

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ACQUIRES MAJOR PAINTING BY MAX ERNST

WASHINGTON, D.C. April 4, 1983. A major painting by surrealist artist Max Ernst entitled A Moment of Calm has been presented to the National Gallery of Art by Dorothea Tanning Ernst, the artist's widow. The gift was accepted by the Gallery's Board of Trustees and announced today by J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery.

The title, A Moment of Calm, refers to a brief interlude in 1938-1939 during which Ernst bought and began to refurbish a farmhouse at Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche, about 30 miles north of Avignon. He decorated the exterior of the house with cement reliefs of fantastic animals while, on the interior, he began work on this large painting which represents a dense forest inhabited by magical birds.

In September 1939 war broke out in Europe and Ernst, a German citizen, was interned as an enemy alien by the French. He was released in December, but re-arrested in May 1940. In the winter of 1940-41 he was released again.

(more)

In the spring of 1941, Ernst traveled to Marseilles and eventually reached New York in July of that year. Ernst returned to Europe in 1949.

The painting was originally designed with an arching upper edge, as it was intended for a lunette. In the 1950s, Ernst made the painting a rectangle by attaching extra canvas and extending the composition to the new borders.

A Moment of Calm is a transitional work, incorporating both the fantastic/magical animal forms of the mid-1930s and the technical experimentation and paradise imagery of later paintings. Ernst used a knife to create the forest, which conveys the feeling of dense vegetation while referring to no specific plants. The birds themselves are part of his life-long fascination with winged creatures--a fascination which began in his childhood according to his autobiographical Beyond Painting.

The painting is on view on the Upper level of the Gallery's East Building, in a Gallery with other surrealist and abstract paintings.

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