

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR MICRO GALLERY - NEW PUBLIC COMPUTER INFORMATION SERVICE

Washington, D.C. -- Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art, today announced a major grant from the American Express Foundation for a Micro Gallery--an interactive computer information system and seventeen workstations--that will enable visitors to probe new ways of exploring the National Gallery's permanent collections. A specially designed information room at the Mall entrance to the National Gallery, the Micro Gallery is expected to open in spring 1995.

The Micro Gallery will be the first multimedia system based on an entire art museum collection in the United States. It will incorporate digital color images, text, graphics, and animation, along with sound for a pronunciation guide to foreign terms. A Micro Gallery funded by the American Express Foundation at the National Gallery, London, was installed in 1991. Receiving international press coverage, it was praised in The Boston Sunday Globe as "possibly the single most effective tool ever to help gallery-goers understand what they are looking at."

Designed for people without prior computer experience, the system will work as an electronic encyclopedia, allowing visitors to research individual interests. By simply touching the screen, they will be able to choose orientation information

-more-

micro gallery . . . page two

about the National Gallery or to select additional background on any of the 2,500 works on view in the Gallery's permanent collection.

"We are indeed grateful to the American Express Foundation for making possible this state-of-the-art educational resource," said Powell. "An easy-to-use, advanced technology guide and tutor, the Micro Gallery will provide the tools to help visitors further enjoy and appreciate our collections and increase their understanding of art."

Susan Bloom, American Express Company vice president for worldwide cultural affairs, commented, "American Express is pleased to be working with the National Gallery of Art to implement the first Micro Gallery in the United States. Building upon the success of the Micro Gallery in London, we anticipate that the National Gallery's installation will become a benchmark for future interactive computer initiatives."

Visitors using the system will be able to find objects by artist, subject, date, or place of origin. They will be able to develop customized tours of the Gallery based on personal interests and print out an accompanying map. In some cases, visitors will be able to study a work of art in detail: its subject, composition, historical context, special effects, and conservation history. A schedule of daily events and special exhibitions also will be available on the system. Various images or text appearing on the screen can be printed out. As at the National Gallery in London, the Micro Gallery system in Washington will be developed with Cognitive Applications, Limited, of Brighton, England.

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micro gallery . . . page three

The Micro Gallery is funded by the American Express Foundation on behalf of American Express Travel Related Services Company, IDS Financial Services, American Express Bank Ltd., and Lehman Brothers. American Express has been a longtime supporter of the National Gallery through its sponsorship of the El Greco of Toledo exhibition in 1982 and reinstallation of the twentieth-century collection, Twentieth-Century Art: Selections for the Tenth Anniversary of the East Building, which was on view from 1988-1990.

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