

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES IMPORTANT EARLY HOMER PAINTING

TO BE ON VIEW IN

"WINSLOW HOMER AND THE CIVIL WAR: RECENT ACQUISITIONS"

JULY 19 - SEPTEMBER 28, 1997

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The acquisition of Home, Sweet Home (c. 1863), a major early work by one of America's greatest artists, Winslow Homer (1836-1910), was announced today by Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art. The acquisition is made possible by the Gallery's Patrons' Permanent Fund, an endowed fund for the acquisition of art. The painting and approximately 20 works on paper, many of which are recent donations from Edmund L. Zalinski, will be included in a special installation, Winslow Homer and the Civil War: Recent Acquisitions, in the Gallery's West Building, July 19 - September 28, 1997.

"With the addition of this outstanding early painting, the Gallery can now represent the full range of this American master's work, from Home, Sweet Home,

-more-

homer . . . page 2

his first exhibited painting, to his last great painting, Right and Left (1909), and many works on paper," said Powell. "We are pleased to be able to present from our collection these insightful portrayals from the Civil War front by Homer." With its most recent acquisition, the Gallery now owns 8 oil paintings, 32 watercolors, 29 drawings, and 347 prints (most of which are wood engravings after the artist's drawings), along with a book with illustrations after Homer.

One of the few painted depictions of the Civil War in its time, Home, Sweet Home is a poignant portrait of two Union infantrymen listening to the regiment band in the distance play the familiar tune. The painting was praised by critics when it was shown with another of Homer's works in his professional debut at the annual exhibition at the National Academy of Design in 1863. More recently, the painting was among 225 works presented in the National Gallery's comprehensive exhibition of the artist's works in 1995-1996. Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., National Gallery curator of American and British paintings, wrote in the exhibition catalogue, "Homer's paintings stood out in the [1863] Academy exhibition because of their comparatively greater quality -- their technical strength and assurance; color, modeling, and drawing; truthfulness; and lack of sentimentality."

After working as a commercial lithographer and freelance illustrator, Homer studied at the National Academy of Design. The outbreak of the Civil War altered the course of Homer's career when, instead of going to Europe, he became fully committed to his job as a Civil War artist for Harper's Weekly. Homer's illustrations,

-more-

homer . . . page 3

along with those of other artists, were the first widely seen images of the conflict.

Eighteen sheets of drawings -- some double-sided -- in Winslow Homer and the Civil War: Recent Acquisitions were a gift to the Gallery from Edmund L. Zalinski in 1996. Zalinski's grandfather, Major Edmund L. G. Zalinski, met Homer during the early days of the Civil War and was the recipient of these sketches in 1904, along with a handwritten letter of conveyance, which was also given to the Gallery. One of the drawings is Two of Sheridan's Scouts; this historic sketch of two Union scouts disguised as Confederate soldiers was drawn by Homer near Hatcher's Run north of Petersburg, Virginia, on March 28, 1865, two weeks before the war came to a close. The sketch is the basis for a beautiful watercolor (a 1992 gift of Nancy Voorhees), also on view. It was one of at least 16 similar works published from 1886 to 1887 by The Century Magazine to portray a series of articles about the war.

Three sketches (from the Zalinski gift) in the installation relate to Prisoners from the Front (1866), an important Homer painting that hangs in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Other works on view illustrate different facets of Civil War army life. Some drawings were published in Harper's Weekly, such as Sutler's Tent: Third Pennsylvania Cavalry (a Zalinski gift), which became the wood engraving Thanksgiving in Camp (an acquisition made possible by the Gallery's Avalon Fund in 1986).

Drawings were also used by Homer as preparatory studies for paintings; his drawing of two boys in bunk beds, for instance, was a study for Army Boots, a painting in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington.

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homer . . . page 4

The works in the installation were selected by the cocurators of the Gallery's 1995-1996 Winslow Homer exhibition, Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, Gallery curator of American and British paintings.

Located on Constitution Avenue between Third and Seventh Streets, N.W., the Gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (202) 842-6176, or access the Gallery's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>.

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