

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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GIFTS FROM PAUL MELLON BRING DEPTH

TO NATIONAL GALLERY'S FRENCH, AMERICAN, AND BRITISH COLLECTIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Seventy-three additional works of art were bequeathed to the National Gallery of Art by Paul Mellon, as announced today by Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. Mellon, one of the Gallery's founding benefactors and most generous donors, died at the age of 91 on February 1, 1999. Among the gifts are Edgar Degas' dramatic masterpiece Scene from the Steeplechase: The Fallen Jockey; nine drawings of horses and riders by Degas, some of them related to The Fallen Jockey; and thirty-seven works of sculpture by Degas in various media, including twenty-nine in wax. The bequest also includes eighteenth-century British painter George Stubbs' sensitive animal portrait White Poodle in a Punt.

The Fallen Jockey will go on view in gallery 89 of the West Building on in mid-July. Selected works from those given to the Gallery by Mellon throughout the years will be on view in a memorial exhibition later this year, dates to be announced.

"Once again, Paul Mellon has demonstrated his munificence to the National Gallery of Art and the country with the gift of these works of art, many of which he lived with and enjoyed immensely," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "They enrich our collection and, with his and others' earlier gifts, make the Gallery one of the world's premiere centers of French impressionist and post-impressionist art."

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Mellon's other bequest to the Gallery of 110 works of art was made public last February. During Mellon's lifetime he gave more than 913 works to the Gallery. He has made generous donations for a number of Gallery projects, including the Gallery's main fund for acquisitions, the Patrons' Permanent Fund. He and his sister, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation provided the funds for the construction of the East Building, which opened to the public in 1978. Mellon's father, Andrew Mellon, founded the Gallery in 1937 and donated to the nation his famous art collection, as well as the funds for the construction of the West Building and an endowment.

The additional gifts are as follows:

- Edgar Degas' large and dramatic oil painting Scene from the Steeplechase: The Fallen Jockey (1866; reworked, 1880-1881 and c.1897), which was a pivotal work in the Gallery's 1998 exhibition, Degas at the Races. The impressionist artist exhibited the painting in the 1866 Paris Salon, an event he considered important to his career. He repainted the work at least twice. The masterpiece joins eighteen Degas paintings, including five given by Mellon, in the Gallery's collection.

- Nine drawings of horses and jockeys by Degas include four studies related to the Scene from the Steeplechase: The Fallen Jockey, which reveal the development of the painting. The drawings in this new gift are in pencil, crayon, charcoal, and pastel. Combined with earlier Mellon gifts, they more than double the number of Degas drawings in the Gallery's collection.

- Thirty-seven works of sculpture include twenty-nine of wax (promised to the Gallery for its fiftieth anniversary in 1991) and four of plaster or mixed materials including plaster, in addition to four bronzes. They depict some of the artist's favorite kinds of figures in motion, such as horses, ballet dancers, and women bathing. Only one of the waxes, Little Dancer, Fourteen Years Old (1878/1881), was ever exhibited in the artist's lifetime. Wax, which reveals the artist's hand most

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directly, was Degas' chosen medium. His works of sculpture were largely private and experimental; he prized the freedom to change them. He never cast his sculptures in bronze. He died in 1917 and most of the bronzes were cast between 1919 and 1932.

The thirty-seven works of sculpture join twenty-six others by Degas already in the Gallery's collection, including seventeen modeled by the artist in wax and/or plastilene, one plaster, and eight bronzes. Most of the sixty-three works of sculpture by Degas in the Gallery's collection were given by Paul Mellon; two bronzes were given by Mrs. Lessing J. Rosenwald.

The Mellon bequest now gives the Gallery a total of forty-nine hand-modeled (wax and/or plastilene) works by Degas, representing a majority of sixty-nine unique surviving works that the artist created with his own hands. A seventieth, the unique plaster torso cast for Degas during his lifetime from a wax that has since disappeared, is also included in the Mellon gift.

- George Stubbs' painting White Poodle in a Punt (c.1780) was promised to the Gallery by Mellon for its fiftieth anniversary. This is the second painting by Stubbs to enter the Gallery's collection. It exemplifies the British master's great achievement, which lay in his sympathetic portrayal of the inner nature of animals combined with an anatomist's attention to their exact physical appearance.

- Five small oils on board or panel by late-nineteenth-century American artist John Frederick Peto depict simple images such as a breakfast of two biscuits with a tea cup and saucer or oranges with a goblet of wine. The compositions are elegant, yet spare. The Gallery owns two other paintings by Peto: The Old Violin (c. 1890) and For the Track (1895) (partial and promised).

- Seventeen nineteenth-century "animalier" bronzes by French artists Antoine-Louis Barye, Pierre Jules Mene, Paul Edouard Delabrière, Christophe Fratin, and Pierre Nicholas Tourgueneff are small-scale representations of animals.

- Mellon also gave a 1910 portrait of his mother, Nora Mellon, by British painter Sir James Jebusa Shannon; an English sporting painting J.G. Shaddick, the

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Celebrated Sportsman (exhibited 1806) by Benjamin Marshall; and Rowing Scene - Crowds Watching from the River Banks by an older contemporary of the impressionists, Emile Lévy (1826-1890).

The National Gallery of Art and Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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