

The Museum of Modern Art

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PRESS PREVIEW

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SEURAT TO MATISSE: DRAWING IN FRANCE OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art's summer show, SEURAT TO MATISSE: DRAWING IN FRANCE, will be on view from June 13 through September 8. Selected and installed by William S. Lieberman, Director of the Department of Drawings, the 184 drawings were produced during a period of seven decades which begins in the 1880s with Seurat and Redon and ends in 1954 with the death of Matisse. Recent acquisitions and promised gifts, previously not seen by the public, are included. Only twice before, in 1947 and 1960, has the Museum displayed such substantial holdings from its extensive collection of more than 2,500 original works on paper.

More than half the artists represented were foreigners in France, perhaps because, as Mr. Lieberman quotes Gertrude Stein as explaining, "Paris was where the twentieth century was." Many artists not of French origin are irrevocably associated with the School of Paris -- for instance, Pascin and Picasso, Miró and Modigliani. The residence in France of other foreign artists was less permanent, and their ties to a French tradition are sometimes forgotten -- as in the case of Calder, Feininger and Nadelman. A few artists, among them Delvaux, Grosz, Kiesler and Kuniyoshi, visited France only briefly but nevertheless produced drawings during their short sojourns.

"Drawings, as it has so often been said, are the most intimate expressions of an artist," Mr. Lieberman observes.* "They can reveal the very act of creation, a first idea, the first spontaneous stroke. They can tell much about an artist himself -- for instance, that van Gogh in the south of France remembered an etching by Rembrandt, or that Picasso reinterpreted a composition by Millet.

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*SEURAT TO MATISSE: DRAWING IN FRANCE edited by William S. Lieberman. 104 pp. 91 illustrations. \$3.95 paperbound. Designed by Carl Laanes. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, and available only at The Museum of Modern Art.

Also, it should be realized that the concept and the appreciation of drawings as independent works of art are relatively recent.

"Occasionally during the twentieth century, traditional attitudes toward draftsmanship have been shattered by various innovations. Of these the most radical were the techniques of collage illustrated in the exhibition with works by Archipenko, Braque, Duchamp, Matisse, and Picasso. The Surrealists, in addition, were particularly resourceful and developed techniques of drawing exploiting automatism, accident, collaboration, photograph and collage.

"The exhibition offers glimpses of France from the tide-washed beach at Deauville to the palm-spiked Croisette at Cannes. Most often, however, it is the architecture and urban life of the capital which are described. The Eiffel Tower is twice seen from Delaunay's apartment window. It is celebrated again by Delmarle, the single French Futurist....Seurat and Gleizes visit the city's environs, as does Feininger, who at Meudon first saw the viaduct which was to become a motif in his art. Modigliani hastily sketches an elderly artist seated alone at a table on the terrace of La Rotonde on a chill autumn evening. Brancusi, Dufy, Giacometti, and Matisse describe their own ateliers.

"Paris is a city of night, and the exhibition does not ignore its entertainments -- Seurat's gaslit view of a café concert, Severini's Spanish cabaret, Grosz's happy clowns Poitu and Chocolat. The glamor of the stage sparkles in souvenirs of Isadora Duncan; in opulent designs by Bakst and Gontcharova for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes; in Léger's decors and costumes for The Creation of the World and Skating Rink; in elegant designs commissioned from Berman and Bérard for the Parisian premieres of the Brecht-Weill Three-Penny Opera and Giraudoux's Madwoman of Chaillot.

"During the decades surveyed by this exhibition, the principal painters and sculptors in France were seldom concerned in their art with the catastrophic events of their time. Léger and Severini documented the new machines of the
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First World War, but little more. The Spanish Civil War, however, provoked visual responses from several artists, notably four fellow countrymen, Dali, González, Miró, and Picasso, whose studies for and after the Guernica are one of the greatest tours de force in the history of draftsmanship. In the exhibition, introspective yet forbidding premonitions of a Second World War are evoked by three drawings: Picasso's rooster, the very symbol of France; González's anguished woman tearing her hair; and Lipchitz's allegories of the rape of Europe, which have little to do with classical mythology."

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