

NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

FOR RELEASE: Sunday Papers,  
March 18, 1951.

WASHINGTON, March 17: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that an important group of paintings, sculpture, and small bronzes, which have been acquired in the last five years by Mr. Samuel H. Kress and the Foundation which he established, was placed on exhibition at the National Gallery on Saturday, March 17th.

This exhibition has been arranged as part of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the opening of the National Gallery of Art, which took place on March 17, 1941. It is expected that the greater part of this group of paintings, sculpture and bronzes will become part of the Kress Collection in the National Gallery. With the addition of these rare and celebrated works of art, the Gallery, itself, will be greatly enriched and the Kress Collection takes on a new significance as one of the most important art collections in the world.

When the National Gallery of Art was established by Act of Congress in 1937, the late Andrew W. Mellon announced his intention of erecting a building and of giving to the new institution his collection of paintings and sculpture which he hoped would become the nucleus of a great and growing National Collection in Washington. With the Kress donation in 1939, the Gallery at once became what it was intended to be - a joint enterprise on the part of the Federal Government and generous individuals who desired to give to their country the best obtainable in the field of art. The gift of the Kress Collection also made the new institution outstanding in the field of Italian painting and sculpture.

Subsequently, in 1942, Mr. Joseph E. Widener gave the famous collection of paintings, sculpture, drawings and decorative arts, assembled by himself and his father, Mr. Peter A. B. Widener. Mr. Chester Dale, in addition to a gift of paintings in 1941 and 1943, sent on loan in 1942 and 1945 many outstanding paintings of the French Nineteenth Century School. In 1945, Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald gave a large and distinguished collection of prints and drawings, to which he has since made important additions. In 1947, Mrs. Ralph Harman Booth gave a number of rare and beautiful paintings and sculpture from the collection formed by herself and her husband. In addition to these gifts and loans,

many works of art, as well as funds with which to buy them, have been given by other donors during the ten years since the Gallery opened its doors in 1941.

Following the original Kress donation in 1939, the Kress Foundation on two later occasions enriched the Gallery's Collection of Italian and French paintings and sculpture by one hundred and seventy-one paintings and thirty-six pieces of sculpture.

The latest group, which has now come to the National Gallery from the Kress Foundation, contains many celebrated Italian paintings, such as The Adoration of the Magi by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi, which was formerly in the Cook Collection; The Dance of Salome by Benozzo Gozzoli; the superb portraits by Mantegna and Titian; and in the Flemish and French Schools the two very important portraits by Petrus Christus; works by Poussin and Claude Lorrain; and the two splendid works by Ingres which now join that artist's portrait of Mme. Moitessier, already in the Kress Collection. Of supreme importance to the Gallery is the group of paintings by Northern European masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as the Madonna and Child and the portrait by Dürer, and the two canvases by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, both artists not heretofore represented in the Gallery's Collection.

With these new paintings there has come to Washington a number of very beautiful pieces of sculpture of the Italian and French Schools, which add still further to the Gallery's eminence in this field. Included also in this latest group is the celebrated collection of medals, plaquettes and small bronzes, brought together by Gustave Dreyfus and known to connoisseurs all over the world.

With these additions the Kress Collection now contains not only an extraordinarily large number of masterpieces by important painters and sculptors, but also examples of the work of practically all artists who brought about changes in direction, style and taste in the field of Italian painting and sculpture from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. It also includes outstanding works by many artists in the French School from the fifteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, and a number of Flemish and German paintings which greatly enhance the Gallery's representation of these Schools.

Mr. Finley said: "In looking back over what has been accomplished in the last ten years by Mr. Samuel H. Kress and his brother, Mr. Rush H. Kress, and the other trustees of the Kress Foundation, their achievement seems almost incredible to anyone who knows the difficulties inherent in such an undertaking. This is especially true in these days when the

great private collections have mostly entered the museums or have been dispersed; when so many restrictions obtain against the exportation of works of art from practically all countries except the United States of America and Switzerland; when the scarcity of great masterpieces available for purchase has resulted in a corresponding increase in price; and when expert knowledge as to provenance and condition is more than ever necessary in avoiding pitfalls in the acquisition of works of art. The Kress achievement could have been brought about only by such intelligence, energy, and generosity as have gone into the making of this great Collection on the part of those who have dedicated themselves to this purpose. The gift of the Kress Collection, renewed and strengthened by additional masterpieces as they have become available in the last ten years, has been a great benefaction to this country and cannot fail to exert a wide-spread and lasting influence in the years to come in building up an appreciation of great art on the part of the American people."

Commenting on the exhibition being held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the opening of the National Gallery of Art, John Walker, Chief Curator, said: "Some idea of the magnitude of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation acquisitions during the last five years is afforded by the fact that the

present exhibition of 116 pictures, 18 pieces of sculpture and over 1300 small bronzes, medals, and plaquettes form in themselves one of the most important collections assembled in the United States. For example, to mention only a few paintings, the tondo by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi from the famous Cook Collection in Richmond, England, ranks with the greatest Italian paintings in the world; the portrait from the Czernin Collection and the Madonna and Child from the Thyssen Collection, both by Albrecht Dürer, are the most important German paintings to be acquired for America in the last decade. Of similar significance among French primitives are the two paintings by the St. Gilles Master, both of extraordinary interest in the history of the city of Paris, being the earliest accurate views of the district around Notre-Dame and Ste.-Chapelle. Of a later period of French art, but of equal beauty, are the Poussin Holy Family on the Steps from the Duke of Sutherland's Collection; the two Chardins, The Attentive Nurse and The Kitchen Maid, formerly in the Collection of Prince Liechtenstein, and the Lancret hunting scene which was once owned by Frederick the Great and remained in the Hohenzollern family until the end of the first World War. From the Mackay Collection in New York has come the fascinating North Italian portrait attributed to Carlo Crivelli."

Similarly the fourteen pieces of eighteenth century French sculpture have all crossed the ocean in recent years. With

these statues by Bouchardon, Clodion, Falconet and others, added to those already given, the National Gallery will become one of the two or three greatest centers outside of France for the study of this important aspect of French art.

One of the most interesting features of the exhibition will be the opportunity to see the celebrated group of medals, plaquettes and small bronzes brought together by the French connoisseur, Gustave Dreyfus. Writing of this collection in the introduction to the National Gallery's catalogue, Perry B. Cott, Assistant Chief Curator, has said: "Not only in numbers -- it comprises 1306 objects -- but also in the exceptional quality of individual specimens, many of which are unique, the present collection ranks with the well-known holdings of the Bargello at Florence, and the museums of Vienna and Berlin. In respect to the 460 reliefs and plaquettes and the 708 medals, the Kress Collection is without rival."

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