

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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PRESS CONTACT: (202) 842-6353
Information Officer, Deborah Ziska
For images, Lila Kirkland

FIRST MAJOR AMERICAN SURVEY OF VICTORIAN PAINTING
TO OPEN AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ON FEBRUARY 16, 1997

Washington, D.C. -- The Victorians: British Painting in the Reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901, the first major survey of Victorian art to be mounted in the United States, highlights the achievements of British painters during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This exhibition of approximately 70 paintings, which reveals the Victorian artists' fascinating variety of subject matter and their deep concern with social issues and mores, will be on view February 16 through May 11, 1997 at the National Gallery of Art, its only venue.

The exhibition is made possible by a generous grant from United Technologies Corporation, which has supported seven exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art, most recently the much-heralded Johannes Vermeer.

The Victorians covers the storied epoch when "the sun never set upon the British Empire," a period when England was the most powerful and technologically advanced country on earth. British painters of the era bore witness to the powerful tensions of

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modern life, depicting the vast panorama of the British social and political landscape, and complementing, in scope and achievement, such great English novelists as Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot, and such poets as Tennyson and Browning.

"The Victorians reveals a great deal about the currents that swept across British society during Queen Victoria's monumental reign. We are especially pleased that the Tate Gallery, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary, would make so many of its important paintings available to the National Gallery," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art. "We also welcome United Technologies Corporation back as the supporter for a major exhibition."

The Victorians includes such masterworks as Frederic, Lord Leighton's Flaming June (1895), John Everett Millais's Ophelia (1851-1852), John Singer Sargent's Carnation Lily, Lily Rose (1885-1886), and John William Waterhouse's The Lady of Shallott (1888). Also included are works by a number of other prominent artists, including Edwin Landseer, William Powell Frith, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Augustus Egg, Edward Burne-Jones, James Tissot, Albert Moore, and William Holman Hunt.

Part of the enormous appeal of Victorian painting lies in the intellectual ferment of the period and the broad range of interests the Victorians subsequently explored--social injustice, the meaning of work, and the role of history and myth, for

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example. The great industrial and social transformations at the heart of the Victorian era fostered an intense concern for morality, and at the same time laid the foundations for what people today think of as modern modes of thought--a preoccupation with anxiety and isolation, and grappling with such issues as how art and taste relate to our sense of who and what we are.

Perhaps because of its technical virtuosity and diverse subject matter, Victorian painting has become more popular since the 1960s, with corresponding increases in both scholarly attention and public recognition. A 1984 exhibition of the Pre-Raphaelites at the Tate Gallery, for example, which boasts one of the world's richest collections of Victorian art, ranked as the second most popular exhibit in the Tate's history. Many of the paintings in this exhibition will be loaned by the Tate Gallery.

Curators for The Victorians are Malcolm Warner, curator of European art at the San Diego Museum of Art and author of the forthcoming catalogue raisonné on John Everett Millais, and Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., curator of American and British paintings at the National Gallery.

A fully illustrated catalogue, written by Warner, with the assistance of Victorian scholar Anne Helmreich of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery (CASVA), will be published by the National Gallery.

United Technologies Corporation has sponsored seven previous

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exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art: Old Master Paintings from the Collection of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza (1979); Twentieth-Century Masters: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection (1982); Stubbs: An Exhibition in Honor of Paul Mellon (1983); Old Master Drawings from the Albertina (1984); American Paintings from the Manoogian Collection (1989); and Johannes Vermeer (1995).

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.

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