

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART INSTALLS

### MAJOR LANDSCAPE PAINTING BY ITALIAN MASTER BERNARDO BELLOTTO

WASHINGTON, DC -- The Fortress of Königstein (1756-1758) by eighteenth-century Italian master Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780), which was recently acquired by the National Gallery of Art, has been installed in gallery 37 of the West Building. The painting was purchased with income from the Patrons' Permanent Fund, an endowment established in 1981 by the Gallery to acquire significant works of art for its collections.

"The Fortress of Königstein is one of the most important European landscape paintings ever acquired by the National Gallery of Art," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery. "The acquisition of this outstanding painting greatly enhances the Gallery's eighteenth-century landscape presentation."

The Fortress of Königstein, an oil painting on canvas measuring nearly eight feet in width and more than four feet in height, will go on public view September 29. Newly cleaned, the painting is installed with six paintings by Bellotto's uncle, the

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Venetian view painter Antonio Canaletto. The painting by Bellotto and four of the paintings by Canaletto have been cleaned by the conservation department of the National Gallery of Art, supervised by the Gallery's chairman of painting conservation, David Bull.

Trained in the studio of Canaletto, Bellotto was invited in 1747 by Frederick Augustus II, Elector of Saxony (and as Augustus III, King of Poland), to the court of Dresden. There he produced for the royal collections thirty large panoramic views of the city and its surroundings that are among his greatest works. Twenty-five of the paintings, views of the city of Dresden and the suburb of Pirna, are today in the Dresden state art collections at the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister.

Bellotto was also commissioned to paint five large views of the elector's castle at Königstein, about twenty-two miles southeast of Dresden. He was sent there on the elector's orders in the spring of 1756, but owing to the outbreak of the Seven Years' War several months later, the canvases were not finished promptly and never delivered to the royal collections. In the late eighteenth century the five views of Königstein entered English collections where four remain: two in a private collection, recording imposing exterior views of the castle from the north and south; and two, now in the Manchester City Art Gallery, showing views from within the fortifications. The National Gallery's new painting is the most dramatic of the series, focusing on the fortress rising hundreds of feet above the valley of the Elbe, an imposing and impressive sight which

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remains unaltered to this day.

Bellotto's views of Dresden, Pirna, and Königstein mark the moment when his style achieves its full maturity, and his emancipation from the influence of his teacher, Canaletto, was complete. In views like the Fortress of Königstein Bellotto unveils a highly original style impossible to confuse with that of his uncle: the canvases are darker in tonality and painted with a thicker impasto, and the figures are larger and more individualized than Canaletto's. In their panoramic breadth, convincing depictions of deep space, and naturalism (reminiscent of Jacob Ruisdael, whose landscapes the artist must have seen), Bellotto's Dresden works stand among the greatest achievements of view painting in the eighteenth century.

The grandeur of the design of the Fortress of Königstein, the delicacy and atmospheric quality of the distant fields to the left of the castle, and the animation of the figures and animals in the foreground invest this landscape with a monumental quality rarely achieved in eighteenth-century art. "Among the late Italian paintings in the National Gallery of Art, none is comparable to the Fortress of Königstein," said Edgar Peters Bowron, senior curator of paintings at the Gallery. "This acquisition enables us to present to our visitors a superb group of works by the most important Italian eighteenth-century view painters: Bellotto, Canaletto, Guardi, and Panini."

In the third quarter of the eighteenth century artists all over Europe were beginning to respond to specific sites in nature in ways that would become more and more agitated in the course of

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the romantic movement. It is in the views of Pirna and Königstein that Bellotto, too, developed a more reverential approach to the grandeur of rural landscape. This northern countryside made a deep impression on the artist, resulting in his own interpretation of reality, imbued with poetic melancholy which, despite Bellotto's Italian background, establishes him as a precursor of the German romantic movement of the early nineteenth century which was to reach its climax in the work of Caspar David Friedrich. Bellotto's handling is so varied that certain passages anticipate the brush of Corot and others, such as--in the great hewn cliffs below the castle--Courbet.

Bowron has written a booklet about Bellotto and the Fortress of Königstein that will be available in gallery 37 as well as at the Gallery's art information desks. Admission to the National Gallery is free of charge. The Gallery, located at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, is open every day of the year except Christmas and New Year's. The public hours are: Monday - Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., and Sunday, 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. For more information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, on weekdays, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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