

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Rare Art Treasure Highlights 2009 Christmas Stamp *Painting Part of Hearst Castle Collection*

A high resolution image of the stamp is available for media use only by emailing [leisha.i.palmore-drummond@usps.gov](mailto:leisha.i.palmore-drummond@usps.gov)

SAN SIMEON, CA — Millions of Americans celebrating Christmas this year can mail their holiday greetings bearing the image of a rare piece of art, now that the Postal Service has issued the *Christmas: Madonna and Sleeping Child by Sassetto* stamp.

The original painting, more than 300 years old, took center stage at a dedication ceremony highlighted by an awe inspiring view of the Pacific Ocean from the [main terrace](#) of the [Hearst Castle](#), a California State Park here. All 600 million, 44-cent, First-Class stamps, available in booklets of 20, are available nationwide today. The 2009 [Winter Holidays, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa stamps](#) were issued earlier this month.

“Sassetto’s *Madonna and Sleeping Child* provides a symbol of the endearing and enduring bond of family,” said James Bilbray, member, U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors, in dedicating the stamp. “The beauty of a mother cradling her child and the symbolic message of purity, love and sacrifice are brilliant. It represents the best of all that is good about Christmas and its traditions — home, family, love and togetherness. It is no small wonder why it was selected.”

Joining Bilbray in the dedication were Ruth Coleman, director, California State Parks; Hoyt Fields, Hearst Castle Museum director; and Tony Cipolla, managing editor and reporter, KSBY-TV. William Randolph Hearst’s great grandson, Stephen Hearst, was unable to attend the event.

“The California State Parks is honored that one of the great works of art at Hearst Castle has been selected as the subject of this year’s Christmas Commemorative Stamp,” said Coleman. “As holiday greetings are sent around the world, people everywhere will be reminded of the amazing treasures that are protected for the public to enjoy throughout the California State Park System.”

“Through the years,” said Hearst, vice president and general manager, Western Properties, Hearst Corporation, “millions of visitors to Hearst Castle have recognized it as a national treasure. It’s especially gratifying now to have the U.S. Postal Service also acknowledge the significance of the art collection at San Simeon.”

The version of *Madonna and Sleeping Child* shown on this stamp was purchased in 1926 by American media entrepreneur [William Randolph Hearst](#) (1863-1951). An avid collector and patron of the arts, Hearst amassed a renowned collection of artwork and artifacts. Hearst Castle served as his private home. This sumptuous residence and accredited museum is open to the public as part of the California State Park System.

For information on mailing holiday cards, letters and packages to men and women in the military, visit this [link](#).

### **First-Day-of-Issue Postmark**

Customers have 60 days to obtain the first-day-of-issue postmark by mail. They may purchase new stamps at their local Post Office, at The Postal Store website at [www.usps.com/shop](http://www.usps.com/shop), or by calling 800-STAMP-24. They should affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes, to themselves or others, and place them in a larger envelope addressed to:

Christmas: Madonna and Sleeping Child by Sassoferrato Stamp  
Postmaster  
444 San Simeon Road  
San Simeon, CA 93452-9998

After applying the first-day-of-issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark. All orders must be postmarked by Dec. 21, 2009.

### **First-Day Covers**

Stamp Fulfillment Services also offers first-day covers for new stamp issues and Postal Service stationery items postmarked with the official first-day-of-issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog. Customers may request a free catalog by calling 800-STAMP-24 or writing to:

Information Fulfillment  
Dept. 6270  
U.S. Postal Service  
PO Box 219014  
Kansas City, MO 64121-9014

### **Philatelic Products**

Three [philatelic products](#) are available for this stamp issue:

- 678661, First-Day Cover, 82 cents.
- 678691, Ceremony Program, \$6.95.
- 678693, First-Day Cover Keepsake, \$9.62.

### ***Madonna and Child Background***

Since 1978, the theme of each “traditional” Christmas stamp has been the Madonna and Child. The 2009 Christmas stamp features *Madonna and Sleeping Child*, a painting by Italian artist Giovanni Battista Salvi (1609-1685), more commonly known as Sassoferrato. The painting is currently in the collection of Hearst Castle in California. The issuance of the stamp coincides with the 400th anniversary of the birth of the artist.

The painting depicted on the stamp shows a blonde Madonna clothed in red and cradling the sleeping Christ Child in purple cloth. From each of the two top corners, the childlike face of a cherub looks down from the clouds. *Madonna and Sleeping Child* measures approximately 29 by 24 inches. The year of the painting is unknown.

Because it is customary to refer to Italian Renaissance artists by their place of birth, Giovanni Battista

Salvi is often known simply as Sassoferrato, after a town approximately 140 miles north of Rome. Sassoferrato served as an apprentice to his father, painter Tarquinio Salvi. Few additional details are known about the life of Sassoferrato, but he is believed to have been a student of the Bolognese painter Domenichino.

Sassoferrato spent much of his career painting Madonna and Child portraits for private devotion by his patrons. Some art historians see these works as having been inspired by the works of Raphael. Today, more than 300 examples of Sassoferrato's artistry can be found in churches, museums, and private collections.

Because more than 20 versions of *Madonna and Sleeping Child* are known to exist, the painting remains one of Sassoferrato's most popular works. Other versions of this painting show a greater or lesser number of cherubs, the Madonna leaning her head in the opposite direction, or other variations of detail.

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