

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

Deborah Ziska, Information Officer

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PRESS CONTACT: (202) 842-6358
Patricia O'Connell, Publicist

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART SHOWCASES TREASURED WORKS ON PAPER

IN "SIX CENTURIES / SIX ARTISTS," FEBRUARY 2 - MAY 4, 1997

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Some of the greatest treasures belonging to the National Gallery of Art, selected from its permanent collection of more than 10,000 drawings, 56,000 prints, and 2,000 rare illustrated books, are presented in Six Centuries / Six Artists, on view in the East Building from February 2 through May 4, 1997. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see 136 works by six major artists from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. Each room of the exhibition will be devoted entirely to the work of a single artist: the refinement of Martin Schongauer, the brilliant technique of Albrecht Dürer, the exuberance of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, the sensuality of François Boucher, the powerful mythology of William Blake, and the modernist transformations of Jacques Villon.

Because the National Gallery of Art's extensive collection of works on paper can only be exhibited on a rotating basis, Six Centuries / Six Artists offers a rare opportunity to see outstanding and unique works by master artists, including many major recent acquisitions and promised gifts from private collections.

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Martin Schongauer (c. 1450-1491)

Schongauer is one of the most influential artists who worked in Northern Europe during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. He earned fame during his lifetime as a painter, though today he is better known for his considerable body of precise engravings and a small group of exquisite drawings. The profound spirituality of Schongauer's art, together with its courtly elegance and ornamental line, reveal the artist's work as a major flowering of the northern Gothic style.

Of Schongauer's rare existing drawings, which number fewer than fifty, only four belong to museums outside Europe. Two, Bust of a Monk Assisting at Communion and Young Woman Wearing a Scarf, are included in the exhibition. Though Schongauer died at forty, his influence was far-reaching and lasting. His prints and drawings had a significant effect on the great German artist of the next generation, Albrecht Dürer. Even Michelangelo copied Schongauer engravings.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

Regarded as one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance, Dürer excelled as a painter, draftsman, printmaker, and art theorist. Beginning in the late Gothic tradition, Dürer subsequently immersed himself in the varied interests of Italian Renaissance artists -- ancient art and literature, mathematical perspective, and ideal human proportions. Although Dürer executed many paintings and altarpieces, he was most widely known for his drawings, prints, and illustrated books.

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With his consummate skills as a draftsman, Dürer combines wide-ranging interests in both the natural and imagined worlds to create detailed renderings that evoke a vivid physical presence. The exhibition includes a chronological survey of some of Dürer's finest engravings and woodcuts. Selected from the Gallery's collection of Dürer drawings, one of the largest and most comprehensive outside Europe, Six Centuries / Six Artists also features religious and mythological drawings, studies of ideal human types and foreign costumes, as well as studies of plants that demonstrate keen powers of observation, such as Tuft of Cowslips (1526). Also shown is one of his finest early pen drawings An Oriental Ruler Seated on His Throne (c.1495), a work that commands the viewer's attention with a visionary quality transcending ordinary reality.

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (c. 1610-1664)

A romantic energy runs through Castiglione's art -- fluttering drapery, dense vegetation among classical ruins, herds of animals, and dark scenes illuminated by flickering torches. Influenced by lifelong travels in his native Italy, Castiglione also learned from Flemish artists Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641).

Castiglione's work focuses on religious and mythological subjects filled with movement, such as Noah Leading the Animals into the Ark (late 1640s), journeys of patriarchs and ancient shepherds, and images of life and death such as Christ's nativity, burial scenes, and The Resurrection of Lazarus (1647-1651). In his drawings, Castiglione developed a distinctive style using brush and oils that paralleled Flemish

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artists' oil sketches on wood. In printmaking, Castiglione studied Rembrandt's etchings. Using creative variations of linear and etching techniques, Castiglione explored sensitive variations of delicate tones and eventually invented the monotype. Castiglione's works on paper were avidly collected in the eighteenth century, and his bravura style, mysterious themes, exotic details, and scintillating technique were enormously influential on later artists, especially the Venetians, from Giovanni Battista Tiepolo to Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and the French, from Boucher to Jean-Honoré Fragonard.

François Boucher (1703-1770)

As the favored artist of the king's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, and later First Painter to King Louis XV, Boucher wielded enormous influence in French artistic circles of the mid-eighteenth century. Boucher was a prolific and talented draftsman; his drawings often show his sensuous figures and lighthearted subjects to better advantage than his paintings. He used pen and wash to brilliant effect, but generally preferred chalks, often red or black, and although many of his drawings were made in preparation for works in other media -- such as paintings, tapestries, Sèvres porcelain, and engraved book illustrations -- a large number were designed to feed a burgeoning market for drawings as finished and complete works of art in themselves.

Early in his career, Boucher made a number of lively black-and-white etchings. Though he never truly became a committed printmaker, he inspired other artists in that arena, most notably Louis Marin Bonnet and Gilles Demarteau. Boucher's

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drawings on view include Tête-à-tête (1764) and perhaps his finest male nude, Apollo (c. 1753). Featured among the prints is Head of Flora (1769), the largest and most elaborate of Bonnet's color prints after Boucher.

William Blake (1757-1827)

A poet as well as a visual artist, Blake was one of the most imaginative and influential of British painter-printmakers. Blake's narrative images are inextricably tied to his own highly complex visionary writings. Others were inspired by biblical subjects, and the classic texts of Dante, John Milton, and William Shakespeare. Admiration for Michelangelo's muscular figures can be seen in Blake's delicate drawings in graphite and pen and ink, as well as in his highly worked and sumptuous watercolors. Blake's inventiveness as a printmaker is revealed in his extraordinary technical range, from line engravings on metal and wood to unique impressions made using highly personal methods of color application.

Highlights of the collection on view in Six Centuries / Six Artists are selections from Blake's two late engraving cycles Illustrations of the Book of Job and Illustrations to Dante's Divine Comedy, including numerous working proofs as well as one of his original copper printing plates. Selections of Blake's drawings include some of his most tender works, like Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity, as well as one of his most powerful and well-known apocalyptic watercolors, The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun.

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Jacques Villon (1875-1963)

"Jacques Villon" is the professional name assumed by Gaston Duchamp, who was the brother of sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon and of the multitalented avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp. Villon learned etching as a boy from his grandfather, and he exploited the medium contrary to the contemporary dominance of lithography in France. In his series of color aquatints from 1899 to 1906, Villon made the finest etchings of that period; his early images were occasionally of workmen or street scenes, but most often of elegant Parisian women, both in society and in the cabarets. The selection includes numerous artist's proofs showing Villon's creative variations of intense color as well as delicate shades.

In 1906-1907, Villon turned from fields of color to black and white, searching for purity of line and more strictly geometric forms. He used intimate subjects drawn from his family life -- including his cousin Renée and his sister Yvonne -- to create many of his major works. These images culminated in Villon's large drypoint prints of 1913, which are among the most powerful cubist prints of the twentieth century. Two examples featured in the exhibition are Yvonne D. in Profile and Yvonne D. from the Front, both in rare early proofs.

The exhibition is organized by the curators of prints and drawings led by Andrew Robison, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, National Gallery of Art.

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

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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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