

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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JASPER JOHNS DRAWINGS AT NATIONAL GALLERY

SOLE U.S. VENUE

Washington, D.C., February 16, 1990 -- A major exhibition of drawings by American artist Jasper Johns will open in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art on May 20, 1990. The Drawings of Jasper Johns will feature 117 works spanning the artist's entire career over the last 35 years. Ranging in size up to seven feet tall, the works, many in color, use more than ten different media, often in combination. Public and private collections worldwide are lending to the National Gallery, the first venue for the exhibition and the only one in the United States.

The exhibition at the National Gallery has been made possible by Ford Motor Company.

"Jasper Johns' virtuosity as a draftsman may be known to the public through his prints, but the scale, impressiveness, intellectual challenge, and beauty of his drawings, and their centrality to his work, may come as a revelation," said National Gallery director J. Carter Brown.

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One-third of the more than 400 drawings Johns has made have been created since 1980. Johns' drawings are distinctive in part for his use of several techniques in the same work, including freehand drawing, tracing, and imprinting, as well as his superb handling of a variety of media: graphite pencil, graphite wash, charcoal, pastel, chalk, Paintstik, oil crayon, pen and ink, brush and ink, and watercolor.

Johns' drawings are intimately related to his paintings and prints, although they are not usually executed specifically in preparation for these works. Johns has said that he often uses his paintings as models for his art in other media, and his drawings are often reworkings of his paintings. Working on paper or sheets of plastic, he stresses certain elements of the paintings and reduces others to correspond with the different materials he is using. In this way, Johns refocuses attention on the subjects of the paintings and provokes new thoughts about the images. This process is at the heart of his approach to drawing.

Using familiar images of flags, targets, and numbers, Johns focused his early work on elevating these subjects to the level of fine art. These same icons, and later, objects such as studio artifacts, bathtub faucets, a lithograph by Barnett Newman, and a pattern of flagstones seen by Johns on a wall he glimpsed, derive from what the artist calls "things the mind already knows." They have continued to serve as his subjects, along with imprints from the palm of his hand and other parts of the body. Johns' use of disparate images in the shallow illusionistic space of his recent drawings pose personal intellectual riddles.

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Johns's largest drawing, Diver, 1963, in charcoal and chalk on two paper panels over seven feet tall, is also one of his most important works. Rarely exhibited, Diver is a complex and difficult, nearly monochrome work. As in his painting of the same name, the drawing suggests a figure enacting the motions of a swan dive, but it has an ambiguous quality that can suggest either life or death.

Selected by Nan Rosenthal, National Gallery curator of twentieth-century art, and Ruth E. Fine, National Gallery curator of modern prints and drawings, The Drawings of Jasper Johns will be at the National Gallery through July 29, 1990. The show will travel to the Kunstmuseum, Basel, from August 19 through October 28, 1990, and the Hayward Gallery in London, from November 29, 1990 through February 3, 1991. The scholarly catalogue for the exhibition will contain essays by Rosenthal and Fine and an interview with the artist, as well as discussions of each work and reproductions in color of all the works in the exhibition.

The Drawings of Jasper Johns is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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