

News Release: June 6, 2002

## Stunning Still Lives by Anne Vallayer-Coster, Foremost 18th-Century Painter in Court of Marie-Antoinette, On View at the National Gallery of Art June 30 through September 22, 2002

Washington, DC--**Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette** is the first significant exhibition to focus on the work of one of the most talented still-life painters of the French School. Acclaimed by the critics, admired by her peers, and enjoying the patronage of the queen herself, Vallayer-Coster was one of only four women accepted at the prestigious Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture before the French Revolution.

Organized by the Dallas Museum of Art, this exhibition has its debut at the National Gallery of Art, where it opens on June 30 and closes on September 22, 2002. More than 40 of Vallayer-Coster's paintings are presented from private collections and museum galleries in Europe and North America. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

To put Vallayer-Coster's achievements in perspective, the exhibition includes additional works by such renowned artists as Jean Siméon Chardin, her elder and the celebrated master of still-life painting, and her contemporary Henri-Horace Roland Delaporte, among others.

"We welcome this opportunity to bring to an international art audience, for the first time, a comprehensive view of the oeuvre of this accomplished artist," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "For too long her art has remained the exclusive

pleasure of a few collectors and connoisseurs."

Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818) achieved fame and recognition very early in her career, being admitted to the Royal Academy in 1770, when she was only 26 years old. That same year the bi-weekly *Mercure de France* paid tribute to her achievement, heralding that "the disadvantages of her sex notwithstanding, she has taken the difficult art of rendering nature to a degree of perfection that enchants and surprises us." Her highly developed skills, especially in the depiction of flowers, soon generated a great deal of attention from collectors and other artists. Commenting on the Salon exhibit of 1771, the encyclopedist Denis Diderot noted that "if all new members of the Royal Academy made a showing like Mademoiselle Vallayer's, and sustained the same high level of quality, the Salon would look very different!" Her precocious talent and the rave reviews brought her to the attention of the court, where Queen Marie-Antoinette took a special interest in Vallayer-Coster's paintings. She would paint for the court for many years, creating not only still lifes but also portraits later on. Unfortunately, the portraits commissioned by Louis XVI of himself and the queen are lost.

The queen's favor extended to non-artistic areas as well. Anne Vallayer's marriage contract to Jean-Pierre Coster was executed at Versailles, in 1781, in the presence of Marie-Antoinette, who signed it. With the queen's patronage, commissions from members of the court followed, and Vallayer-Coster listed among her clients several great collectors, including Louis-Gabriel, marquis de Véri-Raionard, the abbé Terray, the prince de Conti, the financier Beaujon and the comte de Merle.

Vallayer-Coster painted more than 120 flower still lifes, always with a distinctive coloristic brilliance. She balanced very vivid hues with remarkable success, as in her *Bouquet of Flowers in a Blue Porcelain Vase* (1776). Her talent in portraying nature was such that *A Vase of Flowers and Two Plums on a Marble Tabletop* (1781) was used as the model for a Gobelins tapestry.

One of her most accomplished works, and one of the highlights of this exhibition, is *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* (1769). Later in life, in what was to be her last painting--*Still Life with Lobster* (1817)--she managed what an expert called "a summation of her career," depicting most of her

previous subjects together in a work she donated to the restored king Louis XVIII.

Some critics place the origin of her talent in her childhood years when she lived on the grounds of the Gobelins Manufacturing complex, where her father was an apprentice goldsmith. Her mother was a somewhat accomplished painter of miniatures, and Vallayer-Coster herself very likely studied under Claude-Joseph Vernet, the great landscape painter.

As with most artists so closely associated with the royal court at the time, her reputation suffered with the French Revolution. Even though, after the arrival of Napoléon, the empress Josephine acquired two works from her in 1804, several decades would pass before the brothers Gouncourt, in 1880, restored the prestige of the "extravagant privilege and delightful frivolity" of the late 18th century.

Vallayer-Coster, however, continued to be largely ignored: her only mention being a 1970 monograph by Marianne Roland Michel, an expert in 18th-century art. Then, ten years ago the Louvre acquired her *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* (1769), and a few years later the Dallas Museum of Art purchased a pendant pair of floral still-life paintings that had been exhibited in the Salon of 1777.

Now, *Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette* reacquaints the art world with one of the 18th century's most gifted painters.

## **EXHIBITION TOUR**

(as of June 5, 2002)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, June 30-September 22, 2002

Dallas Museum of Art, October 13, 2002-January 13, 2003

The Frick Collection, New York, January 21-March 23, 2003

## **ORGANIZATION, CURATOR, CATALOGUE**

The exhibition is organized by the Dallas Museum of Art. The guest curator is Eik Kahng, formerly with the Dallas Museum of Art, currently the associate curator of 18th- and 19th-century art at The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. An illustrated catalogue will be available in the Gallery Shops and through the Shops Web site

([www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm](http://www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm)) for \$60 (hardcover). To order by phone, call (800) 697-9350.

## **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

### **Sunday Slide Lecture**

#### **Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818): Career and Myth**

Eik Kahng, exhibition guest curator and associate curator of 18th- and 19th-century art, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, and Marianne Roland Michel, 18th-century art expert and independent scholar, Paris.

June 30, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

East Building auditorium. No reservation is required.

This program is free.

### **Gallery Talk**

Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette

J. Russell Sale, lecturer (60 mins.)

August 19, 21 at 1:00 p.m.; August 23, 27, 29 at noon

Talks begin in the West Building Rotunda. No reservation is required.

This program is free.

### **Family Workshop: Painter to the Queen**

Program designed for children aged 9 to 12, accompanied by an adult.

Painter to the court of Marie-Antoinette, Anne Vallayer-Coster was one of the leading still-life painters of her time. Delve into the work of this gifted artist while touring the exhibition and creating a still-life project.

July 14; August 4, 18, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Required preregistration starts June 16; call (202) 789-3030.

This program is free.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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