

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 25, 1996

JAN STEEN: PAINTER AND STORYTELLER

OPENING AT NATIONAL GALLERY ON APRIL 28

PRESENTS EXCEPTIONAL RANGE OF DUTCH MASTER'S PAINTINGS

Washington, D.C. -- Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller, which will be on view from April 28 to August 18, 1996, will present the exceptional range of the Dutch master's painting in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art, the only venue outside of Europe. Steen (1626-1679), a contemporary of Johannes Vermeer, is best known for his witty, comic narratives, particularly his bawdy tavern scenes, chaotic households, and quack doctors tending lovesick women. However, he also painted portraits, delightful images of upper-class life, and religious and mythological scenes.

This exhibition of forty-eight of the artist's finest paintings was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, where it will be on view from September 21, 1996 to January 12, 1997.

On behalf of its employees, Shell Oil Company is proud to make possible the presentation of the celebrated works of Jan Steen to the American people. The show is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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"We expect that Steen's infectious humor will delight viewers, who will see in his art a very different narrative style than that found in Vermeer's paintings," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to Shell Oil Company and its employees for making this exhibition possible."

"Shell Oil Company is very pleased to be associated with this superb exhibition that provides the rare opportunity to enjoy the works of one of the most important Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. It is gratifying to be able to add to the enrichment of the lives of so many people of all ages," said Philip J. Carroll, president and chief executive officer. Shell has supported two previous exhibitions of Dutch artists at the National Gallery, Piet Mondrian: 1872-1944 in 1995 and The Age of Bruegel: Netherlandish Drawings of the Sixteenth Century in 1986.

Steen has long been one of the most popular of Dutch artists. His Feast of Saint Nicholas is so beloved in his native Holland that Gallery exhibition dates were arranged so that the painting will be back on view at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, for Saint Nicholas Eve on December 5. But with the exception of a focus show of paintings belonging to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1983, no exhibition of this painter's accomplishments has been presented in the United States.

The exhibition provides an overview of Steen's career, from his early works painted in The Hague around 1650 to those executed in the mid-1670s in Leiden. As is vividly apparent in

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his paintings, Steen's genius as a storyteller derives from his ability to stage compelling narratives through expression, gesture, costume, and settings. He is also an extraordinary craftsman whose paintings come alive through his ability to create both the sheen of satin and the texture of Persian carpets.

Steen, like Rembrandt, distinguished himself from many of his contemporaries by his artistic breadth. More than any other artist he pushed the limits of pictorial types, merging portraiture with genre (scenes from daily life) and blurring the edges between genre and biblical and mythological subjects.

Steen executed two self-portraits, but he also included himself in many scenes where he plays the role of comic fool, profligate, or rogue. For example, in Merry Threesome he is a besotted old buffoon, blissfully compliant as the object of his desire picks his pocket. Steen's wives and children also frequent his paintings and they too are often cast in comic roles. Portraying oneself in a larger work was an established convention at the time, but Steen's innovation was to use this convention consistently to characterize himself as a comic satirist.

Steen's genre paintings vary from seemingly naturalistic scenes, such as his extremely sensual Girl Offering Oysters (c. 1658-1660), to pictures that represent proverbs. Many of these include the boisterous family gatherings and dissolute households

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for which he is well known, such as In Luxury Beware and As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young. The Dutch expression "a Jan Steen household," prompted by these and other paintings, is used today to refer to a home in disarray and full of clamorous children.

Curators for Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller are Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, who was co-curator for the recent exhibition Johannes Vermeer; and Wouter Th. Kloek, head, department of painting, Rijksmuseum. Guest curator for the exhibition at the National Gallery is H. Perry Chapman, associate professor of the history of art, University of Delaware.

The fully illustrated catalogue, to be published in English, Dutch, and German, will make a major contribution to Steen scholarship. In addition to contributions by the curators of the exhibition, it will include essays by such prominent scholars as Eddy de Jongh, Lyckle de Vries, and Mariët Westermann. They will examine Steen's artistic sources, his relation to literary and theatrical currents, his audience and clientele, and his critical reputation. New information about his painting technique will be presented in an essay by Marten Bijl, conservator at the Rijksmuseum. The English edition of the catalogue, published by the National Gallery of Art and distributed by Yale University Press, may be purchased for \$29.95 (softcover) or \$50.00 (hardcover) and may be ordered from the Gallery by calling (301) 322-5900.

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This exhibition coincides with Scenes of Daily Life: Genre Prints from the Housebook Master to Rembrandt van Rijn, works from the National Gallery's collection that will emphasize themes and motifs shared with the Steen paintings.

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

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Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND

JAN STEEN

Jan Steen (1626-1679), more than most Dutch artists of his day, painted a wide range of subjects, from genre scenes to portraits to biblical stories. His approach varied from the bawdy to the serene, but it always was founded upon a keen perception of humanity. Besides being a marvelous storyteller, Steen was a wonderful painter who could work in both very refined and extremely broad styles.

Steen frequently represented himself in his pictures, a phenomenon that has intrigued viewers since the seventeenth century. Not only is Steen's face known from his one formal self-portrait (c. 1670) and the Self-Portrait as a Lutenist (c. 1663-1665), but it also appears in scenes where he plays the role of the comic fool, profligate, or rogue. In Merry Company on a Terrace (c. 1675-1677), Steen presides as a jolly tavern owner in a scene of temptation and indulgence. In The Merry Threesome (c. 1670-1672), he is a besotted old buffoon, blissfully compliant as the object of his desire picks his pocket. Steen's wives and children also frequent his paintings and they, too, are often cast in comic roles.

Seventeenth-century documents, however, present a somewhat different impression of Steen's life than the one projected by his paintings. Steen was, in fact, a learned artist. At the age of twenty, he registered at the University of Leiden, indicating that, at the very least, he had attended the Latin School, where

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the classics were taught. As is evident in a number of his paintings, he was also familiar with contemporary theater. One of Steen's biographers praised his "philosophical knowledge" of painting, which, it was said, he set forth in long speeches. His Drawing Lesson (c. 1663-1665), with its array of pens, chalks, charcoal, and statuettes, demonstrates that he was familiar with the theoretical principles of his day.

Steen was born in Leiden, the son of a brewer. He spent much of his childhood on the Delftse Vliet, a short canal running from the city walls. He certainly learned to read and write in primary school. The family belonged to the city's upper middle class, and adhered to the Catholic faith in a predominantly Calvinist country.

It seems that he trained with several masters in different towns. Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719), Steen's first biographer, says that he was a pupil of the landscape painter Jan van Goyen (1596-1656), who lived in The Hague. Another biographer, Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747), reports that Steen studied in Utrecht with Nicolaes Knüpfer (c. 1603-1660), and with the genre painter Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1684) in Haarlem. Steen must have completed his training by 1648, because in that year he became a charter member of the artists' Guild of Saint Luke in Leiden.

Even after becoming a master painter, Steen still moved from city to city. In 1649 he went to live in The Hague, where he married his teacher Van Goyen's daughter. Five years later he

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appears to have moved to Delft, where he leased a brewery. After staying briefly in the late 1650s in Leiden and Warmond, a nearby village, Steen and his family went to Haarlem in 1660 and remained there for the next decade. By 1670 Steen returned to Leiden to live in the house that he inherited from his father, and during this period he was granted permission to open an inn. He died at the age of fifty-three, in 1679, and was buried in the family grave in Saint Peter's. He left only a modest inheritance to his second wife and the ten or eleven children from his two marriages.

Steen possessed a remarkable ability to assimilate the influences of different localities. While living in Leiden in the late 1650s, he adopted the meticulous, fine technique and small format characteristic of Leiden painters. This approach is illustrated in Girl Offering Oysters (c. 1658-1660), in which a charming young woman, placed in the extreme foreground, engages the viewer directly with a flirtatious glance, as she sprinkles salt on an oyster.

He executed one of his most sensitive paintings, The Prayer before the Meal, in 1660. In this scene, which is imbued with quiet spirituality, a mother prays while cuddling her child as the father reverently holds his hat before his face. Steen's painting technique, with its carefully modeled figures and meticulously rendered objects, adds force to the image.

During the 1660s, Steen lived in Haarlem, where he painted a

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number of impressive, large-scale scenes with bright colors and loose but confident brushwork, which reflect the art of that city. In Luxury Beware (1663) shows a household gone awry, where amusing vignettes are bound together thematically. With the mother asleep, all manner of animals invade the house, the children run amuck, and the father slings his leg across the lap of an alluring seductress, who personifies Luxury. Countless details restate the message that luxury leads to ruin, but to be sure the viewer doesn't miss the point, Steen inscribes the proverb on a slate near the door. After he returned to Leiden in 1670, Steen's paintings became larger and more spacious and his references to older art even more pronounced.

Few documents have survived from Jan Steen's final years. He continued to paint and dutifully paid his annual contribution to the Guild of Saint Luke. Jan Steen seems to have been a happy-go-lucky man who lived from one day to the next, and was thus quite the opposite of the stereotypical thrifty and God-fearing Dutchman. But he was also a hard worker who was regarded as a major artist from an early age. In his 1721 biography, Arnold Houbraken proposed the following epitaph for Steen, reflecting his view of this multidimensional artist:

This stone covers Jan Steen.
There was no other artist
Who painted so ingeniously.
His famed brushwork shows how,
When people become unused to discipline,
They grow ever more unruly.

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National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller April 28 - August 18, 1996

Related Activities

SUNDAY LECTURE

June 2, 4:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Jan Steen's Tavern

H. Perry Chapman, associate professor of the history of art, University of Delaware, and guest curator for the exhibition, Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller, at the National Gallery of Art.

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE EXHIBITION

Public tours and slide overviews of the exhibition are given by staff lecturers. No reservations are required. For dates and times, please consult the calendar of events at the art information desks, or call (202) 842-6706.

Guided tours for school groups are available beginning two weeks after the exhibition's opening date, Mondays through Fridays, by calling (202) 842-6249 at least four weeks in advance.

AUDIO TOUR

Narrated by Alan Shestack, deputy director, National Gallery of Art. Available at the entrance to the exhibition for \$4.00 (\$3.50 for senior citizens, students, and groups of ten or more). Amplified headsets and/or scripts are available to visitors with hearing impairments. To reserve audio tours for groups, call (202) 842-6592.

EXTENSION PROGRAM

The Age of Rembrandt: Dutch Painting of the Seventeenth Century, a color slide program (#052) narrated by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. Available on a free loan basis through the department of education resources, extension programs section, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 20565.

BROCHURE

A brochure and a large print version of the brochure are available at the entrance to the exhibition.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Sundays, 1:00 to 3:00

May 26, June 9, 23, and 30

July 28 and August 11

for ages six to nine

for ages ten to twelve

Tuesdays, 10:30 to 12:30

July 16 and July 30

for ages six to nine

Designed for children with accompanying adult. Includes a tour of the exhibition followed by a studio activity. Programs are free but space is limited. Pre-registration is required by calling (202) 789-3030.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller, co-published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 272 pages, 64 color plates, and 180 black-and-white illustrations, available from Gallery shops for \$29.95 (paperback), \$50.00 (clothbound).

This book may be ordered by telephone or mail through the National Gallery of Art. Check or money orders should be made payable to NGA Publications Sales. Visa, Mastercard, and American Express are also accepted. Postage and handling are extra.

Send all orders to : National Gallery of Art
 Publications Mail Order Department
 2000B South Club Drive
 Landover, MD 20785
 Telephone: (301) 322-5900

GALLERY HOURS

Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and to all of its programs is free except as noted.

ACCESSIBILITY

For information about accessibility to public areas and galleries, assistive listening devices, sign language interpretation, and other services, please inquire at the art information desks or call (202) 842-6690, (TDD line (202)842-6176, weekdays only).

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Checklist

- color transparencies available
- black & white images available

1. Winter Landscape, c. 1650
oil on panel
66.7 x 97.5 cm (26 x 37 13/16)
Skokloster Castle, Bålsta, Sweden
2. The Fat Kitchen, c. 1650
oil on panel
71 x 91.5 cm (28 x 36)
Private Collection
3. The Lean Kitchen, c. 1650
oil on panel
69.7 x 92 cm (27 1/2 x 36 1/4)
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
4. Village Festival with the Ship of St. Rijn-Uijt, c. 1653
oil on panel
42.5 x 66.5 cm (16 3/4 x 26 1/8)
Private Collection
5. Peasants before an Inn, by 1653
oil on panel
50.2 x 61.6 cm (19 3/4 x 24 1/4)
The Toledo Museum of Art; Purchased with funds from the Libbey
Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey
6. The Village Wedding, 1653
oil on canvas
64 x 81 cm (25 3/16 x 31 7/8)
Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, on loan from the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst
8. The Leiden Baker Arend Oostwaert and His Wife Catharina Keyzerswaert, c. 1658
oil on panel
37.7 x 31.5 cm (14 7/8 x 12 7/16)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

9. Girl Offering Oysters, c. 1658-1660
 oil on panel
 20.5 x 14.5 cm (8 1/16 x 5 11/16)
Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague
10. Acta Virum Probant (Actions Prove the Man), 1659
oil on panel
42.3 x 33 cm (16 5/8 x 13)
The Trustees of the National Gallery, London
11. Bathsheba Receiving David's Letter, c. 1659
oil on panel
41.5 x 33 cm (16 5/16 x 13)
Private Collection
12. The Poultry Yard, 1660
 oil on canvas
 107.4 x 81.4 cm (42 1/2 x 32)
Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague
13. The Prayer Before the Meal, 1660
oil on panel
52.7 x 44.5 cm (20 3/4 x 17 1/2)
Sudeley Castle Trustees, Gloucestershire, Walter Morrison Collection
14. The Card Players, c. 1660
 oil on panel
 45.5 x 60.5 cm (17 7/8 x 23 7/8)
Private Collection
15. Easy Come, Easy Go, 1661
oil on canvas
79 x 104 cm (31 x 41)
Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam
16. The Doctor's Visit, c. 1661-1662
oil on panel
47.5 x 41 cm (19 1/4 x 16 1/2)
The Board of Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum
[Exhibited at Wellington Museum, Apsley House, London]
17. The Garden outside an Inn, c. 1661-1663
oil on canvas
68 x 58 cm (26 3/4 x 22 7/8)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
18. Twelfth Night, 1662
oil on canvas
131.4 x 164.1 cm (51 3/4 x 64 5/8)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
19. A Woman at Her Toilet, 1663
oil on panel
64.7 x 53 cm (25 1/2 x 20)
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

20. The Dancing Couple, 1663
 oil on canvas
 102.5 x 142.5 cm (40 3/8 x 56 1/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection
21. In Luxury Beware, 1663
oil on canvas
105 x 145 cm (41 3/8 x 57)
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Vienna
22. Skittle Players Outside an Inn, c. 1663
oil on panel
33.5 x 27 cm (13 1/4 x 10 5/8)
The Trustees of the National Gallery, London
23. As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young, c. 1663-1665
 oil on canvas
 134 x 163 cm (52 3/4 x 64 3/16)
Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague
24. Rhetoricians at a Window, c. 1663-1665
oil on canvas
74 x 59 cm (29 1/8 x 23 1/4)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, The John G. Johnson Collection
25. Self-Portrait as a Lutenist, c. 1663-1665
 oil on panel
 55.3 x 43.8 cm (21 3/4 x 17 1/4)
Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
26. The Little Alms Collector, c. 1663-1665
oil on panel
59 x 51 cm (23 1/4 x 20)
Ville de Paris, Musée du Petit Palais
27. The Drawing Lesson, c. 1663-1665
oil on panel
49.3 x 41 cm (19 7/16 x 16 1/8)
Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California
28. The Prayer Before the Meal, c. 1663-1665
oil on canvas
99 x 84 cm (39 x 33 1/16)
The Duke of Rutland, Belvoir Castle, Grantham
- 29a. Portrait of Gerrit Gerritsz Schouten, 1665
oil on panel
28.5 x 22.9 cm (11 1/4 x 9)
Private Collection
- 29b. Portrait of [...] Gael, Second Wife of Gerrit Gerritsz Schouten,
(1665)
oil on panel
28.4 x 22.7 cm (11 3/16 x 8 15/16)
Private Collection

30. The Feast of Saint Nicholas, c. 1665-1668
oil on canvas
82 x 70.5 cm (32 1/4 x 27 3/40)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
31. The Supper at Emmaus, c. 1665-1668
oil on canvas
134 x 104 cm (52 1/2 x 41 1/2)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
33. Twelfth Night, 1668
oil on canvas
82 x 107.5 cm (32 1/4 x 42 3/8)
Staatliche Museen Kassel
34. Samson and Delilah, 1668

oil on canvas
67.3 x 82 cm (26 1/2 x 32 1/2)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation
35. The Severe Teacher, c. 1668
oil on panel
57.5 x 57 cm (22 5/8 x 22 1/2)
Private Collection
36. Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13), c. 1668-1670
oil on oak panel
67 x 83 cm (26 3/8 x 32 5/8)
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum der Stadt Köln
37. Couple in a Bedroom, c. 1668-1670
oil on panel
49 x 39.5 x 7 cm (19 1/4 x 15 1/2)
Museum Bredius, The Hague
38. Wine is a Mocker, c. 1668-1670
oil on canvas
87.3 x 104.8 cm (34 3/8 x 41 1/4)
Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California
39. The Return of the Prodigal Son, c. 1668-1670

oil on canvas
119.4 x 95.2 cm (47 x 37 1/2)
Private Collection
40. Self Portrait, c. 1670
oil on canvas
73 x 62 cm (28 3/4 x 24 3/8)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
41. School for Boys and Girls, c. 1670
oil on canvas
81.7 x 108.6 cm (32 1/8 x 42 3/4)
National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

42. The Merry Threesome, c. 1670-1672
 oil on panel
 39 x 49.5 cm (15 3/8 x 19 1/2)
Private Collection
43. The Wedding Feast at Cana, c. 1670-1672
oil on panel
63.5 x 82.5 cm (25 x 32 1/2)
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin
44. The Wrath of Ahasuerus, c. 1671-1673
oil on canvas
129 x 167 cm (50 3/4 x 65 3/4)
The Trustees of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The University of Birmingham
45. The Wedding of Tobias and Sarah, c. 1671-1673
oil on canvas
103 x 123 cm (41 x 50 1/4)
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of The de Young Museum Society
46. A Village Revel, 1673
oil on canvas
110.4 x 147 cm (43 1/2 x 50 1/4)
Lent by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
47. The Worship of the Golden Calf, c. 1673-1677
oil on canvas
178.4 x 155.6 cm (70 1/4 x 61 1/4)
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina
48. Merry Company on a Terrace, c. 1673-1675
oil on canvas
141.5 x 131.5 cm (55 1/2 x 51 3/4)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1958
49. The Garden Party, 1677
 oil on canvas
 67 x 88 cm (26 3/8 x 34 5/8)
Private Collection, Belgium

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