

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30 : David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that Mr. Stephen C. Clark of New York has given to the National Gallery the well-known painting of Monsignor Diomede Falconio by Thomas Eakins.

Commenting on the new donation, Mr. Finley said, "It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of Mr. Clark's gift. In 1941, at the time of the opening of the National Gallery, three of our greatest American artists, Homer, Ryder, and Eakins were not represented in the collection. Owing to the generosity of private benefactors, outstanding canvases by Homer and Ryder were subsequently acquired, but Eakins remained a serious gap in the representation of American painting. As most of his great pictures had been bought or given to other museums before the National Gallery was established, it seemed doubtful whether a sufficiently important work could be acquired. We are particularly fortunate, therefore, that Mr. Clark has now made it possible for Eakins to be represented in the National Gallery by one of his last and finest portraits".

John Walker, Chief Curator of the National Gallery, speaking of the portrait of Monsignor Diomede Falconio, said that it indicated the great simplicity of composition and the power of expression of Eakins' final portrait style.

"Like Rembrandt, Eakins' insight into human personality increased with the years," Mr. Walker added. "In the portrait of this ageing prelate, painted in 1905, the artist has shown a man of understanding and compassion, whose tired face seems lined with sadness. The hands are particularly beautiful, and recall a letter Eakins wrote many years earlier, in which he said, 'A hand takes as long to paint as a head nearly, and a man's hand no more looks like another man's hand than his head like another's.'"

Though Eakins himself was an agnostic, in his later years he repeatedly portrayed the scholars, writers, and teachers of the Catholic clergy in America, painting them always on his own initiative.

Goodrich, in his life of the artist, tells how Eakins was accustomed to bicycle on Sundays to St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook, Pennsylvania, where he would spend the day in enjoyment of the monastic atmosphere. Once he astounded a group of Chinese priests by speaking to them in Latin.

Eakins was a brilliant linguist and often added Latin inscriptions to his portraits. "In the case of the painting of Monsignor Diomedes Falconio, who was Apostolic Delegate from 1902-1911 and was created Cardinal in 1911," Mr. Walker said, "the Latin inscription indicates that the portrait was done in Washington, one of the rare pictures which the artist painted away from his home in Philadelphia. Thus after more than forty years it has returned to its city of origin, the first work to represent Eakins in the collection of his National Gallery."