

THE Renaissance

ARTISTIC PASSIONS OF PETER WELLER

BY JOHN D. ADAMS



o say that actor Peter Weller is a multi-tasker would be a serious understatement. Most of us are familiar with the movie and television actor's long list of roles in projects like: *Robocop*; *24*; *Dexter*; and the untitled *Star Trek* film currently in production. What you may not know, however, is that Weller is presently completing his dissertation toward a PhD in Italian

Renaissance Art History from UCLA; and is an adjunct professor at Syracuse University in Florence, Italy. Is it cringe-worthy to label Weller a "Renaissance Man"?

OPENING A DOOR

Weller credits longtime friend, actress Ali McGraw, with introducing him to the esoteric worlds of art and design. "Ali is incredibly astute. I admired her intelligence to such a degree that I wanted to learn what she knew. If it wasn't art, it was the Ballet Russe Russian Ballet costumes of Leon Bakst, or set designs of Picasso and Matisse... all sorts of subjects that I thought at the time was a bunch of wacky stuff... this was New York in the late '70s. She introduced me to this crowd of people who were really hip to culture. That period turned out to be instrumental, a cornerstone of influences in an amalgam of art and design."



The Birth of Venus (in Italian: Nascita di Venere) is a 1486 painting by Sandro Botticelli. It depicts the goddess Venus, having emerged from the sea as a fully grown woman, arriving at the seashore (which is related to the Venus Anadyomene motif). The painting is held in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.



The Doni Tondo or Doni Madonna, sometimes called The Holy Family, is the earliest of only three surviving panel paintings by the adult Italian Renaissance master Michelangelo Buonarroti, and the only one to be finished. Located in the Uffizi in Florence, Italy.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

How did Weller move from art neophyte to passionate intellect? "I had taken some summer classes between movies at the famous Syracuse University campus in Italy. They invited me to go over for a yearlong Master's Degree study program. That was a life-changer. SU has possibly the most intense master's degree program in Renaissance art history available," reflects Weller. "For the most part, you do it all in Italy. You gesso poplar wood, you mix egg tempera, you paint; then you mix lime paste, stucco a drywall and paint a fresco from scratch... SU has the largest, most voluminous opportunity of programs abroad of any college in the world. It is extraordinarily rich, and it busted me! If it wasn't for a kick in the butt from my mother and my marvelous wife, Sheri, I would have quit three weeks in. In the end, I had no notion that one day I would be teaching." Weller now delights in the challenge of opening students to Renaissance art. "Some people learn tactilely, some visually, some out of books...If you can access their secret door, if you can get in, I think anybody's curiosity can be ignited. It just has to be their entrance."

FRIENDS OF THE UFFIZI GALLERY

Today, Weller is working to complete his PhD in Italian Renaissance Art at UCLA. He is also an enthusiastic supporter, sitting on the Board of Advisors for the organization Friends of the Uffizi, the American wing of the Italian organization Amici degli Uffizi, which raises money to restore works of art at the incomparable Uffizi Gallery in Florence. "When you go to Italy you want to see Botticelli, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and all those guys, but sadly the cultural arm of the government of Italy, like so many governments with local art, doesn't have enough money for maintaining or restoring all of these

works," explains Weller. "Some incredible Americans, Mary Jo Zingale and Lisa Marie Brown, are committed to restoring the beautiful gifts that Italy has given the world and I am proud to be a part of this necessary cause." Weller reflects, "You know, I work as a craftsman within the bigger realm of visual arts called moviemaking. I am also a passionate student of Renaissance art. It is all a continuum of visual information for me. If someone takes you by the hand, opens up your eyes, opens the door for you, you can appreciate it, whatever it is. That's what happened to me."



Rembrandt Self Portrait as a Young Man 1634.



The Madonna with Child (Salting Madonna) is a painting by the Italian Renaissance master Antonello da Messina. It is housed in the National Gallery, London. The name Salting derives from the collector who donated it to the gallery in 1910.



FRIENDS OF THE UFFIZI GALLERY

In 2006, the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, Inc. was established in Palm Beach as the U.S. "sister" organization to the Amici degli Uffizi. Its sole purpose is to support the activities of the Amici by helping to fund ongoing restoration projects and bring these projects to fruition. The Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, in conjunction with the Amici degli Uffizi, raises funds to support all of these activities through an international group of members and patrons. More than 20 important restoration projects, designated priorities by the Uffizi Gallery, have been completed over the last several years and include paintings, altar pieces, sculptures, and tapestries.



To raise awareness and funds, a traveling exhibit *Offering of the Angels* is currently featured at the Ft. Lauderdale Museum of Art and runs through April 2012. The exhibit then moves on to:

**James A. Michener Art Museum
Doylestown, Pennsylvania
April 21, 2012 – August 10, 2012**

**Chazen Museum of Art
Madison, Wisconsin
August 24, 2012 – November 25, 2012**

**Telfair Museum of Art, Jepsen Center
for the Arts
Savannah, Georgia
December 7, 2012 – March 31, 2013**

**To learn more about the Friends of the Uffizi
Gallery, please visit their website at:
www.friendsoftheuffizigallery.org**

When Peter Weller talks Renaissance art and artists, he bursts forth with myriad anecdotes, references, and citations. Here are a few of his favorites:

Simon da Martini's *The Annunciation and Two Saints* (ca. 1333, tempera and gold leaf on wood). "I could stare at it all day. It was the first announcement painting to bring the Angel and Mary into an equal realm of size. That's tempera on wood, folks, nobody does that anymore! That's rotten egg, mixed with rabbit bone, and pigment! It's a stunner."



The portraits and *Ecce Homo* works of Antonello da Messina. "There's humanity, realism and a fundamental breakthrough with what he does with faces that is unparalleled for the time. Nobody in Italy was doing what he was doing."

Bartolommeo (Baccio) Bandinelli's *Laocoön and His Sons* (1525). "The Friends of the Uffizi contributed to this restoration." The Florentine sculptor was commissioned by Pope Leo X de Medici to make a copy of the famous Greek sculpture. "Bandinelli sculpted this smaller copy of the famous Greek statue now in the Vatican because it was a great influence to his hero Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel and forever afterward."

