

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FRAGONARD AND ROBERT DRAWINGS EXHIBITIONS

GO ON VIEW NOVEMBER 19

WASHINGTON, D. C. October 26, 1978. Two unprecedented exhibitions, one of drawings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) and the other of drawings and watercolors by Hubert Robert (1733-1808), both major eighteenth-century French artists, will open in the National Gallery of Art's West Building on November 19, 1978. Entitled Drawings by Fragonard in North American Collections and Hubert Robert: Drawings and Watercolors, both exhibitions will run through January 21, 1979.

Complementing these exhibitions will be a third, selected from the Gallery's collection, French Printmaking in the Time of Fragonard and Robert, and a partial reinstallation of the Gallery's Widener rooms of French eighteenth-century decorative arts, including four eighteenth-century Gobelin tapestries depicting the four seasons.

Fragonard and Robert were contemporaries whose works reflect the richness and diversity of a tumultuous, transitional period in French political, philosophical and artistic life. Early in their careers, when attending the French Academy in Rome, they worked together so closely that subsequent attribution of particular early works to one artist or the other has sometimes proved extraordinarily difficult. After they returned to France--Fragonard in 1761, Robert in 1765--each developed his own interests and style.

Drawings by Fragonard in North American Collections, the first United States exhibition devoted to Fragonard's work, will offer sixty-nine of his drawings and four related examples by artists who knew and were influenced by his style. The

(more)

exhibition has been organized by Eunice Williams, assistant curator of drawings at the Fogg Museum, Harvard University.

The first exhibition to feature Robert's works on paper, Hubert Robert: Drawings and Watercolors will include sixty-two examples lent from public and private collections in the United States and Europe. Among the selections will be twenty-eight never before shown outside France. Victor Carlson, curator of prints and drawings at the Baltimore Museum of Art, has organized this exhibition.

Although his works are well known, Fragonard remains largely misunderstood as an artist. In contrast to the traditional view that he represents the last great exponent of the rococo style, this exhibition will show that this great draftsman does not fit that stereotype. His drawings alone reveal an astonishing range of interest and subjects and a virtuoso command of style and media. Consequently, in addition to red-chalk drawings of realistic figures and scenic views, there are landscapes of lyrical inspiration, such as View of a Park, and scenes implying narrative and romance, such as The Letter. That Fragonard's use of ink and wash could be as expressive as his use of oil paints is shown by the sensitive rendering of Portrait of a Neapolitan Woman and a highly finished landscape filled with Dutch inspiration, Shepherd Boy and Sheep on a Sunny Hillside.

Hubert Robert in his drawings and watercolors demonstrated a continuing interest in nature and the transient character of a man's accomplishments. Influenced by Giovanni Paolo Pannini and Giovanni Battista Piranesi during his eleven years in Rome, Robert developed a preoccupation with architectural ruins--real and imaginary, ancient and contemporary--as seen in Roman Ruins, Villa Pamphilj, Canal Bordé de Colonades and The Opera in Ruins after the Fire of 1781. This sustained interest gave rise to his nickname, "Robert des Ruines." He would often include

(more)

small figures in rustic or informal dress to heighten the drama in these works and in his landscapes, such as Pond in a Garden. Rarely did he render domestic scenes like Young Woman Seated before a Fireplace, Playing with a Baby or glimpses of day-to-day life as depicted in Peasants Dancing.

The third exhibition is of prints, selected to further illuminate the milieu in which Fragonard and Robert lived. It will offer approximately forty prints by these two artists and their contemporaries. In addition to the rare prints by Fragonard and Robert, the exhibition will include color aquatints by Jean-François Janinet and Philibert-Louis Debucourt, prints by Nicolas de Launay and Gabriel-Jacques de Saint Aubin, and examples based on Fragonard's and Robert's works by other French master engravers. Organized by Lynn Gould of the Gallery's Graphic Arts department, the exhibition will also remain on view through January 21, 1979.

END