

NEWS RELEASE
National Gallery of Art
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, December 12: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announces the opening on December 21 of a special exhibition, THE ART OF FRANCE IN PRINTS AND BOOKS. The scope and unusual quality of the exhibition are the results of combining prints and books from the Rosenwald and Widener Collections in the National Gallery with books from the Rosenwald Collection in the Library of Congress. This is the first of a series of exhibitions which are planned by the Print Department to illustrate the history of the graphic arts in several countries.

In France the production of beautifully illustrated books has always paralleled the history of printmaking. Two large Bible pages written and illuminated in the thirteenth century, fine examples of the miniaturists' art before the use of the printing press or the engraver's block, introduce the exhibition. Most fifteenth century French graphic work was done by anonymous artists and is exceptionally rare. A few colored woodcuts and a number of important woodcut books, the Paris, Danse Macabre, a Virgil published in Lyon, Gaston de Foix's book with the first pictures of hunting and a Crescentius with scenes of country life, give an idea of the diversity and charm of French art in this period.

A small group of the engravings by Jean Duvet, the first French engraver to whom a name may definitely be given, are outstanding prints in the sixteenth century section. Also, of the same century, is an unusual set of large woodcuts, representing the Triumph of Faith, which were cut after a famous design of Titian.

The sober portraits by Nanteuil, Drevet, and Morin mirror the great figures of the French seventeenth century in literature, science and politics. The popular festivals, receptions and triumphant royal processions which were characteristic of the grand siècle are well illustrated in the engraved plates of the seventeenth century books which are in the exhibition.

A number of the well known prints by such artists as Fragonard, Lavrience, Moreau-le Jeune, Saint-Aubin and Debucourt are representative of the eighteenth century. The Amsterdam edition of La Fontaine's Fables, The Praise of Folly by Erasmus, with original drawings by Eisen, are typical of the luxurious books which were published at the time.

In the nineteenth century there are prints by Daumier, Ingres, Delacroix, Corot, Manet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and many others. The exhibition concludes with the etchings made by Picasso to illustrate a new edition, 1942, of Buffon's celebrated work on Natural History.