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Italian Drawings from Renowned Wolfgang Ratjen Collection Presented at the National Gallery of Art, Washington



Canaletto

The "Giovedì Grasso" Festival before the Ducal Palace in Venice, 1763/1766

pen and brown ink with gray wash over graphite and red chalk, heightened with white gouache

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Wolfgang Ratjen Collection, Paul Mellon Fund, 2007

Washington, DC—Splendors of Italian draftsmanship from the Wolfgang Ratjen Collection, spanning the late Renaissance to the height of the neoclassical movement, will be showcased at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. On view in the Gallery's West Building from May 8 to November 27, 2011, ***Italian Master Drawings from the Wolfgang Ratjen Collection, 1525–1835*** will include 65 stunning Italian compositions and study sheets by the most important artists of the period, from Giulio Romano and Pellegrino Tibaldi to Canaletto, all three members of the Tiepolo family, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

In 2007, the National Gallery of Art acquired 185 German and Italian works from the Ratjen Collection—one of the finest private European holdings of old master drawings—with the help of 12 generous private donors as well as the Paul Mellon Fund and the Patrons' Permanent Fund.

"We are delighted to celebrate the second part of the Gallery's acquisition of this exceptional group of German and Italian drawings formed by the great European

collector Wolfgang Ratjen," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Italian portion of the collection is an assemblage of works of beauty and power. Italian drawings were in fact Ratjen's first love, and he worked on this part of his collection with attentive care throughout his years as a collector."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the STIFTUNG RATJEN, Liechtenstein.

The Exhibition and the Ratgen Italian Collection

Wolfgang Ratjen formed his Italian collection of drawings over a period of about 25 years. He grew up with two that had been acquired by his family during his youth—works by Guercino and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo—and he began collecting himself in the early-1970s. He purchased his last Italian drawing, by Giulio Cesare Procaccini, in July 1997.

Ratjen's collection of Italian drawings is best described as a group of single outstanding works, including famous artists as well as artists of lesser renown. For a select few—such as Jacopo Palma il Giovane, Guercino, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo—he acquired multiple sheets that conveyed different facets of the artists' styles or represented a variety of media used.

Organized chronologically throughout three galleries, the exhibition will present works that span three centuries, from the last flowering of the Renaissance around 1530 to the height of neoclassicism in the early 19th century. The works represent a dynamic range of techniques, including quick pen and ink sketches, finely nuanced chalk studies, and highly finished brush drawings.

Early works of special importance include the complex mythological composition *The Banquet of Acheloiüs* (c. 1545) by Luca Penni, a follower of Raphael who played a key role in the development of French mannerism at the School of Fontainebleau in the 1530s and 1540s; a powerfully sculptural *Holy Family with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* (c. 1546) by the Bolognese painter Pellegrino Tibaldi; and the enchanting

watercolor *A Marmot with a Branch of Plums* (1605) by Jacopo Ligozzi, who had once served as court artist to the Medici family in Florence.

The exhibition will reveal many of the stylistic characteristics found in the most prominent artistic centers of Italy, such as Florence, Rome, Bologna, and Naples. The ensemble of drawings by Venetian artists is the richest and most varied, ranging from a pair of color sketches for a mural by Domenico Tintoretto (1598/1605) to a playful depiction of rampaging elephants by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (c. 1791).

The most impressive and best known work in the Ratjen collection is *The "Giovedì Grasso" Festival before the Ducal Palace in Venice* (1763/1766) by Canaletto, an extravagantly beautiful drawing of the celebration of "Fat Thursday" on the Piazzetta in Venice. This masterpiece embodies the kind of perfect expression of a draftsman's achievement that Ratjen worked so diligently to represent in his collection, and also serves as the brilliant culmination to his own accomplishments as a collector.

Wolfgang Ratjen

Wolfgang Ratjen (1943–1997), one of the most discerning collectors of the 20th century, was born to a banking family in Berlin, but moved as an infant with his parents to Liechtenstein. While at university, his love for classical music was followed by a passion for old master drawings. That passion, he once said with his characteristic humor, was "the most wonderful disease you can imagine," and it led him to become a professional collector. Ratjen pursued art-historical knowledge as well as connoisseurship, and with remarkable objectivity refined his collection throughout his life, frequently upgrading or replacing works with better ones. After Ratjen's sudden death in 1997, the collection was cared for by the Ratjen Foundation in Liechtenstein, from which the Gallery acquired it in 2007.

Prints, Drawings, and Illustrated Books at the National Gallery of Art

The National Gallery's collection of prints, drawings, and illustrated books in the department of prints and drawings consists of more than 100,000 Western European and American works on paper and vellum, dating from the 11th century to the present day. Because works on paper are highly susceptible to overexposure to light, they can be exhibited only for short periods. For that reason, the Gallery maintains a schedule of changing exhibitions drawn from its own collection or on

loan from other institutions and private individuals. Drawings and prints not on view may be seen by appointment by calling (202) 842-6380.

Curator and Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition curator is by Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curato and head of the department of old master drawings, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Published by the National Gallery of Art in association with Paul Holberton publishing, London, the exhibition catalogue was written by Hugo Chapman, British Museum and David Lachenmann, Stiftung Ratjen, with Grasselli's assistance. The 170-page fully illustrated hardcover catalogue includes 131 color illustrations and is available for purchase in the Gallery Shops in May. To order, please visit our Web site at www.nga.gov/shop; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items

larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov