

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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On Sunday, March 15th, two days before its first anniversary, the National Gallery of Art had its two millionth visitor. Thus, in less than a year, an astonishing record for attendance has been established.

Just one year ago, on March 17th, the Gallery was dedicated by President Roosevelt before an audience of 9,000 people, including leaders of thought from every part of this country and the world. During the eventful year that has passed since that occasion, the National Gallery has been obliged to establish itself and to find its place in the national life. That it has become firmly established and that the need for such an institution exists have been proved by the reception the Gallery has met on the part of the general public.

On Sunday afternoons there have been as many as 23,000 people in the Gallery. On weekdays the average attendance has been over 5,000. People have come by families, with fathers carrying babies on their shoulders. Special tours have been organized for soldiers and sailors

on leave, all eager for a first sight of their new National Gallery. One young man from a New Hampshire village, on his way to join the Marines, said that he had left his home a day earlier in order to stop in Washington and see the National Gallery and its collections.

Only yesterday a letter came from a private in one of the many camps to which, through an anonymous donor, the Gallery had sent a gift of colored reproductions of paintings by Titian, Rembrandt, etc., for the decoration of the camp libraries. "It is difficult," he writes, "to express in words just how much pleasure I, for one, have derived from them. Each time they are viewed, they seem more and more impressive. In days such as these it is consoling for us to know that beauty and the inspiration derived from beauty are not things forgotten. These are still with us and for this we can be thankful."

Words like these give proof, if any is needed, of what America's new National Gallery means to the people of this country.

While the Gallery has only recently come into being, it had its beginning many years ago. Mr. Andrew W. Mellon, when he came to Washington from Pittsburgh in the early 1920's to become Secretary of the Treasury, felt the need of a National Gallery in Washington, with a collection

of paintings and sculpture which might serve as a nucleus of a great National Collection and a building adequate to contain that future great collection. Before his death in 1937, Mr. Mellon provided the funds and approved the plans for the building since erected on the Mall in Washington. He also gave his collection of paintings and sculpture, containing only the finest works by the greatest masters. In respect to quality, that collection has become the norm or standard by which all gifts to the Gallery are measured.

Mr. Mellon's hope that others would carry on the work has already been realized, notably by the action of Mr. Samuel H. Kress, who, before the Gallery opened, took from the walls of his home in New York and gave to the Nation his magnificent collection of paintings and sculpture, including works of most of the important artists of the Italian School. Following Mr. Kress's example, Mr. Chester Dale has also generously taken from his New York house and sent to the Gallery, on permanent loan, practically all of his famous collection of paintings. In addition to

well known works by old masters and by important American painters, Mr. Dale's collection illustrates, in a unique way, the development of French painting, especially during the 19th century.

In addition, the Gallery now has on exhibition a loan collection of 19th century French paintings from French museums, sent to South America before the war and subsequently exhibited on loan in this country. These paintings, with those from the Chester Dale and Harris Whittemore collections, now on loan at the National Gallery, illustrate in a most comprehensive way this great century of French painting. The Whittemore collection also brings to the Gallery superb examples of the work of Whistler.

Most acceptable also, especially at this time, have been gifts to the Gallery of a fine painting by Daumier, from Mr. Duncan Phillips; of paintings by Pietro Lorenzetti and Morone, from Mrs. Felix Warburg; and of two splendid Goyas, from Mrs. Peter Frelinghuysen.

The Gallery contains also a small but very distinguished collection of prints; and is acquiring, as rapidly as possible, an adequate library of books and photographs. A catalogue of the works of art in the Gallery's collection had been prepared and was available

at the opening of the institution last year. Also black and white and colored prints of many of the paintings can be purchased, for very moderate prices, and during the year have been widely distributed throughout the country. Each week the curatorial staff gives lectures in the lecture hall on some phase of art as illustrated in the Gallery's collection. These lectures are free, as are all services, including daily admission to the Gallery.

During the year there have been a number of loan exhibitions, including an exhibition of American water colors in May; a retrospective exhibition of Australian painting held in the autumn; and an exhibition last summer of paintings of London under bombing as seen by British artists serving with the London Auxiliary Fire Service. These London paintings, executed with skill and restraint, aroused in this country the greatest admiration for the courage and stamina of the British people, recorded with such sincerity by artists who had themselves taken part in the scenes depicted. Another exhibition, just closed, has shown, through the medium of water color, wartime activities in this country as seen and recorded by American artists. Other exhibitions are planned for the coming year.

Thus the National Gallery has taken its place in American life and is fulfilling the hope expressed at the dedication of the Gallery last year by Paul Mellon, son of

the donor, "that the National Gallery would become not a static but a living institution, growing in usefulness and importance to artists, scholars, and the general public."

In all of this the National Gallery has followed the tradition of public service, so well established in this country by the great museums in New York, Chicago, and other cities, where for many years splendid work has been done for the cause of art education and scholarship.

In addition to all that has been done by the museums, much of the increased interest in art in this country has resulted from the intelligent efforts of the Federal Government in recent years, through the Works Projects Administration Program and the Section of Fine Arts, to encourage our own artists and to provide an outlet for their talents. In this way the Federal Government has succeeded in bringing about a better understanding of art and has encouraged its development in every corner of the United States.

To promote such a development and understanding of art is one of the fundamental purposes of the National Gallery. It was a fortunate circumstance, therefore, that the Gallery has come into being at this time when the stimulus and enjoyment of great art is more than ever needed in a world so filled with grim realities.