

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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**NATIONAL GALLERY BEGINS OVERHAUL OF WEST BUILDING SKYLIGHTS
AND UPGRADE OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT AND FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS;
ITALIAN PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE MOVED DURING FIRST PHASE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art has begun a major overhaul of its West Building skylight system, and will upgrade its energy management and fire protection systems in the East and West Buildings. The projects will enable the Gallery to enhance its presentation and protection of one of the world's greatest collections of European and American art, including many masterpieces, the earliest dating from the thirteenth century.

The skylight renovation project will take place in five phases over three-and-a-half years (1996-1999). It will require the closing of the Seventh Street entrance of the West Building between Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive, N.W., beginning May 31, 1996, for about two years, as well as the reinstallation of portions of the collection on a rotating basis throughout most of the three-and-a-half-year period.

"We are pleased to begin these major renovation projects and greatly appreciate the understanding of visitors during this period," said Gallery director Earl A. Powell III. "We will do everything possible to minimize the inconvenience."

The \$19.3 million skylight renovation project will involve the replacement of a 55-year-old, three-acre skylight system,

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gallery skylights . . . page 2

skylight glazing and framing, and the surrounding areas of roofing, as well as repairs to flashing and masonry, including the complete repointing and sealing of the marble dome and portico roofs. State-of-the-art, multi-layer glass will filter out harmful ultraviolet light rays and ensure proper natural lighting in the main floor galleries, eliminate condensation, and conserve energy.

The enhanced fire protection system in the East and West Buildings will cost approximately \$5.3 million and is slated for completion in 2001. It includes the installation of an updated computerized fire detection, suppression, and smoke purge system.

The energy management system for both buildings will cost approximately \$3.5 million (including a \$2 million grant from the Department of Energy), and is expected to be fully operational in 1998. The improved system will provide continuous remote monitoring, recording, and adjustments of environmental conditions in every gallery.

The first phase of the skylight renovation will affect main floor galleries 1 through 28. Many of the thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Italian works from these galleries are now on view in the ground floor central galleries. The paintings and sculpture are arranged chronologically and by size and medium, beginning near the Seventh Street entrance, reached via the main floor stairway in the west end or by walking through the galleries from the Garden Café at the Sixth Street entrance. Among the works on view are such masterpieces as Leonardo da Vinci's Genevra de'Benci (c. 1474), the only painting by the artist in the western hemisphere; Raphael's Alba Madonna

gallery skylights . . . page 3

(c. 1510), and Giovanni Bellini's and Titian's The Feast of the Gods (1514/29). All of the art is expected to be returned to its former galleries by May 1997.

Visitors may check with art information desks before their visit by calling (202) 737-4215, or during their visit, to find out what installations are affected during the various phases of the renovation projects.

Work was recently completed on the East Building skylights. Repairs around the cascade area of the concourse between the East and West Buildings are slated to begin in October 1996.

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