

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY PRESENTS CAPTIVATING WORK OF DUTCH DRAFTSMAN

M.C. ESCHER: A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE, October 26, 1997 – April 26, 1998

Washington, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art will celebrate the centennial of twentieth-century Dutch artist M.C. Escher's birth with an exhibition drawn entirely from the Gallery's holdings, the most comprehensive collection outside The Netherlands.

M.C. Escher: A Centennial Tribute, on view October 26, 1997 – April 26, 1998, will present approximately 85 works spanning the artist's career, including drawings, woodcuts, lithographs, and mezzotints, as well as illustrated books and related technical materials. The exhibition shows some of the artist's most recognized works, as well as lesser known images, beginning with his first known print, Escher's Father, G.A. Escher, 1916, a linoleum-cut portrait printed in vivid purple, and ending with his last work, Snakes, 1969, a three-color woodcut.

"For more than four decades Escher's prints and drawings have captivated the imagination of artists, scientists, and the museum-going public," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. A gifted draftsman, Escher (1898-1972) is best known for his compositions of complex interlocking shapes that evoke jig-saw puzzles; perceptual games in which two-dimensional objects appear to be three-dimensional;

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and architectural designs that are physically impossible to construct.

The exhibition is organized in four galleries. The first, "Self Portraits," includes one of Escher's earliest portrayals of himself as a young man. Also exhibited are three lithographs from the 1930s and 1940s, in which Escher placed his image in a reflecting sphere. In his much admired Drawing Hands, 1948, the artist depicted his own hands in the process of drawing each other to create one of his visual paradoxes. Also on view is Escher's only portrait of his wife Jetta, a woodcut from 1925, the year after they were married.

Highlights of the exhibition's second section, "The World Observed," are a selection of Escher's Italian scenes -- deep landscape vistas, densely structured city streets, and complex architectural interiors -- often seen from dramatic vantage points. Among these is one of Escher's most highly finished ink drawings, Italian Town, 1930, which reveals the artist's keen draftsmanship. Other works offer insight into his study of detail. In the lithograph Still Life with Spherical Mirror, 1934, Escher meticulously drew such personal effects as a comb and brush, a toothbrush in a glass, and a candlestick, all depicted in front of a mirror. The result was to create an image in which the objects are seen directly by the viewer and shown in the mirror's reflection. Also reflected is a cavernous street scene viewed through a window behind the artist. A group of mezzotints dating from the late 1940s, such as Mummified Frog, 1946, and Drop, 1948, show Escher's brilliant control of the tonal possibilities inherent in this rarely used printmaking medium.

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The third section, "Inner Visions," includes a group of Escher's early religious woodcuts, such as Saint Francis, 1922, and features the visual experiments that brought him international acclaim in the 1950s and 1960s. Among these are the lithographs Up and Down, 1947, and Print Gallery, 1956, in which the subject of one of the prints in the gallery is depicted as it is transformed into the architecture of the room; and the color woodcut Tetrahedral Planetoid, 1954. Presented in this section is a technical display explaining Escher's working process for his five-color woodcut, Circle Limit III, 1959. Included are preliminary drawings, the five woodblocks Escher carved for the print, and color-separation proofs showing that he printed each block several times to form his color repetitions.

"Metamorphosis," the final section of the show, concludes with the last of Escher's metamorphosis prints, a twenty-three-foot-long woodcut from 1967/1968. It begins and ends with a checkerboard pattern, but among the visual events that take place along the way are squares metamorphosing to cubes, fish to horses, hexagons to birds, and birds to sailboats. Also included are Metamorphosis I, 1937, and a selection of prints that show Escher's development of his idea, starting with a 1922 woodcut Eight Heads, in which interlocking images define the two-dimensional plane, and one of Escher's most admired woodcuts from the 1930s, Day and Night, 1937.

The exhibition is organized by Ruth E. Fine, curator of Modern Prints and Drawings, 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 Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or access the Gallery's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>.

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