

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES THREE MAJOR AMERICAN PAINTINGS

WASHINGTON, D. C. February 24, 1978. The National Gallery of Art has acquired three major American paintings which will go on view at the Gallery today--Jasper Francis Cropsey's The Spirit of War (1851), a large allegorical work among the finest by this important artist of the Hudson River School; John F. Kensett's Beach at Newport (late 1850s), an outstanding example of American luminism; and Andrew Wyeth's Snow Flurries (1953), a work of near-abstract power and the first painting by Wyeth to enter the Gallery's collections.

One of Cropsey's very rare allegorical paintings, The Spirit of War was acquired through The Avalon Foundation and is on view in gallery 65. The monumentally-scaled scene--knights and other soldiers issuing from a medieval castle in craggy, mountainous terrain in which the smoke from signal fires blends with tumultuous clouds of an approaching storm--suggests imminent turmoil and destruction. Following the precept that the depiction of nature should suggest the sublime, Cropsey moves in this work toward a heightened romantic melodrama and, particularly in his handling of the sky, hints at the newly emerging interest in luminist effects of glowing atmosphere. The subject, too, provides an ironic premonition of the Civil War in the next decade.

Kensett's Beach at Newport, a bequest of Frederick Sturges, Jr., is on view in gallery 67. In this open, light-filled rendering of a serene

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day near Newport, Rhode Island, this key luminist painter has carefully balanced the areas of sky, water and land with an extraordinarily delicate treatment of light. The serenity and clarity in his representation of nature suggest the optimistic belief in universal harmony held by Kensett and many of his contemporaries during the period just before the Civil War.

Snow Flurries, on view in Lobby B, is a bequest from Wyeth's friend Dr. Margaret I. Handy. Portraying a hill well-known to him on the Kuerner Farm in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, this tempera depicts the atmosphere of a winter's day in which the colors of the sky modulate from brownish-gray to white. The painting presents the subtle tonalities and contours of the hillside, the cloud shadows across it, and thin lines and small patches of snow, some delineating a wagon track which at one point runs between two weathered fence posts. The deliberate emptiness of the landscape and the long, low vantage point of the painting create an almost disturbing uneasiness. Further, the play between the spatial depth of the scene and the surface patterns of color in the work are not too distant from the formal abstractions explored by other modern and contemporary artists.

Beach at Newport is one of five American paintings in Mr. Sturges' bequest. The others, which will go on view after conservation at a future time and which all date from the 1850s, are John W. Casilear's View on Lake George, Francis W. Edmonds' The Bashful Cousin, and two works by Asher B. Durand--A Pastoral Scene and Forest in the Morning Light.

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