



## Online Press Kit

### Press Release

Release Date: Updated November 4, 2003

### [Backgrounder](#)

**FIRST MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION IN UNITED STATES OF  
CHRISTOFFER WILHELM ECKERSBERG "FATHER OF DANISH PAINTING"  
ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART  
NOVEMBER 23, 2003-FEBRUARY 29, 2004**

### [Press Images](#)

### [Checklist](#)

### [Curator's Biography](#)

### [Related Activities](#)

### [Online Resources](#)

#### For Press Inquiries Only:

Mary Jane McKinven  
(202) 842-6358  
[mj-mckinven@nga.gov](mailto:mj-mckinven@nga.gov)

[Eckersberg at the  
Statens Museum for  
Kunst, Copenhagen](#)



Christoffer Wilhelm  
Eckersberg  
*Woman in Front of a  
Mirror, 1841*  
oil on canvas, 33.5 x 26  
cm (13 3/16 x 10 1/4)  
The Hirschsprung  
Collection, Copenhagen

Washington, DC -- The first monographic exhibition in the United States devoted to the "father of Danish painting," **Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, 1783-1853**, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art from November 23, 2003, until February 29, 2004.

A noted professor as well as a prolific artist, Eckersberg exerted tremendous influence on a generation that collectively created the "Golden Age" of Danish painting. Coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the artist's death, the exhibition will be the first in 20 years devoted exclusively to his work. The exhibition of 52 works traces Eckersberg's career from its neoclassical beginnings, through his formative periods of study in Paris and Rome, to his mature work in Denmark

where, after his appointment to the Royal Academy in 1818, he became the most influential teacher in the history of Danish art.

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in collaboration with the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, and the Royal Danish Embassy, Washington.

#### EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition is made possible by support from Her Majesty Queen Margrethe and His Royal Highness Prince Henrik's Fund, The Danish Ministry of Culture, Lockheed Martin, Augustinus Foundation, Bikuben Foundation, Scandinavian Airlines System, GroupV Falck and The Wackenhut Corporation, Beckett Foundation, and Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals, Inc. Generous support for the catalogue of the exhibition was provided by The Honorable Edward E. Elson and Mrs. Elson.

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

"We are pleased to celebrate the close ties between Denmark and the United States with this first-ever exhibition of one of its most distinguished artists," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to the funders for their generous support, and for the superb cooperation of our Danish colleagues in making this exhibition possible."

#### THE EXHIBITION

Eckersberg's major contribution to Danish art was the introduction of a realism based on the close study of nature combined with classical principles of composition. His work focused on ordinary, everyday subjects, rendered with a clear, light palette and a precise touch, the hallmarks of Danish painting in its Golden Age. Organized chronologically, the exhibition represents all aspects of Eckersberg's multi-faceted work, with special emphasis on his portraits, landscapes, and marine subjects.

Eckersberg's early neoclassical works, influenced by his studies with Jacques-Louis David in Paris, are represented in the exhibition by such paintings as *A Young Bowman Sharpening his Arrow* (1812) and *Sleeping Woman in Antique Costume (Alcyone's Servant)*, (1813). Eckersberg's interest in landscape was already evident during his early years in Paris, as demonstrated by *The Pont Royal Seen from the Quai Voltaire in Paris* (1812) and *View from the Château Meudon near Paris* (1813).

His open-air Roman landscapes usually focus on some element of architecture, and featured examples from this period include *The*

*Cloisters of the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome (1813/1816), The Marble Steps Leading Up to the Church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome (1813/1816), and View through Three of the Northwestern Arches in the Third Story of the Colosseum in Rome (1815/1816).*

After three years in Rome, Eckersberg took these lessons in painting from nature back with him to Denmark, where he encouraged the study of life and nature and wrote books on perspective, illustrated with scenes of daily life. The exhibition features many of Eckersberg's closely observed portraits, including *Julie Eckersberg, née Juel, the Artist's Second Wife (1817)*, and *Mendel Levin Nathanson's Eldest Daughters, Bella and Hanna (1820)*. All are characterized by a directness of approach that breaks with the traditions of the past, a quality shared by his later studies of the nude human form.

Eckersberg's nudes are portrayed with a candor remarkable in European painting of the early 19th century. The exhibition includes one of Eckersberg's most famous works, *Woman in Front of a Mirror (1841)*, as well as *Woman Putting on Her Slippers (1843)*, paintings characterized by a cool classical light and a striking modernity.

Eckersberg's marine paintings that record nautical life along the Danish coast are among his most original works. They reflect his love of nature and obsession with accuracy: he would take sailing trips to study rigging and other details. Notable examples of his marine paintings on view include *The Russian Ship of the Line "Asow" and a Frigate at Anchor in the Elsinore Roads (1828)*, and *An American Naval Brig Lying at Anchor while the Sails Are Drying (1831-1832)*. Eckersberg was also fascinated by the weather, as revealed by his *Study of Clouds (1826)*.

#### THE ARTIST

Eckersberg learned the rudiments of painting as a child from his father, a carpenter and house painter. After serving as an apprentice to two minor artists, Eckersberg enrolled in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1803, aspiring to be a history painter. At the time, the academy in Denmark, like the academy in Paris, held history painting in greater esteem than all other categories of painting, such as landscape or genre. Eckersberg studied under Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard, who instilled in him the principles of neoclassical art.

As a result of winning top honors, Eckersberg went to Paris in 1810. There he studied with Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) for a year, painting from life for five or six hours each morning. In Paris he also made drawings and paintings in and around the city and suburbs, observing daily life around him. Continuing to study in Italy from 1813 to 1816, Eckersberg joined colleagues from all over Europe in painting small pictures in the open air.

When Eckersberg returned to Copenhagen in 1816, Denmark was

devastated by defeat in the Napoleonic Wars yet experienced a time of national cultural revival, now considered the beginning of the Golden Age of Danish art. Painting from nature, as he learned to do in France and Italy, was Eckersberg's principal legacy to Danish artists. After his election as professor at the Royal Danish Academy in 1818, Eckersberg began to inspire the next generation of painters--Købke, Lundbye, and others--by encouraging them to make sorties into the countryside around Copenhagen. In the 1830s and 1840s he also conducted classes in painting from the nude model, male and female.

As with many other artists and poets of his time, Eckersberg was fascinated by the discoveries of science, evident in his 1833 **Theory of Perspective for Young Painters**, where he applied the laws of geometry to the depiction of the natural world. Eckersberg believed the ideal is uncovered through the closest possible attention to nature, stating:

"Therefore let us with assiduity scrutinize Nature's Great Book, let us endeavor to eradicate all kinds of prejudice and seek out the nearest path to the goal--namely to Truth!"

#### **CURATOR, CATALOGUE, ACTIVITIES**

The co-curators of the exhibition are Philip Conisbee, senior curator, European Paintings, National Gallery of Art, and Kasper Monrad, chief curator, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Conisbee, Monrad, and Lene Bøgh Rønberg, assistant curator for research at the Statens Museum for Kunst, are co-authors of the exhibition catalogue, *Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783-1853)*. The lavish illustrated volume includes an essay on Eckersberg's originality by Conisbee, an examination of Eckersberg in the tradition of open-air painting by Monrad, and a biography by Rønberg, who also wrote the catalogue entries. Published by the National Gallery of Art, the catalogue will be available from the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 for \$25.00 softcover (192 pages, 60 color, 36 black-and-white illustrations).

Exhibition curator Philip Conisbee will present the opening day lecture, "**Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg and the Golden Age of Danish Painting**," on November 23, 2003 at 2:00 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium. A special series, "**Four Great Danish Art Museums**," will feature illustrated lectures by the directors of Copenhagen's major museums on four consecutive Sundays starting January 4, 2004 at 2:00 p.m. Speakers include: Flemming Friberg, The Ny Carlsberg Gluptotek; Allis Helleland, The Statens Museum for Kunst; Marianne Saabye, The Hirschsprung Collection; and Stig Miss, Thorvaldsens Museum.

Since the early 1990s, Danish film has enjoyed a period of exceptional artistic innovation and unprecedented international success. Young Danish directors including Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg and others

will be represented in a special film series beginning January 10, "**New Cinema of Denmark.**" In February, a selection of "**Danish Silent Films**" produced by Nordisk Films, the world's oldest production house, will be shown. Both film series will be shown in the East Building Auditorium.

Two Gallery concerts will be presented in honor of the exhibition on November 23 and January 18. Gallery talks will be given by National Gallery of Art lecturer Philip Leonard through December, January and February. For specific dates, times and other details about all Eckersberg-related activities, visit [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov).

---

## National Gallery of Art, Press Office

home | [general information](#) | [exhibitions](#) | [image lists](#) | [recent announcements](#)  
[press archives](#) | [contact us](#) | [nga.gov](#)

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](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Click here for [detailed information on National Gallery location, hours, and policies](#).  
If you are a member of the press and would like to be added to our press list, [click here](#).

If you would like to subscribe to the Gallery's Web site newsletter, contact [webnews@nga.gov](mailto:webnews@nga.gov) with the word "subscribe" in the subject field and you will be automatically signed up. Your message must come from the e-mail account to which you want the newsletter to be sent. If you decide to remove your name from future mailings, send an e-mail to [webnews@nga.gov](mailto:webnews@nga.gov) with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject field.

[Copyright ©2003 National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC](#)

---

