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"JEAN-ANTOINE HOUDON (1741-1828): SCULPTOR OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT" ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART MAY 4 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 7, 2003

Washington, DC --Jean-Antoine Houdon is widely acknowledged as the greatest sculptor of the 18th century. A confidant of princes and intellectuals, he created busts and statues that have shaped our image of the leaders of the Enlightenment, from Diderot to Jefferson. **Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828): Sculptor of the Enlightenment**, on view in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art from May 4 through September 7, 2003, is the first major international monographic show devoted to Houdon's work. Some 60 of Houdon's finest sculptures in terracotta, marble, bronze, and plaster will be on view in rooms adjacent to the new Sculpture Galleries. From *L'Ecorché (Flayed Man)* (dated 1767) that first won him fame to iconic busts such as *Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)* (dated 1779), mythic figures such as the *Priest of the Lupercalia* (about 1768) and touching family portraits, Houdon's work is presented in all its expressive range and power.

The exhibition has been organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, where it will be on view from November 4, 2003, through January 25, 2004; and the Réunion des musées nationaux and l'Établissement public du musée et du domaine national de Versailles, France, where it will be on view at the Musée national du château de Versailles from March 1, 2004 through May 30, 2004.

"Houdon continues to astonish us today with the vitality and realism of his work," said

Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful for the superb cooperation of the many lenders, our museum partners, and the generous support of the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation, all of whom have made this landmark exhibition possible."

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition at the National Gallery of Art is made possible by a generous grant from the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

THE EXHIBITION

Despite Houdon's reputation as the foremost sculptor of the remarkable era that encompassed the American and French Revolutions, the Directoire, and the Empire, this is the first international exhibition devoted to his art. The presentation includes major sculptures spanning the artist's entire career, borrowed from collections throughout Europe and the United States.

The exhibition ranges from Houdon's early works--such as the *Morpheus* (dated 1777), his "reception piece" for membership in the prestigious Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in Paris--to late works such as his beautiful portraits of Napoleon and Josephine. Several exciting discoveries distinguish this exhibition, among them an original plaster bust of the actress Sophie Arnould, in pristine condition, which lay unidentified in storage for more than a century. The exhibition will demonstrate Houdon's intention to create a gallery of great men in the tradition of ancient Rome and the Italian Renaissance and will make clear his enormous influence on later sculptors like David d'Angers. Highlights of the exhibition include:

L'Ecorché, (Figure of a Flayed Man) (dated 1767), executed by Houdon when he was a student in Rome as a study for a figure of Saint John the Baptist and sold to the Académie de France there in 1767. This is the first time it has ever been loaned by the Académie to an exhibition.

Life-size statues of *Diana the Huntress* (dated 1782) and *Apollo* (dated 1788). *Diana* was the first life-size bronze the sculptor ever made and is among his most famous and popular works. It is one of the rare nude depictions of Diana from the period. Originally commissioned as garden sculptures, the statues are reunited in this exhibition for the first time since the eighteenth century.

François-Marie Arouet, called Voltaire (1694-1778) (dated 1778), Houdon's first portrait of the famous philosopher, one of three busts of Voltaire in the exhibition. Of the numerous portraits done of Voltaire in the previous 60 years, Houdon's work was the only one that completely satisfied the sitter and his fans. Much acclaimed, the bust turned Houdon's studio into a public attraction, drawing crowds of people who wanted to see the lifelike image.

George Washington (1732-1799) (late 1780s), a portrait considered by Houdon to be the most important commission of his career. When Congress and the Virginia legislature decided to erect a monument to recognize Washington's contributions, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin recommended Houdon for the work. Houdon and Franklin sailed together from France in 1785, and Houdon traveled on to Mount Vernon to study Washington from life. Houdon's portraits established the primary iconography for Washington in Europe and America and were copied and imitated by many sculptors in the 19th century.

Winter (also called *La Frileuse*) (dated 1783) and *Summer* (dated 1785), a pair of marble statues that won great fame for the originality of the treatment of the subjects. *Winter*, a shivering young girl, departs strikingly from the images of maturity or old age associated with the season. In *Summer*, Houdon augments Ceres' traditional sickle and sheaves of wheat with a modern addition, a watering can.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) (1789), a portrait that has literally shaped our image of the man. Jefferson probably met Houdon through Franklin

shortly after arriving in Paris in August 1784. Many artists portrayed Jefferson throughout his long life, but Houdon's work has had the greatest impact. It was used for the profile on the obverse of the Jefferson dollar, minted in 1903, and it was chosen again in 1938 for the obverse of the American nickel, a coin still in circulation today.

John Paul Jones (1747-1792) (dated 1781), a work commissioned by the Masonic lodge whose members included Jones, Houdon, Voltaire, and Franklin. To come as close as possible to the anatomical truth of his models, Houdon employed a rigorous system of measurements using calipers: his exactitude was demonstrated when the exhumed skull of Jones was compared with the head sculpted by Houdon, and the dimensions were identical.

Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France (1769-1821) (dated 1806) and inscribed, "executed from life at Saint-Cloud, August 1806," remained in Houdon's possession until his death and was sold along with the contents of his studio in 1828. Executed late in the sculptor's career, this and his bust of Josephine reveal an undiminished ability to create an accurate depiction not only of his sitters' appearance but of their inner life.

A bust of *Lafayette, Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roches Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834)* (before 1789) once owned by Thomas Jefferson is shown along with the life mask of Lafayette used in its creation. Jefferson ordered at least seven Houdon busts before leaving Paris and displayed several in the Tea Room at Monticello.

A portrait of the singer *Sophie Arnould (1740-1802)* (1775), represented by two versions of the same model, one in white marble and the other in white plaster. The latter is the only surviving plaster copy. Forgotten in storage rooms for one and a half centuries, it is astonishing for its pristine condition, crisp detail and untouched surface. It was rediscovered and identified in 1999 by exhibition curator Anne Poulet.

THE ARTIST

Houdon's career coincided with an extremely turbulent period in French and American history, spanning two revolutions, the Directoire, and the empire under Napoleon. His images of the key figures of the time provide fascinating insights into history as well as the history of portraiture.

Born at Versailles in 1741, Houdon received the best academic education available to a young sculptor and won the Prix de Rome in 1761. While in Italy he showed an unusual interest in anatomical studies, creating his famous figure of *L'Ecorché*, or flayed man, during his stay at the Académie de France. Although trained to work for the French court, Houdon became the preferred sculptor of leaders of the Enlightenment, especially Frédéric Melchior Grimm (1728-1807) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784). Through them he received commissions from foreign patrons. He traveled to the German court of Saxe-Gotha twice in the early 1770s and later worked for the court of Catherine II of Russia.

It was, however, with his famous bust of *Denis Diderot (1713-1784)* (1771), exhibited at the Salon of 1771, that Houdon's career as a portrait sculptor was launched. He was to portray most of the great intellectual, military, and political figures of the Enlightenment in France and in the United States. He was to revolutionize portraiture, rendering his sitters with a remarkable degree of physical accuracy (often using either life or death masks) and with extraordinary psychological insight. Houdon's real genius lay in his capacity to show the individual as a whole.

CURATOR, CATALOGUE AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

The guest curator for the exhibition is Anne Litle Poulet, curator emerita of European sculpture and decorative arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. A specialist in eighteenth-century French sculpture, Ms. Poulet has published widely in the field. In 1984 she organized and wrote the catalogue for the exhibition, **Clodion Terracottas in North American Collections**, held at The Frick Collection in New York; and in 1992 she served as co-author with Guilhem Scherf of the catalogue for the exhibition, **Clodion (1738-1814)**, held at the Louvre in Paris and published by the Réunion des

musées nationaux.

The exhibition catalogue, **Jean Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment**, is notable for its extensive scholarship and illustration, including at least two views of each sculpture on exhibit. The catalogue features essays by Guilhem Scherf, who places Houdon in the context of his times; Anne Poulet with Ulrike Mathies and Christoph Frank, on a highly important, recently discovered document by Houdon detailing his theories and working methods; Ulrike Mathies, on Houdon's relations with German noble families; and Christoph Frank, on Houdon's dealing with his Russian patrons, most notably the empress Catherine II. Published in English by the National Gallery of Art, the catalogue is available from the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/home.htm>) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 for \$85.00 hardcover (384 pages, 140 color, 203 black and white illustrations). The catalogue will be published in French by the Réunion des musées nationaux.

National Gallery of Art director Earl A. Powell III narrates an audio tour to the exhibition, with commentary by exhibition curator Anne Poulet and Nicholas Penny, senior curator of sculpture and decorative arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington. The audio tour is available at the entrance to the exhibition for \$6 (adults); \$5 (senior citizens, students and groups of ten or more).

A special lecture program, **Portraiture in the Eighteenth Century**, will be held on Saturday, May 10, 1:00-5:00 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium. Panelists include: Kathleen Adler, head of education, National Gallery, London; Philip Conisbee, senior curator of European paintings and curator of French paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Alan Fern, director emeritus, National Portrait Gallery, Washington; Nicholas Penny, senior curator of sculpture and decorative arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington; exhibition curator Anne Poulet; Robert Rosenblum, Henry Ittleson, Jr. Professor of Modern European Art, New York University; and Michael Rosenthal, professor, University of Warwick.

Exhibition curator Anne Poulet will give a lecture on the exhibition on Sunday, May 18, at 2:00 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium.

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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.

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