

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART COLLECTORS COMMITTEE

SELECTS CY TWOMBLY'S UNTITLED (BOLSENA) FOR ITS

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ADDITION TO THE MODERN COLLECTION

Washington, D.C. -- At its annual meeting the Collectors Committee of the National Gallery of Art voted to purchase Untitled (Bolsena) (1969) by American artist Cy Twombly (born 1928) to be included in the Gallery's twentieth-century collection.

Gallery director Earl A. Powell III said of the selection, "Untitled (Bolsena) is a major addition to the group of superb works that the Collectors Committee has acquired on behalf of the National Gallery during the last twenty years. Thanks in large part to the support of the committee, the Gallery's twentieth-century collection has developed into a noteworthy and broad presentation of the art of our time."

Untitled (Bolsena) is one of fourteen large paintings that Twombly created during August and September 1969, working in a desolate stone palace overlooking the lake of Bolsena, north of Rome. Comprised of oil-based house paint, wax crayon, and lead

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pencil on a warm, ocher-white ground, the works mark a distinct departure from the sequence of dark-ground "blackboard" paintings that Twombly had been producing since 1966. Both abstract and cryptically imagistic, the canvas is characterized by a vigorous yet fragile hybrid of painting and script, applied to tumbling diagrammatic marks and signs. According to the artist, some of these marks allude to the coordinates of an Apollo space flight taking place that summer.

The National Gallery owns four prints and three drawings by Twombly. Untitled (Bolsena) is the first painting by the artist to enter the collection.

According to Mark Rosenthal, the Gallery's curator of twentieth-century art, "This work is a spectacular addition to the collection, showing the evolution of abstract-expressionist practices to the next generation."

Cy Twombly is a reclusive, quasi-mythic figure in post-war American art. Born in Lexington, Virginia, the artist spent his early career in New York before moving to Italy in 1957, where he has lived ever since. Long celebrated by artists, writers, and collectors, Twombly remains less popularly known than other members of his generation, such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

Since 1975 the Collectors Committee has made possible the acquisition of fifteen paintings, seventeen sculptures, and two tapestries for the collection, along with four drawings, thirty-

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three prints, and twenty-two photographs. To celebrate the committee's twentieth anniversary, most of the paintings and sculpture have been installed throughout the East Building and on the grounds to the north and south of the building.

The Collectors Committee was formed in 1975 under the leadership of Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery's board of trustees since 1993. Its mission was to help select commissions for the great public spaces of the East Building, then under construction, and to finance them through committee members' annual contributions. When the committee completed that goal three years later, it began a new role of purchasing for the National Gallery paintings and sculpture by major twentieth-century artists. In 1989 the committee also established a curatorial discretionary fund for acquiring prints, drawings, and photographs.

The Collectors Committee is the principal means by which late modern and contemporary art is purchased for the National Gallery. Each year the Gallery's curators present a group of works to the committee, from which it may vote to choose as many works as their funds and interests allow. Approximately half of the committee's acquisitions have been works by living artists.

Among the works acquired by the Collectors Committee over the past twenty years are: Alexander Calder's giant mobile Untitled (1976), created for the East Building's atrium; Jackson Pollock's Number 7, 1951, executed in the year that the artist

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restricted his color vocabulary and returned to figuration; René Magritte's The Human Condition (1933), the surrealist's examination of illusionism in painting; Martin Puryear's Lever No. 3 (1989), revealing the artist's extraordinary mastery of wood carving and joining; Louise Bourgeois' totemic sculptures Spring (1949), Mortise (1950), and Untitled (1952), which draw upon European surrealism while anticipating many aspects of minimal and postminimal sculpture from the 1960s to the present; and Anselm Kiefer's Zim Zum (1990), the artist's monumental lead painting about the instant of creation.

This year's meeting was the final one chaired by Ruth Carter Stevenson and Edwin L. Cox. Succeeding them will be Barney A. Ebsworth and Doris Fisher, both major collectors of twentieth-century art. Ebsworth, from St. Louis, is the owner of INTRAV, a travel company, and Clipper Cruise Lines. Fisher, who lives in San Francisco, is co-founder with her husband Donald of The Gap.

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