



American Federation of Arts

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WATTEAU, HIS FOREBEARS, FOLLOWERS, AND LEGACY EXAMINED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MAJOR EXHIBITION

Watteau and His World: French Drawing from 1700 to 1750

(May 1999)-*Watteau and His World: French Drawing from 1700 to 1750*, opening to the public on October 20, 1999, at The Frick Collection, New York, is the first major exhibition to place the unrivaled achievements of Antoine Watteau, one of the greatest draftsmen of the 18th century, within the wider context of his forebears and followers. On view through January 9, 2000, the exhibition travels to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, opening on February 11, 2000.

Organized by The American Federation of Arts, *Watteau and His World: French Drawing from 1700 to 1750* is made possible in part by The Florence Gould Foundation. The catalogue is supported in part by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

Watteau (1684–1721), who drew relentlessly throughout his lifetime, is one of the most revered artists of the French School. His drawings, a captivating meld of observation and imagination, provide a glimpse into the creative mind that came to define his age. Watteau coveted his drawings and regarded them as superior to the most perfect of his paintings. When he died at age 36, he was a successful, admired, and prominent artist, whose works were avidly sought after and collected in France and throughout much of Europe.

Guest curator Alan P. Wintermute, senior specialist of Old Master paintings at Christie's and former director of Colnaghi USA, New York, has selected approximately 75 sheets from private and public collections. Forty drawings by Watteau, the heart of the exhibition, convey his vision in all its liveliness and variety. These drawings include arabesques and decorative designs; landscapes; copies of the Old Masters; sketches of actors, clowns, singers, musicians, soldiers, and military scenes; multi-figured compositional drawings for theater scenes; and his most distinctive creations, the *fêtes galantes*, small, romantic landscapes with wistful lovers in fancy dress drawn in characteristic red, black, and white chalks.

The three other sections are devoted to artists who influenced Watteau, his contemporaries, and those who contributed to the extension of his legacy. "Watteau's Artistic Forebears" features works by the decorative painters with whom Watteau apprenticed and the powerful members of the French Academy, including Claude Gillot and Charles de La Fosse. "Watteau's Followers" includes superb sheets by his most gifted students, works by other painters of the *fête galante*, and drawings by Watteau's closest friends and contemporaries, such as Jean-Baptiste Pater and Nicolas Lancret. Selected drawings by Pierre-Antoine Quillard and Jacques-André Portail, his close imitators, further illuminate this section. "Watteau's Legacy" explores the first rococo generation of artists for whom the direct example of Watteau's work was paramount, with works by François Boucher, François Lemoyne, and Jean-Baptiste Oudry, among others.

In his essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Mr. Wintermute writes, "Watteau prized his drawings and kept them in bound volumes that enabled him to refer to them easily when composing his paintings; they were the essential sources of inspiration for the figure poses in his *fêtes galantes*."

Edme-François Gersaint (1694-1750), an art dealer and friend, wrote, "In the drawings of his best period...there is nothing superior to them in their kind; subtlety, grace, lightness, correctness, facility, expression, there is no quality that one might wish for which they lack, and he will always be considered as one of the greatest and best draftsmen that France has ever produced."

NATIONAL TOUR

- The Frick Collection, New York October 20, 1999–January 9, 2000
- The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa February 11–May 8, 2000

PUBLICATION: A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. *Watteau and His World: French Drawing from 1700–1750* features a major essay by Alan P. Wintermute presenting an overview of drawing in France during this period and situating Watteau in the context of his time. Also included is an essay by Pierre Rosenberg, director, Musée du Louvre, Paris, discussing Watteau and the Old Masters; by Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curator of Old Master drawings at the National Gallery of Art, examining issues of connoisseurship in distinguishing among drawings by Watteau and his followers; and an essay on the history of collecting Watteau's drawings written by Colin B. Bailey, chief curator, the National Gallery of Canada. Published by The American Federation of Arts and Merrell Holberton Publishers, Ltd., 256 pages, 10 x 10", approximately 90 color and 76 halftone illustrations; clothbound \$75.00 and paperbound \$45.00.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS: Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the AFA is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. The AFA provides its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art.