

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY PREMIERES SEARCH

FOR ALEXANDER NOVEMBER 16

WASHINGTON, D. C. October 23, 1980. The Search for Alexander, a major international loan exhibition of Greek art from the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 B. C.), and the Hellenistic era he introduced, will premiere at the National Gallery of Art November 16 through April 5, 1981, before beginning a cross-country tour of American cities.

For the first time in the United States, a selection of over 175 objects has been assembled from Greek, European and American public and private collections to show the expert craftsmanship and supreme artistry in 4th- and 3rd-century B. C. metalwork, sculpture, jewelry and terracotta sculpture from the region of northern Greece known as Macedonia. The approximately 100 pieces from Greek museums have never been seen outside that country before.

The National Gallery is coordinating the exhibition in the U. S. It will travel to The Art Institute of Chicago (May 14 through September 7, 1981), the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (October 23, 1981 through January 10, 1982), and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (February 19 through May 16, 1982).

The exhibition has been made possible by the National Bank of Greece and Time, Incorporated, and with the cooperation of the Greek Ministry

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of Culture and Sciences. The audiovisual section of the exhibition has been made possible by a grant from Mobil.

Among the highlights of the exhibition will be gold and silver objects--including a wreath of oak leaves, a gilded silver diadem, armor, a gold chest and vessels--from the royal tomb at Vergina discovered in 1977 by Greek archaeologist Manolis Andronikos, who attributed this tomb to Philip II of Macedon, Alexander's father. Other important pieces are small ivory portraits of Philip and Alexander, also from the Vergina site, and a large bronze krater from Derveni, also in northern Greece.

The exhibition is organized to lead the viewer in a search for Alexander backwards in time, through the imagery of Alexander's fame into antiquity and finally to the Macedonian art of his own time and place. The objects will be installed in specially designed areas on the concourse level of the Gallery's East Building.

The selection of objects was made by J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery, with Professor Nicholas Yalouris, Inspector General of Antiquities of Greece, with the approval of the Central Archaeological Council in Athens and in consultation with Greek and American specialists. These included Katerina Rhomiopoulou, Director of the Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki, Professor Andronikos, Cornelius C. Vermeule III and Ariel Herrmann of the curatorial department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Professor Phyllis Lehmann, Professor Emeritus of Art at Smith College.

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition contains essays by Professor Yalouris (Alexander and His Heritage), by Dr. Rhomiopoulou (An Outline of Macedonian History and Art), and by Professor Andronikos (The Royal Tombs at Vergina: A Brief Account of the Excavations), with a

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foreword by Mr. Brown and catalogue entries contributed by Mr. Vermeule and Mrs. Herrmann, and a team of Greek archaeologists headed by Dr. Rhomiopoulou. Each object will be illustrated.

The exhibition at the Gallery has been coordinated and designed by Gaillard F. Ravenel and Mark Leithauser of the Gallery's department of design and installation, in conjunction with Mrs. Herrmann, Eugene N. Borza of the Pennsylvania State University, D. Dodge Thompson, the National Gallery's executive curator, and J. Kent Lydecker of the Gallery's education department.

The exhibition is introduced with an audiovisual presentation exhibited in two theatres. In the foyer to these theatres are photographs of works of art grouped into four categories: modern popular imagery, renaissance and baroque, medieval, and Asian. The audiovisual program, written by Mr. Lydecker, explores in reverse chronology the persistent fascination with Alexander and the legends which have surrounded him, leading the visitor from the present back through two millenia of imagery. Ten original objects from these traditions are exhibited nearby.

The exhibition itself begins with the image of Alexander in antiquity (4th century A. D. - 4th century B. C.). Eleven bronze and marble portraits and two gold medallions show the wide scope of artistic treatment given Alexander, as well as Philip and Olympias, his father and mother. Twenty-two coins dating from antiquity reflect the uses made by his various successors of Alexander's likeness and of his successful military and political career. Alexander's image in antiquity took on many meanings-- as heroic ruler, hunter and warrior, even in portrayals of gods--and this is shown in the exhibition by bronze figures, marble and terracotta heads and relief sculpture.

Evoking Alexander's origins, the exhibition then focuses on 4th-century B. C. northern Greece, exploring the world of his native regions and

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concluding with finds from the royal cities of Pella and Aigai. As a climax to the exhibition are sixteen gold and silver finds from the royal tomb at Vergina, the ancient capital and ancestral Macedonian royal burial ground of Aigai. Among the objects here are finely wrought jewelry and vessels from various northern excavations showing evidence of Macedonian control at the time of the precious metal resources of the Mt. Pangaion region. Among the most important grave sites in the area which yielded such objects are those from Derveni. Discovered by chance in 1962, this site yielded eight small graves with an extensive array of gold, silver and bronze objects, including the large and lavishly decorated Derveni krater, whose subject matter centers on the worship of the god Dionysos.

Also on view will be terracotta objects and figurines, commonly included as offerings from the family of the deceased, created for graves in Veroia and Pella in northern Greece. The excavations at Pella (Alexander's birthplace and Philip II's capital) revealed the city's wealth and high artistic standards.

The objects exhibited in conjunction with the photographic and audiovisual essay on the heritage of Alexander in world art include Donato Creti's painting, The Quarrel (1705), and a marble relief of Alexander, both in the National Gallery's collection, four works from the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and four objects from Greek collections. The Greek objects will travel with the exhibition and each participating museum will supplement them with works from its own collection and others in its area.

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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. 511.