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The Playful and Intellectual Nature of Trompe l'Oeil is Revealed in the Most Comprehensive Exhibition Ever Done of the Genre, on View at the National Gallery of Art, October 13, 2002 - March 2, 2003

Washington, D.C. -- The art of trompe l'oeil, from its origins in classical antiquity to its impact on 20th-century artists, will be presented with more than 100 works in the most comprehensive exhibition of the genre ever organized. It will be at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, from October 13, 2002 through March 2, 2003. The Gallery is the sole venue for this exhibition.

Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting illustrates both the playful and intellectual nature of trompe l'oeil -- a depiction of an object, person or scene, which is so lifelike that it appears to be real. The exhibition includes paintings by Europeans Samuel van Hoogstraten, Louis-Léopold Boilly, and Carel Fabritius; and Americans Charles Willson Peale, William Harnett, and John Frederick Peto, among others; as well as a few mosaics and sculptures.

This exhibition is generously supported by Mary Jo and Robert L. Kirk. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"Throughout the ages, trompe l'oeil has always been one of the most popular genres while, at the same time, engaging some of the best artists in its challenges," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Our generous supporters and lenders have made it possible for us to organize an exhibition of art that is both accomplished and amusing."

THE EXHIBITION

Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting presents paintings from different periods within each of its sections, showing the surprising persistence of some trompe l'oeil themes over the centuries. The exhibition opens with such works as *Still Life with Fruit* (3rd quarter of the first century AD), a fresco found in the dining room of the House of Julius Felix, at Pompeii, and among the last works is *Eaten by Duchamp* (1964), a collage of various materials -- actual remains of a meal eaten by modern master Marcel Duchamp -- mounted on wood, by the Swiss artist Daniel Spoerri.

In its Prologue, **Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting** establishes the literary and visual sources of trompe l'oeil, with works of art inspired by ancient legends. One of the most famous legends comes from Hellenistic times and tells about Zeuxis, so accomplished a painter that birds flew up to his painted grapes, and his rival Parrhasios, who bested him by painting a curtain that Zeuxis tried to draw aside to see what was hidden behind it. Among the works in this section are *The Twins, Chianti Grapes* (1885) by George Henry Hall and the *Portrait of Filippo Archinto* (c. 1558) by Titian.

The exhibition is then divided into six sections, beginning with the *Temptation for the Hand*, where one of the traditional devices used by trompe l'oeil artists is introduced -- images of letters, prints, and other flat objects that appear to rest on the picture surface, as in *Trompe l'Oeil* (1703) by Edward Collyer and *Music Stand* by William Sidney Mount.

The following sections of the exhibition -- *Things on the Wall; Niches, Cupboards, Cabinets*; and *In and Out of the Picture* -- focus respectively on three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface, as in *The Old Violin* (1886) by William Harnett; three-dimensional images on a three-dimensional space, as in the *Cabinet of Curiosities* (late 17th century) by Domenico Remps; and blurring the boundary between real and fictitious space, as in *Escaping Criticism* (1874) by Pere Borrell del Caso.

In the next section, *The Painting as Object*, it is not what is in the painting that is fooling

the eye, but the whole painting, as an object, as in John Haberle's *Torn in Transit* (1890-1895) and Antonio Cioci's *The Painter's Easel* (c. 1775-1780), among others.

The last section, *The Object as Art*, investigates the legacy of the art of trompe l'oeil to 20th-century artists. It includes works such as *The Two Mysteries* (1966) by René Magritte, *Stretcher Frame with Cross Bars III* (1968) by Roy Lichtenstein, *White Brillo Boxes* (1964) by Andy Warhol, and *Security Guard* (1990) by Duane Hanson. Although these 20th-century works of art are not trompe l'oeil, they engage with many of the genre's intellectual traditions.

TROMPE L'OEIL: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Trompe l'oeil, the French term for "eye-deceiver," is a modern word for an old phenomenon: a three-dimensional "perception" provoked by a flat surface, for a puzzling moment of insecurity and reflection. The early precursors of modern trompe l'oeil appeared during the Renaissance, with the discovery of mathematically correct perspective. But the fooling of the eye to the point of confusion with reality only emerged with the rise of still-life painting in the Netherlands in the 17th century.

The new genre spread throughout Europe and the United States. Charles Willson Peale's painting *Staircase Group* (1795), which is in the exhibition, is said to have fooled George Washington. Although based on 17th-century European traditions, American 19th-century trompe l'oeil painting is a genuine American genre and an important link to 20th-century art, especially to American pop art.

Though highly esteemed by collectors, from the beginning art theorists often dismissed trompe l'oeil as the lowest category of art, seeing it as a mere technical tour-de-force that did not require invention or intellectual thought. In the 17th century, trompe l'oeil masters were not only receiving praise and recognition from many quarters but also pushing the boundaries of the genre: Samuel van Hoogstraten was awarded a medal by the Holy Roman Emperor; and Cornelis Gijsbrechts had given trompe l'oeil paintings the shape of the depicted object.

In the 20th century, artists continued to probe the limits of representations, with Pablo Picasso including real objects in his cubist collages, as in *Guitar* (1926), also in the

exhibition. By that time, modern brain research was investigating the issues of perception involved in trompe l'oeil.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION, CATALOGUE

Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The exhibition's guest curator is art historian Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, director at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome. The coordinating curator is Franklin Kelly, senior curator, American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with essays by noted scholars in the field: Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, Wolf Singer, Paul Staiti, Alberto Veca and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. The catalogue will be available in the Gallery Shops, through the Shops' Web site (www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm (<http://www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm>)), and by telephone (800 697-9350), for \$85 (hardcover).

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Audio tour

Trompe l'Oeil

Narrated by National Gallery of Art director Earl A. Powell III, this Acoustiguide tour includes commentary by Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, the exhibition's guest curator; Franklin Kelly, Gallery senior curator of American and British paintings, and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Gallery curator of northern baroque paintings. It is available at the entrance to the exhibition: \$6 (adults); \$5 (senior citizens, students, and groups of ten or more).

This rental fee also includes **The Director's Tour: Masterpieces at the National Gallery of Art.**

Sunday Slide Lecture

Trompe l'Oeil: Art, Philosophy, or Just a Trick?

Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, guest curator and director at the Bibliotheca

Hertziana, Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome

October 13; 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Gallery Talks

Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting

(60 min.)

Frances Feldman, Wilford W. Scott, J. Russell Sale,
and Eric Denker, lecturers

October 24, 25, 26, and 29 at 1:00;

October 31 at 12:00;

November 7, 8, 9, 12, 21, 22, 23, and 26 at 1:00;

November 14 and December 4, 12, 14, and 18 at 12:00

East Building, art information desk

Evening with Educators

Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting

Offered in collaboration with the Kennedy Center, this program features a slide lecture, self-guided tour of the exhibition, and refreshments. A dance educator will be available to work with participants to interpret selected images through choreographed movement.

Wednesday, November 6, 4:30-7:30

Fee: \$20, Registration: (202) 842-6796

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov