



MICRO GALLERY

National Gallery of Art
Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY TO OPEN MICRO GALLERY ON OCTOBER 29

THOUSANDS OF IMAGES AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE

AT THE TOUCH OF A SCREEN

*The Micro Gallery
is made possible by
American Express
Foundation*

WASHINGTON, D.C., August 22, 1995 -- The National Gallery of Art's Micro Gallery, the most comprehensive interactive, multimedia computer system in an American art museum, will open to the public on Sunday, October 29, 1995, as announced today by director Earl A. Powell III. In development for three years, the Micro Gallery will enable visitors with little or no computer experience to discover new ways to view the National Gallery's permanent collection and expand their appreciation of art at the touch of a computer screen.

The Micro Gallery is made possible by a major grant from the American Express Foundation.

National Gallery officials were impressed with the overwhelming success of the first Micro Gallery, which opened in 1991 at the National Gallery in London. The Micro Gallery at the National Gallery of Art in Washington is modeled in part after the London version,

-more-

micro gallery . . . page 2

which was also supported with funds from the American Express Foundation.

"We are especially grateful to the American Express Foundation for enabling the National Gallery to develop the Micro Gallery," said Powell. "Through digital color images, text, animation, special graphics, and sound, we hope to reveal the expressive elements and artistic techniques that have made art central to the human experience. The Micro Gallery will allow us to reach a broader audience and enhance the visitor's experience by encouraging careful viewing of the collection." The Micro Gallery is one of several large-scale imaging projects in which the Gallery has been engaged since 1991.

"The Micro Gallery brings together the latest in technology, education, and our nation's artistic heritage in a way that will become a benchmark for the future," said Harvey Golub, chairman and chief executive officer, American Express Company, and member, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. "American Express Foundation is proud to be supporting this innovative venture and invites citizens from the United States and abroad to use and enjoy this interactive computer system as an enhancement to their visit to the National Gallery."

Visitors need only see and touch the screen to use one of the 13 computers installed in the redesigned Art Information Room situated near the West Building Mall entrance and rotunda. Traditional art information services will continue to be provided by Gallery staff and trained volunteers.

The Micro Gallery makes it possible for visitors to see in

micro gallery . . . page 3

magnified detail nearly every work of art on display in the National Gallery's permanent collection--approximately 1700 objects, including paintings and sculpture. In addition, the user can touch the screen "buttons" to gain access to an illustrated explanation of the subject, the artist's biography, and pertinent sections of the historical and cultural timeline and atlas. Information about the original purpose of the object, its patron, techniques, style, and conservation history is provided for many works. Highlighted text leads the user to related subjects.

Thousands of pathways have been constructed throughout the system to allow users to follow their own interests. Areas for exploration include subjects, artists, geographic locations, time periods, terminology, a pronunciation guide with sound, and more. For example, visitors who want to find objects that depict horses can use the subject pathway to see all such images and print a personal tour to guide them to those works in the galleries. An orientation to the National Gallery and practical information about Gallery restaurants, shops, and other facilities also are provided.

A selection of works of art in a section called *Features* contains extensive interactive presentations using text, special graphics, and animation to reveal aspects of current research, conservation treatment, and visual analysis.

"We want visitors to feel comfortable in front of the works of art they have come to see," said Vicki Porter, curator, Micro Gallery. "*Features* will educate them about visual elements such

micro gallery . . . page 4

as composition and color to increase their own enjoyment of the art in the galleries. It is our goal to draw the user into the works of art and make the technology disappear."

National Gallery of Art curators, conservators, educators, editors, and archivists have applied their specialized expertise in the planning and production of the Micro Gallery. The Circle of the National Gallery of Art helped support the development of a prototype for the Micro Gallery.

Cognitive Applications Ltd. of Brighton, England, provided the technology and graphic design for the Micro Gallery. Their software is also used as the basis for the Micro Gallery at the National Gallery in London. The Washington version will have a similar look and feel to London's Micro Gallery, but will take advantage of recent developments in technology allowing for more varied pathways, interactive zooms, and images with a higher resolution.

Micro Gallery visitors will experience a quiet and elegant environment as a result of a major architectural renovation of the West Building Art Information Room. The space has been returned to its earlier splendor, and now again appears as it did when the National Gallery first opened to the public in 1941. Layers of paint have been removed to reveal the original oak paneling. Two bronze and glass chandeliers were brought out of storage, restored, and rehung. The new art information desk and the computer stations are made of oak and walnut and are designed to match the architecture of the room.

All of the thirteen computer stations are wheelchair

micro gallery . . . page 5

accessible. Nine stations will accommodate two people seated, two will accommodate up to three people seated, and one is designed for stand-up use. Each computer is connected to a central printer at the art information desk that will provide personal tour maps for visitors.

The redesign and renovation of the Art Information Room was directed by the Gallery's design department, which managed a team of architects, production coordinators, and expert craftspeople.

The Micro Gallery will be open, free of charge, during the same hours as the National Gallery: Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

American Express has been a longtime supporter of the National Gallery through its sponsorship of the exhibition El Greco of Toledo in 1982 and the 1988 reinstallation of the twentieth-century collection, Twentieth-Century Art: Selections for the Tenth Anniversary of the East Building.

#

CONTACTS:

At the National Gallery of Art--(202) 842-6353
Ruth Kaplan, Information Officer
Deborah Ziska, Deputy Information Officer
and Micro Gallery publicist

At American Express--(212) 640-4953
Susan Miller, Vice President, Public Affairs
American Express Company