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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART COLLECTORS COMMITTEE  
SELECTS CY TWOMBLY'S UNTITLED (BOLSENA) FOR ITS  
TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ADDITION TO THE MODERN COLLECTION

Washington, D.C. -- At its annual meeting the Collectors Committee of the National Gallery of Art voted to purchase Untitled (Bolsena) (1969) by American artist Cy Twombly (born 1928) to be included in the Gallery's twentieth-century collection.

Gallery director Earl A. Powell III said of the selection, "Untitled (Bolsena) is a major addition to the group of superb works that the Collectors Committee has acquired on behalf of the National Gallery during the last twenty years. Thanks in large part to the support of the committee, the Gallery's twentieth-century collection has developed into a noteworthy and broad presentation of the art of our time."

Untitled (Bolsena) is one of fourteen large paintings that Twombly created during August and September 1969, working in a desolate stone palace overlooking the lake of Bolsena, north of Rome. Comprised of oil-based house paint, wax crayon, and lead

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Fourth Street at Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20565
pencil on a warm, ocher-white ground, the works mark a distinct
departure from the sequence of dark-ground "blackboard" paintings
that Twombly had been producing since 1966. Both abstract and
cryptically imagistic, the canvas is characterized by a vigorous
yet fragile hybrid of painting and script, applied to tumbling
diagrammatic marks and signs. According to the artist, some of
these marks allude to the coordinates of an Apollo space flight
taking place that summer.

The National Gallery owns four prints and three drawings by
Twombly. Untitled (Bolsena) is the first painting by the artist
to enter the collection.

According to Mark Rosenthal, the Gallery’s curator of
twentieth-century art, "This work is a spectacular addition to
the collection, showing the evolution of abstract-expressionist
practices to the next generation."

Cy Twombly is a reclusive, quasi-mythic figure in post-war
American art. Born in Lexington, Virginia, the artist spent his
early career in New York before moving to Italy in 1957, where he
has lived ever since. Long celebrated by artists, writers, and
collectors, Twombly remains less popularly known than other
members of his generation, such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper
Johns.

Since 1975 the Collectors Committee has made possible the
acquisition of fifteen paintings, seventeen sculptures, and two
tapestries for the collection, along with four drawings, thirty-
more-
three prints, and twenty-two photographs. To celebrate the committee’s twentieth anniversary, most of the paintings and sculpture have been installed throughout the East Building and on the grounds to the north and south of the building.

The Collectors Committee was formed in 1975 under the leadership of Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery’s board of trustees since 1993. Its mission was to help select commissions for the great public spaces of the East Building, then under construction, and to finance them through committee members’ annual contributions. When the committee completed that goal three years later, it began a new role of purchasing for the National Gallery paintings and sculpture by major twentieth-century artists. In 1989 the committee also established a curatorial discretionary fund for acquiring prints, drawings, and photographs.

The Collectors Committee is the principal means by which late modern and contemporary art is purchased for the National Gallery. Each year the Gallery’s curators present a group of works to the committee, from which it may vote to choose as many works as their funds and interests allow. Approximately half of the committee’s acquisitions have been works by living artists.

Among the works acquired by the Collectors Committee over the past twenty years are: Alexander Calder’s giant mobile Untitled (1976), created for the East Building’s atrium; Jackson Pollock’s Number 7, 1951, executed in the year that the artist...
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restricted his color vocabulary and returned to figuration; René
Magritte's *The Human Condition* (1933), the surrealist's
examination of illusionism in painting; Martin Puryear's *Lever
No. 3* (1989), revealing the artist's extraordinary mastery of
wood carving and joining; Louise Bourgeois' totemic sculptures
*Spring* (1949), *Mortise* (1950), and *Untitled* (1952), which draw
upon European surrealism while anticipating many aspects of
minimal and postminimal sculpture from the 1960s to the present;
and Anselm Kiefer's *Zim Zum* (1990), the artist's monumental lead
painting about the instant of creation.

This year's meeting was the final one chaired by Ruth Carter
Stevenson and Edwin L. Cox. Succeeding them will be Barney A.
Ebsworth and Doris Fisher, both major collectors of twentieth-
century art. Ebsworth, from St. Louis, is the owner of INTRAV, a
travel company, and Clipper Cruise Lines. Fisher, who lives in
San Francisco, is co-founder with her husband Donald of The Gap.

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