to flee France and go into exile. So he also saw in Vermeer's work an expression of the nobility of the common man.

*BD: He was very much preoccupied in the moral connotation, moral aspect of Vermeer's work. He thought that the works by Vermeer were...of a human quality, of a nobling quality, which was unique given that they represent mostly the common lot of mankind...*

NARRATOR: This is meant to be the last stop on your audio tour. If you're finished enjoying the tour, please press the number 121 and then PLAY. You'll hear directors Michael Shapiro and Henri Loyrette reflect on this three-year collaboration between the High and the Louvre.

## 121 Conclusion

MS: *At a personal level, the Louvre Atlanta partnership has been the deepest, most satisfying collaboration ...that I personally have ever had. It's also the most complex, and I think it has truly repositioned the High Museum of Art in a global sense and it enables us not only to work in an ongoing basis with the Louvre but I believe to partner with virtually any other museum in the world.*

HL: *To see our collection in a museum like Atlanta, and to work with the Atlanta staff on the collection, ...we learned a lot, with the presentation made by Atlanta.... You know, all this collaboration is about the history of the Louvre since the beginning, that means from the end of the 18th century just to our days, and we just added a new chapter to this bicentennial history with the collaboration we had with Atlanta. And in this way it's very important, but also very moving I think.*

MS: *And perhaps most importantly, it has brought literally hundreds of great works of art to our community for the study and enjoyment of the people who bring objects to life, and those are our visitors.*

NARRATOR: Thank you for joining me. Please return your player as you leave the exhibition. This has been an Antenna Audio production.