

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

Washington, D. C. August 18, 1967. "Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century European Drawings" will be the title of an exhibition on view at the National Gallery of Art from August 27 through September 24. The last in a series of three exhibitions devoted to master drawings, it is sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and circulated by the American Federation of Arts.

The fifty drawings were selected from private collections by A. Hyatt Mayor, former Curator of Prints at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The drawings he has chosen are mostly Italian, French, and German, although Austrian, Swiss, Flemish, and Dutch examples are included.

In his introduction for the fully illustrated catalogue Mr. Mayor writes: "There is no precedent for the richness and variety of artistic personalities who emerged from 1400 to 1600. The breakup of the Middle Ages released men's imagination as never before. The first giant personalities of drawing emerge in Jan van Eyck, Mantegna, Leonardo, Dürer, Michelangelo, Raphael--the first inescapable draftsmen. These pacemakers explored the possibilities of the drawing media that their example made

classic--silverpoint, charcoal, red chalk, and ink used with a reed pen, quill, or brush. Sometimes they drew tinily in pocket-size notebooks, and sometimes on the heroic scale of wall decorations. Unhappily their biggest drawings have almost all vanished because the lines were either perforated to transfer the design by dusting charcoal powder onto wood panels prepared for painting, or else scored with a scribe to impress the outlines into soft plaster for frescoes.

"Most early drawings were chucked out as soon as they had served their purpose in planning a painting, a sculpture or a building, just as a scaffolding is cleaned down once a facade is finished. If drawings survived this first hazard, they were then discarded when their style became too old-fashioned for artists to adapt."

The style of drawing underwent an extraordinary development in the period covered in this exhibition. The earliest drawing is "Abraham's Dream and Sacrifice" by an anonymous Austrian of about 1430-1450, which, especially in the drapery of the figures, is still Gothic.

The stylistic development of graphic art as shown in the exhibition continues to such mature Renaissance compositions as "Infant St. John from a Holy Family" by a Follower of Raphael, and the Fontainebleau School's "Venus and River Gods" by an anonymous Mannerist. Several fine examples of Renaissance portraiture are also represented, such as Joseph Heintz, the Elder's "Portrait of Giovanni da Bologna," "Head of a Man" by Gillis Sadeler, II, and "Nicolas Durand" by an unknown French master.