

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, April 11: ¹⁹⁴⁷ David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announces the opening on April 18th of an exhibition of the Indigenous Art of the Americas from the collection of the Honorable Robert Woods Bliss of Washington, D. C. "The collection is the result of more than thirty-five years of Mr. Bliss' interest in the art forms of Pre-Columbian culture," Mr. Finley said. "During this period, Mr. Bliss has built up one of the most important private collections of Pre-Columbian art in the world. It will now be seen for the first time in its entirety at the National Gallery."

The objects in the collection were selected for their beauty, rather than for their archaeological significance. As Mr. Bliss has said in the introduction to the handbook of the exhibition, "Here there has been no attempt to represent every phase of artistic Pre-Columbian expression or to show the full chronological development in any one phase. Archaeology has had little to do with the choice of objects acquired. My interest has been in the art of the inhabitants of Mexico and of Central and South America before the Conquest and I have collected, as opportunity offered, objects which gave me pleasure:--a sculpture boldly conceived; a gold object delicately wrought; a fabric of good design, well woven; ceramics with interesting iconography; metal work of quality:--a rhythm here, a form there. It has been good hunting and I hope will be again."

In commenting on the exhibition John Walker, Chief Curator of the National Gallery, pointed out that Mr. Bliss' search for the beautiful and precious object of Pre-Columbian art was carried on during rare moments of leisure snatched from a busy and successful diplomatic career. "But Mr. Bliss had one advantage," Mr. Walker added, "for many years he was an almost solitary hunter. It is only recently that the beauty of the indigenous art of this hemisphere has been widely recognized. Though Albrecht Dürer in 1520 said of the works of art sent from Mexico to Europe as a result of the Conquest, 'I have never seen in all my days what so rejoiced my heart as these things,' his enthusiasm was exceptional. Thirty years ago, when Mr. Bliss was collecting artifacts of Mayan, Aztec,

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Toltec and other Pre-Columbian cultures, few connoisseurs showed any appreciation for what they considered purely ethnological material. Now with the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art and the exhibitions already held at many other museums throughout the United States, it is becoming increasingly evident that there was a great creative force among the indigenous people of this hemisphere. The beauty they created, with its purity of line and simplicity of mass and plane, has inspired some of the finest creations of modern art. The Gallery is very fortunate in being able to show this superb collection of sculpture, painting, metal work, ceramics and textiles, in which virtually every phase of Pre-Columbian art is represented by magnificent examples."

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