

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

Washington, D. C. April 2, 1968. The work of the foremost French etcher, Charles Meryon (1821-1868) will be shown throughout the month of April in an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art commemorating the 100th anniversary of the artist's death.

Selected entirely from the holdings of the National Gallery, the 90 etchings and drawings to be exhibited are largely from the Rosenwald Collection. They include The Little Bridge of 1850, first of a series immortalizing the Paris of Meryon's day, and the glowing atmospheric print The Apse of Notre Dame. Of particular interest is The Old Louvre, a work which combines the media of etching and pencil drawing, done after a painting of 1651 by Reinier Zeeman.

The tragic conclusion of Meryon's life at a mad-house in Charenton is usually traced to the unhappy circumstances of his birth. Son of an English doctor and a French dancing girl, the sensitive Meryon had an unsettled childhood, followed by an unsuccessful encounter with the rigors of navy life. His plates of the sea and ships reflect this early period, and are probably based on sketches he made on a trip to New Zealand between 1842 and 1846.

Meryon settled in Paris where he attained the highest degree of excellence with renderings of Paris streets in the early 1850's. These etchings are considered the most remarkable architectural prints of their type.

From 1858 on, signs of mental deterioration became evident in his work. The curious vagaries of his sick and suspicious mind were manifested in certain prints to be seen in this exhibition where the stone walls of buildings seem to be peopled with lurking eyes.

In addition to the Meryon prints, the National Gallery will show through April a series of 40 etchings by the English artist-naturalist Mark Catesby (1683-1749), from the collection of Dr. and Mrs. George B. Green of Arlington, Virginia, some of which have been given to the Gallery. Known as the Colonial Audubon, Catesby came to visit his sister in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1712. A trained horticulturist, he became fascinated by the flora and fauna in his new surroundings, and with the encouragement of leading persons in the community, recorded his impressions in drawings and writings which eventually won him the financial support of the British Royal Society. After returning to England in 1726, Catesby learned the art of etching and altogether made 220 plates, personally supervising the production and hand coloring of most of the 34,000 prints in the limited edition of his two-volume The Natural History of the Carolinas, Florida, and the Bahamas, 1731-43. The two volumes were lent especially for this exhibition by Mr. Paul Mellon, President of the National Gallery of Art.

Black-and-white photographs on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, Area Code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.