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THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, ART COLLECTIONS, AND BOTANICAL GARDENS
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High-resolution digital images are available on request for publicity use

Press preview: Friday, May 5 – 10 a.m.

The Belle of San Marino: Introducing Arabella Huntington

New exhibition explores the carefully crafted self -image of Henry Huntington's wife through her fashion and finery, photos and portraits

May 6 – June 25, 2006

SAN MARINO, Calif. – An exhibition dedicated to Arabella Huntington will provide insights into the carefully cultivated self-image of Henry Huntington's second wife, the first lady of The Huntington and the richest woman in America during her time. ***The Belle of San Marino: Introducing Arabella Huntington***, on view May 6 – June 25, 2006, will display portraits and photos, textiles, archival material, and ephemera from The Huntington's collections as well as items loaned by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. (Arabella bequeathed all her possessions to her son, Archer, who donated several treasures from his mother's art collection and many of her personal effects to the San Francisco institution.)

Presenting personal artifacts in the context of her eventful life will create a picture of Arabella that is as revealing as it is beautiful.

"Arabella put a great deal of thought, money, and effort into constructing and controlling her image," says the show's curator, Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, the Huntington's Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in French Art. "She chose her clothing, jewels, and portraitists with care; she had a taste for both art and for jewels from royal collections."

An intensely private person, Arabella "Belle" Duval Yarrington Worsham Huntington remains something of an enigma. She left little of herself behind in San Marino after her death in 1924—neither diaries nor memoirs, and even letters are scarce. However, portraits, photos, and surviving personal artifacts reveal a great deal about her lifestyle and self-image. Following the death of her previous husband Collis P. Huntington in 1900, Arabella wore the all-black attire of a widow for the rest of her life, even after

marrying Henry Huntington, Collis's nephew, in 1913. Her decision to remain in mourning clothes was unusual and significant; widowhood allowed her to enjoy both respectability and independence. Despite her austere wardrobe, she spent enormous sums on jewelry, which enlivened her appearance and advertised her immense wealth.

Arabella bought many of her clothes and jewels in the Paris neighborhood surrounding the Place Vendôme, where the major art dealers were based. There, she assembled her personal collection of 18th-century French art between trips to her couturiers and jewelers. Though born into modest means, Arabella catapulted into wealth at the age of 22 through her association with Collis and their subsequent marriage in 1884, following the death of his first wife. After Collis' death she capitalized on her unique financial and social independence as a wealthy widow. The exhibition focuses on her time in Paris between her marriages, when she would drop hundreds of thousands of dollars at leading jewelers including Cartier, Tiffany, and Boucheron, as well as smaller fashion, lace, and jewelry dealers. Arabella's dutiable purchases abroad were so heavy that on nearly every return to the United States, she set a record for the year in duty payments—in 1910 she paid \$48,000 [now about \$100,000] duty on clothes, personal effects, and small art objects. At the same time, Arabella was building a formidable collection of Old Master paintings and French decorative art worth millions of dollars, and becoming a major force in the art world in the United States and in Europe.

Several of the few surviving garments purchased and worn by Arabella will be displayed. From the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco come several of Arabella's lace items representing a wide variety of lace-making techniques. Lace, particularly antique, was a sign of status, often more expensive than jewelry and highly valued. Audiences can view Chantilly, point de Venise, point d'Argentan, Alençon, and Brussels lace, among others, many incorporating intricate botanical motifs. A parasol and hair ornaments, and representative items of mourning dress will complete the picture.

Although The Huntington has an outstanding collection of 18th-century textiles, mainly tapestries and carpets, it has never showcased fashion, and the institution only recently discovered that Arabella's lace was in the San Francisco collection. Chrisman-Campbell says the show, in part, grew out of the forthcoming catalogue showcasing the Huntington's French art collection (scheduled for publication in 2007), a project in which she plays a principal role. "In researching the formation of Arabella's collection of 18th-century French decorative art, we discovered that she was buying a lot more than just art during her frequent visits to Paris," says Chrisman-Campbell. "The exhibition will examine the spatial and social connections between the French art and luxury goods markets at the turn of the century."

Arabella collected jewelry as enthusiastically as she collected art. After her death, the entire collection was sold to a then-unknown young jeweler named Harry Winston; the Huntington jewels formed the foundation of his empire. By that time, the pieces were old fashioned, and Winston broke them up and reset them in more modern styles. He frequently boasted that Arabella's famous necklace of pearls now adorned the necks of at least two-dozen women around the world. The exhibition will reconstruct Arabella's jewelry collection with photographs and portraits, and through her detailed bills from Cartier, Tiffany, Boucheron, and other leading jewelers. But little is known about what became of her jewels once Winston purchased them; the Harry Winston archives, stored in the basement of the World Trade Center in New York, were destroyed in the collapse of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

The exhibition will also reunite two oil portraits of Arabella and explore her dramatic evolution from the dazzling young beauty in Alexandre Cabanel's 1882 portrait, from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, to the formidable, bespectacled matron in Oswald Birley's 1924 portrait, from the Huntington's collection.

RELATED PROGRAMS:

Lecture: Exhibition curator Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell will give a free public lecture about "The Belle of San Marino" on Sunday, June 25, at 2:30 p.m. in Friends' Hall

Curator's Tour: Chrisman-Campbell will lead a guided tour of the exhibition on Wednesday, June 14, from 5 – 7 p.m. \$20 Members, \$30 Non-members. Registration: (626) 405-2128.

Family Program: An exhibit-themed family sleepover on Saturday, May 27, will explore the question "Who was the real Arabella Huntington?" Ages 7 and up. (One parent of guardian required for every 2 children.) \$45 Members, \$55 Non-members. Registration: (626) 405-2128.

VISITOR INFORMATION: Hours: Tuesday through Friday from noon to 4:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Summer hours (beginning May 30): 10:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Admission: \$15 adults, \$12 seniors, \$11 group rate, \$10 students (ages 12-18), \$6 youth (ages 5-11), free for children under 5. Members are admitted free. Information: (626) 405-2100, or visit online at www.huntington.org.

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