

PRESS RELEASE

## JEAN-JACQUES DE BOISSIEU. A CONTEMPORARY OF STÄDEL'S

11 FEBRUARY–10 MAY 2015

Press preview: Tuesday, 10 February 2015, 11.00 a.m.

Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings

**Frankfurt am Main, 3 February 2015.** The Städel Museum's jubilee year starts with an exhibition of outstanding drawings and etchings by the French artist Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736–1810), which will be on display in the Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 11 February until 10 May 2015. Boissieu was already highly acclaimed beyond France in his lifetime. Not only princes but also private collectors like Johann Friedrich Städel (1728–1816) were fascinated with the landscapes, genre scenes, and portraits depicted in the artist's drawings and prints. The founder of the Städelches Kunstinstitut acquired over twenty drawings and far more than two hundred etchings by Boissieu. These works are not only part of the Städel Museum's oldest holdings but constitute one of the most comprehensive collections of Boissieu's works in Germany. The thirteen drawings and eighty-three etchings which have been selected to be shown in the Städel's special presentation offer an impressive insight into the artist's production. Though created in a period of historically revolutionary events around the French Revolution, Boissieu's oeuvre mirrors the landscape and life of the province around his native city of Lyon with an almost irritatingly unexcited and serious steadiness. His etched landscapes and portraits as well as his subtly nuanced brush and chalk drawings reveal a progressive closeness to reality fuelled by his study of nature that hints at a bourgeois understanding of art independent of any academic norms.

"We have decided to show some very special works from the more than one hundred thousand items of our Department of Prints and Drawings to start our bicentennial program off. The exhibition not only presents Johann Friedrich Städel as a knowledgeable collector of art but also aims at making our public familiar with a brilliant draftsman and engraver," says Max Hollein, Director of the Städel Museum.

**Städelches Kunstinstitut  
und Städtische Galerie**

Dürerstraße 2  
60596 Frankfurt am Main  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170  
Fax +49(0)69-605098-111  
presse@staedelmuseum.de  
www.staedelmuseum.de

**PRESS DOWNLOADS**  
www.staedelmuseum.de

**PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**  
Axel Braun, Head  
presse@staedelmuseum.de

Silke Janßen, Deputy Head  
Phone +49(0)69-605098-234  
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188  
janssen@staedelmuseum.de

“The rich holdings of Boissieu’s etchings and drawings in Johann Friedrich Städel’s collection testify to the taste of the Frankfurt banker and spice merchant, who, as a collector, not only acquired outstanding works by old masters but was equally interested in the art of his day,” emphasizes Dr. Jutta Schütt, Head of the Städel’s Department of Prints and Drawings after 1750.

Born in Lyon in 1736, Jean-Jacques de Boissieu mainly dedicated himself to drawings and engravings in his work as an artist. While he produced about one thousand drawings and 151 etchings, only a small number of paintings has come down on us. Boissieu, who came from a Southern French gentry family and lost his father, a physician, in his early childhood, attended a free-of charge drawing school in his native Lyon, enjoying an education that was intended to serve the local silk industry. A Lyon art dealer encouraged him to try his hand at etching. As Boissieu had not studied at an art academy, he was considered an amateur in his day. The politically and socially turbulent times surrounding the French Revolution did not leave any marks on Boissieu’s oeuvre. His production comprises bourgeois private subjects and motif themes such as landscapes, portraits, and likenesses of family members as well as everyday and generalizing genre representations.

The presentation in the Exhibition Hall of the Städel’s Department of Prints and Drawings commences with a self-portrait by the sixty-year-old artist, an etching dating from 1796 and executed in two versions: the first shows Boissieu with a portrait of his wife in his hands, which has given way to a rustic idyll in the later sheet. The self-understanding of this artist who did not spend his life in Paris, the capital, but in Lyon, the country’s second largest city after Paris at the time, is rooted in his family and the region he was born in. The exhibition highlights these two strands with portraits such as that of his younger brother (c. 1781) or a motif like *Soap Bubbles* (1799), which might remind the viewer of the artist’s sons, on the one hand. On the other, there are topographical views of the city of Lyon and the scenery surrounding it, among them the etching *View of the Rhône Bridge in Lyon* (1761) presented as a striking example next to a watercolor dating from the year before. The painterly rendering of the structure, the distribution of light and shadow, and the atmospheric effect achieved this way clearly evidence the work’s original quality.

The art of Boissieu’s work is pivoted on portraits and genre pictures besides landscapes. One sheet assembles individual eye-catching faces and representations of both known and unknown persons – physiognomic studies reminiscent of the

Swiss philosopher and author Johann Caspar Lavater's (1741–1801) publications dating from about the same time. The artist's genre scenes render aspects of the region's contemporary everyday world and are about listening (*The Oboist*, 1782) and watching (*Portrait of the One-Hundred-Year-Old Man from Lyon*, 1780), about teaching and learning (*The Class*, 1780), giving and taking (*Old Man Giving Alms*, 1780), work and craft (*Large Coopers*, 1790), about resting and playing, youth and old age. Beyond these primarily bourgeois private subjects, the presentation comprises merely a few etchings recording such outstanding current events as Pope Pius VII's stay in Lyon in 1804.

With prints like the etching *Les grands charlatans* (1772) after a painting by Karel Dujardin (c. 1622–1678), the exhibition also explores adaptations of works by Dutch artists of the seventeenth century, which are no reproduction prints in the usual sense but by and large free transpositions. The example of his small etchings of heads and figures arranged in the form of scenes published under the title *Griffonnements* (Doodles) in 1758, which are also presented at the Städel, already reveals the artist's orientation toward Dutch seventeenth-century art, which perfectly corresponds with the increased interest in the era to be observed in his time.

Jean-Jacques de Boissieu ranks among the great eighteenth-century masters of print. Though he spent most of his life in Lyon, he established the best connections with various publishers in Paris, for example, but also in Nuremberg and Mannheim and enjoyed a high standing throughout his life. That he was a member of the Institut de France as well as of the academies of Lyon, Florence, and Bologna indicates the artist's renown. After a longer stay in Paris between 1762 and 1764, where he got to know influential artists such as Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805) or collectors like Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694–1774), Boissieu, joining the entourage of Louis-Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1743–1792), visited Genoa, Naples, and Rome. In the course of this journey, he met a number of personalities pointing the way like the philosopher and author Voltaire (1694–1778) or the archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). When travelling, he recorded his immediate impressions with his brushes, focusing on landscapes unfolding in the light. From then on, he fell back on these Italian nature studies for his works again and again, using them as direct models or memory props for etchings of freely composed landscapes throughout his life. Johann Friedrich Städel succeeded in acquiring one of Boissieu's much sought-after Italian brush

drawings, *Ruins of the Temple of Apollo on the Shores of Lake Avernus* (1765), for his foundation – a sheet that will also be displayed in the Städel's exhibition.

After his journey through Italy, Boissieu returned to his native Lyon and became a civil servant to the Crown in 1771, a post that ensured him a regular livelihood until the outbreak of the French Revolution. His noble descent, which had opened many doors for him until then, suddenly turned into a threat to his life. Finally, however, an official statement from Paris placed him and his works under protection.

In 1801, the sixty-five-year-old artist published a catalogue raisonné of his etchings. Johann Friedrich Städel acquired a copy supplemented by the artist in his own hand, which will also be part of the exhibition. Having cooperated with various Paris publishers for a few years early on, Boissieu took the distribution of his prints into his own hands in 1764. Only in his old age, from 1807 on, he had publishers – this time Frauenholz in Nuremberg and Artaria in Mannheim – represent his works again. Städel seems to have been supplied by these German dealers. We do not know whether the collector ever came into contact with the artist he revered. It is indicative of the Frankfurt citizen's good taste and foresight that he included the works of a French contemporary pursuing his own way into the ensemble of his collection. There is something else Städel and Boissieu had in common: Boissieu had also set up his own collection of artworks. As an artist, collector, and connoisseur of art, Boissieu was even asked to join the committee responsible for preparing the establishment of a museum in Lyon. Their decisive role in founding a museum is another aspect the two contemporaries had in common.



## **JEAN-JACQUES DE BOISSIEU. A CONTEMPORARY OF STÄDEL'S**

**Curator:** Dr. Jutta Schütt, Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings after 1750

**Exhibition dates:** 11 February to 10 May 2015

**Press preview:** Tuesday, 10 February 2015, 11.00 a.m.

**Venue:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt

**Information:** [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de), [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de),

phone +49(0)69-605098-0, fax +49(0)69-605098-111

**Visitor services:** +49(0)69-605098-232, [besucherdienst@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:besucherdienst@staedelmuseum.de)

**Opening hours of the Städel Museum:**

Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun, and holidays 10.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.; Thur and Fri 10.00 a.m. – 9.00 p.m.;  
from 11 March 2015 Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun, and holidays 10.00 a.m. – 7 p.m., Thur and Fri 10.00 a.m. –  
9.00 p.m.

**Special opening hours:** 3 April, 5 April, and 6 April 2015 10.00 a.m. – 7.00 p.m.; 1 May 2015  
10.00 a.m. – 7.00 p.m.

**Admission:** 12 euros, reduced 10 euros, family ticket 20 euros; free admission for children up to  
twelve years of age; Sat, Sun, and holidays 14 Euro, reduced 12 euros, family ticket 24 euros.

From 11 March 2015 14 euros, reduced 12 euros, family ticket 24 euros; free admission for children  
up to twelve years of age; groups of at least ten persons: reduced admission per person. Groups by  
appointment only: please call +49(0)69-605098-200 or contact [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de).

**Advance ticket sales:** [tickets.staedelmuseum.de](http://tickets.staedelmuseum.de)

**Opening hours of the Study Hall, Department of Prints and Drawings:** Wed, Fri 2.00–5.00  
p.m.; Thur 2.00–7.00 p.m.

**General guided tours through the exhibition:** Fri 7.00 p.m., Sun 3.00 p.m.

**Special tours by request:** +49(0)69-605098-200, [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

Further offers at [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de)