

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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GREATEST BINGHAM PAINTINGS AT NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, D.C., May 25, 1990 -- Twenty-nine genre and landscape paintings by the American artist George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879) will be presented in an exhibition in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art July 15 through September 30, 1990. The select show will feature Bingham's greatest works, including several that are considered icons of American art. George Caleb Bingham is made possible in Washington by Hecht's, a division of The May Department Stores Company, and by Monsanto Company.

"George Caleb Bingham was one of America's most accomplished genre painters during the 1840s and 1850s," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery. "Seeing his greatest works in Washington, brought together from collections nationwide, will present a particularly rewarding opportunity."

Famous for his paintings of life on the great rivers of the West and his series depicting rural political campaigns, Bingham recorded the social and political characteristics of the nation during one of its most colorful eras. His most memorable works include The Jolly Flatboatmen, Fur Traders Descending the Missouri, and The County Election.

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Born in Virginia, George Caleb Bingham was raised in central Missouri. He lived as an itinerant painter in St. Louis and, as a mature artist, in Independence and Kansas City. Largely self-taught, Bingham was a master of his craft, combining superb draftsmanship with a sure sense of composition, color, and design. Although he achieved modest renown as "the Missouri artist" during his lifetime, his fame as one of America's great painters was not recognized until well into the twentieth century.

The paintings in George Caleb Bingham date from the decade between 1845 and 1855 when the artist produced his most accomplished work. Stylistically Bingham's painting of this period has a consistent clarity and structure that is recognized on one level as his signature manner, and on another, as a reflection of America's supreme moment of self-confident optimism and expansionism.

George Caleb Bingham has been organized by The Saint Louis Art Museum, where it was on display through May 13, 1990, in association with the National Gallery of Art. The accompanying scholarly catalogue published by The Saint Louis Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, contains essays by Michael Edward Shapiro, who selected the exhibition; Barbara Groseclose; Elizabeth Johns; Paul C. Nagel; and John Wilmerding. At the National Gallery the show has been coordinated by Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., deputy senior curator of painting and curator of American art.

The exhibition is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Humanities. Research for the exhibition and catalogue was funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, Inc.

Concurrent with the National Gallery showing of Bingham's genre paintings in Washington this summer, the National Museum of American Art will feature Missouri Portfolio: The Drawings of George Caleb Bingham June 8 through August 19, 1990.

The National Gallery of Art is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. and on Sunday from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

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