

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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PRINTS BY JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

OPENS SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 1995, NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A dazzling array of 138 works illustrating the printmaking achievements of James McNeill Whistler and his contemporaries in the United States and Europe will be presented at the National Gallery of Art, June 18 through December 31, 1995. Prints by James McNeill Whistler and His Contemporaries is a complementary exhibition to the major retrospective, James McNeill Whistler, on view May 28 through August 20, 1995. Both exhibitions are located in the West Building.

"This exhibition is drawn primarily from the National Gallery's permanent collection. Visitors will see fifteen outstanding prints by Whistler presented among works by other leading artists who worked in the rich environment that existed for printmaking in the second half of the nineteenth century," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

Prints by James McNeill Whistler and His Contemporaries begins with prints by Charles Méryon and the artists at the core

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of the etching revival of the 1860s, including Whistler, Félix Bracquemond, and Francis Seymour Haden. Méryon's views of old Paris helped focus attention on the rapidly changing city during its renovation into the first great modern capital. Contemporary critics compared Whistler's etchings from this period to those of Rembrandt.

The graphic contributions of the impressionists are presented in lithographs, etchings, and monotypes by Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, and others. Manet's impressive lithographs helped to stimulate interest in a process that had been dominated by commercial use for much of the century in France. Degas, Pissarro, Bracquemond, Legros, and Lepic were some of the artists who submitted significant numbers of prints to the early impressionist shows. Rare monotypes and selectively inked etchings relate to Whistler's subtle use of tone in his evocative images of Venice.

The accomplishments of printmakers in the 1870s and 1880s are illuminated by views of upper class life by James Tissot, city scenes by Félix Buhot and Auguste Lepère, the obsessively detailed narratives of Rudolphe Bresdin, and the powerful symbolist images of Odilon Redon.

Color printmaking in the 1890s is surveyed, from the color etchings of Mary Cassatt to the Nabi lithographs of Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard. A small area is dedicated to the works of two other printmakers that Whistler admired, the German

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etcher Max Klinger, and the French master of woodcut Félix Vallotton.

The final section of the show is devoted to Whistler's impact on printmaking in the early part of this century. His Venice prints, a selection of which are included, were a potent influence on British and American printmaking. Works by Joseph Pennell, the artist's friend and biographer, reflect the powerful impact of Whistler on American printmaking, as do the works of the young John Marin, Childe Hassam, Ernest Roth, and John Taylor Arms. Whistler's influence on British printmaking is seen clearly in the work of Theodore Roussel and James McBey, whose Venetian scenes resound with Whistler's influence while adding a new vision to the representation of the Queen of the Adriatic.

Eric Denker, a lecturer in the National Gallery's department of education, selected the works for the exhibition and wrote the accompanying wall text. Many of the finest impressions are from gifts made to the Gallery by Lessing J. Rosenwald and Horace Gallatin. In addition, loans have come from The Baltimore Museum of Art and several private collections. Denker is also the curator of In Pursuit of the Butterfly: Portraits of James McNeill Whistler, at the National Portrait Gallery, April 7 through August 13, 1995.

The National Gallery of Art is open to the public free of charge Monday through Saturday, 10 to 5, and Sunday, 11 to 6. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176.

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