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MEMORIAL EXHIBITION TO HONOR LESSING J. ROSENWALD

OPENS FEBRUARY 21 THROUGH MAY 9, 1982

WASHINGTON, D. C. January 28, 1982. Lessing J. Rosenwald: Tribute to a Collector, a memorial exhibition honoring one of the National Gallery of Art's founding benefactors and its foremost donor of graphic arts, opens in the National Gallery's East Building on February 21, 1982. One hundred old master and modern prints and drawings, including major works by Rembrandt van Rijn, Paul Gauguin, and Pablo Picasso, have been selected from the collection of approximately 22,000 pieces assembled by Rosenwald from the mid-1920s until his death in June 1979.

Rosenwald's very first purchase made about 1926, is on display: The Royal Scottish Academy by the collector's British contemporary, D. Y. Cameron. Within a brief period, Rosenwald formed important collections of many turn-of-the century British and American artists, most notably James Abbott McNeill Whistler, represented in the show by one of his beautiful and rare late Amsterdam etchings as well as a unique hand-colored lithograph, Drury Lane Rags. In 1928 Rosenwald's interests dramatically expanded and he began to assemble his comprehensive survey of artist's prints, making extensive purchases, for example of works by Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt van Rijn, and William Blake. Among the Rembrandts on display is a red chalk Self-Portrait, one of few self-portrait drawings by the artist famed for his many self-portrait paintings and etchings. Rosenwald's first Dürer acquisition was a second state of Melancholia I, but later he acquired the extremely rare first state impression that is on view. Among the Blakes is Queen Katherine's Dream, a stunning late watercolor.

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Among the most exceptional aspects of the Rosenwald Collection is its representation of fifteenth-century prints, including more than 350 woodcuts, the largest group of these rare objects outside of Europe. Of those on exhibition, the earliest and the most unusual is a printed textile dating from c. 1400. It is one of the very earliest European prints to survive. Several of some 250 fifteenth-century engravings that Rosenwald bought are on view, among them sheets by the Masters "E. S.", Martin Schongauer, and Maso Finiguerra who invented the technique in Italy.

While continually refining his holdings, from the 1940s to the 1960s Rosenwald also began acquisitions in a number of additional areas including medieval and Renaissance manuscript illuminations which is represented in the exhibition by Christ in the Lap of Abraham from a sumptuous German Romanesque Psalter. During these decades, Rosenwald also bought important prints and drawings by post-impressionists -- a rare van Gogh lithograph, The Potato Eaters, will be on show-- and German expressionists -- among several on view is Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's vibrant watercolor Yellow Iris. Major works by Matisse, also in the show, were added as well.

Of particular note will be the section showing several works in multiple, varying impressions: among them, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's lithograph Miss Loie Fuller, in two color schemes, and Mary Cassatt's color aquatint In the Omnibus in four progressive states with the preparatory drawing.

When the National Gallery opened in 1941, Rosenwald presented his first gift of 30 prints; in 1943, however, he presented his renowned collection of several thousand items, and later he made numerous additional gifts. During Rosenwald's lifetime, the collection was housed in a wing of his home - Alverthorpe - in suburban Philadelphia.

The exhibition and a fully illustrated catalogue have been organized by Ruth E. Fine, curator in the National Gallery's Department of Graphic Arts. From 1972 until 1980, when the Rosenwald Collection was transferred to Washington, Ms. Fine was curator of Alverthorpe Gallery.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer) or Carolyn Engel, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 842-6353.