

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
**PRESS PREVIEW
JANUARY, 17 & 18, 1983
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WEST BUILDING'S NEW GROUND FLOOR GOES ON VIEW

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 7, 1983. Nearly 2,000 objects from the National Gallery's permanent collection of Western European and American art dating from the twelfth century to the present go on view February 3, 1983 in the recently remodeled Ground Floor of the West Building. Approximately 75,000 square feet, in the West half of the Ground Floor, of which over 40,000 square feet was released by the opening of the East Building in 1978, will display these works of art, which include sculpture and related decorative arts, prints, drawings, and paintings.

Renovation of the West Building Ground Floor began in 1971 in conjunction with the design of the East Building by I. M. Pei. This involved alterations in the West Building's Fourth Street lobby which opened to the public in 1976. The opening up of a spine running the length of the West Building's ground floor became known as "Operation Breakthrough" and, together with the related Ground Floor remodeling, has been funded by The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Paul Mellon, son of the Gallery's founder, The Kresge Foundation, and Federal appropriations.

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Some of the Gallery's most important objects on exhibition for the first time in many years are the great Renaissance bronzes and medals from the Samuel H. Kress Collection and decorative arts from the Widener Collection, including the Chalice of the Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, the Mazarin Tapestry, the eighteenth-century French furniture, and the Chinese porcelains. Three parallel tiers of galleries on the southern side of the central spaces will exhibit, on a permanent rotating basis, highlights from the Gallery's wide ranging collections of works of art on paper. Visitors can reach the new ground floor galleries from either floor of the West Building, or from the Seventh Street entrance, which will be open to the public on a regular basis for the first time.

SCULPTURE

The National Gallery of Art's Kress Collection of Renaissance bronzes, acquired in 1957, is one of the greatest such assemblages in the world. Of its 1,300 objects dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, there are 120 statuettes and reliefs, more than 730 medals and coins, and over 450 plaquettes.

When the Kress small bronzes were acquired, the Gallery already possessed a nucleus of some 20 fine small bronzes and reliefs, and a distinguished group of 127 Renaissance medals and plaquettes, donated in 1942 by Joseph E. Widener in memory of his father, Peter A. B. Widener.

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The new sculpture galleries are arranged in chronological and geographic groupings, rather than by genre, allowing viewers to study the relationship among contemporary works of various types.

Among the most celebrated of the Kress bronzes on view from the early Italian Renaissance are the Self-Portrait by Leone Battista Alberti, and Pisanello's first medal, John VIII Palaeologus, fashioned in lead rather than bronze. The She-Wolf Suckling Romulus and Remus, modeled after the famous Capitoline Wolf in Rome, is exceptional for its large size and high quality of casting and finish.

Costanzo da Ferrara's later fifteenth-century medal of Mohammed II, with its robust portrait and harmonious composition, has repeatedly been hailed as the most outstanding medal in the Kress Collection. The piece is exhibited in the same case with the Renaissance coins.

Two transitional masterworks from around 1500 are Severo da Ravenna's Neptune on a Sea Monster, and a bronze group of Hercules and Antaeus attributed to Francesco da Sant'Agata. Both are exhibited in a room dominated by the plaquettes and small bronzes of their contemporary Andrea Riccio, culminating in his superb signed relief, The Entombment.

A large room of sixteenth-century classicizing works is devoted to the brightly colored tin-glazed earthenware called maiolica (with 34 examples from the Widener Collection, many of them signed), and to plaquettes by Bernardi, Belli, and Moderno--the latter constituting by far the best collection of that artist's works. High Renaissance Venice and Milan are represented by medals, reliefs, and decorative objects

from the circles of Sansovino and Leone Leoni, while a corresponding German and Flemish section is particularly rich in medals and plaquettes, including the unique Orpheus and Eurydice by Peter Vischer the Younger.

The lavish court life of late Renaissance Europe is suggested through parade helmets, elaborate jewelry, vessels of rock crystal, and other decorative arts, as well as masterworks in bronze by Giovanni Bologna (the Sleeping Nymph with Satyr) and his follower, Pietro Tacca (The Pistoia Crucifix). A more developed baroque taste is reflected by Alessandro Algardi's terracotta bust of Saint Matthias, and in two delicate figure groups by G. B. Foggini and Giuseppe Piamontini.

A room of French bronzes and decorative arts from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries features several highly important signed pieces of Limoges enamel ware, a superb collection of Guillaume Dupré's medals, and fine equestrian figures of Louis XIV and the Grand Dauphin after models by Martin Desjardins.

Eighteenth-century French marbles and terracottas by Clodion and Houdon form the transition to a large group of nineteenth-century romantic and realist bronzes, with equestrian and animal figures by Géricault, Barye, and Meissonier, as well as the complete sculptural oeuvre of Daumier.

Later nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculpture is highlighted by a series of seventeen original wax studies (seven of which are of dancers), by Edgar Degas, lent by

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Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. The Galleries also contain a uniquely well-documented sequence of works collected in Rodin's studio by Mrs. John W. Simpson. In addition, they include masterpieces from the modern movement by Renoir, Gauguin, Maillol, Despiau, Epstein, and Manzù.

DECORATIVE ARTS

The National Gallery's Widener Collection of decorative arts includes numerous rare and important works from the twelfth through the eighteenth centuries.

The Chalice of the Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, dating from c. 1140, served as the sacramental cup for the consecration of the new abbey church, the first monument of Gothic architecture, and was used for Holy Communion by the monarchs of France until the French Revolution. One of the most splendid surviving treasures of the Middle Ages, the jeweled chalice is the highlight of an important collection of medieval and Renaissance textiles, furniture, and liturgical arts. A pair of rare stained glass windows, designed for a Florentine church about 1500, show the Virgin Annunciate and archangel Gabriel in separate windows.

The eighteen pieces of French eighteenth-century furniture in the Widener Collection are signed or can be firmly attributed to known cabinetmakers, most of whom worked for the royal court. Of particular interest is Marie Antoinette's writing desk from the Tuileries Palace, the only desk found in the royal apartments where the queen was held under house arrest prior to her execution. (Marie Antoinette was also the last queen of France to use the Chalice of Abbot Suger in her coronation ceremony.) Four

redesigned and relocated rooms devoted to the display of this furniture, other decorative arts and prints and drawings of the period from the Widener collection have been made possible by a generous grant from P.A.B. Widener, nephew of the original donor.

Nine tapestries, dating to the 1400s and early 1500s, are displayed with period furniture in two galleries. They include three designed by the painter Bernaert Van Orley. The Triumph of Christ, once in the collection of Cardinal Mazarin with its extremely fine weave of twenty-two warps to the inch, is considered among the world's finest surviving European tapestry from the Middle Ages.

The Widener Collection of Chinese porcelains, one of the country's best collections of polychrome ware, is newly re-installed in three galleries. These 176 porcelains have not been on public view since 1971.

PRINTS AND DRAWINGS

A historical survey of the Gallery's permanent collection of prints, illustrated books and drawings can be seen in an area consisting of fourteen galleries, four of which display 110 recently acquired prints and illustrated books. These works will be changed every six months.

The installation parallels the Gallery's survey of painting and includes such masters as Dürer, Rubens, Rembrandt, Cézanne, Degas, Picasso, Kirchner, and Stella.

A fifth gallery is devoted to approximately twenty-five old master and modern drawings selected from recent acquisitions of the past four years. This gallery will include different works every four months. On view initially are

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Martin Schöngauer's Young Woman in a Scarf, Federico Barocci's Head of Saint John the Evangelist, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's Alexander at the Tomb of Cyrus, François Boucher's Les Crêpes, and Winslow Homer's Four Boys on a Beach.

The design of the prints and drawings galleries provides a variety of routes within the exhibition area and thus maximizes the use of the space. By changing the works, the broadest sampling of the Gallery's holdings can be shown. The rotation system diminishes the potential damage to works of art on paper by limiting their exposure to light.

The remaining nine galleries in the graphic arts exhibition space will contain special exhibitions on individual artists, themes, or periods. The two opening shows are: Alfred Stieglitz (February 3 - May 8, 1983), 170 photographs drawn from the key set of 1,600 Stieglitz photographs given to the Gallery by Georgia O'Keeffe; and Drawings from the Holy Roman Empire 1540-1680: A Selection From North American Collections, organized with The Art Museum, Princeton University, (February 3 - April 11, 1983).

PAINTINGS

Sixty-three works by artists such as Edward Hicks, Erastus Salisbury Field, Joshua Johnson, and Thomas Chambers have been selected from over 300 paintings in the Gallery's Garbisch Collection, one of this country's foremost collections of American naive painting. Given to the Gallery over the past twenty-five years by the late Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, the exhibition includes recent Garbisch acquisitions such as Peaceable Kingdom by Edward

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Hicks, The Cat by an anonymous painter, and The Burnish Sisters by William M. Prior.

CREDITS

National Gallery of Art

Construction Manager: Hurley F. Offenbacher
Planning Consultant: David W. Scott
Project Coordination: Charles Parkhurst
Design and Installation: Gaillard Ravenel and Mark A. Leithauser (Treasury, Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Sculpture, Prints and Drawings Galleries GN2, GN15-19, GS1-GS14; Elroy Quenroe (Baroque Sculpture Hall and American Naive Paintings, GC5 and GC8/9); Gordon Anson (Lighting)
Curatorial Supervision: Douglas Lewis and Carolyn Wilson Newmark (Sculpture and Associated Decorative Arts); William J. Williams and Susan Ritterpusch (Other Decorative Arts); Andrew Robison (Prints and Drawings); John Wilmerding and Linda Ayres (American Naive Paintings)
Conservation: Victor C. B. Covey (Chief Conservator); Shelly Sturman (Sculpture); Joseph V. Columbus and Julia W. Dippold (Textiles)

Architects, Contractors, Designers and Consultants

Fourth Street Lobby area: I. M. Pei and Partners, New York (architects); Weiskopf and Pickworth, New York; Mueser Rutledge Wentworth and Johnson, New York; Syska and Hennessy, Inc., Washington
Operation Breakthrough and remaining ground floor areas: Keyes Condon and Florance, Washington (architects); Nash M. Love Associates, Springfield, Virginia; James Madison Cutts, Washington
Consultants and Designers: Bolt Beranek and Newman, Inc., Arlington, Virginia (acoustics); Cini-Grissom Associates, Rockville, Maryland (Garden Café); Harold Eberhard, Jr., New York (gilding and painting of Widener Rooms); Charles B. Froom, New York (design and installation of galleries for small bronzes, medals, and plaquettes: GN4-13); Robert Fugelstad, Washington (design and installation of armatures); Herman and Lees Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts (gallery plan); Mark Hampton, New York (Garden Café); William Reider, New York (Widener Rooms)
Contractors: Associated Builders, Inc., Hyattsville, Maryland; Corning Construction Corp., Beltsville, Maryland; Grunley Walsh Construction, Washington; Skinker & Garrett Contractors, Washington; Spradlin Construction Co., Wheaton, Maryland; Charles H. Tompkins, Washington.

END

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs, contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, Carolyn Amiot or Marla Price, Information Office, National Gallery of Art Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.

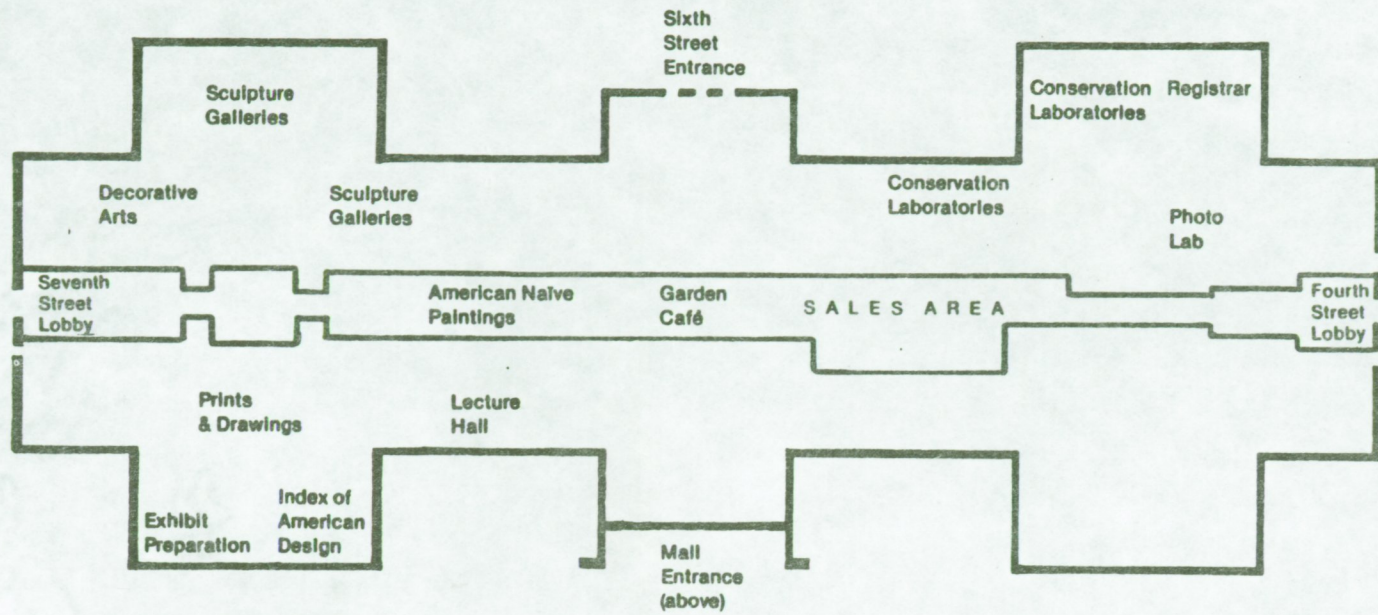


Diagram of the ground floor of the West Building showing Operation Breakthrough