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## Stellar Collection of Renaissance Sculpture Promised to National Gallery of Art by Robert H. Smith

The National Gallery of Art will announce on April 8, 2008, that the Robert H. Smith Collection, one of the most important private collections of Renaissance bronze sculpture, has been promised to the Gallery by its owner, Gallery president emeritus Robert H. Smith. The collection encapsulates the history of Renaissance bronze sculpture in Europe at a superior level. It also includes outstanding carvings in ivory and boxwood.

“Robert Smith’s connoisseurship and generosity will bring our bronze collection to the level of the great princely collections formed over centuries in Europe,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “The ivories will enhance our holdings in a medium we have only begun to collect in the past decade. Boxwood is a completely new medium for us; like ivory, it lends itself to fine and delicate carving.”

The collection, assembled over three decades, consists of 67 bronzes, five boxwood carvings, and three ivories, and is still growing. Of these, 47 bronzes and all of the boxwood and ivories are currently on view in the exhibition *Bronze and Boxwood: Renaissance Masterpieces from the Robert H. Smith Collection* through May 4, 2008 in the West Building, Main Floor, galleries 74 and 75. The exhibition is sponsored by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art. The collection has greatly expanded since part of it was on view in 2002 for the opening of the ground floor Sculpture Galleries at the National Gallery of Art.

The bronze statuette, more than any other art form, embodies the rebirth of classical

forms and techniques that define the Renaissance. The Robert H. Smith Collection comprises exceptionally fine works by major contemporaries and successors of Michelangelo. Among these are four masterpieces acquired since 2002: a superb cast of Giovanni Bologna's *Cesarini Venus* (late-16th or early 17th century), which was once in the French royal collection; the finest and earliest version of the same sculptor's famous *Birdcatcher* (late-16th century); the *Seated Nymph* (1503), one of the most exquisite bronzes made in the early 16th century by the celebrated goldsmith and sculptor Antico, whose real name was Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi; and Giovanni Francesco Susini's *David with the Head of Goliath* (c. 1625–1630), which, like many of the works in the collection, invites admiration from any angle. Giovanni Francesco Susini is the nephew of Giovanni Bologna's bronze caster, Antonio Susini.

Bronzes from Padua, a great center for the art form, located near Venice, include mythological monsters adapted as objects for use. These inkwells and oil lamps reflect the influence of one of the earliest and most gifted creators of small bronzes, Andrea Briosco, nicknamed "Il Riccio" or "curly-haired." A spirited rearing horse and an antiquarian *Spinario* are by Riccio's prolific competitor, Severo da Ravenna.

The collection includes gods and heroes by northern European artists influenced by the Italian Renaissance, including Willem van Tetrode, Hubert Gerhard, and Johann Gregor van der Schardt. Their work contrasts with the sensuous female nudes by Nicolò Roccatagliata (active in Venice around 1600), which retain the direct freshness of their wax models. Every object in the collection reflects the stylistic choices made by its creator, down to the color of the lacquer or chemical patina applied to the surface.

The bronzes are complemented by boxwood and ivory carvings, including the largest grouping of works outside Germany by the sculptor Leonhard Kern, one of the greatest masters in these media. A virtuoso carver, he cut his figures out of a single block of wood or ivory. Works in boxwood were often tinted to resemble the colors of bronze sculpture, while the gleam of ivory evoked the purity of white marble on a miniature scale.

## **The Collector and the National Gallery of Art**

Robert H. Smith, now trustee emeritus, was president of the National Gallery of Art from 1993 until 2003.

In 1982 Smith became the first chairman of the Gallery's newly formed Trustees' Council, a national advisory body to the Board of Trustees. In 1985 he joined the board as a trustee upon the retirement of Paul Mellon, and in 1993 he succeeded John R. Stevenson as president. After serving on the campaign committee for the Gallery's Patrons' Permanent Fund, in 1986 he became founding co-chair, with Katharine Graham, of The Circle, the Gallery's annual membership group. He subsequently chaired the 50th Anniversary Gift Committee.

Recently he chaired the Gallery's New Century Fund campaign. Smith and his wife Clarice, who reside in the Washington, D.C. area, have supported numerous initiatives, such as the scholarly programs within the Gallery's Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, art acquisition, conservation research, and staff development. In addition to the promised gift of Renaissance bronzes and other sculpture, their donations of art to the Gallery include drawings by such masters as François Boucher (1703–1770), Canaletto (1697–1768), Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804), and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973).

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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