

For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Betsy Moss | 804.355.1557 | [betsymoss@verizon.net](mailto:betsymoss@verizon.net)

## **MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART TO HOST EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO HONOR THE COUNTESS MATILDA ON THE 900<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF HER DEATH**

Williamsburg, Va. (February 2, 2015) –The Muscarelle Museum at the College of William & Mary will host *Matilda of Canossa and the Origins of the Renaissance*, the first monographic exhibition in the United States ever dedicated to Matilda, one of the great leaders and women of the Middle Ages.

The exhibition will open on Saturday, Feb. 7, 2015 to coincide with William & Mary's Charter Day 2015 and it will run through April 19. The exhibition takes place in conjunction with program of celebrations planned in Italy to honor the Countess on the 900th anniversary of her death on July 24, 1115, including at the Casa Buonarroti Museum in Florence, where the exhibition will travel after its run at the Muscarelle Museum. The exhibition was curated by Michèle K. Spike, noted biographer of Matilda of Canossa and adjunct professor of law at the Marshall-Wythe School of Law.

Matilda of Canossa, one of only three women whose bones lie within a hundred yards of the Apostle Peter in the Vatican and the only person besides the popes to be depicted holding the keys to Heaven, is virtually unknown in the United States despite her importance in our human story. On the 900th anniversary of her death at sixty-nine years of age in 1115 – the same year that the Cambridge Medieval History dates the end of the Dark Ages – the Muscarelle Museum of Art has organized this exhibition to highlight the transformative events of Matilda's life and her legacy. Her revolt against the feudal system made her one of the most influential leaders of the Middle Ages, and laid the foundations for the Italian Renaissance.

Matilda's legacy is rich and diverse, including founding the first law school in Europe in 1088, which revived the study of Justinian's code of Roman law, which gave women the right to own, manage and inherit property. She built or restored some of the most beautiful Romanesque monuments in Italy, including in Florence, Lucca, Mantua, and Pisa. Her building program created a network of hospices throughout northern Italy that revived pilgrimage and trade laying the foundation for the Italian Renaissance.

"The Countess Matilda was an amazing and extremely important person, and we are so pleased to shine a spotlight on her important contributions," said Aaron De Groft, director and

CEO of the Muscarelle Museum of Art. “Because of her support of literary and legal education by training citizen lawyers, it makes the College of William & Mary-- whose School of Law was founded on the same principle --an ideal location for this exhibition. We are quite fortunate to have Michèle K. Spike, a lawyer and Matilda biographer, as a part of our community to help bring the work of Matilda to light for a broader audience.”

Matilda of Canossa and the Origins of the Renaissance concludes with a specific focus on the transformational consequences of her revival of Roman Law, which was carefully studied by and influential on, Thomas Jefferson and George Wythe during the 1770s as they created the framework of the legal code that would govern the new nation of the United States.

The exhibition stems from a close collaboration between the Muscarelle Museum of Art and the Marshall–Wythe School of Law. A broad variety of historical resources at The College of William & Mary have been engaged in the preparation of the exhibition, together with loans from American and Italian institutions. Members of the Law School faculty have contributed scholarship and essays to the catalogue. The Wolf Law Library has kindly shared a selection of the same Renaissance law books that were in the library of George Wythe, the founder of the Law School. The Special Collections Research Center of the Earl Gregg Swem Library has generously lent two original letters on the topic of law education by and to Thomas Jefferson.

#### About the Muscarelle Museum of Art

The Muscarelle Museum of Art is located at 603 Jamestown Rd in Williamsburg, Virginia. For more information, call 757-221-2700 or visit [www.wm.edu/muscarelle](http://www.wm.edu/muscarelle). Follow on Twitter (@Muscarelle), Instagram (@muscarellemuseum) or on Facebook (Muscarelle Museum of Art). Tickets may be purchased at the museum on the day of your visit.

Please visit the website for admission details for the public; admission is always free to Muscarelle Museum members, William & Mary students, faculty and staff, as well as children under twelve. The Museum is open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 10:00 am. until 5:00 p.m. and on Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. The museum is closed on Monday. Regularly scheduled docent tours take place Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. and on Saturday and Sunday at 1:00 p.m.

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