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NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART  
INSTALLS "LECTOUR" GUIDE SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D. C., January 28: John Walker, Director, announces that, starting February 3, the National Gallery of Art will have in operation an automatic electronic guide service. For twenty-five cents the visitor will be lent a vest-pocket-size radio receiver with an earphone. As he walks through the exhibition areas he will pick up a series of radio lectures, audible only to those with receivers, dealing with the history and significance of the works of art on exhibition. At present the broadcasts, which last about ten minutes each and are repeated continuously, have been installed in ten galleries covering roughly the periods of art represented by the Collections.

Mr. Walker emphasized that this new service will be an additional feature of the National Gallery of Art's education program, and will not replace any of the regular or special tours, lectures and talks which are now offered to the public. The special and different interests of the many individual visitors and groups of visitors to the National Gallery of Art require the Gallery to offer as varied an education program as possible.

Experiments with a radio-guide for museums were made in Holland shortly after the war. In 1954 the Museum of Natural History in New York installed a similar system. The "LecTour", as the device to be used in the National Gallery has been named, is believed to be one of the first guide services of this type to be installed in a museum exclusively devoted to art anywhere in the world. The electronic problems of installation were unexpectedly complicated, due to the intricate lighting systems and steel girders above the exhibition areas. These created a difficult radio atmosphere in which to introduce carefully oriented and often closely situated radio beams. Frank H. McIntosh and Associates of Washington, after many months of experimentation, solved the problem by imbedding the broadcast antennae in the floor boards of the individual galleries. This had an additional advantage; it was possible to create a dead space around the exhibition walls about 18" in width. Thus, the spectator, who feels inclined to come too close to a work of art, is warned by the silence on his earphone to stand further away.

The problems of preparing scripts for an automaton guide were also unexpectedly complicated. A tape does not answer questions, make allowances for children, or wait for people to catch up. Furthermore, a disembodied voice tends to become monotonous. The text, therefore, had to be unambiguously clear and so worded as not to bore the expert or bewilder the newcomer. Only experience will show whether, in fact, this delicate balance has been achieved. Visitors will be asked to fill out a questionnaire to help the Museum staff formulate principles for the future.

After preliminary tests, it was discovered that there were two great advantages of the system over other types of guide service: first, since the spectator is usually by himself or in a small group, he can come as close as the radio dead space permits to the work of art - about 18 inches. From this range he can see more than would be possible for an individual in a group; secondly, visual attention can be concentrated exclusively on the work of art. The lecturer has not only a captive ear, but a captive eye also, which he can direct easily and without breaking the sequence of visual experience. Phrases like "Look carefully at the hand of the figure", "Notice the brush work", when written, are difficult to follow, but when heard in front of a picture without any distracting competition, permit the visitor to understand aspects of painting which otherwise would be appreciated only after a long study.

Although the public's reaction to this revolutionary guide service cannot be predicted, it is expected that it will be a success, and plans have been made to extend the service, not only to cover more of the exhibits but to install various wave lengths with lectures intended for different age groups, levels of artistic education, and possibly in several languages.

The system should, therefore, when completed, prove useful not only to visitors who have only a limited time to spend in the Gallery, but also to those who wish to obtain a thorough and superlatively illustrated course in the history of western painting and sculpture.

# *LecTour*

The LecTour system of broadcasts has been installed in the National Gallery of Art to provide our visitors at all times with a guided tour through ten representative galleries. This service supplements, but does not replace, the regular general and special tours conducted by members of the staff.

On the other side of this information sheet are a list of the galleries and a plan of the Main Floor indicating the rooms where broadcasts may be heard.

When you enter one of these galleries, you may find that the lecture has already begun. In this case, listen for an exhibit to be mentioned by number. The numbers are plainly visible on the ledge below the painting, and you will have no difficulty in finding the picture being discussed. The lectures are continuous and will recommence with exhibit No. 1 as soon as the talk in each room has finished.

The LecTour is intended to give only a brief survey of the various periods of art represented by our collections, and we hope that, having completed the tour, you will return and enjoy the many treasures not mentioned in the broadcasts.

Reception is loudest when the red receiver is hanging vertically. Reception will fade if you stand closer than two feet from the wall. The receiving set rented to you is the property of the National Gallery of Art and may not be taken outside the Gallery. Please return the receiving set as soon as you have completed your tour.

Galleries in Which You May Receive Lectour Broadcasts

- No. 4. Paintings of the Early Renaissance in Florence (including Fra Angelico, Domenico Veneziano and Fra Filippo Lippi).
- No. 8. Paintings of the High Renaissance in Italy (including Raphael, Perugino, and Botticelli).
- No. 39. Paintings of the Northern Renaissance in the Low Countries, England, and Germany (including Van Eyck, Holbein the Younger, and Memling).
- No. 45. Paintings by Rembrandt van Ryn.
- No. 56. Paintings of the French classical tradition (including Poussin, David, and Ingres).
- No. 58. English 18th and 19th century paintings (including Reynolds, Morland, and Constable).
- No. 61. Paintings by Francisco Goya.
- No. 67. Paintings by American artists of the 18th and 19th centuries (including Copley, Benjamin West, and Stuart).
- No. 83. Paintings by the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists (including Monet, Mary Cassatt, and Van Gogh).
- No. 88. French 19th century paintings (including Renoir, Manet, and Degas).

Galleries Wired for Lectour Are Numbered in Boldface Type

