

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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RENOWNED GERMAN MASTERS FEATURED IN NATIONAL GALLERY
BOOK ON DISTINGUISHED COLLECTION OF GERMAN PAINTINGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The first major resource devoted to German paintings of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Art has just been published by the Gallery and Cambridge University Press. The 215-page volume of the Gallery's systematic catalogue, German Paintings of the Fifteenth through Seventeenth Centuries, features the most recent art historical and scientific research on 39 paintings that make up one of the finest collections of its kind in the United States. Included are important works by such great masters as Albrecht Dürer, Hans Holbein the Younger, and Lucas Cranach the Elder, as well as The Small Crucifixion (c. 1511/1520), the only painting in the United States by Matthias Grünewald.

"German and Austrian painting have not received the attention in the United States accorded other areas of art

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history," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We anticipate that this catalogue, which combines the results of scholarly research with technical investigations conducted in the Gallery's conservation and scientific research departments, will help to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of German art of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries."

This is the fifth volume of a projected thirty-volume systematic catalogue of the collections of the National Gallery of Art. The catalogue is written by National Gallery curator of northern Renaissance painting John Oliver Hand, with the assistance of Sally E. Mansfield, formerly at the Gallery, and now assistant curator, Denver Art Museum; and members of the staff of the Gallery's painting conservation and scientific research departments, including Catherine Metzger, painting conservator; Elizabeth Walmsley, conservator for the systematic catalogue, and Paula de Cristofaro, former conservator for the systematic catalogue and now with the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco.

In the catalogue's introduction Hand provides the reader with a brief summary of German history and painting of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, descriptions of attribution terms, and explanatory text about the equipment and methods used in the technical investigations.

Following the introduction, entries on the paintings

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are arranged alphabetically by artist, with a biography and bibliography for each; individual entries provide full and up-to-date scholarly and technical information. Questions of attribution, iconography, social and religious function, and historical context are also discussed, and where relevant, comparative examples, reconstructions of altarpieces, x-radiographs, and infrared reflectogram assemblies are supplied. This catalogue also contains the results of dendrochronological examinations of the panel paintings. (The measurement and study of the growth rings of the wooden boards used as the support of paintings can reveal information about their age.)

Over a period of five years Hand examined every German painting of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries in the collection with Gallery conservators and scientists, utilizing state-of-the-art equipment in the Gallery's conservation department. "This painstaking process enabled all of us to take the time that was necessary to investigate carefully each painting and present a thoroughly researched catalogue with new information," said Hand.

Infrared reflectograms and x-radiographs allowed Hand and the Gallery conservators to discover underdrawings of male and female heads and crosses over the heads of children in two panel paintings, The Crucifixion and Christ in Limbo (c. 1550/1575), in the Samuel H. Kress Collection. This indicated that the panels were part of an epitaph and were

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probably cut at the bottom. As a result of his art historical research, Hand recommended a change in the attribution of the panels from "Anonymous German" to "Workshop of Hans Mielich." This reattribution and others that resulted from the research were approved by the Gallery's board of trustees.

Of the 111 paintings given to the nation by Andrew W. Mellon in 1937 to form the foundation of the Gallery's permanent collection, three are German--two superb portraits by Hans Holbein and a portrait purchased as by Dürer but now attributed to Hans Schäufelein. From the Widener Collection came Johann Liss' The Satyr and the Peasant, the only painting by a German artist in that collection and the only seventeenth-century picture in this catalogue. By far the greatest number of German paintings were given to the National Gallery by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The Kress Collection is marked by both quality and diversity, containing works by fifteenth-century masters as well as outstanding pictures by Dürer and Grünewald. The Gallery's holdings have been further enriched over the years by donations from Ralph and Mary Booth, Chester Dale, Adolph Caspar Miller, Clarence Y. Palitz, and Joanne Freedman. The Gallery continues to acquire excellent German paintings such as Hans Mielich's A Member of the Fröschl Family, purchased in 1984.

German Paintings of the Fifteenth through Seventeenth Centuries is available in hardback for \$35.00 at the National Gallery of Art and at bookstores throughout the United States. To

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order, call (301) 322-5900. Other volumes in the series are:

American Naive Paintings, British Paintings, Early Netherlandish Painting, and Spanish Paintings.

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