

# Hubert Robert

1733 - 1808

One of the most prominent artists of his era, Hubert Robert is perhaps best known today as “Robert of the Ruins”—the nickname bestowed on him by his contemporary, the French philosopher and critic Denis Diderot. Indeed, Robert loved and depicted ruined structures of all types, whether real or imagined. The remnants of ancient Rome fascinated him most, but he also drew inspiration from the rubble of urban renewal projects in his native Paris. At the core of his success was his brilliance as a master of the architectural capriccio (Italian for “caprice”), in which random monuments from different locales were artfully brought together to create new, completely imaginary compositions.

A gifted painter of architecture and landscape, Robert was also a talented and prolific draftsman, a skilled printmaker, a prominent interior decorator, a garden designer, and a



Portrait of Hubert Robert, 1786, oil on canvas, Musée de Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris. © 2004 Musée de Louvre, Paris. All rights reserved.

keeper of the king’s paintings. Lively, intelligent, and well loved as a good-humored bon vivant, Robert moved easily through the most exalted circles of Paris’s society—even though he was only a commoner whose parents had worked in the service of aristocrats. He later chronicled the demise of this glittering world through representations of contemporary events such as the vandalizing of royalist monuments and the destruction of the Bastille prison during the French Revolution. Imprisoned himself because of his close connections with the nobility, he narrowly escaped the guillotine. After his release, he became a curator of the new national museum at the Palais du Louvre, and in his last decade, he painted a series of meditations on its galleries. Presenting paintings and drawings from throughout Robert’s career, this exhibition celebrates his achievements as the creator of some of the most poetic images of his era.

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# Robert in Rome

1754-1765

**H**ubert Robert spent his childhood in Paris immersed in the courtly environment of his parents' employer, the Marquis de Stainville, who granted the boy a classical education. In 1754, the twenty-one-year-old aspiring artist arrived in Rome in the entourage of Stainville's oldest son, the newly appointed French ambassador to the papal court. Thanks to the diplomat's intervention, Robert was permitted to reside and train at the French Academy in the heart of the Eternal City—a privilege normally awarded only to the winners of the most prestigious art prize in France, the Prix de Rome. Robert had neither won nor competed for that honor, but the unusual accommodation would prove typical of the exceptional nature of his career.

Intensive study of Rome's classical heritage was considered essential for any ambitious artist in the eighteenth century. Robert explored the city for eleven years, recording its art collections, monuments, inhabitants, and environs in hundreds of drawings that he relied upon for years to come when composing works in his studio. Under the influence of two of the most prominent artists living in Rome—the view painter Giovanni Paolo Panini, who taught



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Arch of Constantine*, 1748, engraving, National Gallery of Art, Edward E. MacCrone Fund and the Eugene L. and Marie-Louise Garbáty Fund, 2002

Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Interior of Saint Peter's*, c. 1754, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Aileen Mellon Bruce Fund, 1968 (on view in gallery 31, main floor)

perspective at the French Academy, and the architect and engraver Giovanni Battista Piranesi, whose workshop was across the street—Robert inventively combined ancient ruins, modern structures, and vignettes of everyday Italian life to create novel compositions, called capriccios. Long after he left the city, Rome remained an endless source of inspiration.

## *Decorative Ensembles*

The key subjects that Robert explored in Rome—antiquity, ruins, architecture, and landscape—remained the core of his artistic practice even as the scope of his work expanded from small easel paintings to canvases created on a monumental scale. From the 1770s on, Robert received numerous commissions from wealthy French patrons to adorn the walls of their luxurious residences. He painted works suitable to rooms of gracious proportions with soaring ceilings, coordinating his compositions with wall color, ornament, drapery, mirrors, and even furniture to form unified decorative ensembles. The avid taste for these interiors, as well as Robert’s prominence in designing them, was attested by his friend, the artist Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, who noted, “It was fashionable, and very magnificent, to have one’s salon painted by Robert.”

Like many of the works in this exhibition, the four paintings in this room originally belonged to such an installation. Robert executed these canvases for a room on the main floor of the Château de Méréville, some forty-five miles southwest of Paris (a view of the manor itself is on display in gallery 79, adjacent). Robert conceived the paintings as two sets of complementary subjects, with one pair featuring imaginary ruins and the other, invented architectural structures.

# Gardens

**D**uring his formative years in Rome Robert found himself entranced by the picturesque charm of the numerous parks and gardens in and around the city. Drawings from his Italian sojourn show him reveling in the diversity of nature, as he captured twisting tree trunks, dense undergrowth, and the varied shapes of leaves and branches. Many of the landscapes painted after his return to Paris in 1765 are clearly tinged by his memories of Roman gardens and feature ruins, classical statues, and villas amid lush greenery. Other landscapes, however, are thoroughly French in character.

Starting in the 1770s, Robert took up landscape architecture for some of the same patrons who bought his paintings. His successes as a garden designer, which included a major project for Louis XVI at Versailles, led to his appointment as Designer of the King's Gardens in 1784. This interest continued late into Robert's career, when at the turn of the nineteenth century he participated in laying out the gardens at the estate of General Lafayette — the French marquis who had fought in the American Revolution. Contemporary theory held that a garden should be structured as a promenade designed to bring people in and out of a series of emotional and reflective experiences. Thus Robert often incorporated sweeping vistas as well as more intimate views organized around architectural features in his gardens.

# *The Architectural Capriccio*

The architectural capriccio or fantasy reached the height of its popularity in the mid-eighteenth century. Robert became one of its most celebrated advocates, perfecting the genre while in Rome and popularizing it in France after his return to Paris. When he successfully applied for membership in the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1766—a process that required him to offer the institution one of his paintings—he submitted a capriccio as his reception piece. History painting, which focused on narratives taken from the Bible, literature, and antiquity, was then the most highly esteemed category of art, but Robert readily embraced his designation as a painter of architecture. Indeed, it was a new category established specifically for him by the academy upon his admittance.

Intended for highly educated collectors, the capriccio was conceived as both a salute and a challenge to their knowledge of antiquities and the ancient and modern monuments of Rome. Tapping into a wealth of visual memories and technical skills, Robert ingeniously created convincing scenes out of disparate components. He changed details of buildings, integrated parts of one structure into another, added completely imaginary elements such as cracked façades, crumbling columns, or Latin inscriptions, and adjusted size and scale to make everything fit together. It was then up to the patron to discern these alterations, to recognize artifacts and sources, and to distinguish the real from the invented. While capriccios were intended to be enjoyed as a kind of puzzle to be solved, many were also imbued with somber reflections on the transitory nature of things and the destructive effects of time.

# *Paris and the Revolution*

**A**part from the eleven years he spent in Italy, Robert lived and worked in Paris. While the city does not feature in his paintings and drawings to the same extent as Rome does, Paris appears in some of his most striking works, including ones that give a rare glimpse of the French capital in a state of transition. Robert was fascinated by the modern ruins he encountered in the city during the last decades of the eighteenth century. He painted and drew piles of debris and rubble created by urban renewal projects, by major conflagrations that destroyed important public buildings, and even by the tumult of the French Revolution, which broke out in 1789. Brand-new edifices rising out of the ground also presented themselves as worthy subjects. In their transitional state, these Parisian structures took on the grandeur of the timeworn antiquities and ruins that had so appealed to Robert in Italy.

The French Revolution led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the demise of a privileged world, with mass incarceration of nobles and confiscation of their property. The most ill-fated were sent to the guillotine. Many of those associated with the aristocracy were also persecuted, including Robert. Arrested in 1793 “for his well-known lack of patriotism” and “links to aristocrats,” he spent nearly a year in prison. During this uncertain time — when Robert undoubtedly feared for his life — sketching was a particular solace and joy for him. He also managed to continue painting. When temporarily deprived of the ability to set up an easel and canvas, he found creative ways to keep active by using material on hand, for example, turning the plates on which his supper was served into supports for his compositions. (An example is in the nearby vitrine.) After his release, Robert resumed his career in a changed society, searching out new patrons to replace those whom he had lost to the Revolution.

## *The Louvre*

**R**obert had a deep and enduring connection to the Louvre. Throughout his career he regularly submitted paintings and drawings to the biennial Salons, the public exhibitions of works by living artists that were held at this former royal residence. For several decades he enjoyed the privilege of having an apartment and studio there. Appointed Keeper of the King's Paintings in 1784, he later participated in plans to create a new museum out of the royal collections — today's Musée du Louvre — and became its curator in 1795, not long after his release from prison. During his last decade Robert devoted himself to a series of paintings of the Louvre and its galleries — both as they appeared intact and in an imagined state of ruin. Despite the disasters of history, these pictures reflect a certain confidence in the regenerative power of art.

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*Interior of the Colosseum*

c. 1759

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris

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*The Spiral Staircase  
at the Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola*

1764

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris



*Colonnade and Gardens at the Villa Medici  
with Gentlemen Sketching*

c. 1759

oil on canvas

Private collection

Built in the sixteenth century for a member of the political dynasty that ruled Florence, the Villa Medici in Rome was one of Robert's favorite sites. (Another painting of the villa, no. 68, is also on view in this room.) Here, he envisioned the estate given over to the pursuit of pleasure. Ladies in pastel-colored silks and lace and gentlemen in tricorne hats stroll along the stately loggia and terrace. Among the lively details are artists sketching the ancient sculptures. The draftsmen's presence would prove prophetic, as the villa would become the home of the French Academy in Rome in the early nineteenth century.

## *Remains of the Palace of Pope Julius*

1759

oil on canvas

Private collection

A hallmark of Robert's Roman imagery is the theme of workaday life unfolding against the backdrop of spectacular architecture and dilapidated monuments. Here, in the shadowy portico of a sixteenth-century papal palace, peasants go about their business preparing bales of hay and saddling their horses, unaffected by their grandiose surroundings. A colossal ancient statue peers out from the arcade at far left, forever silent and motionless in contrast to the industry of the workers. Robert's eye for such detail appealed to collectors abroad who sought souvenirs of Italy.

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## *Laundress and Child*

1761

oil on canvas

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown

Robert was continually drawn to the humorous intersection of past and present. In this amusing scene, a little boy relieves himself, mirroring the water that pours out of the mouth of a lion on the side of an ancient fountain. The laundress appears to have done her washing in the basin, unconcerned with its venerable status. The lively, sketchlike painting technique, also used by Jean Honoré Fragonard, a fellow art student in Rome, is characteristic of Robert's Italian work.

*A Hermit Praying in the Ruins  
of a Roman Temple*

c. 1760

oil on canvas

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Humorous touches—for example, the attempt by a young woman on a ladder to distract the monk with branches—seem at first to align this work with Robert's series of lighthearted genre scenes depicting daily life in Italy amid the ruins. Yet the humbleness of the monk, together with the still life of hourglass, skull, and rosary on the makeshift altar, suggests somber reflections on the transience of life.

## *The Discoverers of Antiquities*

c. 1765

oil on canvas

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

The archaeological fervor of the eighteenth century is embodied in this image of a torch-bearing guide eagerly revealing Rome's ancient secrets to his wealthy and cultivated foreign client. The rustic figures at the entrance to the site are perhaps less fascinated by the splendid find than by the preoccupation of the educated classes with such excursions. Typically for Robert, the image combines accuracy and fiction. The statue of a captive barbarian warrior is recognizable as one then in the Capitoline Museum in Rome; the arcaded gallery recalls the Colosseum; and the pyramid in the distance is identifiable as the tomb of the ancient Roman magistrate Gaius Cestius. These relics, however, were never within visible distance of one another.

## *The Artist in His Studio*

c. 1763/1765

oil on canvas

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

## *Loggia of the Villa Medici*

c. 1780

oil on canvas

Kraemer Gallery, Paris

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## *The Landing Place*

1788

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Gift of Richard T. Crane

Robert tailored these paintings to the ornate décor of the room of the château for which they were commissioned. The paintings' restrained, somber palette, with beige and brown architecture set against cool-blue and silver-white skies, would have thus complemented, rather than dominated, the rich furnishings. Each painting emphasizes architectural or decorative elements such as columns and Greco-Roman statuary that were also prominent features of the château and its gardens.

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## *The Fountains*

1787-1788

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Gift of William G. Hibbard

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## *The Old Temple*

1787-1788

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Gift of Adolphus C. Bartlett

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## *The Obelisk*

1787

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Gift of Clarence Buckingham

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## *Garden of an Italian Villa*

1764

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 1998

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## *The Terrace at the Château de Marly*

c. 1780

oil on canvas

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City,  
Purchase, William Rockhill Nelson Trust

Situated in a wooded valley on the Seine outside Paris, the royal château of Marly had been constructed for Louis XIV (1638–1715) as an informal retreat. The surrounding park was known for its splendid views, including this vista with a neighboring château in the distance. Nourished by a large hydraulic system that pumped water from the Seine, the gardens were far more lush than those of nearby Versailles. Thomas Jefferson, who visited Marly twice, took inspiration from the estate for the grounds of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

*Stair and Fountain in the Park  
of a Roman Villa*

c. 1770

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art,  
Gift of the Ahmanson Foundation

This monumental work represents a summit in the artist's experimentation with the subject of gardens. The immense vessel in the lower left corner, known as the Borghese Vase (now at the Louvre), is a much-admired ancient Greek artifact discovered in Rome in the sixteenth century. The enchanting setting was inspired by the celebrated terraced gardens and fountains at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, but the fanciful arrangement is an improbable feat of architecture and engineering that sprang entirely from the artist's own imagination.

## *View of the Tapis Vert at Versailles*

1777

oil on canvas

Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles  
et de Trianon, Versailles

In the mid-1770s, the trees in a small park at the royal residence in Versailles began dying one after the other. Louis XVI ordered their removal and commissioned Robert to execute this view of the destruction. To the right of the improvised seesaw, Robert included Marie-Antoinette, dressed in a pale gown and bending over two children, and the king, in red, consulting with a figure traditionally identified as the royal director of buildings.

## *The Baths of Apollo*

1803

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

Louis XVI commissioned Robert in 1777 to design a new garden setting in Versailles for a seventeenth-century sculptural group representing the sun god Apollo accompanied by nymphs and horses. In 1803 the elderly Robert returned to Versailles—no longer a royal residence after the French Revolution—and made this painting of the grove with the grotto and waterfalls he had devised a quarter of a century earlier.



*View of Méréville  
in the Direction of the Château*

c. 1790

oil on canvas

Musée de l'Île-de-France — Département des  
Hauts-de-Seine / Musée du Domaine Départemental de Sceaux

Robert's most ambitious project as a gardener was laying out the grounds of the estate of Méréville, for whose château he had painted the set of four large canvases in the previous room. Robert conceived the layouts, designed the numerous buildings scattered about the grounds, and commissioned sculptors to create works that would add to the glory of the whole. Writing in 1786, the artist promised that the garden would be the most visually interesting in France. He captured the final results, including an artificial lake, in this painting. However, the estate's owner, the Marquis de Laborde, had only a few years to enjoy his new gardens: arrested during the French Revolution, he was sent to the guillotine in 1794.

*The Old Bridge*

c. 1760

oil on canvas

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven,  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James W. Fosburgh, B.A. 1933, M.A. 1935

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*The Pantheon  
with the Port of Ripetta*

1766

oil on canvas

École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris,  
on deposit from the Département des Peintures  
du Musée du Louvre

Robert's majestic fantasy combines recognizable structures from different eras and different locations in Rome: the ancient Pantheon, dedicated in 126; the curved staircase built in 1705 in the Ripetta, the city's port on the Tiber River; and, at left, part of the magnificent façade of the Palazzo dei Conservatori, designed in the sixteenth century by Michelangelo. This painting secured Robert admittance to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris. His first completed version of the composition (no. 21) is the watercolor from 1760 on view nearby.

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*The Ponte Salarío*

c. 1775

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1952

*The Bridge*

1776

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier

Although he is known chiefly for architectural fantasies with Italian themes, Robert also found inspiration in his extensive travels throughout France. He made countless sketches of the country's most famous or unusual sites and put them to use in new compositions. Robert's taste for picturesque scenes led him to vernacular structures such as this medieval castle from Dieppe, on the coast of Normandy. He reproduced a number of its features accurately, but embellished elsewhere, adding, for example, a porchlike structure at left. The dramatic setting with a crumbling bridge over falls is entirely invented.

*Antique Capriccio with the  
Statue of Marcus Aurelius*

1784

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Paris,  
on deposit at the Embassy of France, London

This inventive image is full of examples of the indignities to which the inhabitants of modern Rome subjected the city's ancient monuments. The famous equestrian statue of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, which Robert moved from its usual prominent position on the Capitoline Hill to this imaginary dark and tumbledown site, supports one end of a clothesline. The triumphal arch serves as a makeshift shelter for an impoverished family. In the foreground a man saws in half a marble relief, perhaps to sell it to a wealthy collector, and the trench near the bottom edge of the canvas offers further evidence of archaeological looting. Robert's ironical eye translated it all with benevolent candor.

*Architectural Capriccio  
with the Portico of Octavia*

1784

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Paris,  
on deposit at the Embassy of France, London

*The Studio of an Antiquities  
Restorer in Rome*

c. 1783

oil on canvas

Lent by the Toledo Museum of Art,  
Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment,  
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey

Robert studied many of the depicted statues in person in Italy, though never in one place. In the center of the painting, an artist sketches and watches the restorer work on an ancient statue of the Greek philosopher Zeno. Perhaps a stand-in for Robert, the artist might also be considered a type of restorer, one who ensures the survival of classical art through his own study.

## *The Finding of the Laocoön*

1773

oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,  
Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund

One of the great archaeological triumphs of the sixteenth century was the discovery in Rome in 1506 of an ancient marble statue representing the tragic fate of the Trojan priest Laocoön and his two sons, who were strangled by enormous sea serpents at the behest of the gods. Recognized as the masterpiece described by the ancient writer Pliny the Elder, the sculpture was purchased by Pope Julius II and is now in the Vatican Museums. Robert's composition deviates from the known site of the excavation—outdoors on a hill near the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore—situating it instead in a cavernous barrel-vaulted gallery. The work presents an ambiguous time period by mixing a toga-clad figure, seated at right, with others whose peasant dress belongs to no specific century. The painting clearly is meant as a caprice, albeit one that plays with historical events rather than with architectural elements.

## *Fontaine-de-Vaucluse*

1783

oil of canvas

Private collection

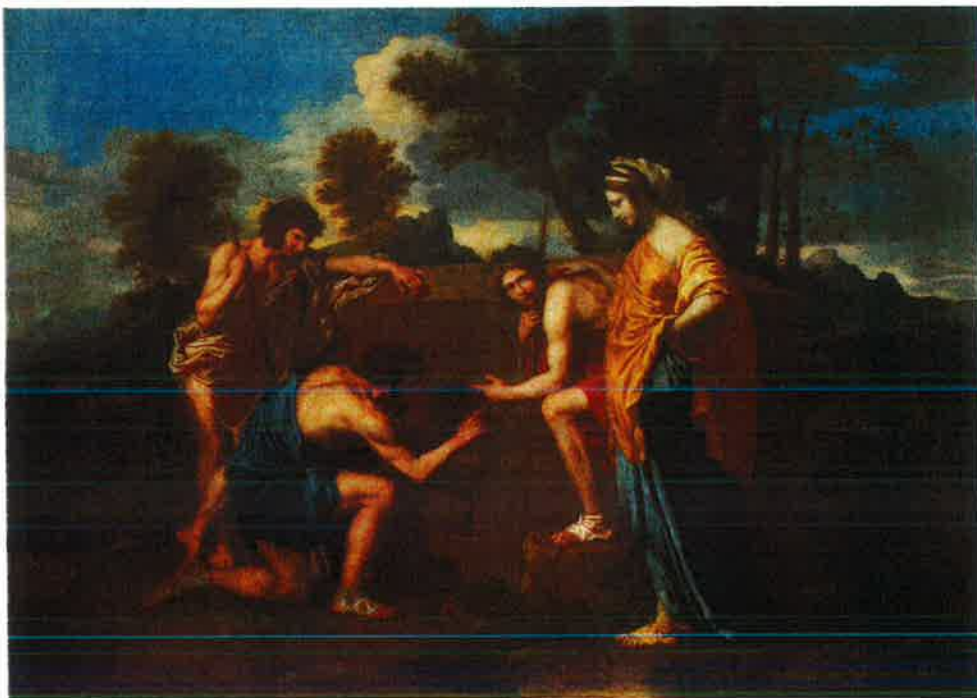
## *Landscape with Arcadian Shepherds*

1789

oil on canvas

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

Ancient Greek and Roman poets celebrated Arcadia (a region in the Peloponnese) as a bucolic spot of unspoiled wilderness, where shepherds lived in harmony with a benevolent Nature. In this imaginary scene of the fabled land, shepherds ponder the melancholic inscription on a tomb: “Even I, a shepherd in Arcadia,” alluding to the inevitability of death, even in such an idyllic setting. The composition pays homage to the great seveneenth-century French artist Nicolas Poussin, whose paintings, like Robert’s, reflect a serious study of classical antiquity, particularly the legacy of ancient Rome. Poussin’s renditions of the same subject, well known in France among artists and critics alike, also include the motif of shepherds contemplating a tomb and its profound inscription.



Nicolas Poussin, *The Shepherds of Arcadia*, oil on canvas, c. 1638, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais / Stéphane Maréchalle / Art Resource, NY

## *The School of Surgery under Construction*

1773

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

Robert must have been attracted to the classicizing architecture of this state-funded school, whose imposing character reflected the magnanimity shown by Louis XV toward the vocation of surgery. Up to this point it had been relegated to the status of a manual trade, the surgeon being equivalent to a barber. The school was a modern complex that housed everything necessary to advance the profession, including an amphitheater for classes, a library, a chemistry laboratory, two small hospital wards, and a storage room for corpses.



*The Demolition of the Houses  
on the Pont Notre-Dame*

1786

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,

Département des Peintures, Paris

Starting in the mid-1780s, efforts to modernize Paris were made by removing old houses that had long stood on several bridges over the Seine in the heart of the city. Home to silversmiths and other tradesmen and merchants, the buildings blocked views and slowed traffic. Moreover, they were deemed unsafe because of perilously overhanging additions. Since shopkeepers prized having a location on a main commercial route, building owners had over time added floors, in defiance of regulations.

## *The Monuments of Paris*

1788

oil on canvas

Collection Power Corporation of Canada, Montreal

Although there were few classical vestiges in Paris, this capriccio conveys a grandeur that sets the city in dialogue with Robert's depictions of Rome. The assemblage spans centuries of Parisian history, from antiquity to the modern era. Among the pile of fragments in the right foreground corner is a piece of a Gallo-Roman pillar that had been excavated just a few decades earlier. Behind it, in the form of a domed loggia, is the sixteenth-century Fountain of the Innocents, the oldest public fountain in Paris. A bronze equestrian statue of Louis XIII (1601–1643) faces the triumphal arch of the Porte Saint-Denis at left, a gateway into the city built by his son Louis XIV. The long colonnade of the Louvre behind them was another of the Sun King's building projects. Rising in the background to represent the present day is the domed Church of Sainte-Geneviève, which had just been constructed.

*Young Girls Dancing around an Obelisk*

1798

oil on canvas

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,  
Lady Davis Bequest

Robert's lifelong fascination with pyramids and obelisks was perhaps fueled by numerous publications on ancient Egypt written by contemporary French scholars. This painting's execution in 1798 coincided with the first year of General Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, which sparked renewed interest in its monuments. Roiling clouds and the broken obelisk suggest a meditation on the fall of civilization. Yet the head on the base of the obelisk is that of the Egyptian god Osiris, who was associated with resurrection, and the buoyant dance performed by lithe young girls could signal rejuvenation. Thus, the cyclical nature of time brings both downfall and renewal.

## *The Burning of Rome*

c. 1771

oil on canvas

Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux, Le Havre

Following his return to Paris, Hubert painted a number of scenes of catastrophes, appealing to a contemporary taste for dramatic compositions that inspired awe, wonder, and even horror. Most of his calamitous subjects were based on actual events in Paris (as is the drawing of the Opéra after a fire, no. 80 in this room), but this innovative work imagines an inferno that might have created some of the Roman ruins he so avidly rendered. Although the painting recalls the dreadful conflagration that ravaged Rome in 64 during Emperor Nero's reign, the building engulfed in flames beyond the arch resembles the Colosseum, which at the time of the famous fire had not yet been built.

*The Bastille*  
*in the First Days of Demolition*

1789

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

In July 1789, in one of the opening acts of the French Revolution, armed crowds stormed the Bastille prison, a hated symbol of the arbitrary nature of royal justice. Robert depicted the start of its subsequent demolition, as workers on the roof knocked it down stone by stone. His interest in the subject probably owed more to the opportunity to record the creation of an imposing ruin than to sympathy for the political act of destroying an icon of despotism. The Marquis de Lafayette, one of the signatories of the decree ordering the demolition, reportedly admired the painting so much that Robert gave it to him.

*Interior of the Basilica of Saint-Denis*

c. 1770/1774

oil on canvas

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

*Corridor of Saint-Lazare*

1794

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

*Feeding the Prisoners of Saint-Lazare*

1794

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

Firsthand accounts of the food offered to the prisoners at Saint-Lazare — where many victims of the Revolution were incarcerated, including Robert — describe it as ranging from disgusting to revolting: the bread was abominable, the wine poisoned, the cheese teemed with maggots, and the herring was full of worms. Affluent prisoners petitioned their families or outside suppliers to send in provisions. Robert captured the bustling traffic in this poignant work commissioned by the future French chancellor Étienne Denis Pasquier (for several months Robert's fellow inmate), who perhaps wanted to preserve the memory of those who helped make his stay in prison less miserable.

*The Destruction of the Royal Tombs  
of Saint-Denis*

1793

oil on canvas

Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

In 1793, the revolutionary government ordered the complete demolition of royal tombs at the Basilica of Saint-Denis on the outskirts of Paris. Robert is the only artist known to have portrayed the events. Featuring no corpses, his picture is neither morbid nor melodramatic. Instead the composition focuses on the picturesque effect of the damaged vault and the glimpse of the basilica's Gothic architecture, which can be seen more fully in the nearby, earlier painting of the intact church (no. 55).

*Painting Gallery  
Being Used as an Artist's Studio*

1789

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris

*View of the Grande Galerie  
of the Louvre in Ruins*

1796

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris

In this imaginary scene of the Louvre as a ruin a young artist copies a bronze cast of the Apollo Belvedere, one of the most famous of all ancient statues. Apollo, god of the arts, raises his arm in a triumphant gesture that seems to defy the passage of time. The remains of a few other celebrated sculptures, including the broken figure of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* in the right foreground, are visible. At the foot of Apollo, a bust of the great Renaissance master Raphael faces the young copyist, suggesting the transmission of the arts from one era to the next: despite catastrophes, the spirit of Raphael continues to inspire.

*The Palais du Louvre  
and the Garden of the Princess*

c. 1796/1798

oil on canvas

Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris



*The First Gallery  
in the Musée des Monuments Français  
before the Renovation of 1801*

1795/1801

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris

Works of art seized from nationalized properties during the Revolution were stockpiled and later put on display in a new museum opened to the public in 1795. Devoted to preserving French cultural patrimony, the Musée des Monuments Français closed in 1816; its collections were restored to public and private owners, with a large portion subsumed into the Louvre.

# *Demolition of the Château de Meudon*

1806

oil on canvas

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles,  
Purchased in part with funds realized from the  
sale of paintings donated by Peter and Iselin Moller,  
Dr. Walter S. Udin, and Howard Young

As a prominent symbol of the monarchy, the royal residence at Meudon, outside Paris, was ransacked during the Revolution. Part of the estate was transformed into a testing ground for artillery experiments, which led to a fire that destroyed the château in 1795. Robert, who had been asked to redesign the gardens in 1784, returned to sketch the demolition of the ruins. In the right foreground, an artist happily exploits the spectacle for his own work, perhaps a tacit acknowledgment of the complexity of Robert's own relationship to ruins and their history.

[Not in catalog]

*Project for the Transformation  
of the Grande Galerie*

1796

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Peintures, Paris

Robert was a member of the commission in charge of converting the Palais du Louvre into a public museum. This view of its main gallery envisions architectural ideas that were being considered to solve the problem of lighting the space. Some of the suggestions he illustrated here — including dividing the vast space into bays and piercing the vaulted roof with skylights — would be implemented during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Shortly after this and its companion, the nearby imagined view of the Grande Galerie in ruins (no. 98), were exhibited in Paris, they were acquired for the Russian imperial collections, a testament to Robert's ability to revive his career after losing so many of his French patrons to the Revolution.

92

*Pastoral Scene*

1794

oil on octagonal pipe-clay plate  
Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

*Nave of Santa Maria  
degli Angeli e Martiri, Rome*

1757/1758

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

Red chalk was Robert's favorite medium for drawing because it combined color and line in each stroke, needed no drying time (unlike ink and watercolor), and was easily portable. At this early moment in his career, however, Robert was still in the process of mastering it. Although he drew here with great confidence, some of the contours are rather heavy and are not perfectly integrated with the hatchings that shade the forms. Still, the rich color contrasts between the chalk and the paper create an impressive visual effect.

*Interior of the Colosseum*

1759

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

Robert excelled at creating dramatic views of the great monuments of ancient Rome. In this case he situated himself in the outermost corridor on the ground level of the Colosseum, looking out toward the nearby Arch of Constantine. The young man seated in the lower right corner is an early example of one of Robert's favorite motifs: the draftsman at work. Robert surely must have worked in similar fashion, seated informally on the ground or on a stool and balancing his drawing board on his knees.

*An Artist Seated in the Ruins  
of the Colosseum*

c. 1759

chalk

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William O. Hunt  
and Print and Drawing Department Purchase Fund

A recurring theme in Robert's work is Nature's dominance over man-made structures. Even the great Colosseum, the largest and most recognizable relic of ancient Rome, succumbed to the insidious encroachment of vegetation. Taking root in the crevices and cracks, it all but obliterates the crumbling stones.

*The Wine Press*

c. 1759

chalk

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Prints and Drawings Purchase Fund

Robert rarely focused on artisans engaged in a specific craft—in this case the pressing of grapes to make wine. He was apparently fascinated by the complex structure of the press and the manpower required to operate it. However, he never seems to have included this activity in any of his pictures.

*The Piazza della Rotonda  
and the Pantheon*

c. 1759

chalk

Private collection, New York

To ensure his success as a creator of seamless architectural fantasies, Robert studied many of the great monuments and landmarks in Rome in true-to-life renderings. Here he depicted the ancient Pantheon as seen across the Piazza della Rotonda with its obelisk fountain. The bell tower rising behind the pediment at left was added in the seventeenth century; its twin is hidden behind the roof of the building in the right foreground. Derogatorily known as “ass’s ears,” the towers were removed in 1883.

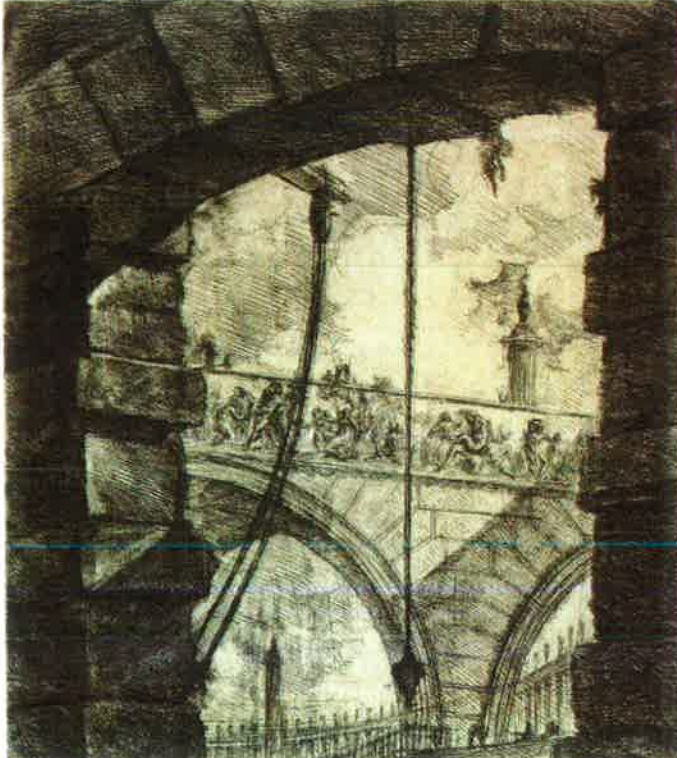
## *Architectural Fantasy with a Triumphal Bridge*

c. 1760

chalk

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
The Armand Hammer Collection, 1987

During his eleven years in Rome Robert was greatly influenced by the inventive prints of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. This work was inspired by Piranesi's famous etchings of imaginary prisons that feature similarly massive bridges and complex views through archways. Although the ancient equestrian statue of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161–180) stood for centuries on Rome's Capitoline Hill, Robert fancifully placed it at the intersection of two bridges, one of his favorite visual motifs.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Grand Piazza*,  
published 1750/1758, engraving,  
National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, 1946

*A Loggia at the Villa Madama  
with an Artist Sketching*

c. 1760

chalk

Princeton University Art Museum, Museum Purchase,  
Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund  
and Laura Hall Memorial Fund in honor of David Coffin,  
Class of 1940 and Graduate School Class of 1954

*Roman Capriccio with the Dioscuri  
and Bernini's Colonnade*

1760

chalk with pen and ink, wash, and watercolor over graphite  
The Horvitz Collection, Boston

Robert brought together two well-known Roman landmarks in this drawing: the colossal sculptures of horsemen, known as the Dioscuri, that have stood for more than four hundred years at the top of the steps leading up to the Capitoline Hill; and the curving seventeenth-century colonnade from Saint Peter's Square, designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The pristine portico of Bernini's structure, however, has been transformed into the façade of an ancient temple falling into ruin.



## *The Temple of Athena at Paestum*

1760

chalk

Private collection

In the spring of 1760, Robert accompanied one of his patrons on a trip to Naples and its environs. They visited Paestum, originally a Greek colony founded about 600 BC that had later been taken over by the Romans. The remains of three temples there, including this one, are among the best-preserved examples of archaic Greek architecture of the Doric type, characterized by fluted columns with no bases and plain circular capitals.

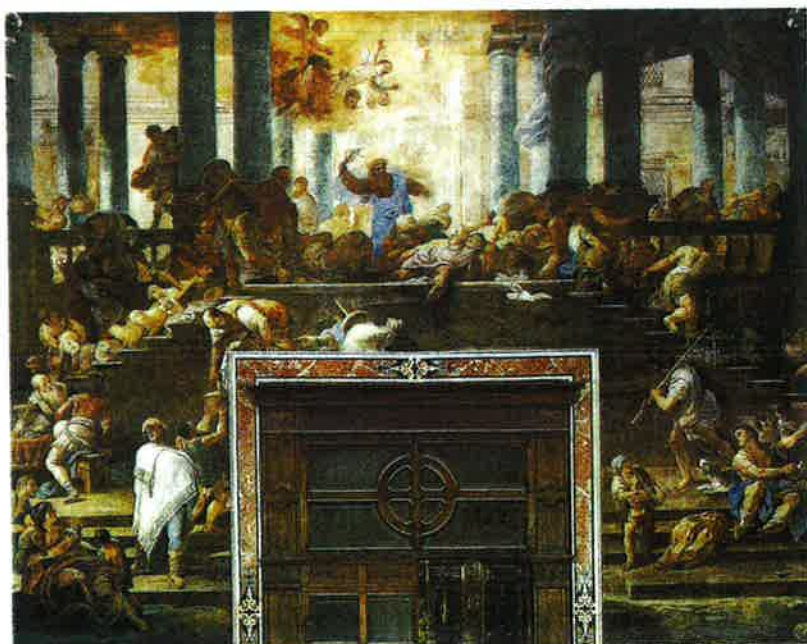
*Christ Driving the Money-Changers  
from the Temple*  
(after Luca Giordano)

c. 1760

pen and ink with wash over chalk

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

In the Gospels, Jesus angrily expels moneylenders and merchants from the Temple of Jerusalem, castigating them for having turned “my father’s house” into a “den of thieves.” This drawing and the one adjacent were inspired by a fresco in the Church of San Filippo Neri, Naples, painted by Luca Giordano in 1684. Neither drawing copies Giordano’s composition exactly, but this one follows it more closely and includes the doorway around which the fresco is painted. The other drawing is Robert’s more personal interpretation of the story. In many ways they are both experimental works, for Robert usually shied away from depicting biblical, mythological, or historical subjects, preferring to populate his compositions with ordinary people going about their daily lives.



Luca Giordano, *Christ Driving the Money-Changers from the Temple*, 1684, fresco, Church of San Filippo Neri, Naples

*Christ Driving the Money-Changers  
from the Temple*

c. 1760 or after

pen and ink with wash over chalk,  
with touches of white gouache

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris

JEAN-FRANÇOIS JANINET

French, 1752–1814

*Villa Madama*

(after Hubert Robert)

1778

wash-manner engraving, printed in blue,  
orange-red, yellow, and black inks

Ivan E. and Winifred Phillips

This print and the one adjacent reproduce two of Robert's most important watercolors from 1760 (both now in the Albertina, Vienna). The prints are executed in a complex, full-color print-making technique that was invented by Janinet in Paris in the early 1770s specifically to replicate the appearance of watercolor drawings. This technique, which involved five separate copperplates, was the precursor of the four-color process that is today such an important part of publishing.

18

JEAN-FRANÇOIS JANINET

French, 1752-1814

*Villa Sacchetti*

(after Hubert Robert)

1778

wash-manner engraving, printed in blue,  
orange-red, yellow, and black inks

Ivan E. and Winifred Phillips

20

*Courtyard of an Italian Villa*

1760

chalk

The Horvitz Collection, Boston

*Architectural Fantasy  
with the Pyramid of Cestius  
and the Arch of Constantine*

1761

pen and ink with wash and chalk, extensively stumped,  
on two joined pieces of paper, made up to complete the oval

The Horvitz Collection, Boston

The pyramid of Gaius Cestius and the Arch of Constantine are two of Rome's most recognizable ancient monuments. Robert depicted the pyramid with a broken apex and transformed the arch by substituting a number of elements borrowed from a different triumphal arch, that of Emperor Titus. One can imagine that Robert would have enjoyed teasing his friends and patrons with such images, challenging them to identify the monuments, while also asking them to pick out the obvious and subtle changes he had made.

24

*Palace with a Triumphal Bridge*

1761

pen and ink with wash and watercolor over graphite

Albertina, Vienna

Robert was a skillful watercolorist, having learned the technique primarily from Giovanni Paolo Panini in Rome. It is an unusual aspect of Robert's working process that he would complete some of his most magnificent compositions as highly finished watercolors before he would execute—sometimes years later—the same subjects in oils.

## *The Trevi Fountain under Construction*

1761/1762

chalk

The Morgan Library & Museum, New York,  
Gift of Mrs. Allerton Cushman in honor of János Scholz  
and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Library

Modern construction sites were a rare departure from Robert's usual interest in the remnants of antiquity. The tattered state of the canvas tarpaulins and the rickety fence around the Trevi Fountain (dedicated in 1762), however, suggest the same air of desolation that permeates many of Robert's images of ruins.

## *The Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius Seen from the Palazzo dei Conservatori*

1762

two shades of red chalk

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

In 1762 Robert made a number of drawings recording the area in and around the Piazza del Campidoglio on top of the Capitoline Hill in Rome. One of his favorite subjects was the ancient statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius on horseback, which then stood in the middle of the piazza. It is now in the Capitoline Museums, and a replica is in its place.

## *A Draftsman in the Capitoline Museum*

c. 1762

chalk

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Robert here captured an accurate view of a gallery in the Capitoline Museum, a favorite spot for artists to practice their draftsmanship because of the wealth of antiquities on view. Many of the statues depicted still stand in the very same location.

## *Antique Sculptures with a Roman Family*

c. 1762

chalk

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstbibliothek

On this sheet Robert assembled various antiquities he would have seen on visits to the Capitoline Hill: the fragmentary hand and foot that were once part of a colossal statue of Emperor Constantine (both pieces are now preserved in the Capitoline Museums) and two sculptures that adorn an outdoor fountain on the main piazza, the seated goddess Roma and a personification of the Nile River reclining on a sphinx. Using a different, brown-red chalk, Robert later added the family at left, whose relatively small scale enhances the monumentality of the sculptures.

30

*The Semicircular Portico and Courtyard  
of the Villa Giulia*

1762

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

31

*The Water Theater of the  
Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati*

1762

pen and ink with wash and watercolor and touches of  
white gouache, over graphite on two joined sheets

Albertina, Vienna

32

*Archaeologists at the Temple of Vespasian*

1762

chalk

Private collection

The figures assiduously taking notes on the ruins are apparently amateur archaeologists. Their inclusion here acknowledges the newly burgeoning enthusiasm for studying, recording, and restoring the ancient ruins of Italy. Nearly buried in sediment over time, the forty-six-foot-high columns of the Temple of Vespasian (dedicated in 87 to the deified Roman emperor) were not fully excavated until the nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century scholars therefore had easy access to the very top of the structure.



33

*Saint Peter's, Seen from the Peristyle*

1763

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

34

*Maderno's Portico in Saint Peter's, Rome*

1763

chalk

Private collection, Courtesy of Nicolas Joly

35

*View of the Vaulting of Saint Peter's  
from an Upper Cornice*

c. 1763

chalk

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Purchase, 1984

This composition attests to Robert's determination to find dramatic views. He drew it perched on a cornice high above the nave of Saint Peter's Basilica, peering down toward the aisle more than one hundred feet below.

*The Oval Fountain in the Gardens  
of the Villa d'Este, Tivoli*

c. 1763

chalk over graphite

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Neil Phillips and Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Phillips,  
in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the  
National Gallery of Art, 1990

The gardens of the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, situated nearly twenty miles east of Rome, were a favorite subject for artists almost from the moment they were created in the 1560s. By the end of the seventeenth century, the grand park and fountains had fallen into neglect, with the gardens reverting to a half-tamed wilderness. The picturesque results of the ongoing struggle between Nature and man-made order would have held special appeal for Robert, who visited Tivoli many times.

*Les Soirées de Rome*  
*(Evenings in Rome)*

1763/1764

series of 10 etchings

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
 The Amanda S. Johnson and Marion J. Livingston Fund

This suite of ten etchings is Robert's most celebrated achievement as a printmaker. The set was produced in honor of a visitor to Rome who was also an accomplished etcher, Marguerite Le Comte. The title of the series does not describe the subjects of the prints, for all represent daytime scenes. Rather, it indicates the hour of their making: at the end of the day in convivial gatherings with Le Comte and her paramour Claude Henri Watelet, during which drawing and etching were regular pastimes.

*The Roman Studio*  
*of Bartolomeo Cavaceppi*

c. 1765

chalk

Katrin Bellinger Collection

Cavaceppi was the leading restorer of antiquities in Rome in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Because so many fine works were entrusted to his care, his workshop was called the Museo Cavaceppi and attracted both artists and tourists. Cavaceppi brought damaged antiquities back to life by adding missing arms, legs, fingers, and noses, and by recarving draperies, faces, and hair. In so doing, he shaped perceptions of how antique statues should look for decades to come.

## *Roman Sketchbook*

1760/1764

bound volume with 68 drawings on 39 leaves

The Morgan Library &amp; Museum, New York

Over the course of his lifetime, Robert filled more than fifty sketchbooks and albums with rapid drawings and studies. Several of the jottings in this notebook are related to the set of prints entitled *Evenings in Rome*; a number of others represent ideas for capriccios and feature recognizable monuments and sculptures of ancient and modern Rome, many of which appear in other drawings and paintings presented in this exhibition. A digitized recreation of the sketchbook can be viewed on the adjacent screen.

## *Roman Busts in a Wooded Park*

1763

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

43

*A Hermit Reading,  
Spied on by a Young Woman*

c. 1764

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

Robert made a number of images of monks and hermits praying or reading, but he tempered the seriousness of those subjects by including mischievous young women who are bent on distracting the men from their meditations.

44

*Wooded Landscape with Two Women  
and Two Monks*

c. 1764

chalk

Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

47

*Fountain in a Park*

1763/1765

chalk

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Restricted gift of Margaret Day Blake

52

*Avenue of Trees*

c. 1770

chalk

The Morgan Library & Museum, New York

58

*A Woman and Her Daughter  
Walking in a Roman Landscape*

1774

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

According to an inscription on the mount of this drawing, it is the sixth made by Robert on Wednesday, February 9, 1774. He drew it at one of the meetings of the informal “academy of drawing” he attended regularly in the home of the Comte de Rohan-Chabot in Paris. That Robert could produce this delightful sheet together with five others in a single evening attests to his quick touch and his irrepressibly creative spirit.

53

*An Ancient Circular Temple  
in a Wooded Landscape*

c. 1770

chalk

Private collection, U.K.

*Château de Gaillon*

c. 1773

chalk over chalk counterproof

Private collection

In 1773 Robert was commissioned by the archbishop of Rouen to execute four views of Norman towns and locales. Among the subjects was the archbishop's own summer residence, one of the first examples of Renaissance architecture in France. The structure here is shown in reverse, because Robert was working over a counterproof—essentially a print made from a chalk drawing. The counterproof was made by placing a dampened sheet of paper over an original drawing and then running both through a press. The top layer of the chalk was thus transferred to the blank sheet, creating a slightly fainter image of the composition, but in reverse. Robert produced hundreds of counterproofs from his original chalk drawings. The process served as a means of “fixing” them so they would not smudge and also allowed him to keep records of works he had sold. He reworked many of these counterproofs in other media — pen and ink, wash, watercolor, and even red chalk, as here.

56

*Capriccio with the Portico of the Pantheon and  
a Statue of Hercules and Antaeus*

1770

pen and ink with wash and watercolor  
and touches of white gouache over graphite

Albertina, Vienna

57

*Bathers near an Ancient Temple*

1774/1775

chalk

Collection Andrea Woodner

Although Robert never aspired to be a painter of historical subjects — from mythology, the Bible, or ancient history — the inclusion here of the swan near the standing bather calls to mind the mythological story of Leda. In that tale the king of the Greek gods, Zeus, turned himself into a swan in order to seduce Leda, the queen of Sparta. Robert's rendition is more humorous than erotic. The dog at lower right eyes the bird as a possible meal; the swan pecks ineffectually at the woman's chemise; the sculpture of a man at left discreetly turns his back on the scene; and a fascinated young voyeur looks on from behind a tree, wishing perhaps that he could take the place of the bird.



59

*Herdsmen Crossing a Waterfall*

1770/1775

chalk

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Andrew W. Mellon Fund, 1978

60

*Capriccio with a View of Saint Peter's  
through an Arch*

c. 1772

pen and ink with wash and watercolor  
and touches of white gouache over chalk counterproof  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

*Allegory on the Downfall  
of the Du Barry Family*

c. 1774

pen and ink with wash and watercolor over graphite  
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

Despite its apparent charms, this rustic scene is a sharply pointed barb aimed at Mme du Barry, the last mistress of Louis XV (1710–1774). The drawing's first owner was one of Du Barry's enemies at court and a friend of Robert's. According to the artist's own inscription, a number of the details he included were intended to symbolize the bad character of Mme du Barry and her family: the two mackerels (French slang for "pimps") hanging by the casement window; the two donkeys; the rose bush growing in a chamber pot; and the derelict barrel and broken pots. In addition, the wheel leaning against the wall may symbolize the wheel of fortune that had borne Mme du Barry to the pinnacle of personal power at court, only to cast her down again.

*A Roman Fountain  
with a Woman Collecting Water*

1792

wash and watercolor, with touches of  
pen and ink over graphite  
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

95

*Architectural Capriccio  
with the Sculpture of Laocoön*

1790s

pen and ink with wash and watercolor over graphite

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge,  
Gift of Therese Kuhn Straus in memory of her husband,  
Herbert N. Straus, Harvard Class of 1903

21

*Architectural Capriccio with the Port of  
Ripetta and the Pantheon*

1760

pen and ink with wash and watercolor over chalk  
on paper that appears to be partially prepared

Collection of Jean Bonna, Geneva

39

*Fantasy on an Ancient Campidoglio*

c. 1763

pen and ink with wash

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1986

41

*The Campo Vaccino in Rome*

1760/1761

pen and ink with wash over graphite

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris

Robert is known to have had a spritely sense of humor. Here, he made a visual pun on the traditional name of the Roman Forum—the Campo Vaccino or cow field—by showing cattle herding through the illustrious ruins.

42

*Village Dance*

1763/1764

pen and ink with wash and watercolor

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris

*Architectural Capriccio  
with Ancient Monuments*

1766/1767

two shades of red chalk

Musée du Louvre,  
Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris

Produced shortly after Robert's return to France, this fantasy drawing is one of his largest in red chalk and was clearly intended to impress his new Parisian audience. Brought together from various parts of Rome and incorporated into this depiction of an imagined Italian villa and garden are, among other things, the pyramid of Cestius; a triumphal arch based on the Arch of Titus; the Atlas fountain from the Villa Albani; and a grand portico based on the garden façade of the Villa Medici.

*An Old Watermill  
(The Mill at Charenton)*

1765

chalk

The Horvitz Collection, Boston

After his return to France, Robert made a point of searching out new subjects that would appeal to his French patrons. This modest, picturesque, and characteristically French mill could hardly be more different from the grand buildings and antiquities he had studied in Italy. Pastoral landscapes of this kind aligned Robert with the leading French master of the day, François Boucher, who had made paintings of the same mill.

51

## *The Place Louis XV under Construction*

c. 1770

chalk

Musée de Valence, Art et Archéologie

The great Parisian square now known as the Place de la Concorde was under construction for many years before it was completed in 1775. The two palatial buildings at left and center still stand prominently on the north side of the square, while the structure at right is one of four towers that originally stood at its corners. For this view, Robert positioned himself in the dry moat that then surrounded the square and was later filled in to street level.

80

## *Ruins of the Opéra after the Fire of 1781*

1781

chalk

The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Restricted gift of Alan Rutenberg, Margaret Day Blake  
and Harold Joachim Endowments

89

## *A Prison Warden Sleeping*

1793/1794

pen and ink, with wash and watercolor over graphite  
Albertina, Vienna

90

*An Inmate of Saint-Lazare Prison*

1794

pen and ink and watercolor

Collection Andrea Woodner

70

*The Terrace at the  
Château de Marly*

c. 1780

oil on canvas

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,  
Kansas City,

Purchase, William Rockhill Nelson Trust

Situated in a wooded valley on the Seine outside Paris, the royal château of Marly had been constructed for Louis XIV (1638–1715) as an informal retreat. The surrounding park was known for its splendid views, including this vista with a neighboring château in the distance. Nourished by a large hydraulic system that pumped water from the Seine, the gardens were far more lush than those of nearby Versailles. Thomas Jefferson, who visited Marly twice, took inspiration from the estate for the grounds of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.



*He was a natural wit, highly cultivated ...  
and his unfailling high spirits made him the most amiable man.*

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, 1835

*The effect of these compositions ... is to leave you in a state of gentle melancholy.*

Denis Diderot, 1767

*Of all the artists I have known, Robert was the one who cut the best figure in society,  
of which he was moreover very fond. Loving all pleasures, without omitting those of the table,  
he was generally sought out, and I doubt that he dined at home more than three times a year.  
Plays, balls, dinners, concerts, visits to country houses, nothing was declined by him,  
for all the time he did not employ working, he spent in amusements.*

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, 1835