

Media Notice

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Presidential Portrait Artist to display the nation's only JFK assassination painting during a symposium with former Minnesota Governor, US District Judge, Art Historian and Presidential Speechwriter

KENNEDY SYMPOSIUM AND FIRST PUBLIC EXHIBITION OF "PIETA" ON VIEW FOR ONE-WEEK ONLY NOV. 15-22 AT THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT PAUL BEFORE PAINTING IS PRESENTED TO THE VATICAN COLLECTION

ST. PAUL, MINN. – November 9, 2006 -- For one week only Americans will get a rare chance to publicly view for the first time ever a defining moment in their history when the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul will display an important painting about the John F. Kennedy assassination called *Pieta*. The week-long symposium ***The Kennedy Assassination: A Decisive Moment in America's History*** is hosted by Father Joseph Johnson, Rector of the Cathedral of Saint Paul, (www.cathedralsaintpaul.org) and sponsored by Sharing the Moment Foundation, (www.sharingthemoment.org) the large 5'x7' historical work poignantly depicts a stirring scene at Parklawn Hospital in Dallas, as Jacqueline Kennedy cradles President Kennedy in her lap in the back of the presidential limousine after being shot 43 years ago on November 23, 1963. The painting will be on display in the Sacred Heart Chapel daily from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with an opening ceremony November 15 at noon and a closing ceremony and prayer service on November 22, the anniversary of the assassination, also at noon.

The *Pieta* (Italian for compassion) painting will then be presented to the Vatican's art collection. From November 15-22, 2006, the oil tempera painting by the international presidential portrait artist and Twin Cities painter, Mark Balma, will be on display as part of a week-long symposium called *The Kennedy Assassination: A Decisive Moment in America's History* (<http://www.cathedralsaintpaul.org/pdf/SymposiumBrochure.pdf>). Related materials will also be on view, including items such as Balma's early sketches for the work and the only replica of the famous pink brocade ensemble by the First Lady, which was worn by the portrait model that posed for the work. The dress was specially created by tailor Carlos Chavez.

The only U.S. public display of the painting, the **Pieta** exhibition will also feature a series of public discussions to be held at the almost 150 year-old Cathedral, lead by a distinguished group of elected officials, an art historian, a presidential speechwriter and others, talking about issues related to Kennedy's life and death, plus his role as the first Catholic president in the United States. The participants include:

- **Former Governor Arne Carlson:** ***"The JFK Assassination: It's Impact on America's History."*** Long fascinated with the tragic event and Kennedy's influence, Carlson will speak Thursday, November 16 at 7:00 p.m.
- **Art History Professor Mark Thistlewaite:** ***"History Painting in America: What It Is, What It Does, Why It Matters."*** The Texas Christian University professor explores how

Balma's **Pieta** belongs to traditions of history paintings, from Europe to the U.S. Friday, November 17, 7 :00 p.m.

- **Panel on “Remembering Kennedy:”** Roger Banks was a student studying history at the University of New Mexico in 1960 when President Kennedy announced the creation of the Peace Corps. Banks was among the first to participate in the program in Punjab, India, from 1963 -1965. He will talk about the formative years of the Peace Corps. Joining him will be a recently returned Peace Corps volunteer who will talk about how the vision has been sustained. A special screening of JFK's filmed visit to the Cathedral will also be shown. Sunday, November 19, 2:00 p.m.
- **Artist Mark Balma: “Creating ‘Pieta’: The Year-Long Journey and Its Stories”.** How a lingering visual image of the now-depicted scene drove Balma “to paint it out” and the numerous steps he took to create the work. Sunday, November 19, 3: 00 p.m.
- **US District Judge John Tunheim: “The JFK Assassination: Opening Its History for Public Review.”** The Judge who served as the chair of the U.S. Assassination Records Review Board from 1994-1998 will discuss the 4 million pages of reviewed documents about the assassination and screen the again-controversial Zapruder film.
- **Presidential Speechwriter Colleen Carroll Campbell: “The Kennedy Compromise”.** At a time when Minnesota just elected the country's first Muslim (Keith Ellison) to the US Congress, Campbell, who was a speechwriter for George W. Bush and a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, will discuss how and why JFK severed his ties to his Catholic faith from political decisions.

About the *Pieta* and the Painter

Since there were no photographs or news footage of the limousine as it arrived at Parklawn Hospital, Balma's painting relied on an obscure narrative passage from controversial Warren Commission Report on the assassination, which reads, “*For a moment, Mrs. Kennedy refused to release the president whom she held in her lap.*” But prior to discovering this detail in two years of intense research for the painting, Balma, first received a visual inspiration for the painting while traveling through the Dallas/Ft. Worth airport in 2002. Doctor Phillip Williams, who was an intern at the hospital that day and only one of two surviving people on site that day along with Secret Service Agent Clint Hill (who threw himself on the president and the first lady after the shots rang out), confirmed how chillingly accurate the painterly depiction really is.

“The painting is in the style of other historical paintings that belong to the national memory, like Washington crossing the Delaware, the signing of the Declaration of Independence and others,” Balma notes, pointing out how the title alludes to the famous Michelangelo sculpture of Mary and the crucified Jesus, which is called “The Pieta” and on display at the Vatican. “This historical work one just happens to capture a period in our history that is not uplifting but nonetheless important, since in many ways it marked an end of innocence in American life and politics. It is more like Goya's ‘Third of May’ painting, or Picasso's abstract work about the Spanish Civil War, ‘Guernica.’”

“History is the memory of a nation. Through art and history we honor and transmit our cultural values. That is reason enough for Balma’s “Pieta” to become part of our historical artistic heritage,” notes Philip Eliasoph, Ph.D. Professor of Art History, Fairfield University, Connecticut. Based on such similar observations and reactions from those who’ve seen the painting, it’s very possible that when people look back on the art that interpreted the assassination event in 100 years, this will be the piece that they will turn to.

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