

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

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CONTACT: Deborah Ziska
Elizabeth Kimball
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY TO PRESENT FIRST MAJOR EXHIBITION
OF FRANS HALS PAINTINGS OUTSIDE THE NETHERLANDS

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 12, 1989 - The first major exhibition of paintings by the great seventeenth-century portrait painter Frans Hals to be held outside the Netherlands will be presented in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art, October 1- December 31, 1989. The exhibition has been organized by the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Frans Halsmuseum in Haarlem, the Netherlands. Frans Hals is supported at the National Gallery of Art by a generous grant from Republic National Bank of New York. The National Gallery will be the first venue and the only one in the United States for the exhibition.

The exhibition contains more than sixty paintings and small oil sketches drawn from all phases of Hals' remarkable career. They have been borrowed from major public and private collections in Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Examples of all facets of his work will be shown, including his earliest known painting, a portrait of Jacobius Zaffius (1611), genre scenes, among them Merry Drinker (c. 1628), family portraits such as the large Family Group in a Landscape (1648), and his remarkable regent portraits, including the portraits of the regents and regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House in Haarlem, painted c. 1665.

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"This is the most significant exhibition of Hals' work ever shown in the United States. It will offer visitors the opportunity to see the full range of his genius, including the development of the bold and innovative techniques and the incredible range of blacks for which he is so well known," said J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery of Art.

Hals was born of Flemish parents in 1581 in Antwerp. By 1591 the family had moved to Haarlem where Hals studied under the painter and theorist Carel van Mander. Hals lived and worked in Haarlem until he died, penniless, in 1666.

Hals' sitters were primarily contemporaries from Haarlem, one of the most important cities in the Netherlands during the early years of the seventeenth century. The spontaneity of his brushwork and his extraordinary ability to convey the psychological essence of his models contributes to his reputation as one of the finest portrait painters in the history of art. Among the many outstanding portraits in the exhibition are four paintings from the National Gallery's collection: A Young Man in a Large Hat (c. 1628-1630), Portrait of a Seated Woman (1633), Willem Coenraetz. Coymans (1645), and Portrait of a Gentleman (c. 1650-1652).

In the second decade of the seventeenth century Hals embarked on what was to become a series of major commissions from the lively groups of militia companies organized to protect Dutch cities from Spanish forces. In 1633 he was commissioned by the Amsterdam militia to execute the Corporalship of Captain Reynier Reael, which measures nearly ten feet in length. The group portrait became popularly known as The Meagre Company, since among its members there were none of the robust figures usually found in his paintings of such groups. This painting, now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, will be included in the exhibition. It is the first militia piece by Hals ever to be shown in the United States.

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For two hundred years after his death Hals' paintings were largely ignored. In the 1860s the painterly qualities of his works were once again appreciated by critics, collectors, and artists, in particular Manet.

Seymour Slive, Gleason Professor of Fine Arts at Harvard University and a preeminent authority on Hals, and Christopher Brown, deputy keeper at the National Gallery, London, are the curators for the exhibition. Arthur Wheelock, curator of northern baroque painting at the National Gallery of Art, is the coordinating curator for the Gallery. A fully illustrated scholarly catalogue written by Slive, and including essays by other scholars, will accompany the exhibition. The exhibition will travel to the Royal Academy of Arts, London, January 13 - April 8, 1990, and the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, May 11 - July 22, 1990.

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