

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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Press Preview:

February 19, 1985

10am - 3pm

LEONARDO DA VINCI DRAWINGS OF HORSES  
FROM THE ROYAL LIBRARY AT WINDSOR CASTLE  
TO PREMIERE AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. January 30, 1985. By gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, fifty drawings of horses and other animals by Leonardo da Vinci have been selected from the holdings of Leonardo's works in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. The drawings go on view for the first time in this country in the National Gallery's West Building Ground Floor galleries February 24 through June 9, 1985.

These drawings are among the most renowned animal studies in the world and have been selected from among six hundred Leonardo drawings at Windsor by the exhibition's guest curators, Mrs. Jane Roberts, Curator of the Print Room at the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, and Dr. Carlo Pedretti, Leonardo scholar and Professor of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles. Mrs. Roberts and Dr. Pedretti have also written a fully illustrated exhibition catalogue. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh has written a preface to the catalogue.

Upon his death in 1519, Leonardo's drawings, books and papers were bequeathed to his favorite pupil, Francesco Melzi. After Melzi's death about 1570, the collection was purchased by the sculptor Pompeo Leoni, who attempted to categorize the works, placing a selection of them in one large volume which was purchased by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, sometime after Leoni's death in 1609. While a precise date is not known, it is thought that the crown acquired the works around 1637.

Leonardo's preparatory drawings date from 1478 to around 1517 and relate to each of his major projects involving horses. The Windsor holdings include ninety-two drawings of horses and other animals. They represent a small but significant segment of Leonardo's surviving work and give insight into his profound interest in the natural world.

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Leonardo considered the horse second only to man as an object worthy of attention and his feeling for horses is clearly reflected in this exhibition.

On view are seven of Leonardo's earliest works, executed in Florence about 1478-1480, which also mark the beginning of his horse studies for two nativity scenes: the Adoration of the Shepherds (1478) and the Adoration of the Magi (c. 1480, now in the Uffizi); neither composition was completed. Leonardo seems to have concentrated on the handling of human figures in the first Adoration and later incorporated the equestrian motifs into the background of the Uffizi Adoration.

There are also studies of traditional nativity animals (donkeys and an ox) as well as a galloping horseman, a rearing horse, studies of horses grazing and studies of dragon fights, a recurring theme in Leonardo's work. All of these drawings demonstrate Leonardo's magnificent handling of pen and metalpoint.

Another group of sheets in the exhibition includes studies for the Sforza Monument, an equestrian statue meant to immortalize Duke Francesco Sforza of the ruling family of Milan. Leonardo won the commission upon his first trip to Milan in 1482. The bronze horse which he originally envisioned and referred to as Il Cavallo was to be a life-size rearing horse with a rider. However, when Ludovico Sforza won control of the duchy in 1476, Il Cavallo assumed grander proportions. Ludovico commissioned a colossal sculpture twenty-four feet high and weighing 158,000 pounds. The problems of casting a rearing horse of such colossal proportions forced Leonardo to abandon the original design in favor of a walking horse with Duke Francesco astride in full armor. Leonardo worked on the monument from 1484 until 1493 when the unstable political climate brought the project to an end. While Leonardo gave instructions to cast the monument, it was never completed nor was a later equestrian sculpture, the Trivulzio Monument, for which there are several fascinating studies in the exhibition.

While working on the Sforza commission, Leonardo compiled a book containing studies of the anatomy and the proportions of horses from the famous Sforza stables. On view are six proportional studies showing the animals from various points of view; several are

carefully marked with measurement lines. Related to these works are other horse studies executed in metalpoint on pink paper which exemplify the master's thorough comprehension of the horse's anatomy.

Drawings which relate to the Battle of Anghiari, a now destroyed work which Leonardo painted in 1505 on a wall of the new Council Hall in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, further display the full range of the master's powers as a draftsman. They are images of great beauty and vitality enhanced by the use of red chalk.

The exhibition presents a black chalk sketch of Neptune With Four Sea-Horses, a composition which requires careful study to appreciate fully the energy and movement conveyed by the horses and by Neptune himself. Finally, there are studies from the late period of Leonardo's life, after 1510. They depict cats, horses, elephants, and dragons. While these and other imaginary animals may seem charming and amusing, they are also described in the catalogue as "the ghosts of Leonardo's mind." Leonardo drew such studies all of his life, taking inspiration from architectural decoration, book illumination, painting, and sculpture.

Dr. Diane Russell, curator in the Gallery's Department of Prints and Drawings, is coordinator of the exhibition for its Washington premiere. Gretchen Hirschauer, assistant curator in the Gallery's Department of Italian Painting, has written a brochure about the exhibition.

After its showing in Washington, the exhibition will be on view at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, June 22 through October 13, 1985 and at The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco from November 9 through February 26, 1986.

Support for the exhibition in Washington has been provided by Mr. Paul Mellon. Funding in Houston was made possible by the generosity of Edward Gregg Wallace and Carol I. Barden, the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, The William Stamps Farish Fund and Mr. and Mrs. William S. Kilroy. The showing in San Francisco is thanks to the support of Mr. Modesto Lanzone, Mr. and Mrs. Peter McBean, Mr. Alfred S. Wilsey, Mrs. William P. Roth, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202) 842-6353.