

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. April 4, 1965. John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today the acquisition of two very large decorative paintings, approximately 8 by 15 feet, by the Italian artists, Francesco and Gian Antonio Guardi. Too large to be shown in Lobby D, the paintings will be on special exhibition in Gallery 50 on the Main Floor, before being hung in their eventual positions on the walls of the Main Staircase. The acquisition was made through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

Considered one of the greatest art finds of the century, the paintings were discovered rolled up in a shed of an old house in Dublin in 1957, covered with layers of discolored varnish, the painter unknown. Their advent on the art scene in 1959 created a sensation. They were at once acknowledged to be the work of Guardi and were put on exhibition in the Royal Academy in 1960.

The paintings illustrate scenes from the First Crusade, as described in Torquato Tasso's Renaissance epic, Jerusalem Liberated. One painting, Carlo and Ubaldo Resisting the Enchantments of Armida's Nymphs, depicts the two Christian knights, who, having come upon two nymphs bathing, resist their charms and go on their mission of finding Rinaldo. Rinaldo, in his turn, had gone to rescue knights who were being held prisoners by Armida, niece of the King of Damascus. The palace where Rinaldo was captive appears in the top right corner of the painting.

The other painting, entitled Erminia and the Shepherds, shows

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Erminia's encounter with shepherds on the banks of the river Jordan during her flight from the Christian armies that were besieging Jerusalem. Erminia, one of the heroines of the poem, was a pagan girl who had pointed out from the city walls the various Christian commanders to Aladine, the Saracen King, who was defending the city.

Painted in 1755-60, the two pictures are based on Piazzetta's illustrations in a 1745 Venetian edition of the Tasso epic. The paintings once formed part of a series embellishing the interior of an unidentified villa on the Venetian mainland.

Originally they had been bought by an ancestor of the Earl of Bantry while on a Grand Tour at the beginning of the 19th century. They had been taken to Bantry House, Cork, Ireland, where they hung until inherited by Mrs. Shelswell-White.

Francesco Guardi (1712-1793), the younger and more famous brother, is principally known for his imaginative Venetian capricci and vedute, painted in the latter part of his life. His elder brother, Gian Antonio (1699-1760), decorator of palaces and churches and a member of the Venetian Academy, has not received as much attention as Francesco. The two brothers probably collaborated in this series, as was frequently the custom in Venice from the 15th through the 18th centuries, notably in the Bellini, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Tiepolo families.

Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), the Italian poet, lived at the end of the Renaissance. His poem, Gerusalemme Liberata, full of noble sentiment and religious fervor, has been called the Renaissance's final masterpiece. A child prodigy, whose later years were to be darkened by recurrent periods of insanity, Tasso was 31 and

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the idol of the brilliant d'Este court at Ferrara, when he produced the epic poem whose characters remained household words in Europe for two centuries.

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8" x 10" color transparencies and black-and-white glossy photographs available on loan for publication from Mrs. Marjorie Czyzak, 737-4215, ext. 247.