Notes for secondary teachers

Titian to Canaletto - Drawing in Venice in collaboration with The Uffizi
15 October 2015 - 10 January 2016

The exhibition challenges the traditional view that drawing had no importance in Venice. Beginning at a time of innovation around 1500 when Titian was an emerging artist and moving to the age of Canaletto and Tiepolo, it highlights the significance of drawing as a concept and a practice in the artistic life of Venice and reveals the variety of aims, purposes and techniques in Venetian drawing.

During this period, Venice was a cosmopolitan city with extensive territories and trading networks. Art education and artistic production took place in the workshop, mainly a family concern. Drawing was used for innovating, experimenting and observation, and drawings were made and admired as works of art in their own right. The exhibition emphasises the role of drawing from sculpture and from life in the education and identities of Venetian artists.

The exhibition’s focus is on two major centres of collecting, Oxford and Florence. It brings together Venetian drawings from The Ashmolean, Christ Church College and the Uffizi in Florence. The vitality and immediacy of Venetian drawing has inspired leading contemporary artist Jenny Saville to respond with new work, reflecting her deep engagement with Venetian drawing. This stunning exhibition of work is on show in a dedicated gallery in the exhibition ‘Jenny Saville Drawing’.

The Triumph of St George
Vittore Carpaccio c.1460/6 - c.1525/6

Carpaccio used red chalk to sketch out an exotic architectural setting with animated crowds in this theatrical composition showing St George killing the dragon. He used decisive pen strokes to develop details and actions, revising them as he worked. The drawing shows a Venetian tradition where red chalk is used with pen and ink to infuse a compositional study with warmth and dynamism.
Cardinal Leopoldo de’ Medici, Uffizi 1287E

Study of a Young Woman
Tiziano Vecellio, known as Titian c.1485/90-1576

Titian used strokes of earthy black chalk delicately overlaid with white. The full, heavy folds of the costume are evoked with broad strokes, and the head is subtle and intricate. White is softly layered to show both surface textures and solid form, bathed in light. The original blue paper would have enhanced the tonal range as well as suggesting veils of hazy air and light around the figure.
Probably Medici-Lorraine Collection, Uffizi 718E
**Group of young women and men**
Lorenzo Lotto c.1480-1556/7

An intent figure, poised, yet turning in space shows Lotto's remarkable abilities as a draughtsman. The composition of an energetic, tightly knit group uses light and dark with vibrant touches of white on originally blue paper. The setting could be in or outdoors, but the gentle brushing of the wash lower down seems to evoke lapping water.

Cardinal Leopoldo de'Medici, Uffizi 684E

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**Draped figure turning with his right leg on a sphere**
Jacopo Tintoretto 1518/19-1594

An intent figure, poised, yet turning in space shows Jacopo's remarkable abilities as a draughtsman. The form of the body beneath the drapery is strongly emphasised and the decisive, gestural strokes of the charcoal fused with the radiant use of white give the figure psychological depth. This drawing is a preparatory study for a series of paintings of philosophers for the prestigious Marciana library in Venice.

Medici- Lorraine Collection Uffizi 12986F N1943.249

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**Young man reclining, and a man with a book behind**
Tiziano Vecellio, known as Titian c.1485/90-1576

Titian created sculptural effects, layering white chalk over charcoal and expanding the figure as he drew and revised. The strong treatment of the dark, shadowed head is daring and experimental and gives the figure a powerful emotional force. The position of the head was altered so that a shadow remains, providing an echo of movement. The contrast of the grainy sketched companion highlights the complexities of representation in drawing.

Medici- Lorraine Collection, Uffizi 717E

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**Study after a model of Giuliano de'Medici by Michelangelo**
Jacopo Tintoretto 1518/19-1594

Tintoretto was fascinated by Michelangelo's commemorative and allegorical sculptures. This figure has a sense of vivacity as though the light catches a sculptural model. The quivering contour and the choice of viewpoint suggest turning or responding. The musculature is comparable to Tintoretto's approach to life drawing, where elements are abstracted or exaggerated. Bequeathed by General John Guise in 1765, Christ Church JBS 7599
**View of the Grand Canal towards the Rialto**
Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto 1697-1768

The immediacy of this drawing suggests that Canaletto drew this scene in Venice out of doors from real life. He began with a black chalk sketch, rapidly elaborating some details with red chalk, and drew in ink with quick parallel or zig-zag strokes, using pressure to give shape to the rocking boats. A cloudy sky is sweepingly evoked and the word ‘sole’ (sun) jotted where it was striking moving water.

_Ashmolean WA 1855.112_

**Study of two struggling figures**
Sebastiano Ricci 1659-1734

Like Tintoretto, Ricci responded imaginatively to sculpture. We can follow his thoughts taking shape, the fast-moving lines creating a range of possible actions. Elements such as the man’s legs are drawn and revised and zig-zag hatching overlays earlier ideas. Trained in a Venetian baroque tradition of robust, energetic drawing, sketched in Florence, Ricci developed the idea further in a fresco of Hercules.

_Presented by Emilio Santarelli in 1866, Uffizi 8006s_

**Studies for Bathsheba at her bath**
Jacopo Palma, known as Palma Giovane 1548/50-1628

From his early career, Palma used pen and ink in brainstorming sheets with jotted ideas. This is a preparatory study for a painting. A quick idea for a turning figure sits in the upper right. This is balanced with a study from life, an everyday woman cutting her toenails, before creating a final composition. The study is given framing lines, and the contours of the graceful yet naturalistic figure are clearly picked out.

_Ashmolean WA 1940.113_

**Standing youth seen from behind**
Giovanni Battista Piazetta 1682-1754

In Piazetta’s emotive and sensuous life drawing, studies of nudes are drenched in light, with subtle tonal gradations, achieved with wetted chalk and dark shadows. Here, white chalk is used on the youth’s right side so the body is seen in terms of shifting light and shade. The tonal and expressive qualities of the drawing are enriched with his treatments of the background, creating a moody aura around the stooped, hulking figure.

_Ashmolean WA 1951.159_
Developing techniques

- Consider how much detail is put into a drawing. Which areas can be left with less detail, which areas require additional detail? How can different types of mark making suggest different levels of detail?
- Use a model or a still life to draw from. Cover a piece of paper by smudging charcoal all over the surface. Use a rubber or eraser to lift areas of charcoal away to create lighter areas or highlights. Try adding more charcoal to create darker areas.
- Try different combinations of materials such as black, red and white chalk and charcoal, pen and coloured ink.
- Consider the qualities of different materials: what type of marks do they make, what effects can you get?
- Try ink-washing paper in different colours before or after drawing with different coloured inks or chalks.
- Create several quick studies from a model or still life on the same piece of paper, observe from several different angles to capture as much visual information as possible about the subject.

Working with drawings: key questions

- What is the main subject of the picture?
- What is your eye drawn to and why?
- Why might the drawing have been created?
- What materials were used? Why do you think they were chosen?
- How have lines or ink washing been used to create different effects?

Exhibition Themes

- The Venetian Workshop
- Collecting and Displaying Drawings
- Preparatory Studies
- Independent Drawings
- Drawing from Life
- Titian and the Venetian Drawing
- Tintoretto’s Practice and Impact
- Palma Giovane’s Importance
- Seventeenth Century Drawings and Designs
- Eighteenth Century Drawings and Tiepolo
- Fantasy and Invention
- Landscape: Fantasy and Reality in Canaletto and Guardi

Further resources

Ashmolean Western Art Collection
http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/?mu=770

Ashmolean Western Art Print Collection
http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/?mu=236

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

To book a group visit please contact the Education Department:
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