

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

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CONTACT: Katie Ziglar
Deb Spears
(202) 842-6353

FILM ILLUSTRATES NEW UNDERSTANDING OF OLD MASTER

Washington, D.C., December 29, 1989 -- A new film produced by the National Gallery of Art in association with Byron McKinney Associates, Inc. brings to life theories about the history of the sixteenth-century masterpiece, The Feast of the Gods, that were formulated during its recent four-year conservation. Using computer graphics and animation, the film enables viewers to envision how the canvas, finished by Giovanni Bellini (c. 1427-1516) in 1514 and subsequently altered twice, looked at various stages in its history.

The film, The Feast of the Gods, is made possible by The Circle of the National Gallery of Art and Salomon Inc.

Shot on location in Ferrara, Venice, Mantua, and in the National Gallery painting conservation laboratory, the film will be shown continuously in an exhibition documenting the conservation of the painting, which will open on January 14, 1990. The exhibition also contains a didactic installation including color photographs of the painting before restoration, a full-scale radiograph, an infrared reflectogram, and enlarged photographs of pigment cross sections.

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The film provides an overview of conservation processes including the removal of varnish from the painting's surface, the study of the canvas with a microscope, infrared reflectography and x-rays, and the use of pigment cross sections. In addition to illustrating elements of its conservation, David Bull, National Gallery head of painting conservation and narrator of the film, takes viewers through a sequence of steps to explore the history of the work. The film offers a glimpse of the historic environment in which Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, commissioned this painting and other works of art for the decoration of his palace, and of the rivalry of various court painters in the sixteenth century. Bull shows how he has considered many clues to the painting's background in reaching new conclusions about its history.

The Feast of the Gods will remain on view in the West Building of the National Gallery through April 29, 1990. The executive producer of the film The Feast of the Gods is Joseph J. Krakora, National Gallery external affairs officer. It was written by David Bull and directed by David Sutherland. The film's graphics and animation were directed by Richard Rauh.