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## **Annenberg Picks Met for \$1 Billion Gift**

By JOHN RUSSELL

Walter H. Annenberg, publisher, philanthropist and formerly United States Ambassador in London, said yesterday that he would bequeath roughly \$1 billion worth of paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The gift, which would be the largest single donation in more than a half-century to the museum's department of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, includes Mr. Annenberg's entire collection of more than 50 paintings by Manet, Degas, Monet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cezanne, van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin, Bonnard, Vuillard, Matisse, Picasso and Braque.

Among the works included in the gift are Cezanne's late "Mont Ste. Victoire," Gauguin's "Siesta," van Gogh's "Berceuse," Picasso's "Lapin Agile" and Renoir's "Daughters of Catulle Mendes."

The installation of the Annenberg collection will be done in the context of a planned overhaul of the galleries devoted to Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings.

The paintings will go to the Met after the death of Mr. Annenberg, who will be 83 years old tomorrow. Mr. Annenberg's decision leaves the Met the clear winner in an informal competition among several of the nation's leading museums for his collection, which has been on a tour that has included stops at many institutions that had hoped to win the collection permanently. By coincidence, the tour had been planned to conclude at the Met, where the paintings are to go on temporary view from June 4 through Oct. 13.

"It is my intention," Mr. Annenberg said yesterday in a telephone interview, "that all my paintings should go to the Metropolitan Museum. I love them with a passion, and I want them to stay together after I'm gone.

"Much as I respect the other institutions that have lately shown our collection -- the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington -- I happen to believe in strength going to strength, and I think that the Met is the proper repository for them. In making this announcement, I want to get the news out that the collection will be kept together and is not for sale."

At one time, there was widespread speculation that a private museum might be set up for the collection on the Annenberg estate in Palm Springs, Calif. Last year, when he was approached by representatives of a Japanese organization offering \$1 billion for the collection, Mr. Annenberg said yesterday, he told them, "I appreciate your offer, but you are asking me to sell members of my family."

During the recent showings of the Annenberg collection in Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Washington, each museum argued strongly for the permanent possession of the paintings. A particularly strong effort was made by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in Mr. Annenberg's home city, which produced a conspicuously fine catalogue for the collection and displayed the paintings in an installation that was a model of sensitivity.

But Mr. Annenberg has had long associations with the Metropolitan Museum, and they are now to reach their culmination. Asked about the effect of the intended gift on the museum's collections, Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum, said last night: "In one splendid generous gesture, Walter Annenberg has given a whole new dimension to one of the Met's greatest existing strengths. This is no mean feat, and we are all of us awed by the seemingly inexhaustible public spirit behind this gift." To Complement a Collection

The Annenberg collection will enhance what is already one of the strongest departments in the museum. In many cases, the 50 and more paintings and watercolors in the intended gift will ideally complement the existing permanent collections. As newcomers, they will reinforce and redefine the importance of those that are already there.

The Met has received major gifts or bequests of French painting of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist periods from Stephen C. Clark, Sam A. Lewisohn and Robert Lehman over the last 60 years, but the foundations of its Impressionist collection were laid once and for all in 1929 by the Havemeyer bequest.

The Havemeyer paintings had been bought during the lifetime of most of the artists concerned and with the advice, in some cases, of Edgar Degas himself. It is no small compliment to the Annenberg collection to say that it may be acclaimed in due time as the most important single gift to have been given to the Metropolitan Museum since 1929.

Unlike the Havemeyer collection, however, the Annenberg collection is as strong in Post-Impressionist as in Impressionist paintings. Furthermore, it has lately moved into the 20th century at a high level, with the recent acquisition of an early Picasso of the first importance -- the "Lapin Agile" of 1905 -- and a Braque of 1939, "The Studio," which marks a hinge point in the later development of one of the great French painters of all time. Already Strong in Cezanne

The Met's existing Cezanne collection already has an exceptional weight and power by reason of the presence of the "Card Players" of 1890, which was bequeathed in 1960 by Stephen C. Clark. When the Annenberg "Seated Peasant" by Cezanne arrives in the Met, it will be as a friend and a brother of that formidable presence.

Even more striking will be the effect on the Met's Cezanne holdings of the Annenberg "Mont Ste. Victoire." This ranks very high among the more than 50 views of the mountain near Aix-en-Provence that Cezanne produced.

It was painted on five different pieces of canvas, as if Cezanne were willing himself to give an ever greater fullness to the huge spreading vision of farmhouse and foothill and distant bald mountain. And when finished looking at it, one might understand what Cezanne meant when he said, not long before his death, that he had wanted "to record the spectacle that God the Father, omnipotent and eternal, spreads

out before our eyes."

It is also relevant to the Annenberg gift that although the Met is rich in Monets of the 1860's, 1880's and 1890's, it is relatively weak in Monets of the 1870's. That will be put right by the arrival of three important Monets from the Annenberg collection: the "Camille Monet on a Garden Bench" of 1873, the "Poppy Field, Argenteuil" of 1875 and "Camille Monet in the Garden in Argenteuil" in 1876. The Met is also to receive something that it has long lacked: a major late Monet of 1919 from the water lily series. A Favorite Renoir

A longtime favorite in the Met is Renoir's monumental family group of "Madame Charpentier and her Children" (1878). The French upper bourgeoisie of the day is nowhere better recorded than in this very large and almost absurdly opulent painting. Exactly 10 years later, Renoir painted the Annenberg "Daughters of Catulle Mendes."

Where the Charpentier group is heavy on silks and velvets and does not go easy on the sugar, the Mendes group shows Renoir's determination to slim down the paint, edit out rather more of the furniture and play up the role of line in the final image. Once again, a gap in the Met's collections will be neatly plugged.

Where the Arles period of van Gogh is concerned, the Met is already well served both by the portrait of Madame Ginoux of 1888, with its vivid background of mustard yellow, and by the small version of the "Berceuse" of 1889, which was part of the Robert Lehman bequest in 1975.

But the Annenberg gift will bring both variety and a definitive weight to that corner of the collection with the large version of the "Berceuse," of which van Gogh said that he had "tried to get all the music of color into the painting." 'A Lullaby in Color'

In the big "Berceuse," Madame Roulin, the wife of van Gogh's friend Roulin the mailman, is seen once again. And once again, she is rocking an unseen cradle with a length of rope. But this time, van Gogh did truly summon up the music of color. Working with olive green, pale malachite green, chrome yellow, vermilion, pink, orange and ultramarine, he turned the portrait into a veritable symphony of reassurance. "But," he wrote to a friend, "I leave it to the critics to say whether or not I sang a lullaby in color."

Mr. Annenberg made his fortune in publishing and communications. He was the founder of Seventeen magazine in 1944 and went on to build a sprawling empire based on Triangle Publications, a family holding company established by his father, Moses Annenberg.

Mr. Annenberg acquired radio and television stations in New York, California, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. But his most successful venture was TV Guide, which he founded in 1953 and watched it grow with regional editions to sell a total of 17 million copies an issue, competing with Reader's Digest as the magazine with the largest circulation:

He sold the company in 1988 to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation for \$3 billion. Homes Decorated With Works

Mr. Annenberg and his wife, Leonore, a White House Chief of Protocol at the outset of President Ronald Reagan's first term, have been prominent patrons of the arts and collectors for many years, and their

homes are decorated with many of their works.

When President Richard M. Nixon sent Mr. Annenberg to London as his Ambassador in 1969, the new envoy not only refurbished the American Embassy extensively at his own expense, but paintings from the Annenbergs' collection came to grace its walls as well.

Photos: Among the paintings Walter H. Annenberg will bequeath to the Metropolitan Museum of Art are van Gogh's "Berceuse," left, Picasso's "Lapin Agile," top right, and Renoir's "Daughters of Catulle Mendes." (pg. A1); Cezanne's "Seated Peasant" is among the works Walter H. Annenberg will bequeath to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (pg.C12)