

Great British Drawings

26 March - 31 August 2015



Tin Mines, 1947 by Bryan Wynter (1915-1975)
Monotype ground with added bodycolour, stencil and woodcut

The Ashmolean's collection of British drawings is one of the largest and most important in the world. It ranges from Flemish artists active in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to experiments in modernism from the Continent by British artists after the First World War. This exhibition includes drawings by well known artists, tracing the history of drawing in Britain.

- The exhibition is arranged in sections:
- Likeness and Sensibility, 1650-1800
 - Vision and Imagination, 1775-1830
 - Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites
 - Caricature, Satire and Humour
 - Diversity and Conflict; the Modernist Century

The exhibition can be used to explore a range of approaches and techniques.

This is a charging exhibition but FREE for pre-booked school groups and for under 12s.

To book a group visit please contact the **Education Department:**
education.service@ashmus.ox.ac.uk
t: 01865 278015

Working with charcoal on paper



Evening in the City of London 1944

by David Garshen Bomberg (1890-1957)

Charcoal on paper

Charcoal is a cheap and versatile drawing medium. It achieves its best results on heavy weight grained paper. It gives a rich, velvety effect ranging from pale grey to a deep black.

This drawing by David Bomberg, looking over London on a cloudy, damp day expresses a mood with which we are all familiar. He is famous for his vigorous expressionist lines, creating bold angles and dynamic perspective.

Activity 1: Charcoal

Using charcoal on A1 paper, choose a rainy day, an urban street scene, with heavy clouds and puddles and imagine the scene in monochrome. Work boldly with swift movements to explore the full tonal range achievable with charcoal.

Working with pen and ink

Mrs Mounter at the breakfast table 1916-17 by Harold John Wilde Gilman (1876-1919)

Pen and black ink, partly scratched, squared in red ink, on paper

Gilman has used a drawing pen which dips into ink. Today we write or draw with biros, fine liners or felt tips. Drawing pens with a metal nib dipped into ink offer a completely different experience; you need to load the pen with ink regularly, the nib will bounce on the paper under the pressure of your fingers and you can control the flow of the ink. Gilman has used this effect by making a drawing composed of dots or short lines. When viewed, the density of the dots creates a delicate sense of light flickering through curtains and falling across a seated figure. The style allows the artist to express the sense of light filtering into a room.



Activity 2: Pen and Ink

Choose a familiar domestic scene, a kitchen, bedroom or bathroom; maybe including a person. Notice the way light filters through windows or curtains and reflects off wall tiles and ceramic surfaces. Sketch a light outline of the scene, then build up a mosaic of dots of different weights to convey a subtle sense of the mood and stillness of your room.

Working with chalk



Study of a Woman, seen from the back c1760-70

by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

Black chalk and stump, heightened with white, on greyish-brown paper

Chalks are used for their softness. They can be particularly effective when white chalk is used together with a coloured chalk, like black, red or blue. A stump is like a pencil, made of soft-coiled paper, sharpened to a point and used like a pencil. It allows you to smudge and blend the chalk to achieve half tones, which enhance the softness of the chalk. Lightly coloured grained paper further emphasises the soft effect. In this drawing Gainsborough is working from a model who is swathed in dresses that wrap around her so that she has to hitch them up to walk comfortably. He wants to convey this swirl of soft material.

Activity 3: Chalk

Drape different types of material across a chair. Create strong shadows using a lamp. Use white and another coloured chalk on A3 coloured paper to recreate the fall of the light on the creases. Don't try to fill the whole sheet of paper, but just work on a central section.

Working with watercolour and graphite

A Ruined House c1807-10

by John Sell Cotman (1782-1842)

Watercolour over graphite on paper and black ink on white paper (43.1 x 35.5 cm)

Cotman uses mixed media in his approach to drawing this house. The subject is in a state of decay and collapse and includes the textures of crumbling brickwork, rotting woodwork and dusty plaster. Cotman also emphasises the fall of light and shadows to define the rooms, which are now open to the elements. It appears Cotman has sketched the house in pencil, placing it centrally, filling the paper. He then painted over the pencil in watercolour, applying the lightest tone first and building up to the sombre sky behind the house. Finally, he used black ink to emphasise the hollow doorways and loft space. The pencil and pen marks give texture to the building while the watercolour shows light and shadow.



Activity 4: Graphite and watercolour

Find a subject in the process of decay such as rusting machinery, cars, a decaying industrial site, rotting tree stumps, allotment sheds and buildings. Like Cotman, place your subject so it fills the paper, then work into your drawing, building up layers of texture, pattern and tone using pencil, watercolour and pen and ink.

The Materials of Drawing

Drawings are made for many purposes. Some require precision, others require more expressive freedom. As the art of drawing has evolved so have the drawing materials and tools used by artists.

Pens - with metal points were known in ancient Rome but later artists preferred the flexibility of a sharpened reed or bird's quill. Since the late 1400s, the pen has been extensively used, often with added brush and ink.

Inks - there are many recipes for making ink. Iron gall ink is made by mixing tannin from crushed gall nuts with iron sulphate and some gum Arabic. Bistre is made from boiling wood soot; sepia is a golden brown ink made from the ink sac of the cuttlefish.

Metalpoints - are made with silver, gold, lead or other metals. A metalpoint gives a fine line but it cannot be rubbed out. It passed out of favour in the 1500s as artists turned to chalks.

Charcoal - is made from burnt sticks of willow. It leaves a soft, powdery mark and is easily erased. It was used in the Middle Ages for making an initial drawing that was then fixed with metalpoint. Later, it was used in its own right, especially for dramatic effects.

Chalks - black chalk is a carboniferous shale that came into common use in the late 1400s. It is ideal for modelling figures in light and shade. Red chalk is a clay coloured with iron oxide. It is excellent for delicate outlines and also for tonal modelling. It came into use in Italy in the later 1400s and was used extensively throughout Europe until the late 1700s.

Watercolours - are made by mixing colouring matter with water-soluble gum Arabic. This dissolves when touched with a wet brush and is easily transferred to paper. Gouache or body colour is watercolour with chalk added to make it thicker and opaque.

Pastel - is a stick of colour bound with gum Arabic. It is often mixed with white chalk. The surface of a pastel drawing is powdery and easily rubbed. Since the early 1500s it has been used for making portraits and head studies.

Graphite - is a form of carbon. The best natural graphite is found in Borrowdale in Cumbria. Artists and designers used it for fine, detailed work and for small portraits but it was too expensive for general use.

Pencil - in the 1795, Nicolas-Jacques Conté patented a pencil made by blending low grade graphite with clay. This provided an excellent, inexpensive substitute that has become the favourite drawing implement for many artists.



Louisa Ruth Herbert, 1858
by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)
Graphite on wove paper