

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY ANNOUNCES 18th CENTURY FIREWORKS SPECTACLE  
FOR JUNE 1 TO OPEN BICENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

WASHINGTON, D.C. April 8, 1976. A program on the Mall recreating a fireworks spectacle of the eighteenth century will be the opening event of the National Gallery of Art's major Bicentennial exhibition, The Eye of Thomas Jefferson. The fireworks will be set off on Tuesday evening, June 1, at the reflecting pool at the foot of Capitol Hill, near the Gallery's new East Building.

The program, which includes live music, will be open to the public and is being made possible through a grant from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation. It is presented with the cooperation of the National Park Service. The presentation will begin at 10:15 p.m. and will last approximately one-half hour.

The firm that produced the fireworks which Jefferson saw in Paris, Ruggieri, is still in business, and has been commissioned to produce the event, which will be on the theme "The Triumph of Reason and Order over Chaos and War."

(more)

It is believed that nothing like the National Gallery's display will have been seen since the eighteenth century. As a result of extensive research in French archives, the program will be authentically representative of the kinds of fireworks, music and theatrical effects that combined in royal pyrotechnic displays which Jefferson mentioned in his letters during his period as minister to France, 1784-1789.

In this respect the Gallery's fireworks are an extension of its special Bicentennial exhibition, as well as an unusual prelude to the exhibition, which will open publicly on June 5. An audio-visual record of the event will be shown to the Gallery visitor during the run of the exhibition, which closes September 6.

In addition to the uncommon design and scale of the fireworks, a thematically integrated central piece, or "machine," and live music will be incorporated into the performance. The machine for the twentieth-century production will relate to both the Bicentennial and the exhibition and will be a reconstruction at full scale of the façade of Monticello, Jefferson's home which he designed himself. A program of music popular in France during the period, performed

(more)

by the National Gallery Orchestra, Richard Bales, Conductor, will accompany the program. The Capitol building, in whose original planning Jefferson was also involved, will form the backdrop for the display.

The program will begin with a musical prelude. A series of pyrotechnics symbolizing the misfortunes visited on humanity when society is in the grip of disorder and anarchy will follow, with an evocation of the calamities of war and the resulting chaos.

Next, the wrath of God will be symbolized, and then, after a brief silence, all returns to calm and reason.

At the end, an enormous, radiant sun will burst behind the reconstructed façade of Monticello in a final apotheosis, the "grande gironde," of the eighteenth century, symbolizing in a last burst of light the triumph of culture over violence.

The exhibition, The Eye of Thomas Jefferson, will be a gathering of paintings, sculpture and decorative arts of Jefferson's day, selected from over 180 public and private collections throughout the United States and Europe and related to Jefferson's involvement with the arts. In addition, the show will feature Jefferson's favorite statue

(more)

from antiquity, the famous Venus de' Medici, lent by special arrangement with the President of Italy. Jefferson's own designs, including his drawings for the White House competition will be shown, and a Jeffersonian botanical garden, which will remain on view indefinitely, is being created out of the Gallery's West Garden Court to reflect Jefferson's horticultural and landscaping interests. The exhibition is being supported by a grant from Exxon Corporation.

Summer hours for the Gallery are in effect: Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday 12 noon to 9 p.m.

END

---

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.