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## **The Georgia Museum of Art at UGA Acquires Two Works Significant to Georgia History**

ATHENS, GA – The Georgia Museum of Art (GMOA) acquired two important American paintings at the sale of the Florence and William Griffin Collection at Brunk Auctions in Asheville, N.C., Saturday, May 30. Between 1945 and the 1980s, the Griffins amassed an exceptional collection of southern furniture, silver, pottery, books, paintings, prints and decorative arts significant to Georgia history.

The purchase, with winning bids and buyer's premiums totaling \$133,400, was made possible by an anonymous donation in honor of George-Ann and Boone Knox. The paintings depict Robert Ransome Billups and his wife, Elizabeth Ware Fullwood Billups, circa 1827 and were painted by Edwin B. Smith (active 1815 to 1832).

The portraits have extensive exhibition and publication histories and were displayed in the traveling exhibition *Missing Pieces: Georgia Folk Art 1770-1976*, organized by the Atlanta Historical Society and shown at a number of venues in 1976 and 1977.

A classic example of early American portraiture, the half-length view of a seated Mr. Billups is set against a backdrop of lush, rolling hills with hunters and dogs chasing a wounded stag. In contrast, the more austere image of Mrs. Billups shows her seated in an interior with drapery wearing a black dress with a silver belt buckle and delicate lace collar.

Married in 1818, Robert Ransome Billups and Elizabeth Ware Fullwood were early residents of Clarke County. Mr. Billups, the nephew of Capt. John Billups, was killed on June 9, 1836, in the Creek Indian battle at Shepherd's Plantation in Stewart County. His son, Edward Swepson Billups, married Mary Richardson, daughter of Richard Richardson, owner of the Eagle Tavern in Watkinsville, Ga., where the paintings hung until 1956, when the building was given to the State of Georgia.

"The personal biography of Mr. Billups, the rich iconography of the hunters and the stag, and even Mr. Billups' elaborate coiffure will likely make this painting among the favorites of our patrons," said William U. Eiland, director of the Georgia Museum of Art.

The acquisition of these two portraits supports and strengthens the museum's collection of American paintings, a collection begun by Alfred Heber Holbrook in the 1940s. With works such as Samuel F.B. Morse's *Portrait of Mrs. Catherine Munro* (ca. 1818) and Charles Bird King's *Portrait of William Harris Crawford* (1823), these paintings are among the earliest images in the American collection.

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“The portraits will serve as an excellent means to encourage the discovery of new knowledge about Georgia’s visual and material culture, especially of the early American republic,” said Paul Manoguerra, curator of American art at GMOA.

In addition the portraits of the Billupses will be anchors for the museum’s collections of Georgia’s decorative arts and American portraiture in the galleries devoted to the permanent collection within the new wing of the museum that will open to the public in early 2011.

**Digital images of the portraits  
are available at our web site:**

**<http://www.uga.edu/gamuseum/press/index.html>**

Visit our web site at [www.uga.edu/gamuseum](http://www.uga.edu/gamuseum) or call 706.542.GMOA (4662)

**Museum Information**

Partial support for the exhibitions and programs at the Georgia Museum of Art is provided by the Georgia Council for the Arts through appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. The Council is a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Individuals, foundations and corporations provide additional museum support through their gifts to the Arch Foundation and the University of Georgia Foundation. The Georgia Museum of Art is located in the Performing and Visual Arts Complex on the East Campus of the University of Georgia. The address is 90 Carlton Street, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 30602. The museum’s galleries and shop are now closed in preparation for construction of the museum’s expansion. Events and programming will continue while the museum is under construction as part of “GMOA on the Move,” a series of off-site events and exhibitions. For more information and event times and locations, please visit [www.uga.edu/gamuseum](http://www.uga.edu/gamuseum).

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