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For Release

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington, D. C.

National Gallery of Art accepts gift of Samuel H. Kress Collection of Italian art, including 375 paintings and 18 pieces of sculpture.

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Trustees of the National Gallery of Art today announced acceptance of a gift of the Samuel H. Kress Collection of paintings and sculpture, which is acclaimed by experts as one of the greatest private collections of Italian art in the world. Announcement of the gift was made by David K. E. Bruce, president of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery.

The collection consists of 375 paintings and 18 pieces of sculpture. Practically all of the important painters of the Italian school from the 13th to the 18th century are represented. It is to become available for installation in the Gallery before the formal opening of the beautiful building now being erected in Washington out of funds provided by the late Andrew W. Mellon.

Competent authorities have stated that, while it is known the collection is a very costly one, it would be difficult to place a value upon it since the objects are unique, and therefore, priceless. They have also stated that it would take many years to bring such a collection together.

Included in the collection are paintings by such outstanding masters as Duccio, Simone Martini, Giotto, Masolino, Fra Angelico, Gentile da Fabriano, Filippo Lippi, Domenico Veneziano, Sassetta, Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi, Piero di Cosimo, Andrea del Sarto, Signorelli, Pintoricchio, Perugino, Mantegna, Correggio, Crivelli, Giovanni Bellini, Carpaccio, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese; also sculpture by ^Ddesiderio da Settignano, Rosellino, Benedetto da Maiano, Sansovino and Andrea della Robbia.

Emphasizing the significance of the gift, Mr. Bruce, in announcing acceptance of the collection in behalf of the trustees, said:

"Art critics who have seen the Kress collection write in praise, not only of the beauty and quality of the paintings, but also of their fine condition. Mr. Kress has spared neither effort nor expense to conserve these works of art so that they may be fully appreciated and seen to the best advantage. Experts state there is no private collection in the world, and very few museums, which can illustrate in as complete a manner as the Kress collection the development of the Italian School of painting and sculpture during the Renaissance period. When this great collection is installed in the National Gallery, with the other masterpieces already there, this newly established Gallery will immediately become one of the outstanding centers for the study of the Italian School of art, not only in the United States, but in

the world."

In giving his great collection to the Nation and in providing for the National Gallery building, it was the purpose of Mr. Mellon, the founder, to set up a monument to art that would attract the donation of other important works of art held in private collections throughout the country. Thus, the gift by Mr. Kress marks the first important step toward the achievement of that objective.

Mr. Kress, who makes his home in New York, is one of the Nation's most successful business men. He is the founder and head of the great enterprise bearing his name, which includes 240 chain stores extending from coast to coast. In spite of his multitude of other activities, he has found time to bring together his important collection of Italian art, to which he has given infinite effort and thought. Born in Cherryville, Pennsylvania, of a family which fought in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, Mr. Kress has long been interested in art, particularly of the Italian School. Since 1936 he has been a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York.

In making his gift to the National Gallery, he was guided, he said, by a desire to keep the collection in the United States and to make the works of art accessible to the many people of the country and abroad who visit the Nation's capital.

Mr. Kress, in tendering the gift to the National Gallery, addressed the following letter to the board of trustees:

"To the Board of Trustees of
the National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen:

Over a period of many years, I have quietly acquired a collection of paintings and sculpture, particularly works of art representative of the Italian School, with the object of some day donating my collection to the public for exhibition and study in our country. Besides bringing from Europe as many as I could, I have made great effort to keep in this country paintings and sculpture that would otherwise very probably have been returned to Europe and have become permanently part of the great European galleries. I have done this in order that my Italian collection might include as many works as possible of the great Italian masters.

The collection includes important works of many of the outstanding masters of the Italian School, such as Giotto, Duccio, Simone Martini, Sassetta, Matteo di Giovanni, Neroccio, Fra Angelico, Masolino, Perugino, Filippo Lippi, Piero di Cosimo, Ghirlandaio, Gentile da Fabriano, Cossa, Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and others; also sculpture by Desiderio da Settignano, Luca and Andrea della Robbia, Verrocchio, Rossellino, Benedetto da Maiano, Amadeo, Sansovino, and others.

I have followed with interest the establishment of the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the construction of the great edifice there to house the nation's works of art. I have also noted with pleasure the nation-wide interest exhibited in this Gallery, established by the late Andrew W. Mellon and dedicated to the encouragement and development of the study of the fine arts.

Because the Gallery and the works of art which it will contain will be for the benefit of all the people of the United States and will be accessible to so many citizens of this and other countries visiting our national capital, it seems most suitable that others should contribute to the collection being formed there; and it is my wish, therefore, that the works of art which I have acquired should become part of the National Gallery Collection, and be exhibited in the gallery building now being erected in Washington. Realizing what it would mean to the Gallery at its opening, I decided some months ago that if the arrangements of the gift were satisfactory I would give up the pleasure of having possession of the collection in my home, and arrange to consummate the gift so that rooms may be prepared for the placing of the objects of art for the opening of the Gallery.

(Signed) Samuel H. Kress"

A statement from the Board of Trustees said:

"The Samuel H. Kress gift includes three hundred and seventy-five paintings and eighteen pieces of sculpture. Almost all of the important painters of the Italian School during the most significant years of its development, from the middle of the 13th through the 18th century, are represented in the collection. These paintings and sculpture will be exhibited in the National Gallery of Art in rooms set apart in the Western Wing, where also will be shown the Italian paintings from the Mellon collection and other collections which may in the future come to the Gallery.

"For many years Mr. Kress has pursued his objective of acquiring fine examples of the works of the most important Italian painters and sculptors for which he has a special preference, with the intention of one day donating the collection to the public for exhibition and study in our country. With great generosity, he has provided for the collection to be placed in the National Gallery immediately upon its opening and in so doing has deprived himself of the pleasure of keeping the works of art in his own home.

"The Mellon Trust, which is erecting the building, is now having rooms and special settings prepared for the installation of the Kress collection at the opening of the Gallery."

Coincident with the announcement of the gift, it was made known also that Mr. Kress and Mr. Joseph E. Widener, of Philadelphia, have been elected trustees of the National Gallery. The action was taken at a recent meeting of the board.

Indicating the high value placed on the Kress collection by experts in the field of art, Sir Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery in London, made the following observation after seeing the collection during a recent visit to the United States:

"There can be no doubt that it is one of the most remarkable collections of 14th and 15th century Italian art ever formed. It is very comprehensive, containing masters hardly represented in any other American collection; and Mr. Kress has managed to assemble a number of real masterpieces of a kind one had supposed no longer available."

Another noted expert, Dr. Wilhelm Suida, author of "Leonardo und sein Kreis" and founder of the famous German art magazine "Belvedere", made the following statement:

"The Samuel H. Kress collection is of an unique character, No other American collection or museum or scarcely any European museum gives such a universal idea of the development of Italian painting, beginning with Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto, and ranging through Gentile da Fabriano, Masolino, Domenico Veneziano, Francesco Cossa, Giovanni Bellini and Carpaccio to Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese.

"Every school is represented by characteristic examples, some by rare painters such as Zenale, Bembo and others, not to be found even in museums of their own province.

"There are in the Kress Collection masterpieces of the very first rank which would be considered as "piece de resistance" in any museum in the world * * * *.

"Taken as a whole, the Kress Collection is the most complete representation of the Italian School known to me in private hands the world over."

Count Contini Bonacossi, of Florence, has cabled:

"Consensus of opinion among European art circles is that the Kress Collection is the most important, extensive, best organized body of Italian painting of high quality which has been assembled by any individual in modern times."

Professor Roberto Longhi, author of "Piero della Francesca" and editor of the Italian art review "Pinacotheca" says: "In my opinion the (Kress) Italian collection by reason of wide range of artists represented, their accurate selection, and the exceptional quality of many pieces must be considered today as the most important in the United States."

Mr. F. Mason Perkins, the author of an important work on Giotto and a specialist on early Italian painting, has cabled of the Kress collection: "In scope, qualitative level, varied interest unquestionably most important collection Italian painting in America."

Mr. Bernard Berenson, of Florence, the internationally known authority on Italian painting and author of "The Italian Painters of the Renaissance", "Italian Pictures of the Renaissance", "The Drawing of the Florentine Painters" etc., has wired: "There are two types

of collections: those like Widener, Gardner, Frick, or Bache consisting of masterpieces only and those like the Johnson collection in Philadelphia constituting a historical series. Kress collection combines both, satisfying students as well as amateurs. Few Italian painters between 1300 and 1600 are missing and the greatest are represented by highly characteristic examples in excellent condition."