

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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RENAISSANCE DRAWINGS FROM THE AMBROSIANA
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. JULY 27, 1984. The Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, one of Europe's most prestigious research libraries, houses an impressive collection of manuscripts, printed books, and drawings. From the approximately 12,000 drawings in the Ambrosiana collection, eighty-seven sheets from the late fourteenth to early seventeenth centuries will go on view in the National Gallery of Art's West Building beginning August 12, 1984 and running through October 7, 1984.

The Ambrosiana collection contains some of the finest works of North Italian draftsmanship. Until recently, these drawings (with the exception of those of the Venetian School) have received little attention from scholars outside Italy. This exhibition brings to the United States for the first time works from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana by prominent artists of the North Italian Schools as well as by major artists of the Renaissance in Italy and Northern Europe. The show includes works by Pisanello, Leonardo, Giulio Romano, Vasari, Dürer, Barocci, Hans Holbein the Elder and Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Some of the earliest drawings in the exhibition are by the masters of the International Gothic Style. Several drawings by the prolific

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draftsman, Pisanello, appear in the show. Figures in elegant and fashionable costumes are depicted in his Eleven Men in Contemporary Dress.

Leonardo, whose presence in Milan in the early 1500s had a tremendous impact on the Lombard-Milanese School, is represented in the exhibition by a woman's head in profile and by several miniature caricatures. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio was one artist who was strongly affected by Leonardo's work. His beautiful Study for Saint Barbara is included in the exhibition. Several other artists who were influenced by Leonardo also appear: Francesco Melzi, Cesare da Sesto, and Bernardino Luini.

Sixteenth-century Italian masters are represented by, among others, Giulio Romano and Giorgio Vasari. The Three Attendants of Europa is a study by Giulio Romano for the left side of the Rape of Europa stucco relief in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua. Giulio Romano received his artistic training in the workshop of Raphael and inherited the workshop with a colleague at the time of Raphael's death in 1520.

Ten drawings by Dürer are on view including his famous, two-sided Knight on Horseback. This sheet from the Ambrosiana is believed to be the last study in a series on equine proportion done by Dürer. Albrecht Dürer was born in Nuremberg in 1471 and worked primarily in that city. However, he was also one of the few German artists of his time to travel extensively and one of the first to travel to Italy. The Renaissance of Northern Europe is also represented by such artists as Hans Holbein the Elder, Wolf Huber, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

The Biblioteca Ambrosiana was founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo in the early seventeenth century. Borromeo lived in Rome during two

periods of his life and was strongly influenced by the culture of that city. Upon his return to Milan he began plans to establish a repository for the extensive collection of precious books and manuscripts he had acquired. Construction on the Ambrosiana was begun in 1603. Cardinal Borromeo was also a patron of the visual arts. His extensive collection of paintings and drawings was donated to the Ambrosiana in 1618 and formed the nucleus of its collection.

The exhibition has been organized by Louis Jordan, curator of The Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame. Drawings were selected by Robert R. Coleman (also of The Medieval Institute) and Dr. Giulio Bora of the Università degli Studi di Milano. The exhibition will travel to several American museums: the Smithe Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Kimbell Art Museum. Its final showing will be at the Ambrosiana.

The catalogue for this exhibition was written by Robert R. Coleman with contributions from various scholars and includes an introduction on the history of the collection by Dr. Angelo Paredi, director of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. The coordinator for the National Gallery is Diane DeGrazia, Curator of Italian Drawings.

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