

Release Date: August 1, 2003

## EXHIBITION OF FRENCH 18TH-CENTURY PRINTS REVEALS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE PERIODS IN HISTORY OF PRINTMAKING AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, OCTOBER 26, 2003-FEBRUARY 16, 2004

**Companion Exhibition to  
The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard:  
Masterpieces of French Genre Painting**



Louis-Marin Bonnet after François Boucher

*Tête de Flore (Head of Flora)*, 1769

pastel manner printed in red, green, yellow, blue-green, light blue, bright blue, black, tan, brown, white and pink inks, sheet: 41.8 x 33.6 cm (16 7/16 x 13 1/4); 2nd framing line: 40.9 x 32.7 cm (16 1/8 x 12 7/8)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection

Washington, DC--Celebrating one of the most innovative periods in the history of color printmaking, **Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-**

**Century France**, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art from October 26, 2003 through February 16, 2004. The exhibition captures the spirit of the times, from the reign of Louis XV to the advent of the French Revolution, in 115 color prints of subtle, delicate beauty and astonishing technical agility. Combining Sir Isaac Newton's optics with new methods of etching and engraving, such master printmakers as Le Blon, Janinet, Descourtis, and Bonnet, among others, pioneered the four-color printing process in universal use today.

"The National Gallery of Art is fortunate to have one of the strongest collections of 18th-century color prints in the United States," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Thanks to our generous donors, from Joseph E. Widener and Lessing J. Rosenwald many years ago, to Ivan E. Phillips, A. Thompson Ellwanger III, and Gregory E. Mescha today, the public can enjoy some of the most beautiful color prints ever made."

## **The Exhibition**

**Colorful Impressions** is organized chronologically. During the second half of the 18th century in France, newly invented engraving and etching techniques were combined with new ways of printing a single image from multiple plates. For the first time, color prints could be created from red, yellow, blue, and black--an innovation that led, over the course of a few decades, to the production of thousands of images. Ranging from high art portraits, landscapes, allegories, and genre scenes to more popular fashion plates, maps, textile and wallpaper motifs, and even button covers, the prints were intended not for royalty but for the middle class.

All the greatest monuments of the genre are represented in this exhibition. Highlights include **Jakob Christoffel Le Blon's** (1667 - 1741) color mezzotint portrait *Louis XV* (1739); **Louis-Marin Bonnet's** (1736 - 1793) so-called "English prints"--partially printed with gold leaf--and his great pastel-manner *Tête de Flore (Head of Flora)* (1769) after Boucher; and **Anne Allen's** (active 1790s) charming acrobats and flowers. *Noce de village (Village Wedding)* (1785) by **Charles-Melchior Descourtis** (1753 - 1820), the centerpiece of the exhibition, shows the steps used to produce this graceful narrative image from five colors on separate copperplates.

## Curator and Catalogue

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Exhibition curator Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curator of old master drawings at the National Gallery of Art, is an expert in French 18th-century art and author of the exhibition catalogue, one of the few books in English on the history, craft, and marketing of French 18th-century color prints.

Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Lund Humphries, Burlington, Vt., and Hampshire, U. K., and due out in October 2003, **Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France** includes essays by the curator on color printmaking before 1730; connoisseur Ivan E. Phillips on his own collection; National Gallery of Art conservator Judith C. Walsh on the craft of color printmaking and, with Lehua Fisher, on the paper used in the prints; and Kristel Smentek on their marketing. The catalogue will be available from the National Gallery of Art Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) (<http://www.nga.gov/home.htm>) or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (\$65.00 hardcover, \$45.00 softcover, 200 pages, 152 color and 66 black and white illustrations).

## Companion Exhibition

[The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting \(http://www.nga.gov/press/exh/158/index.shtm\)](http://www.nga.gov/press/exh/158/index.shtm) , on view at the National Gallery of Art from October 12, 2003 through January 11, 2004, is the first large-scale international survey of French genre painting--scenes from daily life, real and imagined--by such 18th-century masters as Jean-Antoine Watteau, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, François Boucher, and Louis-Léopold Boilly.

###

## 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 at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter 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:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov