

GIFT OF THE WIDENER COLLECTION

Mr. Widener's great gift of his collection to the Nation brings to the National Gallery more than 100 paintings, and many famous pieces of sculpture, as well as tapestries and other works of art of the first importance. Such a gift has an added significance at this time. Not only does Mr. Widener make available to everyone who visits the Nation's Capital, many of the finest works of art in existence, but he has done so at a time when the inspiration and enjoyment of great art are more than ever needed by the people of this country.

As President Roosevelt said at the dedication of the National Gallery in March 1941, in speaking of the works of art it contained: "Whatever these paintings may have been to men who looked at them a generation back, today they are not only works of art. Today they are the symbols of the human spirit, and of the world the freedom of the human spirit made -- a world against which armies now are raised and countries overrun and men imprisoned and their work destroyed."

And so the famous Rembrandts and Van Dycks and other treasures in the Widener Collection today have a greater significance and will speak with a deeper meaning to the Gallery's visitors, who, even with reduced war-time attendance, number more than 100,000 each month.

The collection is given by Mr. Joseph L. Widener in memory of his father, the late Mr. Peter A. B. Widener. In receiving this great collection, the Nation will benefit by the discrimination, knowledge, and taste shown by Mr. Widener and his father, over many years, in bringing together a collection which, in scope and quality, has rarely been equalled in any period of collecting in Europe or America. Any museum fortunate enough to possess the Widener Collection would be considered one of the important museums of the world even if it had no other works of art.

When the Widener Collection has been installed in the National Gallery, the paintings and sculpture will completely fill a number of rooms. These will not be segregated but interspersed among the other exhibition galleries in such a way as to illustrate the chronological development of the various schools. Works of art other than paintings and sculpture will be installed in rooms on the ground floor which have been especially prepared for them.

The collection contains 101 paintings. Among the Italian paintings is the celebrated "Feast of the Gods" by Giovanni Bellini, mentioned by Vasari in 1550 as "one of the finest works that Gian Bellini ever did, which work he, himself, not being able to finish on account of his extreme old age, was taken over by Titian as superior to all others". Also included in the collection is the unique painted shield,

representing "The Youthful David", by one of the rarest of the great Florentine masters, Andrea del Castagno. Other paintings in this group are "The Small Cowper Madonna", perhaps the most characteristic of Raphael's early Madonnas, and superb panels by Benozzo Gozzoli, Lorenzo di Credi, Mantegna, and others. The later Venetian painters are represented by three great works by Titian; the "Venus and Adonis", and the two portraits of the Spilimbergo sisters. Strongly under the influence of Venetian art are the two masterpieces by El Greco, "St. Martin and the Beggar" and "Virgin with Santa Inéz and Santa Tecla", both from the Chapel of San José in Toledo. Also from Spain comes the remarkable painting of a "Girl and her Duenna" by Murillo.

Of the Northern Schools of the 17th Century, Mr. Widener and his father gathered together a group of masterpieces unsurpassed in the annals of private collecting. There are the famous Van Dyck portraits, among which are supreme examples of his Genoese period, such as the monumental "Marchesa Elena Grimaldi" and the "Marchesa Paola Adorno and her Son", and others. There are 14 paintings by Rembrandt, including "The Mill", considered by many connoisseurs one of the greatest landscapes in the history of art; and the pair of portraits from the Youssoupeff Collection, which stand among his portraits as two of Rembrandt's noblest interpretations of character.

There are two famous paintings by Vermeer, "A Woman Weighing Gold" and "A Young Girl with a Flute", the latter closely related to the "Girl with a Red Hat" in the Mellon Collection; and there are also works by other artists of the Dutch and Flemish schools including such masters as Rubens, Hals, Cuyp, Potter, Ostade, de Hooch, Steen, and Hobbema.

Landscapes by Guardi and Canaletto, and a splendid group of portraits by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Romney, Raeburn, and others, illustrate the 18th Century; while 19th Century painting is beautifully shown in a small number of masterpieces by Turner, Constable, Corot, Renoir, Degas, Manet, Puvis de Chavannes, and Whistler.

The sculpture in the Widener Collection, although less numerous than the paintings, maintains the same magnificent level of quality. Included in the collection is the David of the Casa Martelli by Donatello, probably the greatest statue by this artist outside of Italy. There is also a celebrated Cupid by the same master, and distinguished examples of the art of Desiderio da Settignano, Rossellino, and Luca della Robbia. Later Italian Renaissance sculpture is represented by a famous portrait of Pietro Aretino by Jacopo Sansovino, as well as by a fine collection of bronzes including work by such outstanding masters as Benvenuto Cellini and Giovanni da Bologna.

The continuation of the Renaissance tradition in sculpture during the 18th Century in France is admirably illustrated by a number of exceptionally fine pieces. Of these the portrait-bust of Louis II de Bourbon, Prince de Condé by Coysevox, the Diana by Jean-Louis Lemoyne, and no less than six Houdon portrait-busts have made the collection one of the most distinguished in private possession outside of France.

In the Widener Collection there are also important objets d'art such as the Chalice of the twelfth century, which tradition claims as once belonging to Abbot Suger of St. Denis; Limoges enamels, rock crystals, and Renaissance jewelry, several of the latter pieces with settings attributed to Benvenuto Cellini. There are remarkable examples of ceramics comprising a famous collection of Majolica ware from Italy and 169 important examples of Chinese porcelains. There are also outstanding tapestries and furniture dating from the 15th to the 18th Centuries, and a famous collection of drawings chiefly by Rembrandt, Dürer, and French artists of the 17th and 18th Centuries. These works will be installed in rooms on the ground floor where they can be seen to great advantage in specially prepared settings.