



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Katie Ziglar
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY ANNOUNCES GIFT OF MAJOR PAINTING
BY RIBERA IN HONOR OF FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Washington, D.C., December 21, 1990 -- The director of the National Gallery of Art, J. Carter Brown, announced today that the Gallery has been given a major painting by the seventeenth-century southern baroque master, Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), in honor of its fiftieth anniversary. The painting The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, 1634 (oil on canvas, 41 x 44 1/2 in.), has been acquired for the National Gallery as a gift from its 50th Anniversary Committee. The painting is the first Ribera to enter the National Gallery's collection, and will go on view to the public on March 17, 1991, as part of the exhibition, Art For The Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art.

The Committee, chaired by Gallery trustee Robert H. Smith, has not yet completed its campaign, and, having now acquired this signal masterpiece in the old master category, hopes also to be instrumental in the acquisition of a major-twentieth century work.

-more-

"We have long sought a major Ribera for the National Gallery's collection and are greatly indebted to the 50th Anniversary Gift Committee for this magnificent birthday present to the nation," J. Carter Brown said today.

Diane De Grazia, curator of southern baroque painting, called the work, "the most significant seventeenth-century Spanish painting to enter the collection in thirty years."

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, considered by scholars to be one of the finest of the master's career, has been in private hands for almost two hundred years. It depicts the dramatic moment just before the flaying of St. Bartholomew, and is a psychological study of the faith of the martyr and the admiration of his executioner. The legend has it that even after being skinned alive Bartholomew did not die and was thereupon crucified as punishment for his having preached the gospel.

In this painting Ribera concentrates less on Bartholomew's physical suffering than on his mystical experience just before death. This was in keeping with the ideas of the time, when the Counter-Reformation was encouraging participation of the individual in the passion of Christ and his saints. More than

any other artist of his age, Ribera evoked this Counter-Reformation spirit by combining the physical reality of his subjects with the underlying mysticism of their religious experience.

Born in Spain in 1591, Ribera moved at an early age to Italy, where he was influenced by Caravaggio. In 1616, Ribera settled in Naples. There he enjoyed a long and prosperous career with abundant commissions from King Philip IV of Spain, the Spanish and Neapolitan aristocracy, and the numerous religious establishments in the city. His emotional renderings of saints in ecstasy, captured in a dramatic atmosphere, influenced all subsequent Neapolitan painters.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew is all the more significant for its remarkable state of preservation: the delicate glazes and layers of impasto have remained intact, giving the surface a lustrous, vibrating quality. The viewer receives an almost tactile impression from Ribera's characteristically long, thick brushstrokes. It is this virtuoso handling of paint and mystical fervor that make Ribera's paintings singularly important, and secure his reputation as one of the great painters of the baroque period.