

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

PRESS PREVIEW
January 25, 1994

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 29, 1993

CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353

HANS MEMLING'S PANEL PAINTINGS

PRESENTED TOGETHER FOR FIRST TIME IN SIXTY YEARS;

RAPHAEL'S SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON HIGHLIGHTED

Washington, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art will present Netherlandish artist Hans Memling's luminous panel paintings Saint John the Baptist and Saint Veronica (c. 1470/1475) for the first time since they were last seen together in Munich in 1930-1931. Hans Memling's "Saint John the Baptist" and "Saint Veronica," which takes place on the quincentennial of the artist's death, will be on view in gallery 39 on the main floor of the National Gallery's West Building, January 30 through May 15, 1994.

The focus exhibition will explore the issues of whether the two paintings originally made up the two panels of a small, winged altarpiece; the nature of devotional imagery in the late fifteenth century; and the interchange of Netherlandish and

-more-

memling . . . page 2

Italian art and patronage. One of Raphael's finest early paintings, Saint George and the Dragon (c. 1506), will be included to illustrate Memling's influence on Italian painting, particularly landscapes.

"Hans Memling's 'Saint John the Baptist' and 'Saint Veronica' beautifully demonstrates how focus exhibitions allow curators and conservators to bring together related works of art from different institutions to explore complex issues in depth and then present the results of their scholarship to the public," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art.

John Hand, curator of northern Renaissance painting, National Gallery of Art, coordinated the exhibition. He also wrote the exhibition booklet, which has been made possible by The Circle of the National Gallery of Art. The booklet will be available free of charge in the exhibiton space and at the Gallery's information desks.

The panel painting Saint John the Baptist is from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, and Saint Veronica is from the Samuel H. Kress Collection in the National Gallery. It is believed that Saint Veronica and Saint John the Baptist originally formed a small altarpiece. Futhermore, it is generally agreed that the two panels were paired in the collection of the Bembo family in Venice and Padua in the early sixteenth century and that landscapes in both panels may have influenced the landscape in Raphael's Saint George and the Dragon (c. 1506), also from the

memling . . . page 3

National Gallery's collection.

The two panels, which are painted on both sides, probably formed a diptych--a small altarpiece composed of two wings that were hinged and could be opened and closed like a book. When open, the inner left wing displays an image of Saint John the Baptist wearing a bright red cloak over his camel hair robe. He is seated on a grassy hillock in the midst of a sunny and verdant landscape and he points toward a lamb at the right.

On the inner right wing is Saint Veronica, a legendary personage whose name and cult are connected with the *vera icon*, or *sudarium*, a cloth imprinted with Christ's features and venerated as a relic in Saint Peter's in Rome from at least the middle of the twelfth century. In the painting Saint Veronica is depicted holding the kerchief, presumably the one she used to wipe the face of Christ as he carried the cross to Calvary, thereby creating the miraculous image.

On the reverse of the left wing is depicted a skull in a square niche painted to simulate stone. At the base of the niche the word *morieris*, Latin for "you will die," is carved into the stone. On the reverse of the right wing is a representation of the Chalice of Saint John the Evangelist. The bejewelled, metal chalice contains a red-eyed snake and is set into an image of a niche with an arched top.

Hans Memling is first mentioned in the Bruges city records in 1465 when he became a citizen; the records also state

1993
memling . . . page 4

that he was born in Seligenstadt, Germany, a town between Mainz and Aschaffenburg in present-day Hessen. It is not known whether Memling studied with Rogier van der Weyden, the leading painter in Brussels, but there is no question that Memling was influenced by his work. Memling prospered as a painter of altarpieces and portraits. For the two decades preceding his death in 1494, Memling was the leading painter in Bruges and was also popular abroad, particularly with the English and the Italians. His art influenced his contemporaries and the next generation, exemplified by Gerard David (c. 1460-1523), Memling's successor in Bruges.

Admission to the Gallery is free of charge. Located at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., the Gallery is open every day of the year except December 25 and January 1. The public hours are Monday through 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. People with disabilities can call (202) 842-6690 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176.

#