

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 6, 1993

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THE AGE OF THE BAROQUE IN PORTUGAL

OPENS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ON NOVEMBER 7, 1993

WASHINGTON, DC -- The first major art exhibition to be sent by the Portuguese to the United States, The Age of the Baroque in Portugal, will open at the National Gallery of Art in the East Building, November 7, 1993, and will be seen through February 1, 1994. The exhibition of approximately 115 objects will survey the opulent art of the the eighteenth century, a period of brilliant achievement and patronage in the arts in Portugal. The extraordinary treasures include a sixty-five-foot, blue-and-white hand-painted tile frieze depicting the Lisbon skyline as it appeared around 1700, from the Museu Nacional do Azulejo, a monumental carved and gilded wood altarpiece from Evora, and a silver altar frontal from Lamego Cathedral.

The Age of the Baroque in Portugal is being organized by the National Gallery of Art in collaboration with the Portuguese Secretariat of State for Culture.

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"The Age of the Baroque in Portugal celebrates both eighteenth-century artistic achievement and twentieth-century international cooperation. It also reflects the remarkable period of creativity and enlightened patronage that took place in Portugal. We are grateful for the generosity of the Portuguese government and private lenders in sharing their masterpieces with the American public and, especially, to the secretary of state for culture, Pedro Santana Lopes, for his enthusiastic support of this project from the start," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

Jay Levenson is the curator coordinating the exhibition. He was previously the managing curator for the National Gallery of Art exhibition Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration (1991-1992). The Age of the Baroque in Portugal is based in part on a show of this subject that was presented in Brussels in late 1991 as the centerpiece of the Portuguese Europalia festival. The National Gallery exhibition includes objects that were not sent to Belgium, as well as works that appeared in several other Portuguese Europalia shows.

Early in the eighteenth century, discoveries of large deposits of gold, diamonds, and emeralds in Brazil, then under Portuguese rule, ushered in a period of great prosperity that lasted through the century. These resources enabled the Portuguese crown and nobility to offer major commissions to artists in such centers as Paris and Rome as well as to support

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Portuguese artistic production. Portugal produced and commissioned decorative works by the finest masters in all of Europe, especially in the field of decorative arts. Further evidence of this dedication to artistic excellence was demonstrated by King José I, who rebuilt much of the center of Lisbon, together with the royal palace and its collections, after it was destroyed by a disastrous earthquake in 1755.

The Age of the Baroque in Portugal will concentrate on art from the reigns of João V (r. 1707-1750) and José I (r. 1750-1777) and his prime minister, the Marquis de Pombal, including major works of religious sculpture and decorative art such as rarely seen silk vestments from the Treasury of Lisbon Cathedral, precious goldsmiths' works, and large-scale gilded wood carvings. The show will also survey the works of art created for the noble households of the period, including table silver, elaborately carved and decorated furniture, faience, and porcelain as well as magnificent jewels in their original eighteenth-century silver and gold mounts. A special focus of this section will be large compositions in the characteristically Portuguese medium of hand-painted blue-and-white tiles known as *azulejos*.

A special section of the show will highlight royal patronage and projects. It will present works from the world's finest collection of table silver made by the French royal silversmith François-Thomas Germain, spectacular selections from the Portuguese crown jewels, and a number of unusual and beautiful

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scientific instruments that were created for the University of Coimbra under royal patronage.

The National Gallery will publish a scholarly catalogue containing color reproductions of each object in the show and fully illustrated essays by an international group of art historians and historians. The volume will be the first major work to appear in English devoted to Portuguese baroque art.

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