

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Ruth Kaplan
Ann Greer
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY EXHIBITION TO PRESENT SELECTIONS FROM EXCEPTIONAL WOODNER COLLECTIONS OF MASTER DRAWINGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Touch of the Artist: Master Drawings from the Woodner Collections, on view at the National Gallery of Art's East Building from October 1, 1995, through January 28, 1996, honors the achievement of the late Ian Woodner, who assembled one of the preeminent collections of old master and modern drawings in the United States. Selected from the core of the collection preserved at the National Gallery, 114 drawings will be displayed.

"Mr. Woodner had a particular sensitivity to the immediacy and beauty of drawings that informed his acquisition of these exceptional works," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery. "His astute eye and his appreciation for a wide range of types and styles of drawings led him to form a collection of extraordinary breadth and richness."

Woodner was a prominent real estate developer in New York City and Washington, D.C., as well as a noted architect and a

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fine amateur artist. He began to purchase drawings in the mid-1950s, collected extensively during the 1970s and 1980s when unusual opportunities arose from the sales of important European collections, and continued to acquire drawings until his death in 1990. The Woodner collections were exhibited at major museums throughout the world during the 1980s, among them the National Gallery of Art, the Albertina in Vienna, the Haus der Kunst in Munich, the Museo del Prado in Madrid, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London; and in 1990, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Woodner, while a member of the National Gallery's Trustees' Council, had discussed the future of his collections with the Gallery for several years, during which time he gave a number of drawings. On his death the stewardship of the collections, including more than one thousand drawings, passed to his daughters Dian Woodner and Andrea Woodner. In 1991 they decided to preserve a representative selection of the drawings collection at the National Gallery. Working with Andrew Robison, the Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, they selected 145 works that convey the distinctive character of the collections. Of these, 32 have since been given to the Gallery by Dian and Andrea Woodner and The Ian Woodner Family Collection, Inc.; the Woodner family has placed the rest on deposit at the National Gallery with the intention that they will be added to the gift.

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Two drawings in the exhibition that the collector termed his "crown jewels" were purchased by the Gallery through the Patrons' Permanent Fund. In 1959 Woodner purchased the rare and powerful sixteenth-century Italian study of a Satyr by Benvenuto Cellini. Undoubtedly the finest of the seven known drawings by the artist, it is a finished study for one of the giant bronze sculptures, never actually cast, that were intended to flank the principal entrance to the French royal palace at Fontainebleau. In 1984 Woodner acquired a page from the celebrated Libro de' Disegni, assembled toward the middle of the sixteenth century by the first great collector of master drawings, Giorgio Vasari. With nine Florentine Renaissance drawings by Filippino Lippi and a tenth attributed to the workshop of Sandro Botticelli, it is generally regarded as the finest and most beautiful of the few surviving pages from Vasari's book.

The works presented in The Touch of the Artist: Master Drawings from the Woodner Collections span six centuries and were made by artists working throughout western Europe. Since Woodner most admired the drawings of the Renaissance, works from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries make up more than half of the exhibition, including works by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Albrecht Dürer. Dutch and Flemish artists predominate in the seventeenth-century drawings, with several excellent landscapes, including an evocative View of Houtewael by Rembrandt. The

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eighteenth-century drawings constitute the exhibition's second largest grouping, which features the majestic Avenue of Cypresses at Villa d'Este by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and a handsome group of Venetian sheets by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo. The nineteenth-century drawings include three haunting studies by Francisco de Goya and an exceptionally beautiful drawing of Two Elegant Women by the young Pablo Picasso, along with the eerie, remarkable image of Cactus Man by Odilon Redon, one of Woodner's favorite artists.

Woodner was born in New York City in 1903 and grew up in Minneapolis. He decided at an early age to be an architect and attended the University of Minnesota and Harvard University's Graduate School of Architecture on a scholarship. After several notable successes as an architect -- winning with two colleagues, for example, a competition to design one of the largest buildings at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Pharmacy Hall -- he turned to real estate development, establishing the Jonathan Woodner Company in 1944. Two of the company's most successful projects are located in Washington: the large apartment building on 16th Street known as "The Woodner," which received the Washington Board of Trade's Award in Architecture in 1953; and the recent renovation of the Evening Star building on Pennsylvania Avenue, which was honored with the 1990 Modernization Award from Buildings magazine.

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The curator for the exhibition is Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curator of old master drawings at the National Gallery of Art. A fully illustrated catalogue, written by Grasselli and an international team of fifty-three scholars, will be published in softcover by the National Gallery of Art; a hardcover edition will be distributed by Harry N. Abrams.

The National Gallery of Art, located between Third and Seventh Streets on Constitution Avenue, NW, is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. For general information call (202) 737-4215, or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (202) 842-6176. For information on visitor services call (202) 842-6690.

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