

PRESS RELEASE

Beaumont Street
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www.ashmolean.org

25 March 2015, for immediate release:

GREAT BRITISH DRAWINGS

26 March–31 August 2015



Samuel Cooper (1609–72) ■ Detail of *Thomas Alcock*, c. 1650



Tom Phillips (b. 1937) ■ Detail of *Salman Rushdie*, c. 1993
© Tom Phillips

The collection of British drawings and watercolours in the Ashmolean is one of the largest and most important in the world. It ranges widely, from Flemish artists working in Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the experiments in modernism instigated on the Continent and enthusiastically taken up by the British after the First World War. **GREAT BRITISH DRAWINGS** shows more than one hundred works by some of the country's greatest artists, to trace the history of drawing in Britain. Many of the drawings are shown for the first time in public.

Among the highlights are Samuel Cooper's portrait of Thomas Alcock (c. 1650), widely recognized as one of the most sensitive of all drawings of a face; superb works by the landscape artists of the 'golden age' of British watercolours (c.1750–1850), including undiscovered masterpieces by John Robert Cozens, J.M.W. Turner and his friends Edward Dayes and Thomas Girtin; and more famous sheets by John Sell Cotman, David Cox, and other members of the Old Watercolour Society. William Blake was among the most original artists in Europe, and his visionary precepts were passed on to Samuel Palmer; outstanding watercolours by both reflect the pre-eminence of the Ashmolean's collections in this field.

The Pre-Raphaelites were brilliant draughtsmen. This section of the exhibition will include finished portraits and historical subjects by members of the original Brotherhood, D.G. Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt, and their followers, including the romantic *Knight of the Sun* by Arthur Hughes. Their contemporary, Emily Mary Osborne, will be represented by a large and unpublished study for one of the most characteristic of all Victorian paintings, *Nameless and Friendless* (1854). The nineteenth century also saw an unprecedented interest among artists in travelling in Europe and beyond: among the most intrepid were David Roberts and Edward Lear.

As the prestige of the art academies declined in the twentieth century, non-representational art became acceptable, though many prominent artists remained predominantly figurative: examples include Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist *The King Plays* (1942); while the spare line of Ben Nicholson's landscapes of this period are indebted to Picasso's etchings. There is a strong group of Neo-Romantic drawings by Graham Sutherland and John Minton. The vitality and variety of drawing in the later twentieth century can be seen in works by John Piper, Colin Self and Tom Phillips.

Mr Colin Harrison, Senior Curator of European Art, Ashmolean Museum, says: 'The exhibition of GREAT BRITISH DRAWINGS can only scratch the surface of the extraordinary riches of the Ashmolean's collections. It will provide the visitor with an unparalleled opportunity to explore the amazing variety of drawing in Britain, from the rapid sketch in pencil or pen, to the most highly wrought watercolour.'

Exhibition: GREAT BRITISH DRAWINGS
Dates: 26 March–31 August 2015
Venue: Sainsbury Exhibition Galleries 60 & 61
Tickets: £7/£6 concessions available at www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/tickets
Catalogue: £30


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▪ **NOTES TO EDITORS**

GREAT BRITISH DRAWINGS is curated by Mr Colin Harrison, Senior Curator of European Art, Ashmolean Museum.

The exhibition is supported by:

- Lowell Libson Ltd
- Friends of the Ashmolean

LOVE BITES: CARICATURES BY JAMES GILLRAY

26 March–21 June 2015

One of the world's finest collections of James Gillray's (1756–1815) work is owned by New College, Oxford, home to more than two thirds of Gillray's 1100 engravings. On the bicentenary of his death, LOVE BITES takes a fresh look at Gillray's caricatures, focusing on the theme of love in his pictures of courting, friendships and marriages. The exhibition sets his work in the context of a canon of artists who have treated the subject of love, from Brancusi going to back to Rubens, and aims to reveal a new vitality in the caricatures of James Gillray.