



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

When we think about the history of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation (est. 1929), we tend to think also of the former Kress Collection. And when we think about the Kress Collection, we naturally think first and foremost of old master paintings. Kress paintings, after all, greet the museum visitor at more than forty academic and municipal art museums nationwide, thanks to the “Great Kress Give-Away” celebrated by *Life Magazine* in a cover story over half a century ago. Nearly one fourth of the roughly 1,400 paintings in the Kress Collection were donated to the National Gallery of Art in celebration of its inauguration in 1941. And no fewer than four of the nine volumes in the authoritative *Complete Catalogue of the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (London: Phaidon, 1964–77; now available online via the Kress Foundation website) were devoted to European paintings, largely though by no means exclusively Italian.

And yet the primacy we understandably assign to Kress paintings can be misleading. This is evidenced by the mere fact that the remaining five volumes of the comprehensive Kress collection catalogue were devoted to bronzes, decorative arts, sculpture, tapestries and — importantly — medals and plaquettes. The Kress collection embraced no fewer than 662 medals and 438 plaquettes alone. This collection, in its entirety, was also donated to the National Gallery of Art and to this day it forms the core of the Gallery's holdings in these genres. It is thanks to the Kress gift — and to subsequent generous donations by Joseph Widener and others — that the Gallery is home to the most important collection of medals and plaquettes in America, a collection that now rivals the best collections in Europe.

2017 seems an especially opportune occasion to celebrate the Kress collection of medals and plaquettes. The Foundation's seminal donation to the National Gallery of Art occurred exactly sixty years ago, in 1957. And the volume of the *Complete Catalogue* devoted to Renaissance Medals from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art was published just ten years later, in 1967. That imposing volume, in turn, was authored by the pre-eminent scholar of Renaissance medals,

Pisanello (Veronese, c. 1395–1455)  
*Innocence and Unicorn in a  
Moonlit Landscape*, 1447  
Samuel H. Kress Collection  
National Gallery of Art  
Washington, DC



John Graham Pollard (b. 1929), who himself passed away precisely ten years ago, on 17 December 2007. 2007 is further noteworthy for the publication in that year of Pollard's comprehensive catalogue of the National Gallery of Art's entire collection of *Renaissance Medals*. Authored by Pollard with the indispensable collaboration of the late Eleonora Luciano and Maria Pollard, the two volumes of this landmark publication—devoted respectively to Italy and to France, Germany, the Netherlands and England—were issued as part of the Gallery's comprehensive *Systematic Catalogue* of its permanent collections, still in publication and distributed by Oxford University Press.

Pollard's 1967 catalogue of the Kress medals had itself been based upon G.F. Hill's pioneering 1931 catalogue of Renaissance medals in the great

collection of Gustave Dreyfus (1837–1914). Dreyfus' collection was, during his lifetime, the most celebrated private collection of medals in existence. The collection was acquired *en bloc* by the art dealer Joseph Duveen in 1930, and it remained intact until it was sold by Duveen to the Kress Foundation in 1944. In 1957, as we have seen, the Dreyfus medals were in turn donated by Kress to the National Gallery of Art. What distinguishes the collection? Most noteworthy, perhaps, is the Gallery's unrivaled collection of early Italian medals by the greatest master of the art form, Pisanello (ca. 1395–1455). The seventeenth century is also strongly represented by an exceptional group of medals by Guillaume Dupré (ca. 1574–1642).

Turning from medals to plaquettes, the Kress collection of plaquettes was first published by Sir John Pope-Hennessy in a volume of the *Kress Complete Catalogue* issued in 1965 and titled, *Renaissance Bronzes from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Reliefs, Plaquettes, Statuettes, Utensils and Mortars*. Italian sculptors are again in the foreground, including especially an extensive group by one of the pioneering artists in this genre, Moderno (Galeazzo Mondella; 1467–1528). The collection also includes numerous remarkable plaquettes by the great Paduan master Andrea Riccio (1470–1532) and his followers. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Gallery's collection of plaquettes was made the object of intense study by C. Douglas Lewis, former head of the Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts. By his retirement in 2005, he had largely completed the manuscript of what was envisioned as a two-volume catalogue of the plaquette collection. It remains unpublished, in part because comprehensive photographic documentation did not yet exist for the more than 800 specimens that were to comprise the heart of the publication.

Which brings us back to the present. Early in 2017, the Kress Foundation awarded a substantial grant (\$250,000) to the National Gallery of Art in support of the systematic digital photography of *all* the approximately 3,600 sculptures belonging to the Gallery, of which more than 2,600 are

medals, plaquettes and coins. Nearly half of the sculptures, medals, and plaquettes that will be photographed for this project are gifts to the Gallery by Samuel H. Kress. This ambitious effort is being coordinated by C.D. Dickerson III, the National Gallery of Art's Curator and Head, Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, with Alison Luchs, Curator of Early European Sculpture and Deputy Head of Sculpture and Decorative Arts along with Alan Newman, the Gallery's Chief of Imaging. The digital images being produced through this project are already being made available via the National Gallery of Art's admirable NGA Images web portal (<https://images.nga.gov>). NGA Images is a pioneering open access image repository, which embodies the same spirit of generosity that underlay the original Kress "Gift to the Nation," in the words of the *National Geographic*. In a parallel effort, an illustrated edition of C. Douglas Lewis' unpublished catalogue of the plaquettes is expected to be made available incrementally on the Gallery's rich website. And further specialized collection catalogues are likely to follow.

The Kress Foundation may be unique among American philanthropies in being so deeply intertwined with the history of collecting in America—not only with our National Gallery of Art but with public museum collections nationwide. That mission-driven nexus has shaped our philanthropic goals and programs from the beginning, and continues to inspire our work to this day. Instructively, more than one third of the grants described in the following pages advance—in one way or another, and often in multiple ways—the work of art museums throughout the nation.



**Max Marmor**  
President