

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D. C.

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WASHINGTON: ~~July 18~~: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today one of the greatest donations of eighteenth-century French painting ever received by any museum, the gift of a group of paintings from Mr. Samuel H. Kress and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The National Gallery has already received from the same donors a collection of Italian painting and sculpture unique in range and completeness.

The present donation includes the famous Italian Comedians by Watteau; The Game of Hot Cockles, The Game of Horse and Rider and The Visit to the Nursery by Fragonard; the Portrait of Madame Bergeret, and two Allegories, one of Painting and the other of Music, by Boucher; A Large Group Portrait by Drouais; and the well-known portrait of La Live de Jully by Greuze.

John Walker, Chief Curator, stated that these paintings will make the French eighteenth-century section at the National Gallery of Art outstanding in America and, except for two or three museums, unsurpassed in Europe.

The earliest painting in the gift, the famous Italian Comedians, is one of the last important canvases painted by Watteau. It was done in London for Dr. Richard Mead, to whom the artist had turned in a final unsuccessful effort to restore his health. With only a year to live, Watteau paid a last tribute to the gayety and charm of his old friends of the stage, who had just received permission to resume their roles in Paris, after their return from the exile imposed by Madame de Maintenon.

There is a subtle suggestion of melancholy in Watteau's work, but no shadow of tragedy falls across the two superb Fragonard landscapes, The Game of Hot Cockles and The Game of Horse and Rider. They were painted for the Baron de Saint Julien, who also commissioned The Swing in the Wallace Collection, London. These paintings brilliantly suggest the playfulness, the endless frivolity of rococo society. But with the third Fragonard, The Visit to the Nursery, there is a different note, a hint of the final phase of a sophisticated culture, a sentimental, almost artificial, enthusiasm for the simple pleasures of family life. In this case the painter may have been inspired by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Another painting in the Kress gift, Greuze's portrait of La Live de Jully, is a skillful analysis of the typical amateur and patron of the time. Something of a musician, a dabbler in the arts, one of the first historians of French painting, La Live de Jully was well known in the artistic and literary circles of his day.

Madame Bergeret, as we see her in the portrait by Boucher, is just as typical of the cultivated lady of the eighteenth century. Her husband was one of the first patrons of Boucher, and her brother, the Abbé de Saint-Non, was the protector of many artists, among them Hubert Robert and Fragonard. Her portrait suggests the exquisite manners and sophisticated charm of life at the court of Louis Quinze.

Boucher's portraits are extremely rare. He is better known for his decorative painting, and this phase of his activity is superbly represented in the Kress donation by the two Allegories of Painting and Music, executed for the Elector of Bavaria. It would be difficult to find better examples of the flowing brushwork, the rich yet subtly muted colors, the virtuosity of draftsmanship, which mark the rococo style at its best.

The Large Group Portrait by Drouais shows an interior of the time, with delicate ornament, voluminous satins and laces, fragile furniture, and the complex paraphernalia of the boudoir which was an essential part of eighteenth-century life. The three people who occupy the center of the composition, the man, the woman, the child, seem to harmonize well with their environment, and their personalities reflect the refinement and subtlety underlying rococo culture.

Through these nine paintings now given to the nation by Mr. Kress, we are granted an extraordinary insight into one of the most civilized periods of history.

The newly donated group of paintings will be placed on exhibition in the near future in the National Gallery of Art where a special setting has been provided for them.