

Release Date: January 22, 2003

## THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH RETROSPECTIVE ILLUSTRATES THE RANGE, RICHNESS, AND ORIGINALITY OF HIS ART ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON FEBRUARY 9 - MAY 11, 2003

Washington, DC -- **Thomas Gainsborough, 1727-1788**, the first comprehensive retrospective ever seen in the United States of works by one of the masters of 18th-century portraiture and landscape painting, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, West Building, February 9 through May 11, 2003. Sixty-three paintings and 31 drawings, including such favorites as *Mrs. Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (c. 1785-1787) and works rarely seen outside of England such as *Mr. and Mrs. William Hallet (The Morning Walk)* (1785), will illustrate the range, richness, and originality of this great British artist. The last major Gainsborough exhibition was held at Tate Britain in 1980.

The exhibition was organized by Tate Britain--where it has been on view since October 24, 2002, and will close on January 19, 2003--in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where it will be on view June 15 through September 14, 2003. The National Gallery of Art exhibition, which is organized chronologically, includes fifteen works not seen at the Tate, and is the exclusive U.S. venue for the paintings *The Watering Place* (c. 1774-1777) and *The Painter's Daughters with a Cat* (c. 1760-1761).

"An artist with a truly international reputation, Gainsborough has long been admired for the sophistication and elegance of his art, and the inventiveness and complexity of his techniques," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Thanks to the

generosity of General Dynamics and General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd., as well as to the many lenders on both sides of the Atlantic, visitors to Washington will have the rare opportunity of experiencing the full breadth of Gainsborough's artistic genius."

### **Exhibition Sponsor**

The exhibition is made possible by General Dynamics and General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd.

"Through our sponsorship of this exhibition with our British subsidiary, General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd., we celebrate our friendship with the government and the people of the United Kingdom," said Nicholas D. Chabraja, chairman and chief executive officer, General Dynamics. "We hope that visitors will take great pleasure from these beautiful works."

The exhibition is also supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

### **The Exhibition**

The exhibition begins with portraits Gainsborough painted early in his career while living in London and Sudbury, including *The Rev. John Chafy Playing the Violincello in a Landscape* (c. 1750-1752) and *Heneage Lloyd and His Sister* (c. 1752). When commissions proved elusive in Sudbury, Gainsborough settled with his wife and two daughters in Ipswich, a large port city with a military fort. Improving steadily in skills and reputation, Gainsborough finally saw his career advance when he moved to Bath in 1759. At this fashionable holiday resort, with its constant flow of wealthy patrons, the artist achieved instantaneous success. This success is represented in the exhibition by the superb *Uvedale Tomkyns Price* (c. 1760-1761) and *Ann Ford, Later Mrs. Philip Thicknesse* (1760)--works which have a powerful directness matched only by Sir Joshua Reynolds, one of Gainsborough's contemporaries. The exhibition will include portraits of the German composer, *Carl Friedrich Abel* (1777) and of the celebrated Italian dancer, *Giovanna Baccelli* (1782), which reveal the artist's growing confidence and ambition.

Although Gainsborough made his living in portraits, he found greater pleasure in painting landscapes. Some of his early approaches to landscape painting will be represented in the exhibition by major pictures that helped to establish his career, including Gainsborough's *Forest (Cornard Wood)* (c. 1746-1748) and *Holywells Park, Ipswich* (c. 1748-1750).

The exhibition continues with a selection of the major works that Gainsborough chose for public exhibition in London during his lifetime. The spectacular procession of glamorous full-length portraits, including *The Linley Sisters* (1772) and *Grace Dalrymple, Mrs. John Elliott* (1778), will give visitors a sense of how dramatic the annual shows at the Royal Academy of Arts must have been. Further aspects of his portraiture will be shown in his sympathetic and informal depiction of the art dealer, *James Christie* (1778); the glamorous picture of *Isabella, Viscountess Molyneux* (1769), which he showed at the first Royal Academy exhibition in 1769; and the pendant portraits of Lord and Lady Ligonier shown in 1771 when the sitters were involved in a very public divorce.

Gainsborough's success in portraiture is due to the artist's astute attention to the finest points of the sitter's actual appearance, the choice of glamorous pose and costume, and the ability to project, to an astonishing degree, the subject's personality, as seen in *The Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, Attended by Lady Elizabeth Luttrell* (c. 1783-1785). His portraits of women portrayed as intellectual and cultured include such works as *Mrs. Lewes Peak Garland, Formerly Miss Indiana Talbot* (c. 1775) and *Lady Brisco* (c. 1776). Portraits of men often emphasize the sensitivity of his sitters, as in *Ignatius Sancho* (1768); *Joshua Grigby* (c. 1760-1765); and *The Reverend Humphry Gainsborough* (c. 1770-1774), the painter's brother.

Gainsborough thought of himself first as a painter of landscapes, creating more than 200 of them over the course of his career. His depictions of the landscape are often considered as embodying timeless ideals of the English countryside, and his rural vision was complex and marked by contemporary concerns about the agricultural economy. The exhibition will present major examples of some of the exquisite landscape imagery he created, including *The Harvest Wagon* (1767), *Romantic Landscape with Sheep at a Spring* (c. 1783), and *Cottage Girl with Dog and Pitcher*

(1785).

Gainsborough's achievement as a landscape artist is equally evident in his drawings, which stand as works of art in their own right and not merely studies for his oil paintings. Rendered in pencil, chalk, or charcoal and depicting scenery as well as figures, these freely imagined compositions display an easy flow of elements and extraordinarily vigorous handling.

The final works in the exhibition include some of Gainsborough's most accomplished portraits, including the remarkable *Mrs. Siddons* (c. 1785) and *Mrs. Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (c. 1785-1787)--the artist's crowning achievement painted at the end of his career. With these paintings, Gainsborough tested the distinction between "finished" and "unfinished" and continued to explore likeness and character in powerfully original ways. The experimental qualities of Gainsborough's art will be most apparent in such works as his mythological painting *Diana and Actaeon* (c. 1784-1786).

### **Curators, Catalogue, And Related Activities**

The installation at the National Gallery was organized by Franklin Kelly, the Gallery's senior curator of American and British paintings. *Thomas Gainsborough*, a fully illustrated catalogue published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington in association with Tate Publishing, is available for \$60.00 (hardcover) and \$45.00 (softcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Web site at [ww.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). To order by phone, call 1-800-697-9350. A range of educational programs will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition. Further information and a complete schedule of gallery talks, lectures, films, and programs for families are available on the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm](http://www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm) (<http://www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm>)

###

## 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