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Art from captured British ship rediscovered; exhibition offers a window into Grand Tour travel and collecting

THE ENGLISH PRIZE: THE CAPTURE OF THE *WESTMORLAND*,
AN EPISODE OF THE GRAND TOUR

Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford: May 17 – August 27, 2012
Yale Center for British Art: October 4, 2012–January 13, 2013

NEW HAVEN – On January 7, 1779, the *Westmorland* – a British merchant ship sailing from Livorno, Italy, laden with works of art acquired by young British travelers on the Grand Tour – was captured by two French warships. The following morning the *Westmorland* and its crew of sixty men was escorted to Malaga in southern Spain where the ship was declared a prize of war. The crew were released in a prisoner exchange and the contents were acquired by a Spanish grocers' company, who in turn sold most of the works of art on board to King Carlos III of Spain. Much of the material was subsequently presented by the king to the Real Academia de Belles Artes de San Fernando in Madrid. Other works entered the royal collection, and, over the years, some passed on to the the Prado and other museums in Madrid; one painting found its way to Russia.



This October, the Yale Center for British Art will be the only North American venue for an exhibition that will recount the extraordinary story of the capture of the *Westmorland* and the subsequent disposition of its contents. *The English Prize: The Capture of the Westmorland, an Episode of the Grand Tour* will bring together many of the works on board the ship along with details about the various owners of its treasures, forming a remarkably complete cross-section of Grand Tour collecting at the height of this important cultural phenomenon. For many elite young men of the eighteenth century, the Grand Tour was a rite of passage that completed a classical education. It offered an opportunity to acquire taste as well as to partake in the amusements of fashionable society on the European continent.



The English Prize has been organized by the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, in association with the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid, and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford.



On view will be approximately one hundred forty objects, including paintings, watercolors, architectural drawings, sculptures, rare books, maps, and souvenirs. Highlights include portraits of Grand Tourists Francis Bassett and George Legge, Viscount Lewisham, by Pompeo Batoni, a suite of watercolors by the young John Robert Cozens on his first visit to Italy, and portrait busts by the Irish sculptor Christopher Hewetson, who was working in Rome.



The exhibition comes out of a major research project initiated in the late 1990s, led by Professor José María Luzón Nogué, which investigated the story of the *Westmorland* and its contents. In recent years, with the support of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, remarkable progress has been made in identifying and cataloguing these diverse treasures. The original inventories of the *Westmorland*, which survive in the Real Academia's archives, are remarkably thorough, enabling the identification of many of the items on board the ship when it was captured. In addition, most of these works can now be associated with the tourists, collectors, and dealers who were sending them back to Britain, including Bassett, Lewisham, the Scottish painter Allan Ramsay, and the Duke of Gloucester, brother to King George III.



CREDITS

The English Prize has been curated by Scott Wilcox, Chief Curator of Art Collections and Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Center; Elisabeth Fairman, Senior Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Center; and María Dolores Sánchez-Jáuregui Alpañés, Senior Research Fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and lead researcher on the *Westmorland* project. The exhibition is supported in part by the David T. Langrock Foundation.

PUBLICATION

The English Prize will be accompanied by a major publication edited by the exhibition curators with contributions by Professor Luzón and a team of eighteenth-century specialists. The book has been published by the Yale Center for British Art; Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London; Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid; Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford; and Yale University Press (2012, 378 pp., 245 illus, \$75/£45) ISBN 9780300176056. For more information or to request a review copy, please contact Yale Press: Robert Pranzatelli (North America), robert.pranzatelli@yale.edu; or Jessica Lee (London), jessica.lee@yaleup.co.uk.



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