

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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EXHIBITION OF NIGHT PRINTS OPENS IN  
NATIONAL GALLERY'S WEST BUILDING GROUND FLOOR GALLERIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. May 13, 1983. Night Prints, the first major exhibition dealing with this subject, opens in the National Gallery of Art's West Building Ground Floor Galleries on June 5, 1983. Composed of 100 graphic works which survey the development of this theme from the sixteenth through the twentieth century, the exhibition will be on view in the Gallery's new print galleries through September 15, 1983.

The representation of darkness constituted a particular challenge for graphic artists because it required a reversal of customary technique. Traditional print images are black on white grounds; depictions of darkness and night show light images on a black background, and are harder to visualize and to execute technically.

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The exhibition is arranged thematically in nine sections, each devoted to subjects developed by graphic artists making night prints. Naturalistically depicted nocturnes first appeared in woodcuts and engravings in the early sixteenth century. These were usually based on Biblical subjects, such as Albrecht Dürer's The Agony in the Garden and The Kiss of Judas, both done in 1508. In the seventeenth century, the popularity of night images reached an apogee, reflecting the influence of painters such as Caravaggio and Adam Elsheimer. Included in the exhibition are three engravings by Hendrik Goudt after Elsheimer which exerted great influence in northern Europe, particularly on Dutch printmakers.

By the 1630s, the basic difficulties of using linear techniques to create white on black prints had been resolved. New and freer techniques were developed. Rembrandt used mixed techniques to create unsurpassed scenes of night and darkness in subjects ranging from genre (Student at a Table by Candlelight) to religious scenes (Flight into Egypt, Adoration of the Shepherds, Agony in the Garden). Eight prints by Rembrandt are on view.

After a decline in the eighteenth century, night prints returned to popularity in the early 1800s as part of the Romantic interest in fantasy, horror and arcadian moonlit scenes. Artists from this period represented are Delacroix, Goya, Palmer, and Daubigny.

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In addition, the invention of the tonal process of lithography in the late eighteenth century led in the early nineteenth century to wider dissemination of prints as newspaper and book illustrations. Artists such as Daumier used night prints as vehicles for social and/or political satire. Urbanization during the nineteenth century resulted in a great increase in the rendition of subjects like street, theatre and indoor scenes by Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Bonnard, Whistler and Cassatt, among others.

The exhibition has been organized by Ruth B. Benedict as a Guest Curator in the Department of Graphic Arts at the National Gallery. She has prepared an illustrated brochure to accompany the exhibition.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs please contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, (Information Officer) or Marla Price, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.