A Recent Accessions Room

Our first public exhibition of Saint John’s Vision of the Mysteries of the Apocalypse, by El Greco, acquired by the Museum after it was shown in the Mannerist Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1955, marks the reopening of our special room for the display of new acquisitions. On the first floor, beside the elevator to the left of the main stair-case, it has most recently housed ancient Near Eastern art which will in future be shown in the new galleries being installed at the north end of the building.

The Bulletin for August 1906 announced the original opening of this room for “the temporary exhibition of recent accessions of all kinds in one room, where the visitor may find them readily, before they are distributed among the various collections to which they properly belong.” The Recent Accessions Room remained in continuous existence until 1941, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left of the great stairway. From 1951 to 1953 a more remote area was occasionally used for display of new material, until the space was taken for offices. Thereafter no space was available until this year for display of works of art recently received at the Museum. Nor has our custom of listing gifts, bequests, and purchases in the Annual Report satisfied public interest in our current activities.

In a large and growing museum, where a single department may house hundreds of paint-

*The Orsini cassapanca. Italian, xvi century*  
Funds from various donors, 1938
No piece of furniture is more characteristic of the High Renaissance in Italy than the cassapanca. A combined bench and chest, the cassapanca seems to have answered the needs for palace decoration most happily. It was always massive in form, and gave designers full opportunity to display the range of their talents. So it is that a number of these show unusual elegance of design and richness of decoration. Perhaps the most famous of all cassapanca is the one bearing the arms of the Orsini family which the Museum has recently acquired, and which is now to be seen in the Recent Accessions Room.

This thronelike creation is Florentine work of the third quarter of the sixteenth century—the age of Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici, and of such artists as Cellini, Ammanati and Giovanni Bologna. Its essential form is soberly architectural in character. It is entirely of walnut, and the beauty of the wood is brought out by the use of sweeping straight and curved planes in carefully studied combination. Any feeling of undue severity is relieved by accents of carved decoration. Thus the back of the bench is surmounted by a cresting, unique in Italian furniture, in the center of which is a cartouche containing the arms of the Orsini family. Flanking the armorial are two reclining nude figures, sensitively carved by an unknown master who followed in the Mannerist tradition of his time. Other significant areas of carved ornament are the cartouches containing masks of classical inspiration which are found at either end of the base.

The Orsini cassapanca was at one time in the Davanzati Palace in Florence as part of the celebrated collection brought together there in the early decades of this century by Elia Volpi. It was shown, among other places, in the great exhibition of Italian art held at the Petit Palais in Paris in 1935. It is one of the most published of all pieces of Italian furniture.