

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON 25 DC • REpublic 7-4215 extension 247

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WASHINGTON, D.C. September 24, 1961: The pioneering electronic guide system of the National Gallery of Art will be increased by over 50% today as the result of overwhelming public response, John Walker, Director of the Gallery, announced. 11 new rooms exhibiting art ranging from the 12th to the 20th century will be added to the 20 already wired for broadcast. The continuous 15-minute lectures are heard individually by means of small "LecTour" earphone receivers available for rent at the Gallery's entrance.

The National Gallery of Art is the first museum exclusively devoted to art in the country to install an electronic guide system. Since February 1958, when the system was inaugurated in ten galleries, over a quarter of a million people have availed themselves of the National Gallery's LecTours. Hundreds of letters a year have been received by the Gallery enthusiastically praising the system and requesting more galleries to be LecTour equipped. Art museums all over the country, following the National Gallery's lead, have installed or are in the process of installing electronic guide systems of their own.

The increased equipment at the National Gallery makes it possible for the first time for the visitor to be electronically guided in the Gallery's collection of decorative arts downstairs on the Ground Floor. Here, in Gallery G-2, a small room reminiscent of the medieval church treasuries which were among Europe's earliest museums, the device will guide visitors among priceless objects from the Widener Collection.

These include the 12th-century Chalice of Abbot Suger of St. Denis, celebrated as the father of the Gothic style. The cup is often referred to as the most important single medieval object in America. It was used by the medieval kings of France for Holy Communion for more than two hundred years.

Other objects in this room are Italian and German cut crystal goblets from the 16th century, among the best examples in this country; elaborate 16th-century jewelry; and a 12th-century Limoges enameled reliquary box thought by scholars to be the finest of its kind anywhere.

Special lectures by the Gallery staff will now also be available electronically in the following additional galleries:

(more)

Galleries G-4, G-5, G-6. The Widener Collection of Chinese porcelains. Many have a special form of the imperial mark, showing them to have been used in the palace of the Emperor.

Gallery 19. North Italian painting of the Renaissance: Mantegna, Crivelli; and the school of Ferrara, Tura, Cossa, and Ercole de' Roberti.

Gallery 21. Early Venetian painting: two examples by Giorgione, one of the rarest and most highly prized of all artists; portraits by Giovanni Bellini, principal founder of the Venetian School.

Gallery 28. Venetian painting of the High Renaissance: the great Doge Andrea Gritti and other portraits by Titian.

Gallery 37. Italian painting of the 18th century: Guardi, Tiepolo, Longhi.

Gallery 43. Rubens and Van Dyck: the National Gallery's collection of Van Dyck portraits is considered the greatest in America, and one of the two greatest in the world.

Gallery 59. British painting of the 18th century: the Golden Age of English portraiture and landscape, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Constable, Raeburn, etc.

Gallery 64. 20th-century School of Paris painting, on loan from Mr. Chester Dale: Picasso, including the "Blue Period" acrobats, the Family of Saltimbanques; Matisse; Derain; Soutine.

The Lectour is a closed-circuit high fidelity radio broadcasting system. Lectures, taped by members of the Gallery staff, are broadcast continuously via transmitting antennae concealed in the gallery floors. To hear the broadcast in any of the wired galleries, visitors rent small receiving sets for 25¢. These units (approximately 5-1/2" x 1") hang from a cord around the neck, and are attached by a wire to a small earpiece which is kept from physical contact with the ear by a disposable cardboard shield. If a visitor should come dangerously close to a work of art, the broadcast reception automatically fades.

End

Further information, and photographs of visitors using the device, the electronic mechanism, or any of the art objects involved, available through J. Carter Brown, National Gallery of Art, Washington 25, D.C. RE 7-4215 Ext. 248.