

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART CELEBRATES THE HOLIDAYS WITH EXHIBITION OF ANTIQUE TOYS FROM SHELBURNE MUSEUM

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22, 1987 - The holiday season is underway at the National Gallery of Art where a collection of antique toys from Vermont's Shelburne Museum is now on view. The exhibition, which is entitled Naive Visions: Antique Toys from the Shelburne Museum, includes paintings and watercolors from the National Gallery's own collection and complements the current exhibition, An American Sampler: Folk Art from the Shelburne Museum. Both exhibitions will be on view in the Gallery's East Building through April 14, 1988. They are made possible through a grant from The New England, the Boston-based financial services and insurance institution.

Regular hours will be in effect at the National Gallery during the holiday season, with the East and West Buildings open from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Saturday, and from 12:00 noon until 9:00 PM on Sundays. The National Gallery will not be open on Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

The toys on loan from the Shelburne Museum demonstrate the variety of playthings available in America in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Because few toys were manufactured in the United States until the 1860s, most playthings used in America before then were imported from Europe. Although the exhibition includes a few European dolls, one of which was made in the 18th century, the majority of the toys are American and date from around 1870 to 1910.

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By the middle of the 19th century most toys used by American children were unique objects, handmade of wood at home or by professional carvers and carpenters as a sideline to their usual crafts. In the 1840s toymakers began to fashion playthings of tin as well, first in Europe and later in this country. The use of tin permitted mass production, as dyes could easily stamp out multiple copies of shapes which were then crimped together at the seams. By the 1870s and 1880s some toy manufacturers produced several million tin toys annually. Cast iron playthings became popular in the latter third of the 19th century, both here and abroad, and because of their weight were often used as pull toys.

The watercolors on display have been chosen from the Index of American Design to complement the concurrent exhibition of sculpture, textiles, and toys from the Shelburne Museum. The Index of American Design is a collection of approximately 17,000 watercolors depicting American decorative arts from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Established during the Depression as a federal work project, the Index was active from 1935 to 1942 and employed more than 1,000 artists in 34 states and the District of Columbia. Reflecting a growing interest in folk art during the 1930s, Index artists produced precise renderings of ceramics, costume, furniture, glass, carvings, tools, textiles and toys. These meticulous watercolors were meant to provide students, scholars, collectors and designers with exemplary models of American design.

Some of the the objects recorded by the Index are identical to pieces in the Shelburne collection, such as the ninepins in this exhibition and the carved soldier and Indian weathervane inscribed "TO, TE," in "An American Sampler." Other renderings represent works of a similar nature to those found at Shelburne, including carousel animals, dolls, toys and quilts.

America's entrance into World War II and the termination of many federal work projects brought the Index of American Design to a close. The National Gallery became the collection's permanent home in 1943.

The National Gallery's collection of American naive art, a portion of which is on view in this exhibition, is almost entirely the gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Friends of Electra Havemeyer Webb, the founder of the Shelburne Museum, they were similarly drawn to works by people with little or no artistic training, yet with a strong instinct for design and a keen sensitivity to the character of their subjects. The Garbisches began acquiring 18th- and 19th-century American naive paintings in 1944 for their estate, Pokety Farms, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. They soon assembled the most comprehensive and important collection in the field. By frequently lending their works for public exhibition and eventually donating most of them to museums, they greatly furthered the appreciation, study, and preservation of naive art. As the principal beneficiary of their generosity, the National Gallery received nearly 100 pastels, drawings, and watercolors and more than 300 paintings, 18 of which are on view in this exhibition.

Naive Visions: Antique Toys from the Shelburne Museum was conceived and organized by Gaillard Ravenel and Mark Leithauser, chief and deputy chief of design and installation at the National Gallery. The objects were selected by staff at Shelburne and the National Gallery.

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