

PRESS RELEASE

# VICES OF LIFE. THE PRINTS OF WILLIAM HOGARTH

10 JUNE TO 6 SEPTEMBER 2015

Press preview: Tuesday, 9 June 2015, 11 am

Exhibition gallery of the Department of Prints and Drawings

**Frankfurt am Main, 26 May 2015.** From 10 June to 6 September 2015 – in its bicentennial year “200 Years Städel” – Frankfurt’s Städel Museum will be presenting prints by the English painter, engraver and etcher William Hogarth (1697–1764). Altogether seventy works including the famous printmaking series *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732), *A Rake’s Progress* (1735) and *Marriage à la Mode* (1745) will be on view in the exhibition hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings. These visual novels from the Städel holdings take the fashions, vices and downsides of modern life in the London metropolis as their themes. Hogarth conceived of his artworks as printed theatre of his times and with them he laid the cornerstone for socio-critical caricature in England. The prints owe their special quality to the keen powers of perception and caustic humour of an artist who contributed so greatly to shaping the image of his era that it is still referred to as “Hogarth’s England” today. Executed during Johann Friedrich Städel’s lifetime, the engravings are among the Städel’s oldest holdings and mirror the critical spirit inherent to this institution since its founding.

The exhibition is being sponsored by the Hessische Kulturstiftung.

William Hogarth was born in London in 1697. In keeping with an early eighteenth-century fashion, his father Richard opened a coffee house at which only Latin was spoken. The business failed, and Richard Hogarth had to serve five years in London’s notorious Fleet Prison for failure to pay his debts. As was usual at the time, his wife and children had to accompany him. In 1713, after his father’s release, William Hogarth began an apprenticeship as a silver engraver where he also learned

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the rudiments of the complex techniques of intaglio printing – engraving and etching. Following his seven-year training, he went into business for himself as an engraver and attended the privately run St Martin's Lane Academy, an art school in London, to acquire the art of painting. In 1724 he also became a member of the academy of royal court painter James Thornhill (1675–1734), whose daughter Jane he married in 1729. It was not with his paintings, however, that Hogarth achieved a breakthrough with the public, but with the prints made after his works on canvas. With the series *A Harlot's Progress*, produced in the early 1730s, he founded a new genre he later dubbed *modern moral subjects*. Hogarth conceived of these subjects as contemporary, moral-didactic history scenes. He thus took a stand against the hierarchization of the visual arts, a firmly entrenched principle of academy doctrine which granted classical history painting pride of place. With his printmaking works, he succeeded in creating a new, up-to-date genre based on the keen observation of reality. In 1755 Hogarth was elected to the Royal Society of Arts, which he quit again just two years later on account of artistic and personal differences. His appointment as royal court painter followed in 1757, but never led to any commissions. The final years of the artist's life were overshadowed by bitter disputes between himself and his critics. A stroke in 1763 left Hogarth severely handicapped and he died the following year in his home in Leicester Fields, a district of London.

The presentation in the exhibition gallery of the Department of Prints and Drawings focuses primarily on those of William Hogarth's printmaking series that earned him international fame: *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress* und *Marriage à la Mode*. There is a very simple reason for the fact that his works on paper secured him a place in art history: prints can be circulated far better than paintings. It was by these means that the artist reached the enlightened and educated public of his day in large numbers. Already the first edition of *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) comprised 1,240 sold copies. In six episodes, this series describes the rise and fall of a young woman who has come from the country to the city to find work. To earn a living she ends up as a prostitute and lands in prison as a result. The final scene shows the wretched funeral of the protagonist, whose life has already come to an end at the age of twenty-three. Hogarth had numerous real and literary models to look to for his creation of this figure. Inspired by his great interest in the social characterization of his time, he directed his critical, ironical gaze to all strata of society, from the highest nobility to the most abject circumstances. The sick and needy of all generations formed the

downside of the economic boom enjoyed by the colonial and commercial metropolis and its many profiteers.

In his second series, *A Rake's Progress* (1735), consisting of eight prints, Hogarth tells the story of the social decline of Tom Rakewell, who brainlessly squanders his inheritance and is thrown first into debtors' prison and then the madhouse. Rakewell's incarceration on grounds of indebtedness is reminiscent of the artist's own biography. Entirely unlike his father, however, William Hogarth was an excellent businessman and very clever at taking advantage of the London press – which was flourishing in his day – and its public impact for his own purposes. In newspapers such as the *London Daily Post*, the *General Advertiser* or the *London Journal* he published announcements of his prints and advertised them for subscription.

Hogarth borrowed the title of his third major series, published in 1745, from a comedy by John Dryden (1631–1700). *Marriage à la Mode* is about an espousal arranged by the two spouses' fathers. Neither the bride nor the groom is the least bit interested in the other, both amuse themselves on the side, and the situation comes to a dramatic conclusion. Hogarth's protagonists feign innocence and practise deception, abandon themselves to their passions and founder on their false ideals. Looking to true stories for orientation and integrating well-known persons and recognizable sites, he warned his public of the dangers of modern life – dangers still very real today. In 1751, with his popular prints *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*, he supported a public campaign against the excessive consumption of gin. The former scene presents the enjoyment of beer as healthy and beneficial in contrast to the destructive effects of gin portrayed in the latter.

From mid century onward, in addition to socio-critical themes Hogarth also devoted himself to matters of national and political relevance, which represent a further focus of the exhibition. In several works, the artist addressed the relationship between France and England, which were at war. *The Gate of Calais* (1748) was his response to his arrest on suspicion of espionage during one of his trips to France. In 1756, in *The Invasion*, he again caricatured the French as grotesque, haggard figures who are after the tasty beer and luscious roast beef of the English. Some fifteen years later, in the print *The Times, Plate 1* (1762), Hogarth made an urgent appeal for the cessation of the Seven Years' War.

In 1753, Hogarth published his own art-theoretical deliberations in the book *The Analysis of Beauty*. In it he concerned himself with the foundations of visual-artistic production and particularly the matter of how to achieve beauty and grace. Hogarth considered the study of nature to be the key to beauty. He called upon his readers to perceive the objects of nature with their own eyes and judge them according to rational criteria. The German writer Christlob Mylius (1722–1754) was in London when Hogarth's *Analysis* came out, and he translated it into German the very next year. Johann Friedrich Städel had a copy of this translation in his library, and it will be on display in the show.

The exhibition "Vices of Life. The Prints of William Hogarth" will be accompanied by a catalogue. Following its presentation at the Städel Museum, the show will be on view at Neuhardenberg Castle.

#### **VICES OF LIFE. THE PRINTS OF WILLIAM HOGARTH**

**Curator:** Annett Gerlach (Städel Museum)

**Exhibition dates:** 10 June to 6 September 2015

**Press preview:** Tuesday, 9 June 2015, 11 am

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

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

**General guided tours of the exhibition:** Fri 7 pm, Sun 3 pm (participation in the guided tour is included in the admission fee)

**Special guided tours on request; please contact:** +49(0)69-605098-200 or  
[info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Information on further events and activities:** [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de)

**Catalogue:** In conjunction with the exhibition, the Städel Museum is publishing a catalogue by Annett Gerlach. Approx. 50 pages, 9.90 EUR

#### **Städel Museum opening hours:**

Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun and holidays 10 am – 7 pm, Thu + Fri 10 am – 9 pm

**Special opening hours:** 24 May, 25 May, 4 June 10 am – 7 pm

**From Tuesday, 9 June to Sunday, 28 June:** open daily, including Mondays 10 am – 9 pm

**Admission:** 14 EUR, reduced 12 EUR, family ticket 24 EUR; admission free for children to the age of 12; groups (minimum 10 persons): reduced admission fee per person. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting us at +49(0)69-605098-200 or [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de).

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



**Department of Prints and Drawings, Study Hall opening hours:**  
Wed, Fri 2 – 5 pm, Thu 2 – 7 pm

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