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Companion Exhibition to
The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard:
Masterpieces of French Genre Painting

Washington, DC--Celebrating one of the most innovative periods in the history of color printmaking, Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-
The exhibition captures the spirit of the times, from the reign of Louis XV to the advent of the French Revolution, in 115 color prints of subtle, delicate beauty and astonishing technical agility. Combining Sir Isaac Newton’s optics with new methods of etching and engraving, such master printmakers as Le Blon, Janinet, Descourtis, and Bonnet, among others, pioneered the four-color printing process in universal use today.

"The National Gallery of Art is fortunate to have one of the strongest collections of 18th-century color prints in the United States," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Thanks to our generous donors, from Joseph E. Widener and Lessing J. Rosenwald many years ago, to Ivan E. Phillips, A. Thompson Ellwanger III, and Gregory E. Mescha today, the public can enjoy some of the most beautiful color prints ever made."

The Exhibition

Colorful Impressions is organized chronologically. During the second half of the 18th century in France, newly invented engraving and etching techniques were combined with new ways of printing a single image from multiple plates. For the first time, color prints could be created from red, yellow, blue, and black—an innovation that led, over the course of a few decades, to the production of thousands of images. Ranging from high art portraits, landscapes, allegories, and genre scenes to more popular fashion plates, maps, textile and wallpaper motifs, and even button covers, the prints were intended not for royalty but for the middle class.

All the greatest monuments of the genre are represented in this exhibition. Highlights include Jakob Christoffel Le Blon’s (1667 - 1741) color mezzotint portrait Louis XV (1739); Louis-Marin Bonnet’s (1736 - 1793) so-called "English prints"—partially printed with gold leaf—and his great pastel-manner Tête de Flore (Head of Flora) (1769) after Boucher; and Anne Allen’s (active 1790s) charming acrobats and flowers. Noce de village (Village Wedding) (1785) by Charles-Melchior Descourtis (1753 - 1820), the centerpiece of the exhibition, shows the steps used to produce this graceful narrative image from five colors on separate copperplates.
Curator and Catalogue

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Exhibition curator Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curator of old master drawings at the National Gallery of Art, is an expert in French 18th-century art and author of the exhibition catalogue, one of the few books in English on the history, craft, and marketing of French 18th-century color prints.

Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Lund Humphries, Burlington, Vt., and Hampshire, U. K., and due out in October 2003, Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France includes essays by the curator on color printmaking before 1730; connoisseur Ivan E. Phillips on his own collection; National Gallery of Art conservator Judith C. Walsh on the craft of color printmaking and, with Lehua Fisher, on the paper used in the prints; and Kristel Smentek on their marketing. The catalogue will be available from the National Gallery of Art Web site at www.nga.gov (http://www.nga.gov/home.htm) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 ($65.00 hardcover, $45.00 softcover, 200 pages, 152 color and 66 black and white illustrations).

Companion Exhibition


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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