

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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\*\*Press Preview Monday, November 14, 1983

10 am - 3 pm

West Building Ground Floor Galleries

PIAZZETTA: A TRICENTENARY EXHIBITION--  
DRAWINGS, PRINTS, AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKS  
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 23, 1983. To mark the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, one of the key figures in eighteenth-century Venetian art, 106 of the artist's most outstanding drawings, prints, and illustrated books go on view for the first time in the United States November 20, 1983 through February 26, 1984 in the National Gallery of Art's West Building Ground Floor galleries.

This exhibition explores questions of attribution and chronology and offers a unique opportunity to study the draftsmanship of Piazzetta, a man who was recognized as a great painter and draftsman in his own time, though his reputation has been somewhat overshadowed by his better-known contemporary, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

George Knox, Professor in the Fine Arts Department, University of British Columbia, and Andrew Robison, curator of the Gallery's Department of Prints and Drawings and Senior Curator, have selected the drawings from the collec-

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tion of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle, and from numerous American and European museums and private collections.

There are seventy drawings, twenty illustrated books and sixteen engravings among five categories: academic nudes, compositional studies for paintings, studies for paintings, portraits, and têtes de caractère (ideal studies of heads), and studies for book illustrations.

About 1720, a revolution in taste in Europe shifted attention away from large-scale history paintings to smaller paintings and drawings which were used in homes as interior decoration to create a sense of intimacy and elegance. Drawings which had been collected by amateurs and stored in portfolios and drawers were now glazed and framed and hung on the wall. A large portion of Piazzetta's work was intended to be displayed in this way. It consists of têtes de caractère, idealized portraits of heads and shoulders of one person or a small group usually depicted in day-to-day circumstances. These works are characterized by a remarkable realism, with the heads usually drawn only a little smaller than life size.

Some studies do relate to extant paintings, making it possible to determine dates. For example, two portraits from Windsor Castle can be dated with some assurance. One is a Piazzetta self-portrait, the other a portrait of his wife, Rosa, both executed around the date of their marriage in 1724. Dates for portraits of their son, Giacomo, also can be pinpointed because a series of drawings were executed beginning in Giacomo's tenth year and going through his twentieth.

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The drawings are almost all in black chalk heightened with white on blue paper and the drawings for engravings are red chalk on white paper.

Piazzetta worked with Marco Pitteri, the leading engraver in Venice at the time and with the leading publisher, Giovanni Battista Albrizzi, for whom Piazzetta made over 450 designs for book illustrations. These designs served as essential elements in the flowering of Venetian book illustrations from 1734 through 1754. His most famous project was an edition of the Gerusalemme Liberata, the epic poem by the sixteenth-century poet, Torquato Tasso, published in 1745. A pattern of dates can be established for these drawings which appear as engravings in illustrated books.

Dr. Knox is the guest curator of the exhibition and has written the fully-illustrated catalogue which accompanies the exhibition. H. Diane Russell, curator in the Gallery's prints and drawings department, is coordinating the exhibition.

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