

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. November 17, 1963. John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, will announce today on television the acquisition of "The Assumption of the Virgin" by Nicolas Poussin. The television broadcast will be relayed across the Atlantic via a National Aeronautics and Space Administration Communications Satellite. The program, produced by the News Department of the National Broadcasting Company and broadcast on their network in the United States, will feature live presentations from the Louvre Museum in Paris and the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

The Assumption (52-7/8" high by 38-5/8" wide) was purchased by the Gallery from a fund established by Mrs. Mellon Bruce of New York, daughter of the founder of the Gallery, the late Andrew W. Mellon. It was formerly in the collection of the Marquis of Exeter at Burghley House, some 75 miles north of London. An 18th-century inventory shows it to have been in the Burghley collection at least by 1794. Burghley House records show the picture as coming from an Italian collection, and it may be the Assumption mentioned in an inventory of the Giustiniani Collection in Rome of 1638. It was exhibited in the Louvre in the comprehensive Poussin exhibition of 1960.

A recent cleaning of the picture has brought out what Mr. Walker has called "the breath-taking clarity of the picture, its architectural structure, its subtlety of modelling." "The remarkable thing this picture has", Mr. Walker said, "is a joyful exuberance, almost a gaiety, so different in mood from the nostalgia and reserve that are the distinction of so much of Poussin's later work. In this picture he was a century ahead of his time, prefiguring the period of Fragonard and the French rococo. No visitor can fail to be beguiled by the playful cherubim or to be swept up by the upward rush of the composition."

Nicolas Poussin (POOH-ssa(n)), 1594-1665, France's greatest artist of her grand siècle, has been the subject of renewed interest in our time, taking his place among the great names in European art of the 17th century - Rembrandt, Vermeer, Caravaggio and Bernini in Italy. Born in Normandy, he made a name for himself in Paris with several pictures now lost - a Death of the Virgin for the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and decorations for

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the Luxembourg Palace. In 1623, at the age of 29, he journeyed to Rome, where he was to remain the rest of his life, except for a visit home in 1640-1642 at the request of King Louis XIII.

The Assumption of the Virgin now in the National Gallery of Art was painted, on stylistic evidence, during Poussin's early years in Rome, probably around 1637. At this period Poussin was frequenting classes of the artist Domenichino, whose classicism the Frenchman greatly admired.

Another favorite of Poussin's at this period was Titian. Recently discovered texts show that Poussin stopped by Venice on his way south, where he would certainly have visited Titian's famous Assumption of the Virgin of over a hundred years before. In Rome, Poussin had access to the Villa Aldobrandini, where, at that time, hung the three great Titian Bacchanals. One of these, the Worship of Venus now in the Prado, Madrid, portrays dozens upon dozens of putti, or cupids, in every conceivable pose. Two studies of Titianesque putti by Poussin are documented as dating from 1627.

The Assumption will be on special exhibition in Lobby D, off the East Garden Court.

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