

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D. C., June 24, 1962. John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that a still life of Oysters by Manet donated by the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc., will go on exhibition today at 2:00. It is part of a gift to a selection of American museums recently announced by Mr. Richard Deutsch, President of the Fund. The Fund has previously presented to the National Gallery Madame Henriot, the portrait of a young actress by Renoir, and a pastel representing a bowl of pansies by Odilon Redon.

"While Mrs. Levy was alive," Mr. Walker said, "she discussed with me the possibility of a gift from her collection to the Gallery and asked which of several available paintings I would suggest. I picked the Renoir portrait after an agony of decision. I wanted the Gallery so much to have the Manet still life as well. You can imagine my feelings when I learned that the Trustees of the Fund established by Mrs. Levy had decided that the Gallery would be given, in addition to the Redon and the Renoir, this superb masterpiece by Manet."

The picture is the first still life painted by Édouard Manet (1832-1883) who, at the age of thirty-one, was already an accomplished figure-painter. It was painted in 1863, the same year as the Picnic on the Grass which, with its nude female guest, scandalized Paris when it appeared in the Salon of the Refused of that year.

Manet presented the still life of Oysters soon after its completion to the girl who subsequently became his wife, Suzanne Leenhoff. It remained in their possession until the artist's death, hanging in the dining room wherever they lived.

It was included in the exhibition held in honor of Manet the year after his death.

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The picture is painted in the limited range of color, black, grey, and white, that intrigued Manet at that period, set off, here, with the brilliant yellow of the lemon. Although he did not go to Spain until two years later, Manet was already fascinated by such painters of the Spanish school as Velasquez, Zurbaràn, and Murillo.

The principal effect of the painting lies in its emphasis on the expressive possibilities of paint independent of subject matter. In his rebellion against the slick finish and sentimental subjects of the popular Salon painting of his day, Manet stands as one of the important precursors of contemporary art.

"A painter can say everything," Manet once said, "with fruit, with flowers, or merely clouds." A modern critic, Maurice Bex, has written:

"Not only does he (Manet) bring back the subject of painting to immediate and everyday things...his motif, whatever it may be, becomes under the stroke of his brush simply a pretext to conjure up a feast for the eyes."

Notification of the gift was accompanied by a statement prepared by the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc., which describes the program whereby the bulk of her collection was distributed to museums throughout the country. This statement follows:

"The unusual, perhaps even unique, decision of the Directors of the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc. to donate the balance of the collection of the late Mrs. Adele R. Levy, consisting of 25 works of art, to fifteen American institutions spread across the continent originated with the desires which Mrs. Levy often expressed before her death on March 12, 1960. She was not interested in the more conventional course of leaving her collection, intact and bearing her name, to a single museum. She had specifically provided for institutions in the city where she resided for the greater portion of her life. These are institutions in which she had taken an active personal interest. However, Mrs. Levy was concerned that such a great proportion of American private collections tend to gravitate to only a few museums in the largest American cities. She recognized

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the effect of this trend -- museums throughout the rest of the country are left with little hope of acquiring outstanding modern paintings either by gift or bequest in times when rising values make acquisition by purchase extremely difficult.

"Mrs. Levy had, therefore, expressed the wish that those of her paintings not specifically earmarked for the large museums of New York and Washington be donated to museums in smaller centers, and to those more remote from the great museum collections already multiplying on the Eastern Seaboard. With this in mind the Directors of the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc., to which Mrs. Levy bequeathed the bulk of her art collection, sought counsel toward a dispersal of the collection in accordance with the donor's wishes, and such a plan has been adopted. In developing this plan, the needs and future potentialities of American museums were considered. Specific museums were then selected as recipients of what might be called an award of recognition for service to their communities and for outstanding excellence in the performance of their own professional functions.

"In summary, the underlying principle of the program involved Mrs. Levy's conviction that fine modern art should be available to people throughout the entire country. The pictures were then given as unsolicited grants to fifteen museums in the United States that have been doing signally good jobs for their communities and as artistic enterprises.

"It is the hope of the directors that this plan, now fully executed, may have some value as an example in the public-spirited dispersal of personal art collections, and that the gifts may promote local interest in the work these institutions are doing for their communities."

The picture will be put on temporary exhibition as a new acquisition in Lobby D, on the Main Floor, just off the East Garden Court.

End

Black-and-white glossy prints, color transparencies or separations lent on request to J. Carter Brown, National Gallery of Art, Washington 25, D. C., REpublic 7-4215 ext. 248.