

AUSTRIAN LEGATION  
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BACKGROUND OF THE AUSTRIAN EXHIBITION

The paintings and art objects to be shown in the United States are a selection mostly taken from the collection of the "Kunsthistorisches Museum" of Vienna. The origin of the collection dates back several centuries. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the House of Habsburg, like other Sovereign families, owned a considerable number of precious objects, goldsmith's works, vessels, illuminated manuscripts, painted panels, etc. Emperor Ferdinand I († 1564), brother of Charles V laid down in his will that these precious things should remain undivided thus creating what could be styled "The Charta" of the future Imperial Collections. Among Emperor Ferdinand's sons, Archduke Ferdinand, the regent of Tyrol, and husband of Philippine Welser formed in his castle Ambras, near Innsbruck, a large collection which was later taken to Vienna. It is worth noting that Ferdinand's activity as a collector produced the first illustrated catalogue in 1602. In the next generation Archduke Ferdinand's nephew, Emperor Rudolph II, added greatly to the Imperial collections by acquiring a considerable number of works by Albrecht Duerer and Pieter Brueghel, which today are the pride of the Vienna Gallery.

About the middle of the 17th century, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm founded for the first time a collection of a more modern type, thus becoming the real father of the Vienna Gallery. Leopold Wilhelm who had been brought up in Spain had formed his taste among the paintings of Titian and Tintoretto and he addressed himself, therefore, foremost to the Venetian Renaissance. After his death the collection fell to Emperor Leopold I and later to his sons, Joseph I and Charles VI. We owe to them among other things, the acquisition of some of the fine portraits by van Dyck and above all the wonderful Rembrandts. During the eighteenth century the Vienna collections were enhanced by the different sovereigns, among them Empress Maria Theresia who, in 1777, acquired a number of important altar-pieces by Rubens which, added to the pictures by this master which the Vienna Gallery already possessed, made it the outstanding Rubens

collection, in which every aspect of that great painter's art can be studied at its best.

After the dissolution of the Monarchy, the Austrian Republic fell heir to these treasures. After the occupation of Austria by Germany in 1938 the collections were disrupted. During the war most of the art treasures were stored away in the saltmines at Alt-Aussee, Upper-Austria; they were recovered and returned to the Austrian Government by General Patton's Army. The forthcoming exhibition of an important selection of these masterpieces is a token of Austrian gratitude for their recovery through the American Forces.

Among the paintings there are 5 works by Jan Brueghel, 2 by Correggio, 1 by Duerer, 9 by van Dyck, 1 by Franz Hals, 2 each by Palma Vecchio and Rembrandt (including a famous self portrait), 9 by Rubens, 7 by Tintoretto, 12 by Titian, 6 by Velasquez, 1 by Vermeer and 6 by Veronese. In addition, many other Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Austrian, French and German masterpieces are represented. The collection also includes the painting by David Teniers who was Gallery Director (1651 - 1656) to the founder of the Viennese collections, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm; it shows the Archduke inspecting his gallery of paintings, many of which are also included in the present exhibition.

The sculptures include work by Bartolde di Giovanni, Cattaneo, Gerhard, Giovanni da Bologna, Leoni, Richio, Roccotagliata, Van der Schardt and Vries. Notable among the goldsmiths' works is the famous Salt Cellar by Benvenuto Cellini which, according to Cellini's autobiography, was made in 1539 for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, who was advised in this commission by Florentine Humanists. The artist, however, disregarded the humanists advice and expressed his own ideas. The work was finished in Paris between 1540 - 1543 by Cellini and some assistants after Francis I had approved the model. In 1562 the Salt Cellar was ordered melted down, along with other objects from the Royal Treasury, but was saved by the Treasurer, Sieur de Gonnort. In 1570 the Salt Cellar was given to Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol by Charles IX of France. Thus it reached the Austrian collection.

Among the fifteenth and sixteenth century armor there are the horse armor made for Frederick III and Maximilian I, the field armors belonging to Maximilian I, and to Ferdinand I, the half-armor of Charles V given as a present by Philip II of Spain.