

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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WASHINGTON, D.C. November 5, 1960: John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that the most important exhibition of French seventeenth century art ever presented in the United States will open to the public at the Gallery on Thursday, November 10. The exhibition, entitled THE SPLENDID CENTURY, will be on view in Washington through December 15.

166 masterpieces - paintings, drawings, sculpture and tapestries - the majority of which have never been shown in the United States, have been lent by more than 40 of the provincial museums of France, as well as 4 churches, the Musée du Louvre and the Château of Versailles. The exhibition of THE SPLENDID CENTURY has been organized to illustrate the variety of painting in this great artistic period, which extended from the death of Henry IV in 1610 to the years just after the death of Louis XIV in 1715. It will also show the underlying unity of balance and restraint which appeal to modern taste.

It is only in the last 30 years, for instance, that the works of Georges de la Tour have suddenly received world acclaim after having been practically forgotten for several centuries. Five paintings by La Tour will be on view, including the famous canvas of The Young Jesus and St. Joseph in the Carpenter's Shop.

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Six canvases of Nicolas Poussin are included in the exhibition. He is generally conceded to be France's greatest classical painter and the artist whose genius dominates the century. Midas, The Death of Adonis, and Spring, from the recently cleaned series of the Four Seasons, are among his most important work and have been recently exhibited in the magnificent Poussin exhibition at the Louvre.

No less important are the 5 landscapes by Claude Lorrain, "the magician of light" as Berenson called him, who is today so highly considered for his impressionistic treatment of sun and atmosphere.

In addition to these works by the giants of the Grand Siècle, as it is called in France, the exhibition will illustrate many other major trends in French 17th century painting. The poignant sincerity of the Le Nain brothers, whose realistic portrayal of peasants seems to say more to us today than much of the purely charming work of the 18th century; Valentin, who, like La Tour, shows his interest in the light and shade of Caravaggio; the baroque style of Simon Vouet and Eustache Le Sueur; the severe classicism of Philippe de Champaigne; and the official or court style of Le Brun, who decorated the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles - all are part of this interesting century, the second half of which was lived under the reign of France's greatest monarch, the "Sun King" Louis XIV. Many painters, like Charles Le Brun and Hyacinthe Rigaud, the official court portrait painter, were commissioned to paint what amounts to propaganda - to spread the

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glory of France and the fame of the monarchy. Louis XIV, whose reign was the longest recorded in European history, from 1643, when he inherited the throne at the age of 5, to his death in 1715, therefore had a tremendous influence on this great age of French art.

In addition to these masters, such lesser known but important painters whose work is seldom seen in America will be shown - the classical Nicolas Tournier, Tassel, Jacques Blanchard, Claude Vignon, Laurent de la Hyre, and Sébastien Bourdon, whose work closely resembles Poussin's.

An outstanding collection of drawings, many by the masters already mentioned, plus others by Watteau, Gillot, Lagneau, Dumonstier and the mannerist Jacques Bellange will be on exhibit, as well as two tapestries after designs by Simon Vouet and five by Le Brun, including two from the famous "Histoire du Roi" series, commissioned by Louis XIV, and sculptures by such great masters of the century as Puget, Girardon, Coysevox and Collignon.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Government of France and has been arranged by the Direction Générale des Affaires Culturelles and the Association Française d'Action Artistique. Monsieur Jacques Dupont, Inspector General of French Historic Monuments and President of the Friends of the Louvre, has accompanied the pictures to Washington.

After the exhibition leaves Washington it will be shown at the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, from January 6 to February 20, 1961, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from March 8 to April 30, 1961.