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### NATIONAL GALLERY ANNOUNCES ACQUISITION OF RUBENS GROUP PORTRAIT

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 16, 1973. A major group portrait by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art, it was announced today by J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery.

The painting, Deborah Kip, Wife of Sir Balthasar Gerbier, and Her Children, is considered one of the finest group portraits of the seventeenth century (oil on canvas, 65 1/4 x 70 inches). Gerbier, the unseen family member, was a maverick diplomat and art collector.

The painting was purchased by the National Gallery through the Andrew W. Mellon Fund. It has always been in private collections in England and is a painting well known to Rubens experts.

It will go on view Saturday, August 18, in Lobby A on the Gallery's main floor. The 1973 volume of the Gallery's Studies in the History of Art, available late this fall, will be devoted to the painting. The lead article is by Wolfgang Stechow, one of America's leading authorities on late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Northern European art.

Rubens began the group portrait either late in 1629 or early in 1630 while he was in London as Gerbier's guest. He enlarged and finished the painting when he returned to Flanders in March, 1630.

Purchased by the Gallery in 1971, the painting immediately underwent lengthy conservation treatment to remove a heavily pigmented varnish that made the painting nearly invisible. The Gallery's

Research Project at Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, took the opportunity provided by the time necessary to carry out the cleaning to conduct the most elaborate scientific investigation made on a painting in America.

Both the cleaning, which exposed magnificent color formerly distorted by the varnish, and the scientific analyses revealed a very well-preserved picture, extraordinarily undamaged by either successive cleanings or mistreatment. The scientific research also showed that all of the painting's lead white content is contemporary with Rubens and appears to have come from the same seventeenth-century source. A major breakthrough in pigment characterization also occurred during the technical analyses.

The cleaning was done at the laboratory of the Intermuseum Conservation Association, Oberlin College, under the direction of Richard D. Buck. The scientific investigations were carried out simultaneously by National Gallery Research Fellows Richard L. Feller and Bernard Keisch in Pittsburgh.

The painting shows Lady Deborah with her children, in a tight composition, near the terrace of a palatial home. In his Studies article, Dr. Stechow writes: "That the bond of sympathy between Rubens and Gerbier's wife must have been both strong and fine nobody who looks at her face in this picture can possibly fail to sense most keenly."

A stately column and base with spiraling mermaid-caryatids support the roof. A vibrant evening sky deep in the background suggests an expansive landscape, possibly the view of the Thames as seen by Rubens from York House. Dr. Stechow describes the quality of the composition as an example of "perfect rhythmic order."

In addition to his activities as a consul for Charles I, Gerbier was an art adviser to the Duke of Buckingham. Together they formed the Duke's famous collection at York House and

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managed the purchase of Rubens's own collection for Buckingham after the artist's death.

Known for being something of a scoundrel, Gerbier's treachery in later years knew no limits. While British Minister in Brussels, for instance, he betrayed a conspiracy to overthrow Spanish rule of the Netherlands, a plot he helped organize, with the result that the chief conspirators were hanged. Gerbier died in 1667, leaving his family penniless and heavily in debt.

The National Gallery's other Rubens paintings include Daniel in the Lions' Den, a monumental painting acquired in 1965 through funds from the late Ailsa Mellon Bruce; The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, the final version for a tapestry cycle commissioned by the Infanta Isabella of Spain, a double portrait from the Liechtenstein Collection and a gift of Syma Busiel; and one of the painter's earliest portraits, Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria, in the Kress Collection. This is the first group portrait by Rubens to enter the collections.

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