

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353

QUINCENTENARY OF COLUMBUS' FIRST VOYAGE TO AMERICA

TO BE CELEBRATED AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 12, 1989 - The five-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage to America in 1492 will be celebrated in a major exhibition that will open October 12, 1991 at the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition was announced today by National Gallery director J. Carter Brown during the Columbus Day visit of President Francesco Cossiga of Italy to the Gallery.

International in scope, Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration will include more than three hundred objects that will present an image of the world as it existed in Columbus' lifetime, when mankind moved from a period of prolonged isolation to a new era of communication and interdependence. The exhibition will be the largest in scale of the Gallery's exhibitions since The Treasure Houses of Britain in 1985-1986.

"We are very encouraged by the enthusiasm for this project from our friends and colleagues all over the world. We look forward to conveying the special message of this exhibition to a world which has, in the five hundred years that have passed since Columbus' great achievement, become a 'global village,' moving toward an era of ever-closer communications," said Brown as he and President Cossiga stood before the National Gallery's Ginevra de' Benci (c. 1474), painted by Leonardo da Vinci.

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The painting, Ginevra de' Benci, will be included in the exhibition in a section presenting the achievements of Leonardo, born in the same country and in the same year as Columbus, as an artist-scientist and discoverer.

Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, through a selection of works of art, in addition to maps, scientific instruments and books of great visual appeal, will survey the world at the dawn of the modern age, when the revolution in communications and world view set in motion by Columbus' voyage was about to change the face of civilization forever. Beginning with medieval views of distant peoples and places, the first section of the exhibition will examine Europe and the Mediterranean world in Columbus' age, placing Columbus in the dramatic revolution of ideas that was the Renaissance. The second section will present the voyage that Columbus had hoped to make, penetrating directly to "Cathay," and exploring the contemporary civilizations of Japan, Korea, China, India, and Persia. The third section will document the world Columbus found instead -- presenting the principal native cultures of the Americas before their first contacts with Spain.

An international group of distinguished scholars is working on the exhibition, including Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress Emeritus and author of The Discoverers and The Americans, Professor John H. Elliott of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, and Dr. Sherman E. Lee, former director of the Cleveland Museum of Art and a leading authority on the art of the Far East. Dr. Jay Levenson, who was curator for the National Gallery exhibitions Dürer in America in 1971 and Early Italian Engravings in 1973, is the managing curator of Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration.

The National Gallery of Art will be the sole venue for the exhibition.