

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ANNOUNCES TWO NEW ACQUISITIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 17: ^{F160} A nearly life-size Renaissance bronze statue of Mercury has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art for the Mellon Collection, it was announced today by John Walker, Director. The Gallery's newly acquired statue measures just over five feet in height and represents the messenger of the gods as a nude youth standing on his left leg and resting his right arm upon a slender tree trunk. He wears the winged hat (petasus) and carries in each hand a portion of his staff (caduceus).

The bronze figure, which was cast probably around the middle of the 16th century, was based upon a famous ancient marble statue of a youth which was discovered in Rome during the Renaissance and was then restored with the attributes of Mercury. The ancient marble was exhibited in the Belvedere of the Vatican from the time of its discovery until it was given, along with other ancient statues, by Pope Julius III to Cosimo I de' Medici and transported to Florence in 1550. It is now exhibited in the Uffizi Gallery. In the 15th and 16th centuries bronze sculptures inspired by, or imitating, ancient marbles were commissioned by princely collectors who could not obtain

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the originals since these usually remained in Rome, where most of them were found.

The Gallery's bronze was formerly in the collection of the Marchese di Montalvo, to whom it was presented, according to documents in the Montalvo archives, by Cosimo I. It remained in the possession of the Montalvo family in Florence from the 16th to the middle of the 19th century, when it was purchased by the collector Frédéric Mylius of Genoa, who owned a celebrated group of Renaissance bronzes. The Mercury, considered to be the finest statue in his collection, was acquired for the National Gallery from his descendants.

Mr. Walker also announced that the National Gallery of Art has acquired for the Mellon Collection The Battle of La Hogue by the American artist Benjamin West (1738-1820). This famous painting, measuring just over 5 x 7 feet, was painted in 1778. West, who was then living in London, was commissioned by the first Lord Grosvenor to paint the picture and it remained in the possession of Grosvenor's descendants, the Dukes of Westminster, until recently.

The battle of La Hogue (1692), off the coast of Normandy, comprised a series of engagements that continued for five days between the French fleet and an allied English and Dutch force. It was a decisive battle, securing William III on the throne of England and ending the attempts of Louis XIV of France to gain control of England by restoring the exiled James II to power. The part of the battle that West has depicted is the
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attack by small English and Dutch fire ships on French men-of-war which had been beached under the guns of protecting forts. James II is shown on the distant cliff watching the destruction of the ships that were to have helped transport him and a large force of French troops to England.

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