

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RADIO & TV -
Ginevra de^oBenci, pronounced:
DjeenEHvra day Benchy.

Washington, D. C. February 20, 1967. Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra de^oBenci has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art, it was announced today by John Walker, Director. The picture will go on public view March 17, the Gallery's anniversary, as the first acquisition of its second quarter century.

No other generally acknowledged painting by Leonardo is known in private hands, or in any public collection outside Europe.

Painted about 1480 in Florence, the picture is believed to be the portrait that contemporary accounts describe Leonardo as having painted of young Ginevra, a member of the distinguished Benci family. The earliest document records that it was "so beautifully finished that it was exactly like her." In 1550, the great biographer of artists, Vasari, described the picture as "a wondrous thing." Its ownership was subsequently unrecorded, until,

at an unknown date before 1712, it entered the collection of the ruling house of Liechtenstein, where it has remained until now.

Scholarly attention was first focused on the Ginevra in the late 19th century. The critic Müller-Walde described it in 1889 as "the most perfect portrait of the early Italian Renaissance and one of the most masterly of all time."

In 1951 it was publicly exhibited at the National Gallery in London. On that occasion, the London Times wrote:

The celebrated portrait of Ginevra de'Benci is one of the few Leonardo's which turn out to be incomparably more beautiful in the original than any reproduction would suggest. It is of course the work of the Leonardo of the quattrocento [15th century] rather than the grim master of cinquecento [16th-century] science, and is therefore, as one would expect, conceived in the most exquisite taste, but the marvelous atmosphere which surrounds the figure and the incredible delicacy with which all the more minute detail is rendered will certainly be a revelation to those who know the picture only from photographs.

Sir Kenneth Clark, formerly Director of the London National Gallery, pointing out in his book on Leonardo that the portrait is the best preserved of all the artist's early pictures, wrote that it "is of an exquisite melancholy beauty....There are passages...which Leonardo never surpassed in delicacy...this pale young woman has become one of the unforgettable personalities of the Renaissance." Ludwig Heydenreich, Director of the Central Institute for

Art History in Munich, finds in it affinities with the Mona Lisa. The late Richard Offner, American authority on Italian Renaissance painting and professor at New York University, has called it "one of the great portraits of the world."

A rare Italian frame, from the same period as the painting, is being adapted for the Ginevra. The 15-1/8" x 14-1/2" painting will be shown without a narrow strip at the bottom which was a later addition.

The picture was bought through the National Gallery's purchase fund, which is made up entirely of private donations.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was a painter, sculptor, and architect. He is also known for contributions in such fields as aeronautics, aesthetics, archaeology, anatomy, biology, botany, cartography, cosmology, civil and military engineering, geology, hydraulics, mathematics, mechanics, music, and zoölogy. Some seven hundred pages of manuscript and drawings by him were recently brought to light again in the National Library in Madrid after two hundred years.

NOTE TO EDITORS: A preview showing of the picture will be held for the press Thursday, March 16, at 2:00 p.m. The Director will be available for questions.

Black-and-white photograph and color transparency on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, Area Code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225. Home phone: Area Code 202, 299-4003.