

# National Gallery of Art News Release



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## REMBRANDT'S LUCRETIAS, SPOTLIGHTED IN FOCUSED EXHIBITION

### AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY, OPENS SEPTEMBER 22

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Two paintings of the Roman heroine Lucretia by Rembrandt van Rijn, one from the National Gallery of Art, the other from The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, will be brought together in a focused exhibition at the National Gallery's West Building. Rembrandt's Lucretias will be on view from September 22, 1991, to January 5, 1992. The Gallery's Lucretia formed part of Andrew W. Mellon's founding gift.

"Juxtaposing these two related masterpieces provides a rare opportunity to examine the artist's penetrating investigations into the human soul and extraordinary technique during the final years of the great master's life," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art.

Although the paintings do not seem to have been conceived as a pair, the two are complementary with similar compositions and painterly qualities. Both also explore the emotional trauma of Lucretia's decision to take her life, following her rape by Sextus Tarquinius, son of the tyrannical Roman ruler Tarquinius Superbus, in the sixth century B.C.

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The National Gallery's *Lucretia*, painted in 1664, depicts the tragic heroine in a moment of inner anguish, dagger in hand, anticipating her self-sacrifice. The Minneapolis image, created two years later, portrays *Lucretia* after the act has been completed, poised at the juncture between life and death.

Earlier representations of the subject had been painted by artists such as Titian, Veronese, and Caravaggio. However, Rembrandt's broad execution, rich colors, impressive use of light and shade, and strong frontal composition give his two images unparalleled forcefulness. Particularly striking in these works is Rembrandt's extensive use of the palette knife.

A recent cleaning of the National Gallery painting revealed subtle chiaroscuro effects under layers of varnish, which had previously given the surface a uniform golden glow.

A similiarly subtle play of light helps create the powerful emotional energy of the Minneapolis Lucretia. Her blood-stained white chemise is fully illuminated, while her face is thrown into half shadows that help convey the heavy sadness overwhelming her countenance.

Completed in the final decade of Rembrandt's life, the two Lucretias offer revealing insights into his state of mind and may have served a cathartic function following the death of his companion, Hendrickje. *Lucretia*'s faithfulness and self-sacrifice parallel the constancy of Hendrickje in the face of public indignities suffered as a result of her commitment to

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the artist. Her youthful features are represented in the National Gallery's image of the anguished figure, which was painted one year after Hendrickje's death.

"Rembrandt's probing interest in the tragedy of Lucretia in the mid 1660s can perhaps be understood as an expression of his own sense of immutable loss. In this respect the two versions of the Lucretia are as much a spiritual self portrait as they are an eulogy to his lost beloved," write curators Arthur Wheelock of the National Gallery and George Keyes of The Minneapolis Institute in the accompanying brochure.

After the viewing at the National Gallery, these masterpieces will travel to The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Tours will be given by the education division of the National Gallery on September 28 at 1 p.m., and on September 29, October 2, 8, 11 at noon, beginning in the West Building rotunda. Reservations are not required. Hours are Monday through Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

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