

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES MAJOR LATE PAINTING BY PAOLO VERONESE

WASHINGTON, D.C. May 25, 1984. The National Gallery of Art has acquired a major late painting by the sixteenth-century Venetian master, Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). The acquisition of the large (55" x 68") canvas, entitled The Martyrdom and Last Communion of St. Lucy, was announced today by J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery, and Sydney J. Freedberg, Chief Curator. The work is on view in Gallery 23 of the West Building, with works by other Venetian masters.

Professor Freedberg, a noted authority on the Italian Renaissance, describes the painting as "totally autograph, and one of the most beautiful of Veronese's late works."

This is the first old master painting of great importance to enter the Gallery's collection since the purchase of Georges de la Tour's Repentant Magdalen in 1974. Acquisition of the Veronese was made possible by a generous gift from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, together with funds provided by the late Ailsa Mellon Bruce, daughter of the Gallery's founder.

One of the triumvirate that dominated sixteenth-century Venetian art (with Titian and Tintoretto), Veronese was born Paolo Caliari in Verona in 1528. In 1553, he came to Venice, where his first major commission was a group of ceiling decorations for the Doge's Palace. He

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soon achieved great fame as a painter of scenes of religious or classical history, presented as if they were occurring in the grand opulence of his contemporary Venice.

In his later period, to which the Gallery's painting belongs, Veronese sought new depths of spiritual meaning in his art, accompanied by a richer and deeper tonality in his color. This depiction of the legend of St. Lucy combines several aspects of her dramatic story. After vowing chastity, St. Lucy was denounced as a Christian by a jilted suitor. She was condemned to a brothel, but obviously refused to go; even a team of oxen to which she was tied miraculously failed to move her. An attempt to execute her by fire failed as well. Veronese depicts both of these incidents--the oxen in the background to the left; the executioner with torch behind the saint. Her final martyrdom and last communion are represented simultaneously. The figures are bathed in the soft light of the setting sun, restricting the painted scene to warm, low tones.

Details of the painting's original commission are unknown. The provenance, however, is described by Professor Freedberg as "exceptional." It was part of the important Lechi Collection in Brescia at the beginning of the nineteenth century; it then passed into the hands of a British noble family, to which the present Queen Mother belongs. The painting has been exhibited only once, at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1960. It has been extensively published by scholars of Veronese's art.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs 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.