

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BERENSON AND HIS CONNOISSEURSHIP

SUBJECT OF EXHIBITION AT NATIONAL GALLERY

WASHINGTON, D. C. January 10, 1979. The exhibition Berenson and the Connoisseurship of Italian Painting, on view in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art January 21 through May 13, will illustrate the history and methods of connoisseurship, specifically as it relates to early Italian painting, by focusing on Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), for more than half a century the foremost authority in the field.

A colorful, even controversial figure, Berenson is also remarkable for the role he played in the history of taste and collecting. By the early twentieth century, American millionaires were beginning to acquire masterpieces of Italian art. Berenson stimulated and guided their interest and, as the leading expert, authenticated paintings for dealers and collectors.

More than any other scholar, Berenson cultivated the role of connoisseur. If the mystique of connoisseurship contributed to the aura surrounding him, by the time of his death in 1959 Berenson was also renowned as a sage, his aesthetic philosophy having reached a broad public through his late autobiographical writings. Nevertheless, it is Berenson's activity as a connoisseur that remains his lasting achievement.

Coming twenty years after his death, the exhibition reassesses Berenson's achievement as a connoisseur. The exhibition is unlike any previously held at the Gallery. It represents an attempt to display an intellectual process, as

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it was exemplified by Berenson; it has less to do with biography. Berenson's choice and discernment were responsible for many of the Italian paintings in the Gallery, of which some twenty will be included in the exhibition. They will be complemented by more than one hundred drawings, prints, photographs, and other documents of historical interest.

The objects will be installed to illustrate three important aspects of Berenson's activity: the scope of his importance as a scholar and advisor to American collectors; the traditions of connoisseurship and aestheticism from which he emerged; and the methods he used to attribute and evaluate paintings.

The exhibition has been organized by David A. Brown, the Gallery's curator of early Italian painting. Mr. Brown has studied at Villa I Tatti, Berenson's home near Florence which is now the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies.

In the exhibition and accompanying fully illustrated catalogue, new information about Berenson will be presented. For example, the importance of his collaboration with his wife, Mary, will be explored for the first time. The activity of an important, but now forgotten early collector, Carl W. Hamilton, and Berenson's relation to the art market and the greatest art dealer of the twentieth century--Sir Joseph Duveen--are also examined. In addition, the exhibition evaluates the role photographs play as a tool for the connoisseur.

Among the paintings in the exhibition will be Madonna and Child by Antonello da Messina, The Youthful David by Andrea del Castagno, Saint John in the Desert by Domenico Veneziano, The Adoration of the Shepherds by Giorgione, Madonna and Child by Giotto, The Alba Madonna by Raphael, and Portrait of a Knight by Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Pamela J. Driscoll, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.