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## **NEWS THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART**

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*William MacLeod: Painter and Curator*

**at the Corcoran Gallery of Art**

**September 10 through November 7, 2005**

**Washington, D.C.** – As the Corcoran Gallery’s first curator and one of the first museum professionals in the United States, Mr. William MacLeod (1811-1892) was a very influential figure in shaping the Corcoran Gallery of Art and establishing the important role of museum curator in America. As a painter himself, MacLeod brought his own artistic creativity and sensibility to his position, which is reflected in daily journal he maintained of gallery activities. This historical exhibition showcases a select number of paintings by MacLeod and excerpts from his personal journals written during the period of Washington’s growth into one of the most important capitals and also features several pieces acquired by the museum during his time. *William MacLeod: Painter and Curator* will be on view from September 10 through November 7, 2005.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, one of the three oldest continuously operating art museums in the United States after the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Wadsworth Athenaeum, has a renowned collection of American art, both historic and contemporary. Founded in 1869 “for the purpose of encouraging American Genius,” the Corcoran’s extensive collection is especially noteworthy for its eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century American art.

MacLeod, a trained landscape artist, and a native of Alexandria, Virginia, was selected by gallery founder William Wilson Corcoran as the first curator for the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1873, and worked there until his retirement in 1889. From the moment he assumed this position, he took great personal pride in his association with the institution, its founder and the Board of Trustees. Works by some of the most prominent American artists of the time, including Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, John Frederick Kensett, and Hiram Powers were acquired during his tenure. *Encouraging American Genius*, one of the Corcoran’s permanent collection exhibitions currently on view, features several of the Corcoran’s major acquisitions made under the curatorial guidance of Mr. MacLeod.

MacLeod also recorded his accomplishments, frustrations and quotidian activities in the daily journals he maintained from 1876 to 1886. The content of his journals provide a daily record of the administration of the Corcoran Gallery and include his comments on a

wide variety of subjects. He chronicles the Gallery's operation, including the artists, patrons, politicians and art dealers who visited the building, key art acquisitions, the formation of the Corcoran School of Art, Washington society and personal observations.

With the financial support from the National Historical Records and Publications Commission and private donors, the Corcoran Gallery of Art is currently working on "The Curator's Journals Project" – an endeavor to transcribe, annotate, index and publish the Journals of William MacLeod. Publishing the more than 2,300 handwritten pages will officially document the historical accounts witnessed by MacLeod, including his observations and thoughts regarding the early development of cultural institutions, the role of art education, the status of women in the arts and various topics beyond the field of art history.

In addition to his role as curator and unofficial historian of the Corcoran, MacLeod was a passionate painter. After living in Scotland while attending the University of Glasgow, he returned to the United States and traveled to New York, New Hampshire, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Virginia where he practiced painting landscapes. The first known exhibition of his work took place in Philadelphia in 1843; a few years later he was exhibiting frequently with the American Art Union in New York. Known for his Hudson River School style, his dramatic renderings of American landscapes carried spiritual and metaphorical significance.

"It seemed a fitting time to honor one of the most prominent and influential figures in the Corcoran's early history," said Marisa Bourgoïn, Corcoran archivist. "We're fortunate to have gathered many of his personal paintings to include in this exhibition. His early views of the city and its environs demonstrate his abilities as a painter and his connection to the city he loved, and his paintings of Civil War scenes offer a unique and personal viewpoint for our visitors."

Other period archival materials, including early photographs of the Corcoran and exhibition installations, related publications and collection catalogues and a limited selection of works from the collection acquired during MacLeod's tenure will also be on view.

#### **EXHIBITION SPONSORSHIP**

*William MacLeod: Curator and Painter* is organized by the Corcoran Gallery of Art and made possible by an anonymous donor and Candace Von Salzen McIlhenny.

#### **CURATOR**

Marisa Bourgoïn, Corcoran archivist

#### **ABOUT THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART**

The Corcoran Gallery of Art was founded in 1869 as Washington's first museum of art. It is a privately funded institution incorporating both a museum and college of art and design. As one of America's oldest art institutions, the Corcoran is

known internationally for its distinguished collection of historical and modern American, art as well as European painting, sculpture, photography and decorative arts.

Founded in 1890, the Corcoran College of Art + Design is Washington's only four-year college of art and design. The college currently offers four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree programs; two-year Associate of Fine Arts (AFA) degree programs; Master of Arts (MA) degree programs in Interior Design, the History of Decorative Arts and Teaching; and a Continuing Education program encompassing more than 250 courses and 14 certificate programs for part-time adult students; as well as year-round classes designed especially for children and teens.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art is located at New York Avenue and 17th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. and is open Wednesdays – Sundays from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and until 9 p.m. on Thursdays. The museum is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, but open on holiday Mondays. Admission to the Corcoran is: \$8.00 for adults; \$6.00 for senior citizens and U.S. military personnel; \$4 for students with current ID and \$3 for Member guests. Admission is always free for Members and children under 12. Admission is “pay as you wish” on Thursdays after 5 p.m. For information about the museum, call (202) 639-1700; for information about the college, call (202) 639-1800 or visit [www.corcoran.edu](http://www.corcoran.edu).