

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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EXHIBITION OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE DRAWINGS TO OPEN SEPTEMBER 18, 1988

Washington, D.C., August 22, 1988 - An exhibition of about 75 Italian drawings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries will be on display in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art beginning September 18, 1988. The selected works are taken from the Gallery's permanent and growing collection and will show many recent acquisitions along with well-known masterpieces and works not previously exhibited. Organized by Diane De Grazia, curator of Italian drawings, and Andrew Robison, curator of prints and drawings, this exhibition highlights the first period of development of drawing as an independent medium.

"Although the National Gallery has collected drawings systematically for only two decades, our efforts and support from many donors have resulted in this survey of beautiful and important Renaissance drawings," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery.

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Among the earliest fifteenth-century works in the exhibition is a fine example by one of the first true draftsmen, Parri Spinelli; his Hercules Leaning on His Club (c. 1440) also announces a typical theme for the Italian Renaissance, the study of the nude human form. Leonardo da Vinci's Sheet of Studies (1470-1480) includes studies of the human face as well as a sketch related to the Gallery's painting of Ginevra da Benci. One of the very few secure drawings from the hand of Mantegna is his Bird Perched on a Branch with Fruit (c. 1495); drawn with crisp authority, the image evokes a classical bas-relief and thus exemplifies another dominant Renaissance interest, that in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Typical for the development of Italian drawing in the period, many of the exhibited works show the artists formulating ideas for paintings. Thus, beginning with Perugino's Baptism of Christ (c. 1475) there are numerous studies for entire compositions. Studies for the pose and drapery of individual figures include A Prophet Addressed by an Angel (c. 1516), one of the finest surviving drawings by Sebastiano del Piombo, and one of the most powerful drawings from the High Renaissance in America.

Among independent drawings in the show, not preparatory for paintings, are a series of landscapes beginning as early as 1500 with Fra Bartolommeo's Two Friars on a Hillside. Several further drawings in the show were intended either as "presentation" pieces or as final works in their own right. According to Vasari, Francesco Mazzola known as Parmigianino, executed a painting of Lucretia which has since disappeared. In the exhibition is a highly finished drawing and watercolor of the same subject, characteristic of the artist's style with its elongated torso and marblelike quality of forms. The drawing might have been presented to the patron before Parmigianino started on the painted version.

Other major and rare works on display include a number particularly important for the study of color in drawings. Jacopo Bassano's powerful Mocking of Christ (1568) is one of the earliest surviving full-color chalk drawings, while Federico Barocci's voluptuous Head of Saint John the Evangelist (c. 1580) shows one of his favored techniques of subtly blended oil paints on paper.

A number of the drawings in this exhibition have had their attributions revised and changed as knowledge of artists and styles has increased. This scholarly process is a continuing one, as in the case of one of the most recent acquisitions, Altarpiece of the Madonna and Child with Saints, offered to the Gallery as by an unknown follower of Peruzzi but now agreed to be a fine and important work by Perino del Vaga.

This exhibition will be on view through December 31, 1988.