

## MICHELANGELO'S DREAM

*Michelangelo's Dream* is the first exhibition to unite The Courtauld Gallery's eponymous masterpiece with an exceptional group of drawings given by Michelangelo to his dear friend Tommaso de' Cavalieri. The exhibition, which is comprised entirely of works on paper, reveals Michelangelo's intimate grasp of his chosen graphic medium and his ability to exploit its creative possibilities. All of the drawings are executed in either black or red chalk on laid paper. Using tiny strokes, Michelangelo worked in harmony with the uneven texture of the paper to create figures of significant depth and volume.

Outstanding in their complexity and beauty, these gifts testified as acts of love and friendship. They are early examples of drawings conceived not as preparatory sketches for a painting or a sculpture but as finished works in their own right. As such, they give valuable insight into the changing views and uses of paper during the Renaissance.

For further information on the works on display please refer to the wall texts in the exhibition.



Above: Michelangelo Buonarroti *The Dream (Il Sogno)* c.1533 (detail)  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London.  
Cover image: Michelangelo Buonarroti *The Risen Christ* c.1533 (detail)  
Royal Collection © 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II  
Figs. 2 & 4 © Museo della Carta e della Filigrana, Fabriano, Italy.

WORKS ON PAPER written by Amanda Sarroff with thanks to Stephanie Buck, Katharine Lockett, Joff Whitten and Francis Ames-Lewis.

## EXHIBITION EVENTS

**Curator's Talks**  
Wed 24 Feb, 7 Apr and  
12 May, 17.15 – 18.00

**Lunchtime Talks**  
Fri 19 Feb, 5 Mar,  
19 Mar, 9 Apr, 23 Apr and  
7 May, 13.15 – 13.30

**Talks on Paper**  
Thurs 11 Mar, 22 Apr and  
13 May, 13.15 – 13.30  
A unique opportunity to  
explore works on paper from  
The Courtauld's collection  
that consider the theme of  
dreaming.



**Sunday Talks**  
Every Sunday 21 Feb –  
16 May, 15.00 – 15.45  
(except 4 April)  
Highlights of the exhibition  
and related works from  
the collection are presented  
by researchers from The  
Courtauld Institute of Art.  
The talk on 9 May will feature  
approx. 20 minutes of music.

*All talks free with admission*

**Study Day:**  
**Michelangelo's Dream in  
Context**  
Sat 6 Mar, 11.00 – 16.00  
On Michelangelo's birthday  
join us to explore the meaning  
of *The Dream* in the context of  
Renaissance art theory, poetry  
and philosophy. £35 (conc £30)  
**Booking essential:**  
[short.courses@courtauld.ac.uk](mailto:short.courses@courtauld.ac.uk)  
Tel. 020 7848 2678

**Michelangelo Lates**  
Thurs 25 Mar and 29 Apr  
Open until 21.00  
Unwind after work and explore  
the exhibition as well as our  
world-famous collection.  
Listen to live music or  
gallery talks and enjoy  
delicious refreshments in  
The Courtauld Gallery Cafe.  
*Normal admission fees apply*

**Teachers' Evening**  
Thurs 11 March,  
17.45 – 18.45  
Join us for a curator's talk  
and find out more about the  
exhibition and our education  
programme. Includes a free  
resource pack.  
**Booking essential:**  
[joff.whitten@courtauld.ac.uk](mailto:joff.whitten@courtauld.ac.uk)  
Tel. 020 7848 2705

*For further information on all  
exhibition events and to enjoy  
videos and podcasts relating  
to the exhibition please see  
[www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/  
michelangelo](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/michelangelo)*

**Public Programmes**  
The Courtauld Gallery offers a  
wide variety of workshops,  
tours and self-guided  
resources for schools, colleges  
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 THE  
COURTAULD  
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## WORKS ON PAPER

EXHIBITION IN CONTEXT  
**MICHELANGELO'S DREAM**  
18 FEBRUARY – 16 MAY 2010

## WORKS ON PAPER

Until around 1500, drawings served largely as preparatory sketches or patterns for the creation of other artworks in the workshop rather than as objects collected for their aesthetic value. They were rarely commented on by writers of the period, and few were dated, signed or even attributed to a specific draughtsman. Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* cartoon (c.1505, now lost) comprises one of the earliest recorded examples of a drawing being admired by the public. It attracted so much attention that the Florentine goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) described it as 'a drawing-academy for the whole world'. This marked an important moment in the transformation of drawing as both a means and an end to artistic revelation.

## THE ORIGINS OF PAPER IN ITALY

Paper has been manufactured in Italy since around 1270, although it had been imported into Europe several centuries before. As early as 1276 paper mills were constructed in Fabriano, a small town in central Italy, where conditions were favourable due to plentiful water, windmills which were converted to paper mills and an abundant supply of raw materials from the local textile industry. By 1330 Fabriano was the leading European centre of the paper industry. Nevertheless, it was many years before paper was widely used. For a long time paper was considered inferior to the animal skin parchment used for manuscripts, and too fragile for legal documents. Due to low manufacturing output throughout the

fifteenth century, paper in Europe remained expensive and difficult for draughtsmen to obtain. Most surviving drawings from this period were preserved because of their function in the workshop or for formal, contractual purposes.

The invention of the moveable-type printing press in Germany around 1450 and its introduction to other parts of Europe radically changed how paper was used. The printing press facilitated swift communication to a newly emergent, literate middle class that could not otherwise afford manuscripts. A printed edition of some 250 books could be produced more quickly, accurately and cheaply than a single copy of the same text handwritten on parchment. As the demand for prints after religious subjects and famous paintings increased, so too did the demand for paper. Paper gradually rose in quality and decreased in price. Fifteenth-century, good quality rag paper cost only one sixth the price of parchment, but it was still a significant expense for an artist.



Fig 1. Jost Amman woodcut of a printing press and workshop c.1568.

The gradual increase in the availability of paper had an enormous impact on the drawing practices of

Renaissance draughtsmen. The model book stock of motifs was complemented by sheets of rapidly recorded observations or variously worked out solutions to problems of form. Often artists used the same sheet for multiple sketches. This is evident in the Windsor *Phaeton* (1533), which Michelangelo presented as a gift to Tommaso de' Cavalieri. On the reverse of this highly finished drawing is an earlier sketch probably by Antonio Mini, one of Michelangelo's pupils.

## MAKING PAPER

The manufacture of paper was a highly skilled, specialised profession. Until around 1850, the majority of paper was made from rags. The finest, whitest paper was produced from linen, lesser quality paper from cotton, hemp, wool or silk. Rags were carefully sorted according to fibre type, colour, cleanliness and condition. Once separated, the rags were cut up, cleaned, fermented and beaten to break the cloth down into fibres called *stuff*. These fibres were then mixed with water in a vat to form paper *pulp*. Paper sheets were formed by dipping a mould and deckle into the vat of pulp.



Fig 2. A Fabriano paper mould with examples of wire watermark designs.

The mould consisted of a rectangular frame with a lattice-like screen of closely laid copper wires stretched

horizontally, held together by evenly spaced vertical chain wires. These laid and chain wires left an imprint on the paper that gave the surface a ribbed appearance when held to the light, hence the name *laid paper*.

The rectangular frame placed underneath the mould, called the deckle, kept the pulp on the mould as it was dipped into the vat. The mould and deckle were moved back and forth in the vat, before being lifted out and shaken so that pulp was evenly distributed and the excess water could drain through the wires.



Fig 3. Jost Amman woodcut of paper being made by hand c.1568.

The deckle was removed from the mould and the wet paper rapidly placed between two pieces of felt. After a number of sheets had been assembled, the pile was placed under a hand press to further squeeze out excess water. After a second pressing without felt, the sheets were hung over ropes in ventilated drying lofts. Once dry, the paper was coated with gelatin, this process was known as *sizing*.

Paper, as we know it today, is mostly produced from bleached wood pulp and is a cheap, mass produced

material. Rag paper, made from cotton and linen as in Michelangelo's day, is still produced but is expensive and tends to be used mostly by artists or specialist publishers.

## WATERMARKS

When paper is held up to the light, often a monogram or an image is faintly visible. Made from wire, these designs are sewn into the wire lattice of the mould. As the pulp settles, it is thinner in the areas of the design thus allowing more light to pass through and the writing or image to be seen. This is called a watermark and was used by manufacturers as a form of trademark. Watermarks provide important clues to art historians about where and when, and sometimes by whom, paper was made.



Fig 4. An example of a Fabriano ladder watermark c.1525 on a laid paper.

Although Michelangelo's *Dream* has no discernible watermark, other drawings do. A watermark resembling a ladder is found in *The Risen Christ* (c.1532-33, cover illustration), although this has yet to be traced to a specific paper mill.

## CARING FOR PAPER

Despite Michelangelo's astounding productivity, many of his drawings do not survive. The artist is known to have destroyed works on paper in his studio. He may have felt that they revealed more about his creative process than he cared to disclose.

Other drawings, like those in the exhibition, were created as gifts for friends such as Tommaso de' Cavalieri. These were received to great acclaim. Admirers, including the Pope, visited Cavalieri's home to view and study masterpieces such as *Tityus* and *Phaeton*. Their good condition attests to the fact that they have been prized and cherished for nearly five hundred years.

Works on paper are fragile. Light causes oxidation of paper and unrestricted exposure will lead to discolouration and eventual damage. This can be seen particularly in poor quality wood pulp paper, such as newspaper. If left in the sun for as little as a day, it will become deeply discoloured. UV rays are particularly insidious and are therefore eliminated from the gallery environment. Heat and humidity also precipitate chemical reactions that endanger paper, as does poor mounting, backing or framing.



Fig 5. A paper conservator from The Courtauld Gallery cleans and prepares a print for the exhibition.

Curators and conservators take great care to maintain conservation standards with temperature and humidity controlled exhibition spaces, low light levels and good quality mounting and framing. They balance the preservation of these precious works of art for posterity with their display for public study and delight.