

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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**NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN DRAWING BY WATTEAU;  
ON PUBLIC VIEW IN "DÜRER TO DIEBENKORN" THROUGH SEPTEMBER 7**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A heretofore unrecognized drawing by the eighteenth-century French artist Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) was recently discovered and purchased at auction in London by the National Gallery of Art. Watteau is widely regarded as one of the greatest draftsmen of all time. However, he died young and works by him are quite rare, and highly prized, with relatively few remaining in private hands. The drawing, The Gallant Gardener (1711-1712), executed in red chalk and measuring 9 x 7 1/8 inches, is one of Watteau's early arabesque designs and depicts a gardener pausing to converse with an elegantly dressed young woman seated under a tree.

"It's a real thrill to have this institution acquire a work of art by such a famous artist out from under the noses of the world's collectors, dealers, and connoisseurs," said J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery of Art. "Our coup comes thanks to the astute eye of Andrew Robison, the National Gallery's Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, who spotted the Watteau, listed as 'French School.' It was among the last drawings to be sold at

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the tail end of an auction. Acting quietly and swiftly we were able to add this Watteau drawing of exquisite charm to the Gallery's substantial collection of eighteenth-century French drawings just at a time when we are celebrating the Gallery's drawings acquisitions in an exhibition."

Referring to The Gallant Gardener, Robison said, "I was excited as soon as I saw the drawing in the boxes, and after studying it a few minutes I thought it must be by Watteau. Every element of the scene is consistent with Watteau's work of this early period, from the precise way the charming figures are drawn to the leaves and airy vines winding up both sides of the design, to the delightful details of the rake and watering can hanging in the tree and the schematically abstracted birds flying at the top."

Robison continued, "I went back to my hotel and immediately called my National Gallery colleague Margaret Morgan Grasselli, our curator of old master drawings, and the leading expert on Watteau drawings."

Grasselli subsequently confirmed the attribution and found that François Boucher had made an etching, in reverse, after this Watteau drawing, including the arabesque framework. The print was included in the Figures de différents caractères, two volumes of prints after Watteau's drawings which were published in 1726 and 1728. Both volumes are in the National Gallery's collection.

The figures in the drawing have the angular forms and

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abstracted features typical of Watteau's work in the period just prior to his provisional admission to the French Academy in 1712. Equally characteristic are the sharp, staccato accents and the thin, wiry contours that he learned from his first Parisian teacher, Claude Gillot (1673-1722). Watteau himself used the central motif from the drawing, but without the surrounding arabesque, in a painting, now lost, that is known through an engraving by Jacques de Favannes.

The newly acquired Watteau drawing was purchased with funds given by the late Ailsa Mellon Bruce. It has been installed in the eighteenth-century section of the Gallery's current exhibition, Dürer to Diebenkorn: Recent Acquisitions of Art on Paper, which remains on view through September 7. The National Gallery of Art is open free of charge, Monday through Thursday and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.; and Sunday, 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Call (202) 737-4215 for more information.