

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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SCENES OF DAILY LIFE: GENRE PRINTS FROM THE HOUSEBOOK MASTER
TO REMBRANDT VAN RIJN TO OPEN AT NATIONAL GALLERY ON APRIL 28

Washington, D.C. -- Scenes of Daily Life: Genre Prints from the Housebook Master to Rembrandt van Rijn will be presented in the National Gallery of Art's West Building from April 28 to August 18, 1996. It will coincide with and complement the Gallery's exhibition Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller by emphasizing shared themes and motifs in Steen's paintings and the graphic tradition of northern Europe.

Thirty-eight prints, six illustrated books, and one copper plate will depict scenes of everyday life in Germany and the Netherlands from the late-fifteenth to the late-seventeenth centuries. The exhibition will demonstrate the continuity of certain themes and motifs despite changing morals, taste, and fashion.

Although religious imagery dominated early printmaking, northern European printmakers also portrayed secular subjects, including lovers courting, professions and labor, leisure activities, and illustrations of proverbs. These appealing images of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were the

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predecessors of the genre prints that became so popular in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. These apparently simple scenes frequently had allegorical meanings.

The selection will include illustrated books and prints in various techniques, all from the National Gallery's permanent collection. The earliest print in the exhibition is the Housebook Master's Two Peasants Fighting (c.1475/1480). This German artist is named after a famous manuscript, known as the Housebook, in which he executed numerous drawings. His work is extremely rare, with only four prints in American collections.

The prints of everyday life by the Housebook Master and another German fifteenth-century printmaker, Israhel van Meckenem, greatly influenced the genre prints executed by the next generation of artists, particularly Albrecht Dürer. Two of the best-known, The Ill-Assorted Couple (1495/1496) and Peasant Couple Dancing (1514), are included in the exhibition.

The early sixteenth-century Netherlandish artist Lucas van Leyden also created an important body of genre prints, the most influential being The Milkmaid (1510). Some of the most significant genre prints from the mid-sixteenth-century were those done after drawings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. These include the panoramic, multi-figured compositions depicting local celebrations, such as The Festival of Saint George, and allegorical prints such as The Lean Kitchen and The Fat Kitchen, both engraved in or after 1563.

Rooted firmly in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century pictorial

genre prints...page 3

traditions, genre subjects of the seventeenth century proliferated in the Netherlands. The exhibition includes four genre prints by Rembrandt -- a very fine impression of the poignant Beggars Receiving Alms at the Door of a House (1648), the delightful etching and drypoint of The Hog (1643), a rich chiaroscuro print depicting the Twelfth-Night celebration of The Star of the Kings, and the c.1635 etching of The Strolling Musicians.

Also highlighted in the exhibition are prints by the seventeenth-century Dutch master of the genre scene, and teacher of Jan Steen, Adriaen van Ostade. His ten prints in the exhibition include The Peasant Family (1647), The Dance in the Tavern and The Spinner, both dated 1652, and The Painter in the Studio dating to probably 1667.

Curator for Scenes of Daily Life: Genre Prints from the Housebook Master to Rembrandt van Rijn is Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, who was also curator of the recent Johannes Vermeer exhibition. The National Gallery, 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.

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