

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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Washington, D. C. October 5, 1967. The first showing in this country of Swiss drawings from the early 16th century to the present will open at the National Gallery of Art Sunday (October 8th).

Swiss Drawings, Masterpieces of Five Centuries will provide a unique opportunity for American audiences to study, through 126 important drawings, the full sweep of Swiss draftsmanship from the Holbeins to Giacometti.

The artistically important 16th century was a time of social upheaval for the Swiss who found themselves grappling with the divergent ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Within this century the Gothic tradition would give way to the Renaissance emphasis upon Antiquity, Man, and Reason, while the Reformation, with its ban on religious art, would end the Church's leadership as an art patron.

Contemporary man and his surroundings were of particular interest to the northern artist. Urs Graf's Young Girl in Elaborate Dress in the exhibition displays this important early

artist's devoted care in portraying the elegant costume and mien of a young woman of the times. This interest is also apparent in the rendition of religious themes in which the saints are represented as Northern Renaissance Man in his environment. The St. Christopher of Niklaus Manuel Deutsch is one such example.

The transition from Gothic to Renaissance is strikingly revealed in the work of the Holbein brothers who reflected the birth of new ideas in their crossroads city of Basel, an intellectual center which attracted Dürer in his early travels and in which Holbein the Younger met Erasmus.

Portraiture dominated in the 16th century as influential citizens of an expanding world became the new patrons of art. Hans Holbein, with a letter of introduction from Erasmus, traveled to England and the home of Sir Thomas More, where he established his reputation as a portraitist. His Portrait of Sir Nicholas Carew, the Master of the King's Horse who later incurred Henry VIII's disfavor and was beheaded, is an example of the artist's ability in this field. Of comparable ability was Hans's brother Ambrosius, whose Portrait of a Young Man with a Cap in this exhibition reveals the youthful, yet subtle hand of a master.

Toward the end of the 16th century Swiss art began to decline as the Reformation drew the strings of the clergy's purse and the greatest source of commissioned art dissolved. Artists who survived did so as heraldic designers and portraitists. One such artist of the generation following Holbein was Tobias Stimmer, whose Self-Portrait is included in the exhibition.

The 17th century was an interim period of relative quiet,

but the 18th century saw the rise of a new breed of well-traveled artists such as Anton Graf and Etienne Liotard who went abroad for additional experience. Graf's rather brusque Portrait of a Man and Liotard's delicate portrayal of the Archduchess Maria Karolina suggest the opulence of the European society they found in their travels.

From the mid-18th century on, the Swiss were influenced by a concern for nature. Caspar Wolff's The Monastery of Engelberg recognizes the majesty of the Alpine landscape while the Picnic beside Lake Lemán, a gentle drawing in tones of brown by Wolfgang Töpffer, provides an intimate view of the Swiss hills.

In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Dr. Walter Hugelshofer observes that Swiss cultural identity began to form in the 19th century. Félix Vallotton and his contemporaries retained their nationalism while coming into contact with modern European movements such as the Nabis. Although linked with the Symbolist group, the Nabis were, in their emphasis upon shape and pattern, primarily followers of Gauguin.

As the 19th century became the 20th, modern art with its search for expression emerged in Switzerland. Abstraction became the new reality. With the exhibition's Dancer Fastening Her Stocking, René Auberjonois imparts a very personal interpretation which, nevertheless, echoes the influence of Degas and Picasso. According to Dr. Hugelshofer, van Gogh greatly influenced Giovanni Giacometti. Indeed, the restless activity of Giovanni's line gives the coloristic effect of a van Gogh painting. In turn, the influence of this nervous line appears in the work

of Giovanni's son, the famous sculptor Alberto Giacometti. In this exhibition Alberto's drawings suggest the elongated line of his sculpture.

Swiss Drawings, Masterpieces of Five Centuries was selected by Dr. Walter Hugelshofer, and organized by the Pro Helvetia Foundation of Zürich. The exhibition is circulated in the United States by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. After opening at the National Gallery of Art, Swiss Drawings will be exhibited at the Pierpont-Morgan Library in New York, the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

The exhibition will continue in Washington through October 29th. The National Gallery of Art is open fall and winter from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on weekdays; Sundays 2:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Admission is always free.

Black and white photographs and catalogues for review purposes are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, Area Code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.