

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARIS DEPICTED IN

THE ART OF LOUIS-LÉOPOLD BOILLY: MODERN LIFE IN NAPOLEONIC FRANCE

OPENING AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ON FEBRUARY 4, 1996

Washington, D.C. -- The work of Louis Léopold Boilly (1761-1845), the leading genre painter and one of the most prolific portraitists in France during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, will be presented in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art from February 4 through April 28, 1996.

Boilly's first American retrospective, taking place on the 150th anniversary of his death, will include forty-six of the artist's finest paintings from museums and private collections in Europe, North America, and Australia, and will trace his development from 1780 to 1830. The exhibition was organized by the Kimbell Art Museum of Fort Worth and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"Boilly's work movingly evokes the world of which he was a part, from the ravages of revolution to the entertainments of the salon. The National Gallery is pleased to present this important retrospective," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art.

At a time when painting in France was dominated by the

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literary and historical subject matter of the classical tradition, Boilly initiated the depiction of subjects from contemporary society, and his works present a fresh and candid view of the everyday Parisian life around him. In his preference for subjects of the modern city, Boilly anticipated the work of Manet and the Impressionists.

The exhibition presents the acknowledged masterpieces of Boilly's long career, including A Game of Billiards (1807) from The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; The Triumph of Marat (1794) and a core of great works from the Musée des Beaux-Arts, located in the artist's birthplace of Lille; The Entrance to the Theatre Ambigu-Comique for a Free Performance (1819) from the Musée du Louvre, Paris; The Conscripts of 1807 Parading Past the Saint Denis Gate (1807) and The Galleries of the Palais Royal (1809), both from the Musée Carnavalet, Paris; Moving Day (Les Déménagements) (1822) from The Art Institute of Chicago; and The Reading of the Bulletin of the Grande Armée (1807) from The Saint Louis Art Museum.

Recently rediscovered works also will be featured, such as The Geography Lesson (1812) from the Kimbell Art Museum and The Entrance to the Turkish Garden Café (1812) from an Australian private collection, and paintings that have never been shown to the public, such as the artist's intriguing trompe l'oeil Collection of Drawings with Boilly and Elleviou (c. 1800), from a private collection. In addition, the show will include the

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little-known but impressive pendant portraits of one of the most distinguished manufacturers of the era, Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf, and his family (1803), from a private collection.

Born a generation after Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) and a generation before Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), Boilly trained in the north of France and worked his way to Paris in 1785, where he quickly gained a reputation as a "charming painter of boudoirs." Working in a style close to Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Marguerite Gérard, Boilly created stunning genre scenes of domestic intrigue and romance that were also indebted to Dutch painters of the seventeenth century.

The exhibition will include all aspects of Boilly's art: scenes of Parisian leisure and entertainment, revolutionary portraits and political subjects, the artist in his studio, still life and trompe l'oeil painting, caricatures, and studies of physiognomies. It will illustrate Boilly's prodigious technique and virtuosic handling of paint, and will document the surprising range of his subject matter.

As pictorial motifs, scenes of everyday life were considered of secondary importance for artists. Boilly helped transform this situation; in his art, public street life was elevated to a new level and found its way into the elegantly furnished salons of the bourgeoisie. Boilly was not only a pioneer, but also an integral force for artistic change, demonstrating that the 1789 revolution made civic and public life a subject of interest to

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all. In this regard, the impact of his art is as significant as that of David, Ingres, and Géricault.

Boilly provides insight into the Parisian art world of his time. He depicts artists in their studios, presenting themselves as a new kind of cultural hero to their public, in such famous scenes as A Reunion of Artists in Isabey's Studio (1798), from the Louvre, and Houdon's Studio in 1808 from the Musée Thomas Henry, Cherbourg. Boilly represents a modern, self-conscious dialogue whereby, for the first time, the viewers of his exhibitions and the characters depicted in his work were both ordinary members of the public.

Philip Conisbee, the National Gallery's curator of French paintings, serves as coordinator for the exhibition. Dr. Susan L. Siegfried, research projects manager of The Getty Art History Information Program, is guest curator of the exhibition and author of the new critical study of the artist, published by Yale University Press to coincide with the exhibition.

The National Gallery of Art, located on Constitution Avenue between Third and Seventh Streets, NW, is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For general information call (202) 737-4215, or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at (202) 842-6176. For information on visitor services call (202) 842-6690.

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