

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY REINSTALLS WEST BUILDING COLLECTION;

HISTORY OF ART GAINS FRESH DIMENSION

Washington, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art has reinstalled its permanent collection throughout the main floor of the West Building. This two-year program has involved complete reorganization of the Italian, Spanish, German, Flemish and Dutch, British, American, and French painting and sculpture collections. Galleries have been repainted, many with special glazes; new lighting has been added; and architectural elements have been adapted to enhance the works of art.

"The new installation reinvigorates the extraordinary cache of treasures that makes up our permanent collection," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery. "The result of an extraordinary team effort by the Gallery's professional staff, this reorganization of nearly one thousand objects in the West Building has enabled us to present the sweeping course of European and American art history in sharper focus and to illuminate relationships between artists working during the same period."

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Brown continued, "At the same time, the remarkable bounty that came to us as fiftieth-anniversary gifts has been united with the enduring national legacy begun by Andrew Mellon and our founding benefactors--including the ongoing generosity of Paul Mellon--and enriched by continuing donors. That largesse continues up to today with the splendid paintings by Claude Monet and Georges Braque recently acquired by the National Gallery." (See related release)

The new installation traces the development of Western art in approximately chronological order within each collection, shifting away from the previous arrangement grouping artists by schools or nationality. Historical relationships between artists have been clarified by exhibiting their work as closely as possible to that of their contemporaries.

Gallery 1, for example, begins with the origins of Italian art as shown in Gothic painting of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While paintings by Giotto and others of the Florentine school used to be highlighted, the gallery now contains a fuller representation of artists from different regions of Italy--Duccio in Siena, Paolo Veneziano in Venice, and anonymous Byzantine artists, thus demonstrating cross-influences among cities and between East and West during these early years.

In another major change, the works of Francisco de Goya were moved from the far end of the main floor among three centuries of art by Spanish painters to Gallery 52, adjacent to Goya's French contemporaries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century,

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while the French and Spanish seventeenth-century paintings are shown with those of their Italian contemporaries. Common characteristics of taste, costume, and style now can be compared more readily.

Works also have been positioned to create vistas along major axes and between galleries. One important exchange takes place between two great full-length American portraits: Gilbert Stuart's elegant The Skater looks across four galleries to James McNeill Whistler's provocative The White Girl at the opposite end of the American collection. Facing each other across the West Sculpture Hall are Joseph M. W. Turner's luminescent seascape Keelman Heaving in Coals by Moonlight and two views of Rouen Cathedral by Claude Monet, another master of light.

In a different association, sculpture has been integrated for the first time with paintings. Thus Ginevra de' Benci, painted while Leonardo da Vinci was an assistant in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, can now be seen in closer proximity to Verrocchio's sculpture. Houdon's busts of Voltaire and of the Brongniart children complement contemporary eighteenth-century portraits in the French galleries.

The juxtaposition of sculpture and paintings presents a fuller experience of art at a given time. Renaissance Italian sculpture, where appropriate, is set into wall niches. Paintings have also been hung to evoke original placements. Titian's Vision of St. John The Evangelist is installed in Gallery 24 in a carved and gilded ceiling, similar to the one for which it was

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originally painted. Small paintings are now clustered together on the walls, including views of Venice and Rome by Canaletto and Guardi displayed in Gallery 36 and still lifes by Chardin in Gallery 53, following the style of intimate groupings common in the eighteenth century. Tiers of George Catlin's paintings of Indian subjects are hung in Gallery 69A in a manner that echoes his original exhibition of the works in 1870.

The placement of all objects and selection of wall colors were carefully considered by a Gallery team. "The reinstallation represents a massive, concentrated effort, a close collaboration between the curatorial and design departments and included reviewing every work of art on display, in storage, and in the National Gallery's lending service," said Roger Mandle, deputy director. "The results are not considered finished, but represent an adaptable context for incorporating future loans and acquisitions."

CONSERVATION, FRAMING, ARCHITECTURAL, AND LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS

Many departments within the Gallery participated actively in the reinstallation process. Over the past two years, thirty-one paintings were treated under the direction of David Bull, chairman of painting conservation, and Sarah Fisher, head of painting conservation, including Albert Bierstadt's Lake Lucerne, Gerard David's The Saint Anne Altarpiece, and Goya's The Marquesa de Pontejos. Rembrandt's Self-Portrait, the most recent work

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restored, is now revealed in its compelling immediacy in Gallery 48.

The Gallery's collection of frames was reevaluated. Period frames were purchased through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund for Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci, Peter Paul Rubens' Fall of Phaeton, and eight other paintings. Frame conservator Stephan Wilcox reproduced thirty-six new frames for works by artists as varied as Monet, Thomas Cole, and Tintoretto, while the search for permanent period frames continues.

The education division, headed by Linda Downs, produced new self-guided tours to the reinstalled galleries, including walking and audio tours and individual laminated guides. (See related release)

To resolve certain spatial and circulation problems, subtle structural changes were made to the galleries under the direction of Gaillard Ravenel, chief of design, and Mark Leithauser, deputy chief. Alterations were planned to be totally consistent with the design vocabulary of the original building by architect John Russell Pope. Throughout, Ravenel and Leithauser worked with each curator to achieve a harmony of architectural aesthetics and art history.

Complementing the paintings and sculpture, rooms were repainted in a variety of neutral and rich colors, many with special glazes to add a sense of depth. Gray tones in the early Netherlandish galleries and buff colors in the Italian Renaissance rooms evoke the stone and stucco of churches and

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residences where the objects were originally installed. In the American collection, the muted yellow behind Whistler's paintings recalls the color favored by the artist for the walls of his exhibitions.

All labels attached to frames have been removed and replaced with larger plaques placed on the dado and painted to blend with the wall colors. Door plaques now identify the number of each gallery as well as the subject and period of objects shown there.

Gordon Anson, chief lighting designer, blended natural and artificial light to provide a more flexible system. Daylight from existing skylights was reduced and a range of traditional and high-tech illumination added, from incandescent bulbs to fiber optics used to light works by Leonardo and Dürer. The new system permits variation in the amount and color of light on each object as well as modulation of light levels between galleries, all designed to create a more pleasant viewing experience.

REORGANIZED PERMANENT COLLECTION

Six centuries of art are displayed along the equivalent of three city blocks on the main floor of the West Building. The plan includes Italian, seventeenth-century French, Spanish, Netherlandish, and German art on the west side of the Rotunda; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French, eighteenth-century Spanish, British, and American art on the east side.

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13th- to 16th-Century Italian

(Galleries 1 to 28)

The National Gallery's collection of early Italian and Renaissance painting, begun by Andrew Mellon and Peter A. B. Widener and expanded by Samuel H. Kress, is arrayed across twenty-eight galleries. The collection previously was organized by schools--Florentine, Central Italian, Northern Italian, and Venetian--following the divisions prescribed by Bernard Berenson in his influential books Italian Painters of the Renaissance and Italian Pictures of the Renaissance.

The reorganization now presents in chronological progression Italian art from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. In Gallery 20, for example, the artistic achievements of Renaissance artists Raphael and Perugino can be understood more clearly following nineteen galleries of work by such masters as Fra Angelico, Filippo Lippi, and Botticelli. Previously, Raphael and Perugino were shown in Gallery 8, at the beginning of the Italian collection among the Florentine school.

The integration of painting and sculpture demonstrates the close relationship between these media during a period when sculptors were often painters and vice-versa. It also shows objects in close proximity by artists working in different media at the same time and place, such as the Venetian sculptor Sansovino and painter Tintoretto. Such cross-references are evident in the reinstalled mannerist gallery 21. The sinuous poses of the early-seventeenth-century bronze group Empire

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Triumphant over Avarice by Adriaen de Vries, a Dutch sculptor trained in Florence, echo the complex movements explored in the surrounding paintings by the sixteenth-century Italian masters Agnolo Bronzino, Andrea del Sarto, and Perino del Vaga.

"Our aim in reinstalling the Gallery's superb collection of Italian Gothic and Renaissance paintings has been to invite comparisons and to create a kind of dialogue among the works in a given room or section," said David Brown, curator of southern Renaissance painting. Working in close association to integrate the Gallery's Renaissance sculpture as well as other objects throughout the collection were Douglas Lewis, curator of sculpture and decorative arts, and Alison Luchs, associate curator of early European sculpture.

16th- through 18th-Century Italian, Spanish, and French

(Galleries 29 to 34, 36, and 37)

The sequence of Spanish and Italian baroque art begins in Gallery 29 with paintings by El Greco. Newly placed among these great works are paintings by Tintoretto that illustrate the young El Greco's indebtedness to the Venetian master; both worked in Venice at the same time.

Other relationships emerge in Gallery 31. Seventeenth-century French painter Simon Vouet's Saint Jerome and the Angel and Georges de la Tour's The Repentant Magdalene reveal the influence of Italian naturalism on their style while the artists lived in Rome. Vouet's later painting belongs to an entirely

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different, more classical tradition and is grouped with French painters of the period who remained in their native country or worked in Italy, such as Claude Lorraine and Poussin.

Portraits by Spanish artist Francisco de Goya, formerly located in this gallery, were moved to the other side of the Rotunda near contemporary eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French painters. From its new location in Gallery 52, Goya's portrait of The Marquesa de Pontejos (c. 1786) can be compared to eighteenth-century French portraits in adjoining rooms, which illustrate similar fashions popular throughout Europe.

Mid-eighteenth-century genre paintings and portraits, including works by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Marc Nattier, are grouped in Gallery 53. French rococo paintings by Fragonard and Boucher that were originally installed in architectural ensembles as part of total decorative schemes have been integrated into the French eighteenth-century galleries.

"The new installation helps visitors understand chronological associations and is historically more accurate," said Diane De Grazia, curator of southern baroque painting.

15th- to 16th-Century Netherlandish, German, French, and Spanish

(Galleries 35, 35A, 38, 39, 40, 41, 41A)

The National Gallery's holdings of early Netherlandish and German paintings are of the highest quality and represent the collecting impulses prominent in the early twentieth century,

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when Andrew W. Mellon and Samuel H. Kress formed their great collections. The galleries designed for their bequests remain suited to important later gifts from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and acquisitions through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

Gallery 40 provides a central vantage point for viewing the new installations. Arranged on the same axis are the magnificently restored Saint Anne Altarpiece by Gerard David in Gallery 41A and Albrecht Dürer's monumental Madonna and Child in Gallery 35. Dürer's two-sided panel is hung on a freestanding baffle, so that Lot and His Daughters can be seen on the reverse.

Dürer's work beckons visitors to one of two newly consolidated rooms of German painting and sculpture. Anchoring a wall is Matthias Grünewald's The Small Crucifixion, the only painting by this powerful artist in the United States. Hans Mielich's A Member of the Fröschl Family hangs on one side, adjacent to paintings by members of his workshop. A second portrait, Sir Brian Tuke by Hans Holbein the Younger, balances on the opposite side. Other panels by Lucas Cranach and Dürer also are installed in the gallery, bringing thematic and chronological coherence to the room.

Early Netherlandish paintings in Gallery 39 have been rearranged to highlight their strengths. Hieronymus Bosch's haunting Death and the Miser forms the centerpiece of a long wall. Rogier van der Weyden's elegantly abstract Portrait of a Lady hangs in a prominent position opposite the entrance to the collection. The exquisite, jewel-like Saint George and the

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Dragon by van der Weyden and two other small-scale pictures are grouped together on a wall panel for greater emphasis. One room away stands an English gothic Saint George and the Dragon in polychromed alabaster.

"When works of art are moved their relationships change. The paintings speak to each other in different ways," said John Hand, curator of northern Renaissance painting.

17th-Century Dutch and Flemish

(Galleries 42 to 51)

The wood-paneled galleries that house the seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings were designed to accommodate the portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings donated to the Gallery by Andrew Mellon and the Widener family. "Four painters were particularly admired by these collectors--Anthony van Dyck, Rembrandt van Rijn, Frans Hals, and Johannes Vermeer. Masterpieces by these artists remain at the core of our collection," said Arthur Wheelock, curator of northern baroque painting.

Two galleries continue to be devoted to Van Dyck's paintings (42 and 43) and two to Rembrandt's (48 and 49). Vermeer's intimate scenes have been moved with an extraordinary group of Dutch genre paintings to Gallery 51 along the West Sculpture Hall. Portraits by Frans Hals, formerly mixed with landscapes, have been united in Gallery 46.

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Integrated with these original bequests are more recent acquisitions and fiftieth-anniversary gifts. A major still life by Haarlem master Willem Claesz Heda and a pristine genre painting by Isack van Ostade are newly installed in Gallery 47. Gallery 45, devoted to works by Peter Paul Rubens, contains two new acquisitions and the centrally placed Daniel in the Lions' Den. In an intimate, cabinet-style setting, Gallery 44 features a mixed grouping of recent gifts, including smaller-scale still lifes, genre paintings, landscapes, and history paintings.

A different character has emerged among these original galleries in recent years as a result of the restoration and reframing of a large number of paintings. For example, Rembrandt's moving Self-Portrait in Gallery 48 now reveals in its full glory the vivid brushwork and rich range of colors that the master employed to render his own features.

American (Galleries 61 to 71) and
British (Galleries 57, 58, 59, and 61)

From the East Garden Court, John Singleton Copley's dynamic Watson and the Shark summons visitors to the core of the American collection. When the National Gallery opened, the American collection was limited to only eleven American pictures given by Andrew Mellon. American art now occupies more than fourteen galleries, the result of generous gifts and careful purchases.

As elsewhere, the collection has been reorganized in approximate chronology. "Perhaps the most radical change we have

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made has been to hang some of our greatest American treasures with British paintings," said Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., curator of American and British paintings. "This reflects the reality that at the time these works were painted, America and England were the same country. Many American artists trained in England, and some--such as Benjamin West and Copley--remained there and were, for all intents and purposes, British artists."

Stuart's portraits of the first five presidents painted between 1795 and 1815 are shown in Gallery 60A. However, his earlier large-scale painting The Skater (1782), produced while he lived in London, is now exhibited among the grand-manner portraits of his British contemporaries and competitors, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, and George Romney. American and British art converges again in Gallery 61, where Benjamin West's rendering of an English naval encounter, The Battle of La Hogue, and another of his works, the recently acquired and conserved Expulsion of Adam and Eve, are displayed with British allegorical and biblical subject pictures.

Nineteenth-century American landscape painting now occupies two galleries rather than one, reflecting its prominence as a subject symbolically identified with American national values and aspirations. Albert Bierstadt's Lake Lucerne commands a focal position in Gallery 64. Around the room are both Old and New World views: from the Swiss Alps to Warwick Castle in England to the Catskills, all by American artists. The walls are glazed a rich red in keeping with taste of the period.

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Gallery 67 highlights a later phase of nineteenth-century landscape painting, when some artists such as Frederic Church and Bierstadt sought out the dramatic scenery of the far West and the South American tropics, and others, such as Fitz Hugh Lane and John F. Kensett found inspiration in quiet views of the New England coast.

Painting from 1900 to 1920 concludes the chronological sequence in Gallery 71 with works by George Bellows, Robert Henri, and John Sloan. Winslow Homer's culminating masterpiece Right and Left of 1909 has been given a new place of prominence and is hung for the first time with works of the same period by younger artists.

Several galleries remain essentially unchanged in content, but have been refined and adjusted in significant ways: American federal portraits by Charles Willson Peale and Thomas Sully, and Edward Savage's George Washington Family against a blue reminiscent of American period interiors in Gallery 62; works by Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, James McNeill Whistler, and Winslow Homer concentrated in Galleries 68 and 69; and British portraits and landscapes more coherently grouped in Galleries 58 and 59.

19th-Century French

(Galleries 72, 80-93)

The National Gallery's collection of nineteenth-century French paintings has grown over the years from the initial block

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of nine galleries (85-93), housing the Chester Dale Collection, to fifteen rooms in the northeast quadrant of the West Building. During the reinstallation, the Dale galleries were reordered for the first time in a more linear sequence, enabling a closer chronological arrangement of the collection as a whole.

The alterations have been sweeping in some instances while other galleries have remained essentially unchanged. The galleries closest to the Rotunda (93-91), for example, still contain paintings from the first half of the century by romantic and naturalist masters, such as Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. The most significant change here is the addition of the recent acquisition La Chasse dans les Marais Pontins by Horace Vernet, displayed in an authentic period frame acquired especially for the painting.

Gallery 90 is the first room that exhibits the full effects of the reinstallation. The gallery is a showcase of avant-garde painting in the 1860s. Works by Edouard Manet and Gustave Courbet, then the leading modernists, are accompanied and complemented by paintings of Claude Monet and Frédéric Bazille, artists of the next generation.

Paintings of the 1860s and early 1870s continue in Gallery 89. The centerpiece of the room is Manet's Old Musician, surrounded by works of Courbet; a large Courbet-like nude, Diana, by Auguste Renoir; Berthe Morisot's Mother and Sister of the Artist; and an unparalleled group of figure paintings and family portraits by Degas.

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The next large gallery (86) continues the chronological sequence with paintings of the 1870s and early 1880s. Here masterpieces by Manet are combined with impressionist paintings by Monet, Mary Cassatt, and Alfred Sisley. The contrast between Manet's Gare Saint-Lazare, exhibited in Paris at the Salon in 1874 when the impressionists were holding their landmark first exhibition, and Monet's Woman with a Parasol--Madame Monet and her Son, shown at the second impressionist exhibition, is particularly poignant and revealing.

Monet's beautiful and important later series painting--including four views of London, two of Rouen Cathedral, and a view of Venice--are now joined in Gallery 85 by the new acquisition The Japanese Footbridge (1899). (See related release)

Other highlights of the reinstalled nineteenth-century galleries are a new wall of late nineteenth-century symbolist decorations, including a pair by Odilon Redon, and galleries featuring works by Renoir (84) and Paul Gauguin (82). Appropriately, the installation concludes with a superlative monographic assembly of works by Paul Cézanne, whose paintings inspired Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and other innovative masters of art in the twentieth century. Their works are on view in the East Building.

"The reinstallation of the nineteenth-century French galleries provides a more meaningful experience from the point of

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view of both connoisseurship and art history," said Charles Moffett, senior curator of paintings and curator of modern painting. "Juxtapositions are more sensitive than previously, whether for two paintings, an entire gallery, or the manner in which galleries interact with each other."

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