

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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

CONTACT: Randall Kremer
Ellen Stanley
(202) 842-6358

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[July 2, 1986]

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART RECEIVES NEW GIFT
FROM COLLECTIONS OF MR. AND MRS. PAUL MELLON

WASHINGTON -- The National Gallery of Art has received a major gift of 186 works of art from the collections of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. The gift includes important paintings by American masters Winslow Homer, George Bellows, Thomas Eakins and Maurice Prendergast, as well as impressionist and post-impressionist works by Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir and Henri Matisse. Selections from this and previous gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Mellon will go on view in a special exhibition in the new Main Floor galleries of the National Gallery's West Building, July 20 through Oct. 19, 1986.

J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art, said: "I want to express our deep appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. Mellon for this new gift to the National Gallery. It ranks as one of the most significant collections of art ever presented to a public institution. Through the continuing generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Mellon, the National Gallery now has one of the finest collections of impressionist and post-impressionist art of any museum or gallery in the world."

(more)

The works of art in this gift cover a wide spectrum of paintings, prints, watercolors, drawings and sculpture from European and American impressionists and post-impressionists. Among the works acquired are the following:

- ° Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917), 17 wax sculptures, providing the National Gallery with the largest and most important collection of Degas waxes in any public institution, including Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans, plaster cast; the acquisition also includes the painting, Woman Viewed from Behind, oil on canvas;
- ° Winslow Homer (American, 1836-1910), Autumn(1877), oil on canvas; The Red Schoolhouse(1873), oil on canvas;
- ° William Harnett (American, 1848-1892), Still Life: Plums(1873), charcoal on gray paper;
- ° Maurice Prendergast (American, 1859-1924), Salem Cove(1916), oil on canvas;
- ° Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954), Checker Game and Piano Music(1923), oil on canvas;
- ° Auguste Renoir (French, 1841-1919), Claude Monet(1872), oil on canvas;
- ° Alfred Sisley (French, 1839-1899), Flood at Port-Marly(1872), oil on canvas;
- ° Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926), The Black Hat(1890), pastel.

1986
Mellon . . . page three

The gift also includes Gustave Caillebotte's Skiffs(1877) and Berthe Morisot's Hanging the Laundry out to Dry(1875), two paintings which were seen in the recent National Gallery exhibition, The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886.

Paul Mellon, son of the National Gallery's founder Andrew W. Mellon, served as the first president, and later, chairman of the board of trustees of the National Gallery. The National Gallery's East Building was constructed with funds donated by Mr. Mellon, his sister Ailsa Mellon Bruce and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Since their first gift of paintings in 1964, the Mellons have donated 822 objects to the National Gallery. Previous gifts have included: The Artist's Father (1866), Houses in Provence (1879) and Antony Valabrègue (1866) by Cézanne; Te Pape Nave Nave (Delectable Waters) (1898) by Gauguin; Woman Ironing (1874) by Degas; The Plum (1877) by Edouard Manet; and 350 paintings of native American subjects by George Catlin. Their most recent gift in 1983 included impressionist and post-impressionist works by Monet, Boudin, Gauguin, Bazille, van Gogh, Renoir and Seurat, in addition to major paintings, prints and drawings by the American artist George Bellows.

#

#

#

Many of the impressionist paintings on view are portraits by the painters of their friends and families. They represent a significant turning point in the field of portrait painting. Charles Stuckey, curator of modern painting at the National Gallery of Art, explained: "In terms of this exhibition, Monet's The Cradle -- Camille with the Artist's Son Jean(1867), Cézanne's Antony Valabrègue(1866) and Renoir's Claude Monet(1872) helped to redefine portrait painting, bringing an intimacy and informality to what were essentially private scenes. I consider them to be among the most moving portraits in the history of art."

Louis-Auguste Cézanne, the Artist's Father, Reading "l'Événement"(1866) is another extraordinary painting by Cézanne, painted during the first decade of his career," Stuckey added. "In this highly charged psychological situation the artist's father, who wanted his son to become a banker not an artist, is depicted reading the politically left-wing periodical for which Cézanne's friend Emile Zola wrote art criticism. The throne-like chair and the deliberately awkward posing of the figure give a spirit of tender mockery to this portrait. The informality of the pose, with the figure looking down rather than out at the viewer, was an entirely new approach to portraiture."

With the Mellons' 1985 gift, the National Gallery now possesses excellent works on paper by Cézanne, Cassatt, Picasso, van Gogh and Braque. "The Mellon exhibition features some very fine works from the classic masters of modern art," said National Gallery of Art Senior Curator Andrew Robison. "Most impressive is Mary Cassatt's The Black Hat(c.1890). This pastel portrait -- the first Cassatt pastel in the National Gallery collection -- is one of her best, an arresting picture of a young woman in which the artist's very direct and very personal sense of her sitter is conveyed with a kind of haunting quality. The dynamic and swift lines which form the lapels of the coat give a sense of focus to the more highly finished areas of the sitter's face and neck."

"Picasso's Portrait of Ruth Dangler(1922), Braque's Aria de Bach(1913) and van Gogh's The Harvest(1888) are also among the outstanding works on paper in this exhibition," Robison added.

An illustrated collection of essays, In Honor of Paul Mellon Collector and Benefactor, has been published in conjunction with the exhibition. Edited by John Wilmerding, it explores various aspects of the Mellon collection and includes contributions by Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., National Gallery of Art curator of American painting, John Walker, director emeritus, National Gallery of Art, impressionist scholar John Rewald and other such notable friends and colleagues.

#