

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART      FOR RELEASE SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 1941

INFORMATION TO ACCOMPANY PHOTOGRAPHS TO ROTOGRAVURE EDITORS

On Monday evening, March 17, President Roosevelt will dedicate the new National Gallery of Art at Washington. On the following day, March 18, the Gallery will be open to the public with the Mellon and Kress collections of paintings and sculpture on view.

The building, recently completed at a cost of fifteen million dollars, was made possible by the gift of funds provided by the late Andrew W. Mellon. In his letter addressed to President Roosevelt in December, 1936, offering to build and to give to the Nation an art gallery, Mr. Mellon stipulated that the edifice should not bear his name but should be called the "National Gallery of Art". The gift was accepted by an Act of Congress on March 24, 1937 and a site for the building extending along Constitution Avenue from 4th to 7th Streets was provided.

The Act constituted the National Gallery as a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution but administered by its own board of trustees, consisting of the Chief Justice of the United States (serving as Chairman of the Board); the Secretary of State; the Secretary of the Treasury; the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, all ex-officio;

and five general Trustees, David K. E. Bruce, President, F. Lamot Belin, Vice President, Duncan Phillips, Joseph E. Widener and Samuel H. Kress.

Following Mr. Mellon's death on August 26, 1937, construction of the building was carried to completion under the direction of Paul Mellon, Donald D. Shepard and David K. E. Bruce, Trustees of The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust.

The architect of the building was the late John Russell Pope, who died a few weeks after the ground-breaking ceremonies in June, 1937. Pope's associates, Otto B. Eggers and Daniel Paul Higgins, of the firm of Eggers and Higgins of New York City, carried the work to completion.

Resting on 6,700 concrete piles, the building is 785 feet long and 305 feet wide. It is constructed principally of hard-surface pink Tennessee marble and is believed to be the largest marble structure in the world. With one-half million square feet of floor area, ample space is provided for exhibiting more than 1,500 paintings and large sculpture collections.

In addition to presenting the building and a substantial endowment for acquisitions and other purposes, Mr. Mellon also gave to the Nation his collection of 126 paintings and

26 pieces of sculpture. In the Mellon collection are some of the finest works of the great masters. Three highly prized Raphaels, among them the famous Saint George and the Dragon, acquired from the Hermitage collection at Leningrad, are included. (See accompanying photograph). Botticelli is represented with four fine canvases, including the well known Adoration of the Magi, also acquired from the Hermitage collection. (See accompanying photograph).

The Kress collection of 375 paintings and 18 pieces of sculpture, one of the most noteworthy private collections of Italian art in existence, is the gift of Mr. Samuel H. Kress to the National Gallery of Art. Works of most of the great Italian masters are included in this generous gift. Together, the Mellon and Kress collections total some 600 objects, all of which will go on permanent exhibition at the formal opening of the Gallery on March 17.

The Trustees of the Gallery have announced a half-hour program of dedication exercises on the evening of the opening. Speakers on the program, in addition to President Roosevelt, will include Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, Paul Mellon, son of the late Andrew W. Mellon, and Samuel H. Kress.

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