



National Gallery of Art

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A Legacy of Cultural Exchange



The West Building Rotunda of the National Gallery of Art.
Photograph © Dennis Brack / Black Star. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington

From its inception, the National Gallery of Art has been inspired and influenced by the Italian tradition in art and architecture. Beginning with founder Andrew W. Mellon's collection as the nucleus of its holdings and later augmented by the Samuel H. Kress and Joseph Widener collections, the Gallery's permanent collection of Italian paintings is regarded as the most important in the United States. It is complemented by noted collections of Italian sculpture and drawings. Among its many masterpieces, the collection boasts the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in the Americas: *Ginevra de' Benci* (c. 1474/1478).

The West Building's grand, Italianate Rotunda is an appropriate setting for this Italian work. The architect of the West Building, John Russell Pope, was trained at the American Academy in Rome and was deeply influenced by classical Italian architecture, believing that it perfectly expressed the American ideals of democracy and humanism. The Rotunda itself was modeled after the ancient Pantheon in Rome, and Italian stone is prominent throughout.

From its founding democratic ideals to its art and architecture, America—and specifically Washington, DC—have long drawn inspiration from Italian culture and principles. As the nation's art museum, the National Gallery of Art's rich history of preserving Italian culture reflects the United States' longstanding ties to Italy. ***A Masterpiece from the Capitoline Museum, Rome: The Capitoline Venus*** follows in the Gallery's long tradition of more than 80 international loan exhibitions that have brought the art of Italy from abroad to be showcased in the nation's capital.

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