

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART BOOK SHEDS NEW LIGHT

ON MAJOR PAINTINGS IN ITS COLLECTION

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art today announced the publication of American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century documenting 107 paintings in the Gallery's collection, including such national treasures as Edward Savage's The Washington Family (1789-1796), Gilbert Stuart's The Skater (Portrait of William Grant) (1782), and John Singleton Copley's Watson and the Shark (1778). The 420-page volume, with color illustrations, artist biographies, and the most up-to-date technical and art historical research, offers new perspectives and interpretations on these paintings. This is the seventh volume of the Gallery's systematic catalogue, which will make more than 5,000 paintings, sculpture, and decorative art objects in the collection more accessible to scholars, collectors, and general readers alike.

American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century is made possible by a grant from The Henry Luce Foundation, which is also supporting the two volumes on the Gallery's collection of nineteenth-century American paintings.

"The National Gallery is very grateful to The Henry Luce

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Foundation for supporting these publications devoted to the Gallery's splendid collection of our nation's artistic achievements during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are also fortunate that Ellen Miles, the gifted curator of painting and sculpture at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, agreed to be the author. She brought to this project her highly developed skills as a scholar of eighteenth-century American portraiture."

While the Gallery's eighteenth-century American paintings represent a range of subjects and styles, the majority are portraits. This is because portraiture was the genre most frequently commissioned in Colonial and Federal America.

Miles' painstaking research of letters, wills, and many previously unpublished documents associated with the portraits led her to such discoveries as the true identity of the second figure in a 1776 double portrait by Benjamin West. It has long been believed that the American Indian standing behind Colonel Guy Johnson, British superintendent of the Six Nations of the Iroquois from 1774 to 1782, was Joseph Brant, a Mohawk leader. Miles has now identified this image as that of Karonghyontye, a prominent Mohawk chief known as Captain David Hill, who was a close ally of Brant. The painting is now known as Colonel Guy Johnson and Karonghyontye (Captain David Hill).

Infrared reflectograms made in the Gallery's conservation laboratories reveal new information on the artists' working methods in several entries. For example, underdrawings that have

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shown up in the reflectograms of Watson and the Shark, along with Copley's preparatory drawings, suggest that the Gallery's painting is actually the first of two done by the artist.

The large number (41) of paintings by Gilbert Stuart in the collection enabled Miles to examine his technique as it developed and changed over 40 years. Among these works is his series of the first five presidents of the United States, completed in the early 1820s and the only such surviving set.

Of the 107 paintings in American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century, 47 were once in the collection of Thomas B. Clarke, who acquired portraits of significant historical figures by prominent artists during the 1920s. After his death in 1931, Clarke's complete collection was purchased by the A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust (established by the Gallery's late founder Andrew W. Mellon) for the National Gallery, with the possibility that some of the works would be transferred to a future national portrait gallery. A number of the paintings were eventually transferred to the National Portrait Gallery when it was established, while those included in this volume remained at the National Gallery of Art.

In addition to Miles, contributors to American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century are Patricia Burda, Cynthia J. Mills, and Leslie Kaye Reinhardt. The 420-page hardback book is available for \$75 in the National Gallery Shops. It can also be ordered by telephone or mail as follows:

National Gallery of Art
Publications Mail Order Department
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785
(301) 322-5900

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