

THE MODERN DRAWING
100 WORKS ON PAPER FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
WALL LABEL

A drawing was among The Museum of Modern Art's very first acquisitions, donated in October 1929 only a few days after the Museum opened its doors for the first time. The Museum was conceived to study, collect and exhibit all of the modern visual arts; drawings were therefore integral to its programs from the very start. From this original conception there gradually developed the idea of an autonomous collection of unique works on paper. The collection now numbers some six thousand works and is widely considered to be the greatest modern drawings collection in existence.

This exhibition -- presented on the eve of completion of expanded facilities for The Museum of Modern Art; facilities that will for the first time provide galleries devoted exclusively to drawings -- previews the range and character of the drawings collection, suggesting the kind of works which will regularly be available to the Museum's public. Since only one out of every sixty works in the collection appears in this exhibition, it can only provide a hint of the collection's breadth. But since the exhibition is chosen from the historically and qualitatively most important works the Museum owns, it provides a good indication of the riches of the collection and of the standards to which it aims. Beyond this, the exhibition seeks to illuminate the range, character and historical development of modern drawing.

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The exhibition begins, as does the Museum's collection, and indeed modern drawing itself, in the 1880s. It ends with the generation of artists who came to maturity in the 1950s, whose works have sufficiently settled into history to properly belong in a survey that starts with Post-Impressionism. A conscious attempt was made to reveal the technical diversity of modern drawing. The exhibition therefore includes not only works in the traditional drawing media -- pencil, ink, charcoal, and so on -- but also watercolors, pastels, papiers collés, and other related forms. And a conscious attempt was made to reveal the stylistic and thematic diversity of modern drawing. The works shown here were therefore chosen so as to present as comprehensive as possible a survey of modern drawing, while recognizing the fact that the achievements of modern drawing have not been spread equally among those who have participated in its history. Because of the limitation to one hundred works, many distinguished artists are not represented, and even the major figures are shown here in a summary way. Some omissions, like some inclusions, are necessarily due to the limitations in taste or historical judgment of the exhibition's director. But an exhibition such as this -- like museum collecting itself -- forces the issue of discrimination. In the end, this exhibition presents a critical version of modern drawing.

Innumerable donors have made important contributions to the collection, in the form of drawings from their own collections or through purchase funds for new acquisitions. The names of a few of them are acknowledged in the credit lines of the works shown here. But to all of the supporters of the Department of Drawings go our deepest thanks. The book that accompanies this exhibition, which begins a program of cataloguing the drawings collection, was researched with the aid of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Director, Department of Drawings