

# National Gallery of Art

## NEWS RELEASE

UPDATED RELEASE  
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### 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 will present the exceptional range of the Dutch master's painting in the West Building at the National Gallery of Art, the only venue outside of Europe, from April 28 to August 18, 1996. Steen (1626-1679), a contemporary of Johannes Vermeer, is best known for his witty, comic narratives. 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.

"We expect that Steen's infectious humor will delight

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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 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 the Gallery's exhibition dates were scheduled so that the painting will be back on view at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, for Saint Nicholas Eve on December 5. 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 depict 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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