MAJOR AFRICAN SCULPTURE, RECENT MARK TANSEY PAINTING,
AND OTHER WORKS OF ART ENTER CMA COLLECTION

(Cleveland, OH) Robert P. Bergman, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, today announced the acquisition of several major works of art including one of the latest oil paintings by American painter Mark Tansey and a major African sculpture. These and other important acquisitions will go on view this week in the museum's recent acquisitions gallery outside the director's office.

Elaborating on the new additions to CMA's collection, Bergman said: "It's extraordinary to be able to reveal that the museum has again—for the second time in a little over three months—acquired its most recently created work of art. Like the Chuck Close [acquired in June 1997], our new Mark Tansey painting is one of the most recent major works by one of America's greatest working artists. At the same time, we've added immeasurably to our Central African holdings with the acquisition of a powerful Kongo sculpture. We've also continued our recent strategy to build a significant Korean collection with the acquisitions of a colossal sculpture and two paintings; we've enhanced our comprehensive collection of Indian sculpture with a major Gandharan relief; and added two major British watercolors to our drawings collection."

Dominating the new installation is the 8½x7-foot painting, Soft Borders, by Mark Tansey. Described by the artist as a "short history of the West from four different points of view," it comprises four interrelated scenes, each depicted from a different perspective: a small tribe of native Americans, an expedition of 19th-century surveyors and photographers, a group of tourists taking photographs and home movies, and a toxic-waste-removal crew in protective clothing. In other words, this canvas may be hung four different ways. All are visually unified by a mountainous backdrop, and characteristically painted in only one color, in this case a dark-redish hue. Tom E. Hinson, curator of contemporary art and photography, says this painting was a highlight of Tansey's May 1997 exhibition at the Curt Marcus Gallery in New York City. In this work, Hinson says, this influential mid-career painter "explores with typical wit and irony his current fascination with questioning the nature of time, space, and painting itself,

(more ...)
skillfully incorporating abrupt changes in scale and surreal justapositions into his piece. It is a picture full of meaning and is a technical tour de force as well.”

*Mother and Child* was created by an anonymous but recognized Kongo artist of the late 19th or early 20th century, specifically of the Yombe sub-tribe located north of the Congo River in modern-day Congo and Zaire. Carved of soft wood and measuring over two feet tall, it depicts a slender woman seated cross-legged with a young child resting in her lap. The mother gazes forward with raised chin, rather than downward at the child. In Kongo society, although political power is held by male chiefs, the right to wield it is inherited through the female line. This statue may represent a powerful woman, whose fertility played a critical part in the survival and prosperity of her clan. It was likely made for placement on an ancestral shrine. Margaret Young-Sánchez, associate curator for art of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania, says of *Mother and Child*: “The woman's gaunt face is arresting, its emotional impact heightened by the stillness of her pose. Despite its intensity, the mother's expression is enigmatic; possibly her child is sick, or dead. This exceptional, large-scale sculpture comes from one of the most prominent art-producing cultures on the African continent. It becomes one of the most important works in CMA's African collection. I believe this same artist's hand is evident in two masks in the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium; one related piece, by a different hand, is in the National Museum of African Art in Washington.” *Mother and Child* was shown in a 1980-81 exhibition of *Masterpieces of the People's Republic of the Congo* at the African-American Institute in New York City, and was included in the 1989 Smithsonian publication, *African Art in American Collections*.

The three additions to CMA's growing Korean collection represent a range in time and artistic media. An over-life-size head of a Buddha in cast iron from the 10th century was originally part of a colossal seated figure placed in a large devotional hall during the Late Unified Silla or Early Koryô periods. An important 16th-century hanging scroll records an historic *Literary Gathering* for posterity in panoramic landscape and calligraphy—the most exalted art form in East Asia. A late-18th-century hanging scroll depicts an engaging *Tiger Family*, a popular subject with later Korean artists since the tiger, in Korea's native religion of Shamanism, is believed to be the messenger of its most important deity, *San Shin* (Mountain Spirit). Also added to the museum's Asian collections is a 2nd- to 3rd-century relief in schist from India's Gandharan (Greco-Roman) style. Sensitively carved in high relief, this more-than-2'-wide stele depicts the temptation of Buddha by the demon Mâra and his daughters.

*Italian Landscape* is CMA's first work by John Robert Cozens (1752-97), of whom the great painter John Constable stated that he was “all poetry, the greatest genius that ever touched landscape.” The
museum's monumental, 26"-wide watercolor is in remarkably fresh condition, in unfaded washes of color in Cozens's preferred limited palette of grays, greens, and blues. CMA's Clara T. Rankin Chief Curator, Diane De Grazia, describes this work: "Cozens's fame rests solely on his watercolor output, and he was the artist who raised the appreciation of landscape watercolors to that of oil painting. The subject of Italian Landscape is Nature itself and man's small part in the breadth of her domain. This is among Cozens's most lyrical works."

*The Valley of the Tyne, My Native Country Near Henshaw, 1842,* is the museum's first mature landscape watercolor by the visionary painter John Martin (1789-1854), who was one of 19th-century England's most popular artists. (Martin's work is currently being revisited in an exhibition of his vast canvases of the biblical deluge, opening this week at the Yale Center for British Art in an exhibition organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.)

Additional purchases include *L'Égyptienne,* (1953), one of forty-seven prints by Pablo Picasso now in CMA's collection. This large-scale print depicts Françoise Gilot, who appeared in much of Picasso's work after the two met in 1943, with an Egyptian hairdo. Picasso's 2,500 prints using numerous techniques, executed over his seventy-year career, constitute a commitment to printmaking unmatched by any other 20th-century printmaker. This work capitalizes on the liquid subtleties possible with sugarlift aquatint.

Notable gifts to the museum include a major charcoal drawing—40" high by 80" wide—by Cleveland artist (and CMA publications head) Laurence Channing. *Big North Coast,* from 1997, depicts the Lake Erie shoreline at Edgewater Park. It was given in memory of chief curator Diane De Grazia's parents, Eugene and Virginia De Grazia, by the CMA staff.

Also, three of the collectors represented in the just-closed exhibition, *Glass Today: American Studio Glass from Cleveland Collections,* offered to CMA works from their collections to add to its own. As a result, the museum received from Heinz and Elizabeth Wolf the *Constructivist Construction* by Henry Halem, *Untitled* (1987) by Jack Ink, and *No Mo* by Mary Kay Simoni; from Robert and Ann Friedman, Janusz Walentynowicz's *The Bundle,* and from Mike and Annie Belkin, Henry Halem's *Figure #1.*

Going on view this week are the Tansey painting, the African *Mother and Child,* the Gandharan relief, the colossal head of Buddha, the Martin watercolor, the Picasso print, and a newly acquired 1925 photograph of the Eiffel Tower by Lázló Moholy-Nagy.

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