

# National Gallery of Art

## NEWS RELEASE

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### "JOHN SINGER SARGENT"

#### ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, FEBRUARY 21 - MAY 31, 1999

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The first major retrospective since the memorial exhibition in 1926 of the work of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, West Building, February 21 through May 31, 1999. One hundred and thirteen paintings and watercolors from public and private collections around the world will include many of his most significant and beautiful works.

This is the first large scale exhibition of Sargent's art to be shown in both England, where it is on view at the Tate Gallery, London, October 15, 1998 through January 17, 1999, and the United States, where it will also be seen at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, June 23 through September 26, 1999.

The exhibition is organized by the Tate Gallery, London, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

This exhibition is made possible at the National Gallery by Ford Motor Company.

"An astute portraitist, Sargent painted many of the leading personalities of the age in works of great elegance and panache," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "He was a brilliant technician who could quickly combine a complex composition with

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the appearance of life itself."

"Ford Motor Company is proud to sponsor the John Singer Sargent exhibition. As a strong supporter of the arts, we believe they enrich our lives and our communities and help to promote mutual understanding among nations," said W.C. Ford, Jr., Chairman of the Board, Ford Motor Company. "We are confident that this exhibition will increase that enrichment and understanding."

### THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is generally arranged chronologically to reflect the main phases of Sargent's work. On view are his early portrait, landscape, and figure sketches, 1874-1884; portraits and subject pictures, 1878-1884; experiments with impressionism, 1883-1889; commissioned American and British society portraits, 1890-1917; landscape and figure subjects, 1900-1914; late landscape oils and watercolors of Venice and Switzerland, 1880-1925; and World War I paintings, including Gassed (1918-1919). Among his best known and beloved works in the exhibition are the "notorious" Madame X (1883-1884), The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit (1882), and the impressionist Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose (1885-1886).

Raised in Europe in an American expatriate family constantly on the move, Sargent studied at art schools in Florence, Dresden, Berlin, and Paris. Precociously gifted, he assimilated lessons from the old masters and realists and the contemporary impressionists and symbolists, to create his own style and become one of the great painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Portraiture, ranging from bold experimentation to studied formality, dominated Sargent's career. Quickly winning fame and fortune as the most admired and sought-after

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portrait painter on both sides of the Atlantic, he was claimed by both the British and Americans as one of their own. Portraits in the exhibition, which reflect Sargent's mastery of psychological expressiveness, physical presence, and social position, include Lord Ribblesdale (1902), Sir Frank Swettenham (1904), and Self-portrait (1906). There is also a fascinating group of portraits of Sargent's illustrious American contemporaries: Frederick Law Olmstead (1895), landscape architect who designed the grounds around the U.S. Capitol; Henry James (1913), novelist of the Edwardian Age; and John D. Rockefeller (1917), businessman and philanthropist.

One gallery in the exhibition is devoted to Sargent's brief experimentation with impressionism and includes paintings such as his friend Claude Monet Painting at the Edge of a Wood (1885?) and Paul Helleu Sketching with his Wife (1889).

Sargent was also a prolific landscape and figure artist who painted a dazzling range of more than one thousand oils and watercolors. Traveling extensively in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, he was intrigued most of all by Venice with its architectural splendor, sunlight, and iridescent water as can be seen in Corner of the Church of San Stae, Venice (c. 1913), The Rialto, Venice (c. 1911), and other Venetian works in the exhibition.

Also on view are Sargent's early subject paintings, inspired by journeys to different parts of Europe, such as A Capriote (1878), a poetic study of a young girl painted in Capri, and the mysterious Fumée d'ambre gris (1880), based on his travels to Morocco.

Sargent was equally adept painting watercolors, which he did profusely for his own amusement and interest. Although he made little effort to sell them commercially, he achieved recognition as a watercolorist as a result of major purchases by The Brooklyn

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Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1909 and 1912, respectively. On the Grand Canal (c. 1907), View from a Window, Genoa (c. 1911), and Graveyard in the Tyrol (1914) are examples in the exhibition of Sargent's fluency in the watercolor medium.

### **CURATORS**

The exhibition has been organized by leading Sargent scholars Richard Ormond, director of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, great-nephew of the artist, and Elaine Kilmurray, who are co-authors of the Sargent catalogue raisonné (Volume I, Early Portraits, published by Yale University Press, 1998). Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., senior curator of American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art, is the coordinator of the exhibition in Washington.

### **CATALOGUE**

A lavishly illustrated catalogue, Sargent, published by the Tate Gallery and edited by Elaine Kilmurray and Richard Ormond, accompanies the exhibition. The catalogue presents a survey of the huge diversity of Sargent's output with reproductions of two hundred works and essays exploring the artist's life and his development as an artist.

### **FORD MOTOR COMPANY**

Ford Motor Company has also sponsored the following exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art: The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting (November 1985 - April 1986), The Pastoral Landscape: The Legacy of Venice (November 1988 - January 1989), The Art of Paolo Veronese 1528 - 1588 (November 1988 - February 1989), The Drawings of Jasper Johns (May - July 1990), and A Great Heritage: Renaissance and Baroque Drawings from Chatsworth (October - December 1995), and in

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addition, the educational programs: Multiple Visit Program, 1994, and Art Around the Corner, 1996.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

The National Gallery of Art, located on the National Mall at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, 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. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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