

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

For Release October 21, 1944

WASHINGTON, October 21: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that the paintings and sculpture which were evacuated at the time of Pearl Harbor have been safely returned to the National Gallery.

For nearly two years these works of art have been stored, for greater safety, at Biltmore House, Biltmore, North Carolina - the famous French Renaissance chateau built by the late George Vanderbilt in the 1890's, in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville, North Carolina. Storage space in Biltmore House was placed at the disposal of the National Gallery through the courtesy and generosity of the Trustees of the Biltmore Estate, Mrs. Peter G. Gerry, Judge Junius G. Adams, and Mr. C. D. Beadle, who considered it a public service to give hospitality and protection to the nation's treasures during these anxious years of war. Valuable assistance was rendered by the staff of the Biltmore Estate, who co-operated in every way in the care of the collection.

Biltmore House is not only one of the largest and most beautiful buildings in America, but is also one of the earliest structures erected in this country with modern fireproof construction of hollow tile and stone. More than six months

before Pearl Harbor, the storage rooms had been prepared, with the co-operation of the Trustees of The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, and equipped with steel doors, screens on which to hang the pictures, and special air conditioning, so that immediately after this country entered the war, it was possible to remove to the quarters prepared for them the famous paintings and sculpture from the Mellon and the Kress collections designated for evacuation.

During the time these works of art have been at Biltmore House, a member of the curatorial staff of the National Gallery has always been in charge, together with a force of armed guards from the Gallery. At regular intervals, the paintings have been inspected by Mr. John Walker, Chief Curator, and Mr. Stephen Pichetto, Consultant Restorer of the Gallery.

Under their direction, and also that of the Director, Mr. Finley, and of the Administrator, Colonel Harry A. McBride, the works of art, during the last week, were repacked in the cases which had been especially designed for them, and brought back to Washington in three large motor vans, accompanied by the above named officers of the Gallery and by a force of Gallery guards. The convoy was escorted, with great efficiency, through North Carolina and Virginia by State Highway Patrolmen of the respective states. It was met at Key Bridge by a motorcycle escort of Metropolitan Police under the orders of Major Edward Kelly, Superintendent of Metropolitan Police for the District of Columbia.

The works of art will be reinstalled in the Gallery as rapidly as possible and, as each room is completed, it will be opened

to the public. Mr. Finley stated: "There will be no special ceremony but a feeling of great thankfulness on the part of the Gallery and the public that the Raphaels and Botticellis and other works of human genius are safely home again."

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