

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HERMITAGE LENDS LEONARDO MADONNA FOR FIRST TIME

WASHINGTON, D. C. March 28, 1979. A rare painting by Leonardo da Vinci from The Hermitage in Leningrad will be seen for the first time in the United States beginning May 13 at the National Gallery of Art. Leonardo's Madonna with a Flower, the so-called Benois Madonna, will be accompanied by ten other major paintings of the Italian Renaissance from The Hermitage, and will remain on view in the West Building through July 29.

There are fewer than twenty generally accepted paintings by Leonardo known, counting the Last Supper mural. The only other Leonardo loan to have been shown at the Gallery is the Mona Lisa, lent by the Louvre in 1963.

Arrangements for the loan of these paintings were negotiated by Dr. Armand Hammer, in consultation with J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery, David A. Brown, curator of early Italian paintings at the Gallery, and representatives of M. Knoedler & Company, Inc., where the paintings will be on view from August 16 through September 14, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it will be shown later in the fall.

Entitled From Leonardo to Titian: Italian Renaissance Paintings from The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, the loan will include paintings by, in addition to Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Raphael (1483-1520), Cima da Conegliano (1459/60-1517/18), Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480-1556), Palma Vecchio (c. 1480-1528), Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530), Correggio (1489/94-1534), Francesco Melzi (1492-1570),

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Pontormo (1494-1556/57), Primaticcio (1504-1570), and Titian (c. 1477-1576).

(NOTE: A complete checklist is attached.)

The works of Leonardo, including the Madonna to be exhibited here, mark a turning point in the history of art. They initiated the period known as the High Renaissance. Leonardo introduced a new subtlety and complexity into the figural arts with his soft modeling in light and dark and his dynamic compositions. Many artists of his time, among them the masters whose works are included in this loan, incorporated his style, even as they developed their own.

Pictures lent to the United States by the Soviet Union on two previous occasions, 1973 and 1975, were dated primarily from the seventeenth and later centuries. This is believed to be the first time The Hermitage has ever loaned paintings in depth from one of the earlier European schools.

The loan will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with introductory text and entries on each painting by Everett Fahy, director of the Frick Collection in New York and an eminent authority on early Italian paintings. The catalogue will also include a Preface by National Gallery director J. Carter Brown, Knoedler president Roland Balay, and Los Angeles County Museum director Kenneth Donahue.

Leonardo's Madonna with a Flower, known also as the Benois (Ben-wah) Madonna, was begun possibly in October, 1478. It first came to public attention in the early twentieth century when it appeared unattributed as part of the Benois family's contribution to an exhibition of works from private Russian collections, held in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad). The family had acquired the painting in the nineteenth century. Shortly after the St. Petersburg exhibition, the painting was recognized as the work of Leonardo, and in 1914 was sold to Tsar Nicholas II for

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The Hermitage Museum by Madame Léon Benois. Reitlinger, in The Economics of Taste, has called it "the most expensive picture that has ever been sold."

The Hermitage's collection of early Italian paintings was built up mainly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with such notable exceptions as Raphael's Holy Family, which was purchased by Catherine the Great in the early 1770's. Alexander I, Catherine's grandson who reigned from 1801 to 1825, concentrated on early works, acquiring from the Empress Josephine's collection at Malmaison, Andrea del Sarto's Madonna and Child, and Saints Catherine, Elizabeth and John the Baptist, which will be in the exhibition. In 1850, during the reign of Nicholas I, Titian's Repentant Mary Magdalene was purchased by The Hermitage from the Barbarigo family, in whose collection the painting had been since 1581. Alexander III, who ruled from 1881 to 1894, acquired Cima da Conegliano's Annunciation in 1886.

The National Gallery's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci is the only painting by Leonardo in a collection outside Europe. Painted four years earlier than the Benois Madonna, about 1474, both paintings illustrate Leonardo's pioneering efforts to achieve subtle modeling and harmonious composition, as well as the artist's concern with atmosphere, highly developed in his later work. The Gallery purchased its painting from the collection of the ruling house of Liechtenstein in 1967 with funds donated by the late Ailsa Mellon Bruce.

END

CHECKLIST OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS FROM THE HERMITAGE
MUSEUM ON LOAN TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, M. KNOEDLER &
COMPANY AND THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)
Madonna with a Flower
(Benois Madonna)
19 1/2 x 12 3/8 in. (49.5 x 31.5 cm.)

Correggio (1489/94-1534)
Portrait of a Lady
40 5/8 x 34 3/8 in. (103 x 87.5 cm.)

Francesco Melzi (1492-1570?)
Flora (Colombine)
30 x 25 in. (76 x 63 cm.)

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530)
Madonna and Child, and Saints Catherine,
Elizabeth and John the Baptist
40 x 31 1/2 in. (102 x 80 cm.)

Cima da Conegliano (1459/60-1517/18)
The Annunciation
53 3/4 x 42 1/8 in. (136.5 x 107 cm.)

Primaticcio (1504-1570)
Holy Family with Saint Elizabeth
17 1/8 x 12 3/16 in. (43.5 x 31 cm.)

Palma Vecchio (c. 1480-1528)
Male Portrait
36 3/4 x 28 3/8 in. (93.5 x 72 cm.)

Titian (c. 1477-1576)
Repentant Mary Magdalene
45 1/2 x 34 1/4 in. (118 x 87 cm.)

Pontormo (1494 - 1556/57)
Madonna and Child, Saints Joseph
and John the Baptist
47 1/4 x 38 3/4 in. (120 x 98.5 cm.)

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556)
Double Portrait
37 7/8 x 45 3/4 in. (96 x 116 cm.)

Raphael (1483-1520)
Holy Family
29 9/16 x 22 1/16 in. (72.5 x 18 cm.)