

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington, D. C.

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National Gallery of Art announces acquisition of two historic fountains which formerly graced gardens of Palace of Versailles in France.

Two famous fountains which first graced the gardens of the palace of Versailles in France more than two hundred and fifty years ago have been acquired for installation in the new National Gallery of Art now under construction in Washington.

Announcement of the purchase of the two important sculptures was made here today by the Trustees of the Mellon Charitable Trust who are administering the fund under which the National Gallery is being built as a gift to the government.

The two fountains, executed in 1672 on orders of Louis XIV as a part of the decoration for the celebrated "Theatre d'Eau" at Versailles, are admirably suited for the setting arranged for them in the handsome marble structure that will house many of the government's most valued works

of art. One will be placed in each of the spacious garden courts which form an important architectural feature of the main gallery floor of the building.

Each of these garden courts, measuring 76 feet wide by 106 feet long, contains 16 monolithic columns and leads into wide central galleries opening off the main rotunda. In the courts will be growing plants and flowers, with benches where visitors may rest during the tour through some 62 gallery rooms immediately to be completed.

Characteristic of seventeenth century decorative sculpture, the two fountains, modeled of lead, are similar in size and general effect. The original sketches for these groups were made by Lebrun to fit in with the landscape design by Le Notre. One group was executed by Pierre Legros, representing two amorini, or winged cherubs, playing with a lyre; the other, by Jean-Baptiste Tubi, depicts two like figures in different positions at play with an irate swan.

Exceedingly valuable now, not only for their antiquity but for the quality of art they reflect, it is interesting to note that old records of the French Court show Legros to have been paid 800 livres, and Tubi 500 livres, as remuneration for their work.

Water effects of the fountains were designed by Vigarini, the renowned Italian expert, who was called to the French Court for that purpose by Louis XIV.

A rather colorful history is associated with the old fountains, which still are in a remarkable state of preservation.

Built for the esthetic satisfaction of Louis XIV, no less than five sculptors were entrusted with the execution of the sculpture for the "Theatre d'Eau" of the Versailles Garden. Of the pieces made for that purpose only the two fountains which are now to be placed in the National Gallery have survived. Completed in the summer of 1674, the "Theatre d'Eau" formed part of the background for the extraordinary fetes offered at the court of the French King in that year.

The open-air theater was considered one of the chief glories of the park of Versailles. Like the many fountains throughout the park, they consumed such a vast amount of water that bitter protests resulted from adjoining districts which were left high and dry by the diversion of streams for the reservoirs. It is recorded that the King, respecting the protests, passed word to one of his ministers, so that thereafter he arranged to stroll through the garden only at a designated hour. As he appeared the water was turned on; the moment he turned his

back it was cut off. Louis is said never to have varied his schedule; nor would he turn his head for a second glance after passing.

The "Theatre d'Eau" was abandoned before 1750, and the sculptured fountains dismantled. Through engravings made by Le Pautre, however, their designs were preserved and it was thus possible after a lapse of years to reassemble two of the original works, which now take a fitting place in the National Gallery, where at the very outset works of art valued at upwards of \$80,000,000 will be housed.

Formerly a part of a ducal collection in Russia, the two fountains were loaned last summer to the French Government for artistic decoration of the French Pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

Meantime, work on the National Gallery is rapidly progressing throughout the interior of the building as it moves steadily toward completion. The last pane of heavy wire-woven glass for the skylight roof -- over ~~one~~² acres of it -- has already been fastened in place. The glass for the lay lights or ceilings of the individual gallery rooms is now being laid -- and this glass has been treated by a new process which makes it twenty times stronger than ordinary glass -- strong enough to bear the weight of a man.

The exterior wall of this 785-foot marble building is finished except for the pediment on the Mall side and the steps leading up to the main entrance. Otherwise, the 800 carloads of Tennessee marble -- 35,000 individual blocks -- are all in place. Claimed by experts to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, its simple architectural grandeur is creating enthusiastic comment.

Having moved inside the building, which is a hive of industry, the marble and stone crews are now setting the Rockwood stone, of soft texture and beauty, which forms the walls of the huge rotunda, main sculpture galleries and entrance lobbies. Most of the large air conditioning vents, covered with cork board, are already encased in the interior walls.

The schedule calls for the final completion of the building about August, 1940, after which some several months will elapse during the decoration of the galleries and the arrangement of the collections therein before the building is opened to the public. The \$15,000,000 building designed by the late John Russell Pope, and carried forward by his successors, Otto R. Eggers and Daniel P. Higgins of New York, was given to the nation by the late Andrew W. Mellon of Pittsburgh. Mr. Mellon's magnificent gift also includes his important collection of works of art, which will be housed in the building.

It was his hope that the National Gallery would attract gifts by other important collectors so that in time our national collection would equal in importance that of any other country. This well known collection contains some 111 paintings and 21 pieces of sculpture. There are no less than three renowned Raphaels and four Botticellis. Important works by Duccio, Fra Angelico, Jan van Eyck, Titian, Rubens, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Frans Hals, Goya, El Greco and Velazquez and others are included. Famous American painters will be represented by fine examples of the work of Copley, West, Gilbert Stuart and others.

Another great gift to the nation, the Samuel H. Kress Collection, will also be housed in the building, and gallery rooms are being prepared specially therefor. This collection, consists of 375 paintings and 18 pieces of sculpture -- practically every one of the important painters of the Italian School from the Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries being well represented -- and is acclaimed by authorities as one of the greatest private collections of Italian art in the world. 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 excellent condition.

The curatorial staff of the Gallery is already at work planning the arrangement of the collections in the various gallery rooms and in the preparation of the catalogues.

Under the graceful marble dome, already in place, the interior rotunda will soon be completed. The principal feature in the interior of the building, the rotunda, will be surrounded by an ionic order comprising twenty-four great columns of dark green marble which support the dome. In the center, a fountain of gray marble from Tennessee, twelve feet in diameter, will play -- surmounted by a famous bronze figure of Mercury made about 1570 by the celebrated sculptor, Giovanni da Bologna, a part of the Mellon Collection. The floor of the rotunda, as well as of the main gallery corridors, will be of Nero Nube, a black-toned marble with insets of lighter marble known as ^{Ph} Fantasia rose.

The two central galleries will contain large pieces of sculpture. Opening off these galleries and surrounding the garden courts will be the exhibition galleries, in which paintings and smaller pieces of sculpture will be shown separately, the latter in specially designed settings which will exhibit to the best advantage the famous pieces of Renaissance sculpture in the Mellon and Kress Collections. The paintings will be shown according to schools and periods, and in rooms especially designed for them.

All the exhibition rooms will be more or less intimate in size. The galleries in which Italian paintings and sculpture will be shown will be finished with travertine or plaster walls and travertine stone trim for doors and wainscot, with wood floors. The Dutch paintings will be shown in oak-panelled rooms; and 18th Century French, English and American paintings will be shown in painted wood-panelled rooms. More than one-quarter of the Gallery will be reserved for paintings of the 19th Century and later periods.

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