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from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**FRICK TO PRESENT FIRST SHOW ON
JEAN-ANTOINE WATTEAU'S MILITARY WORKS
REUNITING A GROUP OF PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS**

WATTEAU'S SOLDIERS
SCENES OF MILITARY LIFE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

July 12 through October 2, 2016



Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Portal of Valenciennes*, 1709–10, oil on canvas, 12 3/4 x 16 inches, The Frick Collection, purchased with funds from the bequest of Arthemise Redpath, 1991; photo: Michael Bodycomb

It would be difficult to think of an artist further removed from the muck and misery of the battlefield than Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), who is known as a painter of amorous aristocrats and melancholy actors, a dreamer of exquisite parklands and impossibly refined *fêtes*. And yet, early in his career, Watteau painted a number of scenes of military life, remarkable for their deeply felt humanity and intimacy. These pictures were produced during one of the darkest chapters of France's history, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14).

But the martial glory on which most military painters of the time trained their gaze—the fearsome arms, snarling horses, and splendid uniforms of generals glittering amid the smoke of cannon fire—held no interest for Watteau, who focused instead on the most

prosaic aspects of war: the marches, halts, encampments, and bivouacs that defined the larger part of military life. Inspired by seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish genre scenes, the resulting works show the quiet moments between the fighting, when soldiers could rest and daydream, smoke pipes and play cards.

Principal support for *Watteau's Soldiers: Scenes of Military Life in Eighteenth-Century France* was provided by an anonymous gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden. Major support for the exhibition also has been provided by the David L. Klein, Jr. Foundation, Sally and Howard Lepow, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Aso O. Tavitian, with an additional contribution from Susannah Hunnewell Weiss. The catalogue was made possible by The Versailles Foundation, Inc.

Watteau produced about a dozen of these military scenes, but only seven survive. Though known primarily only to specialists, they were once counted among the artist's most admired works and owned by such prominent figures as Catherine the Great and the Prince of Conti. **Presented exclusively at The Frick Collection in the summer of 2016, *Watteau's Soldiers* is the first exhibition devoted solely to these captivating pictures, introducing the artist's engagement with military life to a larger audience while offering a fresh perspective on the subject.** Among the paintings, drawings, and prints are four of the seven known paintings—with the Frick's own *Portal of Valenciennes* as the centerpiece—as well as the recently rediscovered *Supply Train*, which has never before been exhibited publicly in a museum. Also featured are about twelve studies of soldiers in red chalk, many directly related to the paintings on view.

The works on display offer a rare opportunity to study the drawings and paintings together and probe Watteau's complex and remarkable working methods. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Watteau did not proceed methodically from compositional sketches, studies, and full-scale models to the final painting. Instead, his process followed the whims of his imagination and the demands of the moment. He began by drawing soldiers from life, without a predetermined end in mind. These drawings provided him with a stock of figures, often used multiple times, that he would arrange in an almost



Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Two Recruits*, ca. 1712, red chalk, 6 3/8 x 6 1/8 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund (1961.9.39); photo: Yale University Art Gallery

spontaneous fashion on the canvas. As a result, figures previously isolated in his sketchbook were brought together and juxtaposed in new social relationships on the canvas, producing the ambiguous, dreamlike effects that make his paintings so intriguing.

The exhibition is rounded out by a selection of works by Watteau's predecessors and followers: the Frick's *Calvary Camp* by Philips Wouwerman, a typical example of the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings after which Watteau modeled his own; a study of a soldier by Watteau's follower Jean-Baptiste Pater, from the Fondation Custodia, Paris; and a painting of a military camp by his other great follower, Nicolas Lancret, from a private collection. These works shed light on the ways in which Watteau transformed the painting of military life in Europe, demonstrating his pivotal influence on the genre.

Published by The Frick Collection in association with D Giles, Ltd., London, the book accompanying the exhibition includes an essay by Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow **Aaron Wile**, and is the first illustrated catalogue of all Watteau works related to military subjects.

INTERACT

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#WatteausSoldiers

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Museum Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

265, October 23, 2015 (revised February 10, 2016)

For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing or Alexis Light, Senior Manager of Media Relations & Marketing; Phone: 212.547.0710; E-mail: mediarelations@frick.org