

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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VAN GOGH "SELF-PORTRAIT" IS AMONG MASTERPIECES

BEQUEATHED TO NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

BY BETSEY CUSHING WHITNEY

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, announced today that Betsey Cushing Whitney, a philanthropist in medicine and art, bequeathed to the Gallery eight important works by major artists, including Self-Portrait (1889) by Vincent van Gogh, Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in "Chilpéric" (1895-1896) by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Open Window, Collioure (1905) by Henri Matisse, The Harbor of La Ciotat (1907) by Georges Braque, The Beach at Sainte-Adresse (1906) by Raoul Dufy, Tugboat on the Seine, Chatou (1906) by Maurice de Vlaminck, The Beach at Trouville (1906) by Albert Marquet, and Saida by Kees van Dongen. Mrs. Whitney, widow of ambassador John Hay "Jock" Whitney, passed away March 25.

"Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney were connoisseurs of the highest order and assembled a truly remarkable collection," said Powell. "They have been extremely generous to the National Gallery and the nation. This latest group of works from Mrs. Whitney, including one of Van Gogh's most powerful self-portraits

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whitney bequest . . . page 2

and a signal fauve work by Henri Matisse, will add great stature to our collection of works by postimpressionists and fauves."

The eight paintings were among seventy-three works from the John Hay Whitney Collection, which was on view at the National Gallery in 1983. Noted art historian John Rewald, who was an advisor to the Whitneys, was guest curator of that exhibition. Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in "Chilpéric" was the subject of a focus show at the Gallery in 1994 and was also seen in the 1991 exhibition, Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art.

Self-Portrait was the first canvas painted by Van Gogh after recovering from his initial attack at the asylum of Saint Rémy. He wrote to his brother Théo, "They say--and I am very willing to believe it--that it is difficult to know yourself--but it isn't easy to paint yourself either. So I am working on two portraits of myself at this moment--for want of another model--because it is more than time I did a little figure work. One I began the day I got up; I was thin and pale as a ghost. It is dark violet-blue and the head whitish with yellow hair, so it has a color effect." (The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh, 2nd ed., 1978, 3, 201-207.) This will be the eighth painting by Van Gogh to enter the Gallery's collection and the first following the 1991 gift of White Roses (1890) by Pamela Harriman in memory of W. Averell Harriman.

Lautrec's Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in

whitney bequest . . . page 3

"Chilpéric" (1895-1896) was a partial and promised gift made to the Gallery by Mrs. Whitney in honor of her husband and the Gallery's 50th anniversary. It is among the twelve paintings by the artist in the Gallery's collection. Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in "Chilpéric," one of Lautrec's largest paintings, is the most monumental and important of his theatrical subjects. In it he conveys the artificial glamour of the stage and the sultry energy of the performers, especially the singer-dancer Marcelle Lender (Anne-Marie Marcelle Bastien, 1862-1926). This painting is the fullest expression of Lautrec's interest in the theater, which, along with the informal theatrics of the Montmartre dance halls, was paramount in his life and art during the 1890s.

Open Window, Collioure was painted while Matisse and Derain worked together at the small Mediterranean seaport of Collioure. Fishing boats framed by an open window, draped with ivy, and flowerpots on a balcony are painted with intense colors and spontaneous strokes. Between his thick, painterly marks, Matisse left bare patches of canvas, freeing the brushstrokes from the traditional role of describing form in detail, so as to suggest an intense, vibrating light. The painting caused a critical furor when it was exhibited at the historic Salon d'Automne of 1905, where the "fauves"--French for "wild beasts"--first got their name.

The Harbor of La Ciotat, Braque's view of the fishing port of La Ciotat, a few miles from Marseilles, is exceptional

whitney bequest . . . page 4

for its size and importance. Painted during the artist's short-lived fauve period, it represents a major development in his evolution as an artist. His fauve works were more restrained in palette than others in the fauve group with a greater emphasis on pictorial structure, but they reached the same expressive heights as works by Matisse and Derain.

Impressed by the fauve works of Matisse and Braque, Dufy abandoned his more impressionist approach to nature and adopted fauvism. After seeing Matisse's fauve paintings he said, "Impressionist realism lost all its charm." He painted The Beach at Sainte-Adresse at a resort near Le Havre, probably in the company of Marquet. Crowds on beaches such as the one in this painting became one of Dufy's trademarks, along with sailing boats and flags.

Tugboat on the Seine, Chatou is typical of Vlaminck's robust style and simplicity. He painted with Derain in Chatou, which became to fauvism what Argenteuil was to impressionism. The first large exhibition of works by Van Gogh held in Paris in 1901, ten years after the artist's death, had a profound effect on Vlaminck.

Marquet's Beach at Trouville is one of his most important works painted during a summer spent with Dufy. It is an extraordinary juxtaposition of intense colors and bold patterns found along the boardwalks and beaches of this coastal city of Le Havre.

whitney bequest . . . page 5

According to a letter from Van Dongen, Saida was painted in Cairo around 1920. The bold and exotic portrayal of a woman typifies the artist's fauve style with its exaggerated colors, strong contrasts, and dashing execution. Van Dongen was the only fauve painter who remained a fauve for a considerable time. This is the first work by this artist to enter the Gallery's collection.

Before Mrs. Whitney's bequest, the National Gallery of Art owned nineteen paintings by Matisse, eight by Braque, eight paintings by Dufy, six by Vlaminck, and one by Marquet.

The National Gallery of Art received eight paintings by George Bellows, Henri Edmond Cross, André Derain, Thomas Eakins, Edward Hopper, Henri Rousseau, and James McNeill Whistler, from John Hay Whitney Collection after his death in 1982. Mr. Whitney--sportsman, financier, publisher, philanthropist, art collector, and Ambassador to Britain--served as a member of the board of trustees and vice president of the National Gallery of Art from 1961 to 1979. He was also a member of each of three standing committees of the board from the outset of his service and, from its inception in January 1970, served on the Building Committee, which was responsible for the planning, design, and construction of the East Building. Mr. Whitney made a gift in 1982 of two million dollars to the Gallery's Patrons' Permanent Fund for future acquisitions. He also served as trustee and chairman of the board of The Museum of Modern Art and as a trustee of Yale University.