

Press release

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Art Fund brings Sir Denis Mahon's 57 Italian Baroque masterpieces into the collections of six UK museums and galleries

The Art Fund today announced that it has completed the transfer of the late Sir Denis Mahon's private collection of 57 Italian Baroque paintings into the collections of museums and galleries across the UK, in fulfilment of Sir Denis's wishes.

The works, which include masterpieces by Guercino, Guido Reni, Domenichino, Ludovico Carracci, Luca Giordano, Pietro de Cortona, Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini and Giuseppe Maria Crespi, have entered the permanent collections of six UK museums and galleries: twenty five works have gone to the National Gallery, London; twelve to the Ashmolean, Oxford; eight to the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; six to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; five to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and one to Temple Newsam House, Leeds.

Sir Denis formed his collection over several decades, progressively demonstrating the range, significance and quality of the Italian Baroque despite its comparative neglect by previous scholars. His passion and erudition – and the sheer quality of the works he brought together – changed hearts and minds and had a discernible impact on its very status in the history of European art. The national collections are very greatly enriched by this extraordinary bequest.

Sir Denis, who died in 2011, was one of Britain's most distinguished art historians, collectors and campaigners. He left his collection to the Art Fund with instructions that the collection should be placed on display in specific locations across the country, in perpetuity.

The collection has been on long-term loan from Sir Denis to the respective museums for many years, on the condition that they did not charge admission or sell works from their collections. Sir Denis saw the Art Fund, independent of government funding and influence, as the ideal long-term guardian of his collection and his wishes. A member of the charity since a schoolboy, he joined the Art Fund in 1926 and remained a close supporter and advocate until his death in 2011.

Sir Denis Mahon's life's work focussed on the formation of one of the most important private collections of 17th Century Italian Baroque paintings anywhere, but also entailed passionate and vociferous campaigning on behalf of museums. He was outspoken in his criticism of any government which sought to starve museums of funding or interfere in their independence. Sir Denis campaigned on two fronts above all: in support of free admission to national museums, and against the selling of works of art from

museums' permanent collections. Under the terms of the transfer of his collection into public ownership, announced today, the Art Fund's trustees, together with trustees of the Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust, reserve the right to withdraw works from museums which breach these principles at any point in the future^[1].

In addition to the 57 bequeathed works, Sir Denis has also left a £1 million legacy to the Art Fund. He also gave the Ashmolean a set of 50 works associated with Guercino. Throughout his life, Sir Denis Mahon gave several major donations to the Art Fund to support major museum acquisitions, and often used his collection and donations for works of art to pressurise the present-day government to support the UK's museums and galleries. In 1977, Bellini's *Madonna and Child Enthroned* – the last major Bellini still in private hands and valued at over £1 million, was offered to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery on condition it raised the £400,000 needed for its purchase before the three months deadline. Sir Denis offered £50,000 on condition the government matched his donation. Government grants amounted to £72,000 for that picture, which was secured by the museum.

Stephen Deuchar, Art Fund Director says: "Sir Denis Mahon was a life-long supporter of the Art Fund and shared our fundamental commitment to widening free public access to art. His vision as an art collector was extraordinary, as was his determination that his collection should ultimately be on public display. It is an enormous honour for the Art Fund to have been entrusted with his private collection and to oversee its transfer into the permanent collections of these museums and galleries across the UK."

Nicholas Penny, Director, National Gallery says: "Sir Denis was associated with the National Gallery for nearly eighty years, beginning with his appointment as an attaché to the curatorial department under Kenneth Clark and culminating in the great celebratory exhibition of his collection here in the 1990s – *Discovering the Italian Baroque*. As a hyperactive trustee of the gallery and exacting friend of many curators he did much to urge us to acquire great Baroque paintings. We also acquired some from him at the end of his life and he bequeathed a masterpiece by Guercino to us. Now in addition we have received many more. He is one of our greatest benefactors and we will always honour his memory."

Sir John Leighton, Director-General, National Galleries of Scotland says: "We are delighted to have received eight paintings from the late Sir Denis Mahon's private collection through the stewardship of the Art Fund. He was an inspirational and passionate collector who supported the National Galleries of Scotland over many years. His generous and careful choice of paintings was made in order to complement other works within the Scottish national collection and we are extremely grateful that we are now able to keep these key works of art on permanent display to the Scottish public."

Christopher Brown, Director, Ashmolean Museum says: "Sir Denis Mahon was a tireless champion of museums. During his lifetime, the Ashmolean was hugely enriched by Denis's friendship and support. We are profoundly grateful to him and to the Art Fund for the allocation of these twelve important paintings from the Mahon collection. They are on display in the Ashmolean's permanent galleries where, as Denis wished, they are seen by millions of visitors free of charge."

Simon Cane, Acting Director of Birmingham Museums Trust says: "Sir Denis Mahon's generous bequest to Birmingham Museums Trust consists of five paintings by Salvator Rosa, Francesco Albani, Giovanni Battista Gaulli, Pier Francesco Mola and Pieter van Laer which have been on long-term loan and displayed at BMAG since 1999. The Mahon pictures add significantly to the visitors' experience as they sit particularly appropriately with the Museums' collection of Italian Baroque paintings. I am delighted

that we are now able to welcome them into the permanent collection thanks to the vision of Sir Denis Mahon and the support of the Art Fund."

David Scrase, Acting Director, Fitzwilliam Museum says: "We are delighted that this choice group of paintings have become a permanent part of our collection. Sir Denis Mahon chose with great care the long-term home for his paintings. Each of these examples makes a significant point within our current holdings, extending and improving the Fitzwilliam's Collections. We are very pleased that Denis' memory will be preserved in permanence at the Fitzwilliam."

John Roles, Head of Museums and Galleries, Leeds City Council says: "This is another significant step in restoring the original contents of Temple Newsam House. In 1922 the contents of the house were dispersed or sold before the estate was purchased by the city of Leeds. Over the following decades as the house has gradually been restored to its former glory, many of the original contents have been repatriated to the house which now contains one of the most important collections of decorative and fine arts in the country. There are now over 400 paintings on show in the house half of which originated there. The Pier Francesco Mola work is an important addition as it was listed as hanging in the Picture Gallery in the 1808 house inventory so we are particularly pleased that Sir Denis was willing to allow the painting to return to its original home, initially on loan and now as a permanent bequest."

The Sir Denis Mahon Bequest of 57 Italian Baroque paintings donated through the Art Fund

To view images of all works in the bequest, please go to: www.artfund.org/mahon
All images are available to download from: <http://tinyurl.com/artfundmahonbequest>

Please credit as follows:

Donated by the Trustees of Sir Denis Mahon's Charitable Trust through the Art Fund

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Note to editors

About the Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity, helping museums to buy and show great art for everyone. Over the past 5 years we've given £24m to help over 200 museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions. We also support a range of programmes which promote museums and their collections to wider audiences, including the national tour of the ARTIST ROOMS collection, the Art Fund Prize which rewards and celebrates Museum of the Year, and our Art Guide, a pioneering smartphone app offering the most comprehensive guide to seeing art across the UK. We are independently funded, the majority of our income coming from 95,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free and discounted entry to hundreds of museums, galleries and historic places

across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions. Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org.

Ashmolean Museum

Founded in 1683, the Ashmolean Museum is the most significant museum of art and archaeology in the heart of Britain, and the finest university museum in the world. Its collections are large, rich and unusually diverse, ranging from archaeology to fine and decorative arts, and from numismatics to casts of classical sculpture from the great museums of Europe. The Ashmolean is home to the best collection of Predynastic Egyptian material in Europe; the only great collection of Minoan antiquities outside Greece; the largest and most important group of Raphael drawings in the world; the greatest Anglo-Saxon collections outside the British Museum; a world-renowned collection of coins and medals; and outstanding holdings of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Islamic art. The works and objects in these remarkable collections tell the story of civilisation and the aspirations of mankind from Nineveh and ancient Egypt, to the Renaissance, right up to the triumphs of twentieth century Europe. Admission to the Museum is free. For more information please contact Claire Parris, Press Officer: claire.parris@ashmus.ox.ac.uk, 01865 278 178, www.ashmolean.org

Birmingham Museums Trust

Birmingham Museums Trust has been established to govern and manage the museum sites and collections owned by Birmingham City Council and Thinktank, Birmingham's Science Museum. The new independent organisation is focused on sustaining and developing key partnerships within the city and beyond, in order to deliver high quality, audience focused museum services, and meet the needs of Birmingham communities as well as its wider audiences. The establishment of Birmingham Museums Trust means that visitors to all venues can take advantage of even more educational and entertaining events and activities, ranging from arts and crafts to history and culture from around the world. www.bmag.org.uk. For more information please contact Claire Fudge, PR Manager on 0121 202 2210/07707 531405 or claire.fudge@birminghammuseums.org.uk

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts.

Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation. Admission to the Museum is free.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

The National Gallery

The National Gallery is one of the greatest art galleries in the world. Founded by Parliament in 1824, the Gallery houses the nation's collection of Western European paintings from the late thirteenth to the early twentieth century. No other collection possesses such consistent quality, nor better tells the story of Western European painting.

The collection belongs to the nation and serves a diverse public from the UK and overseas. It is open to all, 361 days of the year, free of charge. Around 5 million people visit the National Gallery each year. The collection represents the greatest Western European painters including Van Eyck, Raphael, Leonardo da

Vinci, Turner, Rembrandt, Degas, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Renoir, Monet, Rubens, Velázquez, Van Dyck, Titian and Bellini. The Gallery's key objectives are to enhance the collection, care for the collection and provide the best possible access to visitors. www.nationalgallery.org.uk.

National Galleries of Scotland

The National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) looks after one of the world's finest collections of Western art ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day. These holdings include the National Collection of Scottish art which is displayed in an international context. Every year the NGS welcome over 1.5 million visitors from Scotland and the rest of the world to our three Galleries sited in Edinburgh. These include the Scottish National Gallery, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

The Scottish National Gallery comprises three linked buildings at the foot of the Mound in Edinburgh. The Gallery houses the national collection of fine art from the early Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century, including the national collection of Scottish art from around 1600 to 1900. The Gallery is joined to the Royal Scottish Academy building via the underground Weston Link, which contains a restaurant, café, cloakroom and information desk. The Academy building, which was reopened in 2003 following refurbishment, is a world-class venue for special temporary exhibitions. Home to Scotland's outstanding national collection of modern and contemporary art, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art comprises two buildings, Modern One and Modern Two. The early part of the collection at Modern One features French and Russian art from the beginning of the twentieth century, cubist paintings and superb holdings of Expressionist and modern British art. The Gallery also has an outstanding collection of international post-war work and the most important and extensive collection of modern Scottish art. Modern Two is home to a changing programme of world-class exhibitions and displays drawn from the collection. It also houses a fascinating re-creation of Eduardo Paolozzi's studio. Also on display is *The Stairwell Project*, a large-scale, permanent work by 2009 Turner Prize winner Richard Wright.

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery reopened after refurbishment in December 2011. This Gallery is about the people of Scotland – past and present, famous or forgotten. The portraits are windows into their lives and the displays throughout the beautiful Arts and Crafts building help explain how the men and women of earlier times made Scotland the country it is today. Photography and film also form part of the collection and help to make Scotland's colourful history come alive.

For further information please go to nationalgalleries.org or call 0131 624 6200. Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/nationalgalleries](https://www.facebook.com/nationalgalleries) or follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/NatGalleriesco

Temple Newsam House

One of the great country houses of England set within grand and beautiful parkland with one of the largest working rare breeds farms in Europe, Temple Newsam is one of the leading visitor attractions in Yorkshire. Famous as the birth place of Lord Darnley, notorious husband of Mary Queen of Scots, Temple Newsam House is a truly impressive Tudor-Jacobean mansion. Described as one of the best in Britain and beautifully restored to its former glory, it is now home to one of the most important collections of decorative arts in Britain. For more information visit www.leeds.gov.uk/templenewsam

^[1] A reference to free admission is not part of the terms of the bequest to Temple Newsam House, which has charged for admission since it opened to the public in 1922. Mola's *Landscape with two Carthusian Monks*, was sold at auction by Lord Halifax, owner of Temple Newsam House in 1947. Sir Denis bought the work at that auction in order for it to return to the museum, and it now hangs in the same spot as it is recorded to have hung in Temple Newsam's 1808 inventory.

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