

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

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WASHINGTON, January 17: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that a group of eight important paintings by Italian and German artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been given to the National Gallery from the Ralph and Mary Booth Collection of Detroit.

"These pictures are among the most important works of art in private possession in this country," Mr. Finley stated. "They comprise the second group of masterpieces which have been given to the National Gallery by Mrs. Booth. The first, given by her in 1942, consisted of three pieces of sculpture: a fine Greek head and two small, exquisitely carved Rhenish groups."

The late Ralph Harman Booth who, with his wife, assembled the magnificent collection well known to connoisseurs in Europe and America, occupied a distinguished place in the publishing world in the United States, being editor and publisher of a chain of newspapers in many of the larger cities of Michigan. He served as United States Minister to Denmark for about two years, until his death in 1931.

He began collecting works of art as a very young man, and in 1905 twenty-three paintings in his collection were shown in an exhibition held in the Detroit Museum. Eventually his collection included not only many paintings by old masters, such as those which have come to the National Gallery, but also fine examples of the work of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters, (Renoir, Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, etc.). To these Mrs. Booth later added paintings by Ingres, Prud'hon, Manet, Monet, Van Gogh and many others, as well as works by contemporary painters and sculptors of whom she and Mr. Booth were generous patrons.

In commenting on the pictures which have come to the National Gallery from the Booth Collection, John Walker, Chief Curator, said: "The gift of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Bellini, which represents the fifteenth painting in the Gallery's collection by this master, enhances the unique character of the National Gallery's representation of the work of one of the greatest of all Venetian artists. The Booth Madonna," Mr. Walker continued, "is not only one of the most exquisite of all his works in its treatment of the subject, in its relation of figures and landscape, but also historically it is of the greatest interest, since the seventeenth century artist, David Teniers the Younger, left a pictorial record of it in one of his views of the picture gallery of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm at Brussels. In Teniers' painting, the Bellini Madonna, now given by Mrs. Booth to the National Gallery, can be seen hanging with such great canvases as the Philosophers by Giorgione of the Vienna Museum and the Danaë by Titian of the Prado, Madrid.

"The theme of the Madonna and Child reappears in another painting from the Booth Collection executed almost 100 years later by Tintoretto. The beautiful placing of the two figures, surrounded by concentric circles of cherubim and stars, makes this canvas one of the great achievements of Tintoretto's career. I have found no other painting by the master," Mr. Walker continued, "with a similar concentration on the figures of the Virgin and the Christ Child. Moreover, the very original harmony of silvery grays and delicate umbers reveals a rare aspect of Tintoretto as a colorist."

"The Portrait of a Youth by Boltraffio has long been recognized as one of the greatest works by this gifted pupil of Leonardo da Vinci and is, in my opinion, his masterpiece as a portrait painter. It was among the twenty-eight paintings from America shown at the great Italian Exhibition in London in 1930 where it was much praised by critics and connoisseurs. Few interpretations of youth in Italian art are as sensitive and sympathetic."

Portraits of children and young people have a wide appeal. Among the Booth pictures are two entrancing portraits of a Prince and Princess of Saxony by Lucas Cranach the Elder. The brother and sister, with their long flaxen hair, their brocaded clothes and charming, intricate jewelry, face the world with the assurance and poise of children accustomed to the ritual of court life.

Two other portraits in the Booth Collection, representing the Mayor of Memmingen and his wife, also came from Germany. They were painted by Bernhard Strigel, Court Painter of Emperor Maximilian, and are dated 1527 in the inscriptions on the original frames. Strigel died the following year, and the Booth paintings represent almost his final effort to express Renaissance harmony and balance in terms of northern taste and temperament.

The fifth German portrait is one of the very few paintings that have been recognized as the work of Nicolaus Kremer. It represents a German nobleman and is signed N. K. and dated 1529. Like the panels by Strigel it is in its original frame, a beautiful example of German wood-carving of the period.

"These fine German pictures are particularly welcome to the Gallery's collection," Mr. Walker said, "for the representation of German art has been until now somewhat weak when compared to other schools. The addition of the Booth pictures will help to fill this lacuna and greatly assist in rounding out the Nation's collection of paintings."

All the pictures have hung until now in the beautiful house which Mr. and Mrs. Booth erected in Grosse Pointe, near Detroit. Their home has been a center of distinguished social and artistic activity and Mrs. Booth's continued interest in art has maintained the tradition she helped to establish.

For many years Mr. Booth was President of the City Arts Commission of Detroit, and also President of the Detroit Institute of Arts. During his tenure of office, the art movement in Detroit received its greatest impetus. The handsome new building for the Art Institute was erected during this time and dedicated in 1927. It contains a beautiful Gothic Chapel presented by Mr. and Mrs. Booth at the time of the dedication. From 1927 until Mr. Booth's death in 1931, he presented a large number of very important gifts, and from a fund bequeathed by him, many important works of art have been acquired including Goya's Countess De Gondomar, Antonello da Messina's Christ at the Column, and Rubens' portrait of the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, etc. Mrs. Booth continued in this work after her husband's death.

After Mr. Booth's death, the following tribute was paid to him by the Arts Commission of Detroit:

A tribute to Ralph Harman Booth, President of the Arts Commission of the City of Detroit.

"The Arts Commission feels that to its President, Ralph Harman Booth, more than to anyone else, is due the credit of the inception of an Art building of so high a standard, and the carrying of the project through to completion, despite the many difficulties that were encountered. They believe that the work he has done in this connection will live forever in the memory of the citizens of Detroit, and that it will give him for all time a prominent place in the history of art in the United States."