

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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Washington, D. C. April 27, 1967. A celebrated midwestern art collection will have its first public showing at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C.

European paintings and drawings from the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Block of Chicago will be open to the public for five weeks starting May 5. There will be one hundred pictures by such artists as Monet, Degas, Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Seurat, Rouault, Bonnard, Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and Léger.

The collection is the fourth in a series of exhibitions of distinguished American private collections to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Art. In 1961 the collection of The Honorable and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman was shown; this was followed a year later by the exhibition of the collection of Mr. and Mrs. André Meyer. In 1966, the 25th anniversary of the National Gallery was marked by an exhibition of the French paintings of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon and Mrs. Mellon Bruce.

John Walker, Director of the National Gallery, described the collecting enterprise of Mr. and Mrs. Block as "a rare partnership of mutual understanding which has resulted in a collection of great distinction."

The collection was started in 1942 with the purchase of a Still Life by Braque, and has today grown to encompass most of the distinguished names of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and 20th-century abstract art. The early interest in Braque continued, with the result that nine paintings by this artist are included in the exhibition.

The Blocks' first major acquisition, The Town Hall of Auvers on Bastille Day by van Gogh, in 1944, was followed soon after by Portrait of Vallier by Cézanne. The latter, a portrait of Cézanne's gardener, is the very last picture painted by the artist, and the colorful Town Hall was finished only two weeks before the tragic suicide of van Gogh. Both paintings will be seen, as well as another notable van Gogh, the Self-Portrait of 1889, painted after he had mutilated his ear. Other well-known French paintings are Ballet at the Paris Opera by Degas, Two Musicians by Matisse, and Tahitian Scene by Paul Gauguin.

The exhibition will include seven paintings and five sketches by Picasso, including Harlequin with Guitar and Girl with a Pitcher, an example of the artist's rose period and a picture which the owners consider the treasure of their Picasso group.

John Rewald, an authority on the Impressionists, who prepared the fully illustrated catalogue for the exhibition, says in his introduction: "The works of art assembled by Mr. and

Mrs. Block do not merely form one of the best collections of the Middle West, but represent one of the finest collections in this country." He tells how the Blocks, both Trustees of The Art Institute of Chicago, have filled their home, their offices, and even the downstairs lobby of their apartment house with works of art which are more than sufficient to establish them "among the select few who have elevated the hobby of acquiring works of art to the height of a creative act."

Leigh Block is a director of Inland Steel Company and a trustee of Northwestern University and the Chicago Symphony. He is a member of the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art. A collector for most of his life, he started as a young man with the acquisition of prints. Mrs. Block, who founded the women's board of the Art Institute, is the daughter of Albert D. Lasker, a leader of modern advertising in America, who was a noted art collector in his own right.

The collection of Mary and Leigh B. Block will be in Washington, D. C. through June 11. It goes to the Los Angeles County Art Museum September 21.

Catalogues, black-and-white photographs and color transparencies on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Area Code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.