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## National Gallery of Art Acquires Important Works of Art in Several Mediums by Weston, Gérôme, Smithson, Mann, Loving, and Others



Edward Weston  
American, 1886–1958  
*Shell 1 (Nautilus)*, 1927  
Gelatin silver print  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Agnes S. Wolf

Washington, DC—At its recent meeting in May, the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Art approved an impressive array of new acquisitions, augmenting its collections of paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, illustrated books, and photographs.

Among the acquisitions are the Gallery's first paintings by Jean-Léon Gérôme and Cornelis Bega; a rare Florentine red wax relief after a model attributed to Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi; the first printed book illustrated by an Italian artist; and important old master drawings by Lattanzio Gambara and Alessandro Magnasco. The Gallery also acquired two major sculptures by Robert Smithson; its first works by renowned photographer Sally Mann; a landmark photograph by Edward Weston; a portfolio of photogravures by Al Taylor; and Jasper Johns' 1997 edition print *Green Angel 2* along with 13 related proofs and six related copperplates.

"The Gallery is thrilled to accept so many fine works across mediums and spanning the 17th to the 21st centuries, including many important firsts for the collection," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We depend on the generosity of private donors to continue building the nation's art collection, now standing at nearly 130,000 works, and we are enormously grateful to these individuals, foundations, and groups."

#### Edward Weston, *Shell 1 (Nautilus)* (1927)

Edward Weston (1886–1958) was one of America's most important modernist photographers, and his career traced the development of photography as an art form over the course of the first half of the 20th

century. Weston met Alfred Stieglitz in New York in 1922 and remained strongly influenced by him in the following years. At the same time, a 1923 through 1926 stay in Mexico greatly affected Weston's photographic philosophy and style. Turning away from contemporary urban life, he focused instead on precisely rendered physical forms, ranging from nudes and portraits to desert landscapes and gnarled tree roots. Until his career was cut short by illness in 1948, Weston continued to capture his subjects with a modernist eye for objectivity and crisp detail.

*Shell 1 (Nautilus)* was made at a crucial moment in Weston's career, shortly after he returned to California from Mexico in 1927 and began closely examining individual, provocative natural objects. He spent that spring and summer intensively photographing the chambered nautilus, which he described as "a sublimation of all my work and life," before moving on to other objects, most notably peppers, cabbages, and other vegetables. For several months before the photograph was donated to the Gallery, *Shell 1 (Nautilus)* hung in the East Building's American modernist galleries, where its presence emphasized the powerful interactions among painters and photographers during this period. Offered to the Gallery as a bequest of Agnes S. Wolf, *Shell 1 (Nautilus)* greatly enhances the Gallery's small group of photographs by Weston and wonderfully complements its holdings of other 20th-century American modernist photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, and Imogen Cunningham, among others.

#### **Al Taylor, *All Thumbs* (1992)**

A portfolio of ten photogravures, *All Thumbs* (1992) represents the first photographs by Al Taylor (1948–1999) to enter the Gallery's collection, complementing the holdings of his work in other mediums. Taylor's career evolved from drawing and painting to constructing the three-dimensional assemblages for which he is best known. His rare use of photographic processes lends weight to this portfolio, which enters the Gallery's collection as a gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. He served as an assistant to Robert Rauschenberg in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Despite the unusual status of photographs in Taylor's oeuvre, the images themselves are representative of his humorous approach to the everyday. One sees what are presumably Taylor's thumbs overlaid with his signature style of markings. Taylor presents his thumbs as worthy subject matter. In one image he is seen holding a cigarette, but otherwise, as irreverently outlined in the title of the portfolio, only a thumb or both thumbs are pictured. In layering his images with drawing Taylor transforms the two-dimensional surface of the photograph into a complex collage.

#### **Sally Mann, *Untitled (Self-Portraits)* (2006–2012)**

The human spirit, the passing of time, and mortality have fascinated the internationally acclaimed photographer Sally Mann for more than 30 years. She first achieved widespread attention in 1992 for *Intimate Family*, a book of photographs of her three children whom she has continued to photograph in the years since. Yet following a serious riding accident in 2006 in which she broke her back, she began to record herself. Unable to move her large, heavy view camera, she set it up in one position and repeatedly photographed herself in a similar pose.

Using the 19th-century wet collodion process, she made brilliant ambrotype self-portraits. Mann favors these older methods of making photographs for the individuality they impart, as well as for their lack of perfection.

The result is a series of close-up, reflective self-portraits in which Mann does not attempt to project a persona but instead fearlessly confronts the dematerialization of her own body. This unique nine-panel work is the first

work by Mann to enter the Gallery's collection, an occasion made possible by the Alfred H. Moses and Fern M. Schad Fund.

**Cornelis Bega, *The Alchemist* (1663)**

Like his teacher Adriaen van Ostade, the Dutch painter Cornelis Bega (1631/1632–1664) embraced low-life genre scenes, often depicting tavern-goers, quack doctors, and alchemists, such as the one in this remarkable painting. Within a darkly lit interior, the alchemist curls over bellows to stoke a fire, simultaneously handling a pair of tongs near a bell jar. His shop, littered with books and vessels, suggests his tireless efforts to produce precious metal from commonplace materials. A jar of silicon atop some stairs suggests his trade, for silicon was thought to possess transitive properties of precious metal that an alchemist could turn into gold.

This Haarlem artist rendered his scenes with great detail, as is evident here in the careful depiction of books and their curled pages, the smooth earthenware pots, and the rough texture of stone. The painting has been generously donated by Ethel Wunsch and the late Martin Wunsch and is on view in the Dutch galleries on the West Building's Main Floor.

**Jean-Léon Gérôme, *View of Medinet El-Fayoum* (c. 1868–1870)**

Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) was the most publicly honored and financially successful French artist of the second half of the 19th century. His Orientalist scenes were inspired by the many voyages he undertook to Egypt, North Africa, Syria, Asia Minor, and the Holy Land over the course of his career. In *View of Medinet El-Fayoum*, c. 1868–1870, Gérôme depicts the oldest city in Egypt, located some 80 miles southwest of Cairo. Unlike many Orientalist pictures of the day—fantasies constructed in a Parisian artist's studio—this painting is informed by empirical records, while maintaining a sense of the awe and mystery Egypt inspired in French visitors.

While the Gallery owns a drawing and two prints by Gérôme, *View of Medinet El-Fayoum* is the first painting by the artist to enter the collection. Purchased with the Chester Dale Fund, it joins a small group of Orientalist pictures in the West Building's recently renovated 19th-century French galleries, including Delacroix's *Arabs Skirmishing* (1862), Renoir's *Odalisque* (1870), Benjamin Constant's *Favorite of the Emir* (1879), and Matisse's *Odalisque* (1924).

**Matteo de' Pasti, illustrations for Robertus Valturius's *De re militari* (1472)**

Robertus Valturius's treatise on military machines, printed by Joannes Nicolai in 1472, is the first book published in Verona and the first printed with technical illustrations. It is also the earliest with printed illustrations by an Italian artist, usually attributed to Matteo de' Pasti (c. 1420–after 1467).

In a period when military hardware was both practical and artistic, the 100 woodcuts show everything from cannon and catapults to revolving gun turrets, fortified carts with sickle knives, prototype submarines, and fanciful siege engines shaped like dragons. These designs were enormously influential on other artistic engineers including Leonardo da Vinci. This copy of *De re militari* is one of only a few with contemporary hand coloring. It was acquired through the generosity of anonymous donors.

**Lattanzio Gambara, *Samson Destroying the Temple* (c. 1550)**

The pen-and-ink drawing *Samson Destroying the Temple*, c. 1550, by Lattanzio Gambara (c. 1530–1574) is an outstanding example of northern

Italian draftsmanship of the mid-16th century. It is the finest of the Gallery's holdings by this master, and its purchase was made possible by Dian Woodner.

This work was likely a preparatory drawing for the decoration of a palace façade, where the sophisticated interplay among stairs, columns, perspective, and ruins would provide irony as well as delight. In composition and style, the drawing belongs to an important strain of decoration in the area of Italy between modern Emilia and Lombardy, reflecting Gambara's training there with Guilio Campi before returning to his native Brescia around 1547. His first independent paintings from shortly after his return announce his command of Cremonese style and reveal him as that city's most advanced practitioner. This exemplary drawing reflects how highly developed his draftsmanship was at this stage.

**Alessandro Magnasco, *A Quaker Sermon* (c. 1712)**

*A Quaker Sermon* (c. 1712), an extraordinary drawing by Alessandro Magnasco (1667–1749), features a central figure, naked except for a tall cap and contorted with hands clasped in prayer. Juxtaposed with him are heavily clothed figures wearing exotic headgear. Magnasco is usually considered the last important baroque artist in his native Genoa. The Gallery is fortunate to have three of his paintings—a magnificent pair of landscapes with scenes from the life of Christ and a typically eccentric genre scene—as well as a fine example of his drawings of isolated figures meant to be inserted into landscape paintings and then retained as part of a model book for his workshop. Entire, elaborate compositions in brush of small paintings such as *A Quaker Sermon* were undoubtedly conceived and acquired as independent works of art and are rare. The acquisition of this fine example was made possible by the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund.

**After Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi, *Hagar and the Angel* (before 1743)**

The exquisite relief *Hagar and the Angel* (before 1743) depicts the Old Testament episode of the rescue of the Egyptian slave Hagar and her dying son in the wilderness. While a 1780 inventory gives the name of Girolamo Ticciati (1671–1744) as the artist, recent scholarship attributes the composition to Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740) based on style as well as a document about one of his pupils. Soldani-Benzi was one of the greatest baroque sculptors in Florence in the 1700s.

The red wax in which the relief is modeled is particular to the Doccia porcelain manufactory, established in 1737 by Marchese Carlo Ginori (1702–1757) in the Tuscan town of Doccia. Around 1745, Ginori bought all the wax models by Giambattista Foggini (1652–1725) and Soldani-Benzi from the deceased sculptors' sons and commissioned distinctive red wax versions of them for use at Doccia for production in porcelain. Nearly all of these models are in the Museo di Doccia, now located in the town of Sesto Fiorentino near Florence. Ginori was a key figure of the 18th-century Enlightenment. When the Medici dynasty was about to end, he established new industries in Tuscany, built clean dormitories for his workers, and provided education for their children. This sculpture is therefore a very rare object from that significant moment in Florentine history.

The purchase of this relief was made possible by the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund. The sculpture complements the Gallery's Tuscan bronzes by Foggini and Piamontini, as well as its Roman and Genoese 18th-century reliefs. It will go on view in the West Building Sculpture Galleries later this summer.

**Glenn Ligon, *Double America* (2012)**

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960) has come to prominence for his intertextual works that re-present for contemporary audiences excerpts from American history and literature—in particular, the narratives of slavery, the civil rights movement, and politics. The painted neon sculpture *Double America* (2012) was acquired through the Lühring Augustine Gallery and was given by Agnes Gund. The most ambitious and complex example of Ligon's neon works to date, this sculpture joins his painting, *Untitled (I Am A Man)* (1988), on view in the East Building Concourse Galleries. The Gallery also has major prints by the artist.

The top letters in *Double America* are painted black and turned toward the wall so that the viewer is looking at the illuminated "backs" of the letters. This orientation refers to the 19th-century romantic paintings (known as *Rückenfigur*) featuring a person in the foreground looking out over a vast landscape with his back to the viewer. In effect, Ligon places the viewer of this work in the position of the *Rückenfigur* to contemplate the word "America" as a signifier for the country's condition. The bottom letters render the word upside down with the outward facing sides painted black, leaving the "shadow" of the white neon to reflect against the wall. Ligon connects this use of the word America in his work with the famous phrase in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness." Ligon relates this phrase to the situation of the United States in 2008 after the election of the nation's first African American president, a time when the country was also engaged in two wars.

#### **Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey* (1968) and *Glass Stratum* (1967)**

Robert Smithson (American, 1938–1973) is perhaps best known as a pioneer of the Land Art movement and the creator of the iconic *Spiral Jetty* (1970). However, his involvement in earthworks is only one of his many contributions to postwar American art. Though his life was cut short by his untimely death in a plane crash near Amarillo at the age of 35, Smithson's influence on contemporary art has been profound, impacting multiple genres and mediums. The Gallery received two of the artist's most important sculptures as gifts from Virginia Dwan, Smithson's dealer and a great patron of *Spiral Jetty* and his other earthworks.

*A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey* is Robert Smithson's first Nonsite work, constructed in 1968. Referring to a remote area of southern New Jersey, it depicts a desolate, hexagonal airfield and is comprised of two parts: a sculpture of painted aluminum, sand, and wood, and an aerial photograph and map. Smithson's Nonsites were radical in both conception and construction. The artist gathered materials from a chosen location and then exhibited them with other sculptural components. Displayed in a gallery, the Nonsite refers to a "site" in the real world.

*Glass Stratum*, the largest of Smithson's sculptures of layered glass and mirrors, is comprised of 37 sheets of half-inch-thick glass layered atop one another. The base layer is seven feet long; each subsequent layer is two inches shorter than the previous. Smithson stresses the frozen-liquid nature of glass in the sculpture's cool, green color, while his layering of glass is reminiscent of the regular layered molecular planes occurring in crystals. When the viewer moves around the sculpture, planes reflect and refract against one another; what is seemingly shallow appears infinite; what appears transparent is opaque.

#### **Mario Merz, *Lingotto* (1969)**

Mario Merz (1925–2003) was a leading figure of Arte Povera (Poor Art), an important Italian-based art movement, baptized in 1967 by the critic

Germano Celant, which deployed raw materials in often messy installations to challenge the marketplace and conventions of an increasingly commercial, sophisticated, spectacular art world. In his pioneering installations and use of materials like wax, his interest in art as personal and social transformation, and his charismatic, almost mystical persona, Merz closely resembles his German contemporary Joseph Beuys; arguably, Merz's influence on contemporary art has been just as great.

*Lingotto* (1969) is a classic work from Merz's first mature period. He combines bundled branches—one of his signatures—with a four-legged steel structure supporting a slab of beeswax. Such “ingots” (as he called them) were Merz's breakthrough. Made the year that Merz began exhibiting with the other the Arte Povera artists, this *Lingotto* is at once sensual and referential. The acquisition was made possible by the Collectors Committee, Denise and Andrew Saul, Mitchell and Emily Rales, Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, Calvin and Jane L. Cafritz, Nancy and Carl Gewirz, Roselyne Chroman Swig, and Nancy B. Tieken.

#### **Al Loving, *Untitled* (c. 1974–1975)**

In 1969, Al Loving (1935–2005) became the first African American to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the early 1970s he moved away from his tight geometric style of abstraction in order to discover “whether there is black art and what it looks like.” The answer led him to a masterful series of works employing torn, cut, stained, and sewn canvas strips to create shaped abstractions that opened up the language of geometric abstraction defined at the time by Frank Stella, while drawing on a variety of vernacular traditions, from his mother's own quilting to African ceremonial draperies to general practices of thrifty recycling in folk cultures.

*Untitled* (c. 1974–1975) is a major example from this breakthrough series, recently shown at the Gary Snyder Gallery. It is Loving's first work to enter the Gallery's collection, where it resonates not only with Stella's Polish Village paintings but also with works by Sam Gilliam, Robert Morris, and Eva Hesse that explore the potential of draped and hung fabric, both monochrome and colored. Its purchase was made possible by the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund.

#### **Jasper Johns, *Green Angel 2* (1997)**

Artist Jasper Johns (b. 1930) has donated his 1997 edition print *Green Angel 2* along with 13 related proofs and six related copperplates. This powerful, multicolored etching is an important addition to the Gallery's archive of Johns' prints; it features an enigmatic composition seemingly adapted by the artist from an art historical source. When asked about the origins of the image, Johns has declined to be specific. Nonetheless, regarding the title, he has steered viewers to Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512–1516), which includes a greenish, feather-covered angel in the central nativity panel. During the 1990s Johns improvised on this motif in a range of painted, drawn, and printed variations. In *Green Angel 2*, the motif dominates the upper part of the composition and is repeated in the lower third of the composition.

This generous gift will hold a unique position within the Gallery's archive of Jasper Johns' prints, allowing the juxtaposition of progressive proofs that reveal the successive stages of color printing alongside the copperplates that were used to print not only the proofs, but also the culminating final print.

#### **Study Rooms**

Works on paper not on display may be viewed and studied by appointment in the Gallery's Print and Drawing Study Rooms or Photograph Study Room by qualified scholars and students in accordance with the Gallery's rules and requirements. Single visitors as well as small groups are welcome.

The Study Rooms are open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., except on federal holidays.

To make an appointment to view prints or drawings, please telephone (202) 842-6380. To make an appointment to view photographs, please e-mail [photographs@nga.gov](mailto:photographs@nga.gov) or telephone (202) 842-6144. Appointments should be made at least two weeks in advance.

## 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 at 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 remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/modern-art-during-renovation.html>.

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