

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES NEWLY DISCOVERED EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH PORTRAIT MASTERPIECE

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The director of the National Gallery of Art, Earl A. Powell III, announced today that the Gallery has acquired a newly discovered masterpiece of eighteenth-century portraiture The Marquis de Beringhen (1722) by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), the most important French painter of still life and hunting scenes in the first half of the eighteenth century. A favorite painter of Louis XV, Oudry created many hunting scenes and still lifes for the monarch, who was devoted to the hunt. Among less than twenty portraits by Oudry known to exist, The Marquis de Beringhen is one of his finest. It now hangs in gallery 54 of the West Building.

The purchase of this painting was made possible by Eugene L. and Marie-Louise Garbáty, the Chester Dale Fund, and the Patrons' Permanent Fund.

"We are thrilled to have acquired this magnificent, radiant portrait in the French grand manner," said Powell. "It combines the acute observation typical of the Enlightenment with the sophisticated elegance characteristic of this great artist. The Marquis de Beringhen is an outstanding addition to our exceptional group of French portraits from the seventeenth

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through nineteenth centuries by such celebrated artists as François Boucher, Jacques-Louis David, and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun."

Until its discovery in France last year, the commanding painting--measuring nearly five feet high by three-and-three-quarters feet wide--was virtually unknown. Its existence was marked only through later copies by different artists. The original had remained in a private collection.

The graceful portrait with a lively sense of personality and charm depicts Henri-Camille, Marquis de Beringhen (1693-1770), who inherited the title of Master of the King's Private Stables in 1724. In this position he organized the king's hunts and came into frequent contact with Oudry, who often joined the hunt as an observer. An important patron of contemporary artists, Beringhen commissioned Oudry to produce a series of paintings that played a key role in the history of landscape painting in France before the generation of Boucher, Fragonard, and Hubert Robert.

In The Marquis de Beringhen, the subject is shown sitting on a knoll at the base of a tree. Dressed in the height of fashion, he wears a pale gray hunting coat lined with teal velvet and trimmed with silver buttons and braid, breeches, and thigh-high boots. His powdered hair is tied at the back with a black silk ribbon. He is accompanied by symbols of the hunt, both living and lifeless. With his right hand the marquis strokes a pointer, while his left hand holds aloft a red-legged partridge. A still life of a powder horn and game bag occupies the lower left corner

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of the painting. In the distance, two women converse on the terrace of a country house, possibly the Château d'Ivry, which Beringhen was soon to inherit.

"Oudry's art is characterized by a sharp observation of nature, a bold sense of ornament and design, and brilliantly assured technique," noted Philip Conisbee, National Gallery curator of French paintings. "With its ravishing passages of execution in the lace and sleeve of the costume, on the partridge, the still life, and the hound's head and ear, The Marquis de Beringhen is one of Oudry's finest works in any genre."

Oudry trained with the famed portraitist Nicolas de Largillière, was received into the Academy in 1719, and soon embarked on an illustrious international career. He was much in demand throughout Europe, working also for the royal courts of Stockholm and Copenhagen. Among his many commissions from Louis XV was a monumental series of tapestry cartoons of The Royal Hunts (1733) for the Gobelins factory. The cartoons hang at Fontainebleau, along with portraits of the king's favorite hounds.

One of Oudry's hound portraits, Misse and Lutline (1729), a promised gift to the National Gallery from Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Victor Thaw, was displayed in the exhibition Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art (1991). The Gallery also owns several important drawings of animals and birds by Oudry.

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