



Circa 1492

Art in the Age of Exploration

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART LAUDS GLOBAL COOPERATION

AS IT PREPARES FOR CIRCA 1492:

ART IN THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

National Gallery of Art
Washington

October 12, 1991-
January 12, 1992

4th Street and Constitution
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WASHINGTON, D.C., October 9, 1990 -- The National Gallery of Art will obtain loans of more than 400 paintings, sculptures, drawings, maps, and other works of art of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas for Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, National Gallery director J. Carter Brown announced today. The exhibition, which will be presented in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, October 12, 1991 - January 12, 1992, will convey an image of the world around 1492 at the dawn of the modern era, when Christopher Columbus sailed from Europe to the Americas in search of the riches of the Far East. The largest in scale of the Gallery's exhibitions since Treasure Houses of Britain in 1985-1986, Circa 1492 will occupy some 30,000 square feet in the East Building.

The exhibition is made possible by Ameritech, The Nomura Securities Co., Ltd./The Mitsui Taiyo Kobe Bank, Ltd., and Republic National Bank of New York.

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"Circa 1492 will survey some of the major civilizations of the world as they were catapulted from a period of prolonged isolation to a new age of communication and interdependence," said Mr. Brown. "This exhibition will depend greatly on the cooperation and generosity of governments and institutions in some 20 countries. We are encouraged by the enthusiastic support that we have received from our colleagues and from government leaders throughout the world."

Among the countries from which the Gallery is borrowing works of art are Austria, People's Republic of China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Germany, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, and Turkey. Works by artists as diverse as Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Dürer, Sesshu Toyo, Shen Chou, celebrated Islamic scribes, the bronzecasters of Benin, and the master goldsmiths of the Americas will be organized into three major areas: "Europe and the Mediterranean World," "Toward Cathay," and "The Americas."

The first section of the show will begin with a look at European knowledge of and fantasies about the Far East in the late Middle Ages. It will then survey the major political forces surrounding the Mediterranean during Columbus' lifetime--Portugal, Spain, the maritime states of Italy, the kingdoms of West Africa, and the Islamic empires of the eastern Mediterranean--and examine the principal intellectual and spiritual currents of the period.

"Europe and the Mediterranean World" will include a selection of the most beautiful surviving scientific instruments from the fifteenth century, as well as a series of maps documenting the changing perceptions of the world that resulted from the voyages of exploration. The section will examine Renaissance developments in the rendering of pictorial space and the depiction of the human figure. It will conclude with a comparison of Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer as the quintessential artist-scientists of the Renaissance, whose wide-ranging interests symbolize the breadth of the period's quest for knowledge.

"Toward Cathay" will take the visitor on the route east to China that Columbus proposed in his "Enterprise of the Indies," presenting paintings, sculpture, calligraphy, and works of decorative art that document the highly sophisticated civilizations of Japan, Korea, China, and India as they existed in the later fifteenth century, showing how far the realities of Far East culture exceeded the Europeans' dreams.

The concluding section of the exhibition will survey the Americas beginning with works of art from the earliest points of contact with Europe--the West Indies, Florida, and Brazil. It will include major works of Aztec sculpture and pre-Hispanic Mexican codices, precious textiles from the Inca Empire, and masterful works in gold from Columbia and Costa Rica.

The managing curator of the exhibition is Jay Levenson, who was curator for the National Gallery exhibitions Dürer in America in 1971 and Early Italian Engravings in 1973. He is joined by an international group of more than 30 distinguished scholars who are writing essays and entries for the exhibition catalogue, including Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress Emeritus and author of The Discoverers and The Americans. The catalogue, fully illustrated in color, will be published by the National Gallery of Art.