

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art,
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WASHINGTON: November 19: A special exhibition of drawings, prints and books, which were made in France during the eighteenth century, opens at the National Gallery of Art today, David E. Finley, Director of the Gallery, announced.

This exhibition, devoted entirely to French graphic art from the time of Louis XV through the French Revolution, displays valuable material of a period which is rarely shown adequately in America. The present exhibition is made possible by drawing first on the resources of the Widener Collection in the National Gallery, and then augmenting the exhibition by a number of fine individual items selected from the Rosenwald Collection in the Gallery, and also by loans from the collections of Dr. A. W. S. Rosenbach of Philadelphia, and Mrs. Irwin Laughlin of Washington. The paintings and sculpture in the Widener Collection so overshadow the minor arts that the public has never been aware of the wealth and rarity of the eighteenth-century color plates, engravings, books and drawings which came to the National Gallery with this famous Collection.

Included in the exhibition are beautiful color plates by Debucourt and Janinet; black and white engravings after the paintings of the frivolous Swedish artist Lavreince, or the spirited son-in-law of Boucher, Baudouin; also drawings by Lancret, Fragonard, Gravelot and Moreau. In collecting examples of these masters, quality and provenance are of the greatest importance; and really fine pieces by these artists have always been admired, collected and kept mostly in Europe.

The purchase of the celebrated Albert Christophle Collection formed the nucleus of the eighteenth-century library in the Widener Collection. It was Christophle who went to the small town of Hagenau in Germany in 1878 and bought a number of prints from a portfolio which had belonged to the heirs of Janinet. The portfolio contained artist's proofs; and, when the contents became known, it caused something of a sensation in Paris. The eighteenth-century color plate process permitted only a very limited number of good proofs before the delicate coloring was lost. Consequently, such famous color plates as the two rare color engravings, Love and Folly, by Janinet after Fragonard, should only be seen with fresh clear printing. Also included in the exhibition from the same source is a marvelous impression of the Guitar Player, a print known only in two or three impressions of quality, and two superb proofs of the Indiscretion and Avowal.

The well-known set of color plates, the Promenades by Debucourt, which mirror and ridicule the costumes and behavior of famous characters and types to be found in the French capital just before the Revolution, are to be seen in the exhibition with the full blue tones which only Debucourt knew how to print successfully.

Of no less interest are a number of drawings, illustrated books, and eighteenth-century bindings which once formed a part of the well-known Roederer library at Reims. During the first World War, this library was removed under shell fire, without loss, from Reims to safety in Paris. A few years later, in 1921, it was brought to this country, broken up, and sold. By happy chance, a number of the Roederer items are now reunited. The most outstanding things from this source, in the present exhibition, are the finest known copy of the La Fontaine Contes, 1761, which was bound by Derome in yellow inlaid morocco for the Fermier-General, Bonnemet; three luminous wash drawings by Fragonard, one from the Rosenwald Collection and the other two lent by Dr. A. W. S. Rosenbach; also a very choice group of drawings by Eisen, Gravelot and Boucher.

Special mention should be made of two characteristic drawings by the great master of illustration, Moreau le Jeune. Both are exquisitely drawn figure sketches, studies for two of the plates in the Monument de Costume.

Mention should also be made of a very recent gift to the Gallery by Mr. Myron A. Hofer in memory of his mother, Mrs. Charles Hofer, consisting of two beautiful drawings by Lancret, representing two women posed in eighteenth-century costumes. One of the drawings, an original sketch for one of the Lancret panels at Potsdam, is now shown for the first time in this country.