

# The Courtauld

## ***Pen to Brush: British Drawings and Watercolours***

19 Nov 2021 - 27 Feb 2022

Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery

This display showcases a selection of The Courtauld's British drawings - the national school most strongly represented in the drawings collection. Celebrating the quality and the diversity of British draughtsmanship, it spans the early 17th century to the middle of the 20th. It shows artists working in a variety of media, ranging from delicate pen and ink sketches to bold chalk figure studies and landscapes to the watercolours for which the British school is celebrated.

The earliest works include a rare group of figure studies by the French-born Isaac Oliver and a splendid large-scale drawing of two heralds of the Order of the Garter by the Dutch portraitist Peter Lely. They were among the many foreign-born artists working in Britain in the 16th and 17th centuries who helped shape an emerging national school.

The Golden Age of British watercolour saw artists exploring new ways to portray landscapes both close to home and abroad, while during the Victorian era, they increasingly used watercolour in a manner similar to oil paint. In the early years of the 20th century, radical groups such as the Vorticists shattered the conventions of the past with their bold abstract compositions.

The programme of displays in the Drawings Gallery is generously supported by the International Music and Art Foundation

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## Works on display



Isaac Oliver I (around 1565-1617)

Peter Oliver (around 1594-1647)

**Figure studies**, around 1610

Pen and brown, grey and black ink and grey and brown wash, on five sheets

Sir Robert Witt bequest, 1952

D.1952.RW.2390.1-5

These finely detailed studies are among the earliest British drawings in The Courtauld's collection. Their small scale and delicacy of execution reflect Isaac Oliver's training as a miniature painter. Although trained in England, the French-born Oliver brought a new Continental influence to British art. His subject matter and style, especially the distinctive use of pen and ink were strongly informed by the Italian Renaissance artist Parmigianino, whose prints and drawings he admired. Two of the drawings are by his son, the miniaturist Peter Oliver, whose style was very similar to his father's.

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Peter Lely (1618-1680)

**Study of two heralds in ceremonial dress of the Order of the Garter**, mid 1660s

Black and white chalk and charcoal on blue laid paper

Sir Robert Witt bequest, 1952

D.1952.RW.1259

This elaborate work belongs to a series of 31 drawings depicting the members of the Order of the Garter, England's highest order of chivalry. The series was made shortly after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, possibly for an unrealized decorative scheme, most likely a tapestry series. They may have been inspired by an oil sketch of the same subject in Lely's collection, painted by Anthony van Dyck, his predecessor in the role of Principal Painter to the King.



James Thornhill (1675-1734)

**Design for the ceiling of the Painted Hall, Greenwich Hospital**, around 1707

Graphite, pen and brown ink and brown wash

Sir Robert Witt bequest, 1952

D.1952.RW.2250

James Thornhill made numerous studies in preparation for his ceiling of the Painted Hall at the Royal Hospital in Greenwich, set up in 1692 as a home for retired sailors of the Royal Navy. Arguably the grandest Baroque scheme by a British artist, this design celebrated the nation's scientific and cultural achievements. At lower centre, the figure of Architecture holds a plan of the building. At the foot, Hercules (Strength) wields a club, and Pallas (Wisdom) destroys the vices.

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Jonathan Richardson the elder (1665-1745)

**Profile self-portrait in a cap**, early 1730s

Black and white chalk on blue paper

Sir Robert Witt bequest, 1952

D.1952.RW.2189

In the last twenty-five years of his life, Jonathan Richardson the elder, a successful portraitist, began drawing self-portraits such as this one as a means of self-examination. Never intended for public exhibition, they reveal an aging artist reflecting on himself with unsentimental directness. The austere profile pose he adopts here is associated with ancient Roman portrait medals and coins. Richardson's costume of cap and robe however would have been worn at home or in the studio, reinforcing the informality of the image.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

**Landscape with sheep and cattle on the bank of a stream**, around 1780-84

Black chalk with stumping

Sir Robert Witt bequest, 1952

D.1952.RW.2432

This pastoral landscape, with its incidental details of a bridge and some cattle, was probably done from imagination rather than life, as was typical of Thomas Gainsborough. Here, he laid out the composition with energetic strokes of black chalk and used a stump (a tool whose end blends the chalk marks) to render shadows as well as the softer tones of the distant church and hills. The attention to everyday detail is characteristic of Gainsborough's landscapes, even though they represent idealised scenes.

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Thomas Jones (1742-1803)

**View of Tivoli**, 1777

Graphite and watercolour

Dorothy Scharf bequest, 2007

D.2007.DS.22

Thomas Jones was part of the first generation of British artists to travel to Italy. Jones considered the area around Tivoli, near Rome, to be 'Magick Land'. This wide-angle view of the ancient Roman Villa of Maecenas is depicted with the point of the brush in a restricted palette of blue-green and reddish brown. Pencilled notes on the sheet indicate the graphite outlines were drawn on the spot. Neither preparatory studies nor finished works, these 'hybrid' watercolours were not intended for sale.



John Robert Cozens (1752-1797)

**A ruined fort near Salerno**, around 1782

Graphite and watercolour, with scratching out

Dorothy Scharf bequest, 2007

D.2007.DS.12

John Robert Cozens based this view of a crumbling fort on a sketch made during a trip to Italy. The careful rendering of vegetation and clouds attests to the artist's close study of nature. However, the overall focus is on mood rather than exact representation. Cozens achieved rich colour effects by applying multiple layers of wash to the sheet. His painterly handling profoundly influenced younger watercolourists, especially J.M.W. Turner.

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Edward Dayes (1763–1804)

**Somerset House seen from the Thames, 1788**

Graphite, pen and grey ink, watercolour and touches of opaque watercolour

William W. Spooner bequest, 1967

D.1967.WS.37

An admirer of the sweeping cityscapes popularised by Venetian artists, Edward Dayes depicted London with similar grandeur in his highly finished watercolours. His ideas of compositional balance used linear opposites and warm and cool colours to convey opposing emotions. This is demonstrated in the contrast between the carefully ruled stonework of buildings and the undulating contours of waves and clouds. On the far left, Dayes shows the incomplete south block of Somerset House before the construction of the Victoria Embankment in 1865.



John Sell Cotman (1782–1842)

**Doorway to the refectory of Kirkham Priory, Yorkshire, 1804**

Graphite and watercolour

William W. Spooner bequest, 1967

D.1967.WS.24

John Sell Cotman made this watercolour at Kirkham Priory during the second of three summers he spent in Yorkshire. A sunlit patch of masonry and a luminous sky pierce the golden haze enveloping the medieval ruins. The Norman arch is observed from an oblique angle to exaggerate its monumentality; a shadow cast on the doorway hints at a greater structure looming nearby. Devoid of human presence, this evocative portrait of a ruin becomes a study of light and shadow on stone.

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Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851)  
**Rome from San Pietro in Montorio**, around 1820–21

Watercolour with gum arabic, opaque watercolour, pen and brown ink with scraping  
Accepted by HM Government in Lieu of Inheritance Tax and allocated to the Samuel Courtauld Trust for The Courtauld Gallery in 2007  
D.2007.DS.53

On his return from his first trip to Italy, Turner produced eight views for his patron Walter Fawkes. In this one, Rome is seen from the church of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum, a hill to the west of the city, with sweeping hazy views across the Trastevere neighbourhood and the Colosseum, to the Alban hills in the distance. Two peasant women in the foreground and a puppet show at the left animate the scene with hints of local character.



Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–1828)  
**Fishing boats moored in an estuary**, around 1825

Graphite, watercolour and opaque watercolour, with scratching out  
Dorothy Scharf bequest, 2007  
D.2007.DS.4

Richard Parkes Bonington began studying watercolour when he moved to France in 1817. The following year he befriended the painter Eugène Delacroix. Delacroix later praised Bonington's 'lightness of touch which, especially in watercolours, makes his works a type of diamond which flatters and ravishes the eye'. The brushwork in this scene of fishing boats is extraordinarily lively, while the white paper showing through the crisp surface colours creates an impression of sparkling light.

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John Constable (1776-1837)

**Stanway Mill, near Colchester**, around 1833-35

Graphite and watercolour, with scratching out  
Dorothy Scharf bequest, 2007  
D.2007.DS.9

One of the greatest English landscape painters, John Constable is less known for his watercolours. This vibrant sheet is thought to be one of the few he exhibited at the Royal Academy. Close observation of nature and the effects of weather was at the heart of Constable's art. His mastery at depicting skies is evident from this stormy scene. Dark streaks of rain lash across pale clouds; their diagonal lines, echoed in the mill sails, create a palpable sense of blustery wind.



William Henry Hunt (1790-1864)

**Chaffinch nest and May blossom**, around 1845

Graphite, watercolour with gum arabic,  
and opaque watercolour

John Witt bequest and grant aid by the Art Fund,  
1982

D.1982.JW.22

William Henry Hunt was renowned for his minutely rendered watercolours of fruit, flowers and birds' nests, earning him the nickname 'Birds' Nest Hunt'. Despite its air of simplicity, this still life was painstakingly created in the studio. To achieve such illusionism, Hunt used stippling (small, closely packed dots of pigment) in subtle combinations of colour and layered bright watercolour washes over an underlayer of white. Younger artists like Frederick Walker were strongly influenced by Hunt's technique.



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Frederick Walker (1840-1875)

**The Old Farm Garden**, 1871

Graphite, watercolour with gum arabic, opaque watercolour and scratching out  
Diana Mallinson and Hugh and Paul Gorton gift, 2009  
D.2009.XX.10

The combination of careful observation and poetic idealisation is characteristic of Frederick Walker's landscapes, which often focus on solitary figures. Here, an elegant woman, modelled by the artist's sister, calmly knits in a walled garden, unaware of the cat poised to pounce on her ball of wool. Admired for its bright colour and close attention to detail, this watercolour was considered by the influential art critic John Ruskin to be 'worth all the Dutch flower-pieces in the world.'



Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)

**Self-portrait**, 1911

Graphite and watercolour  
Acquired for the Samuel Courtauld Trust by Daniel Katz, 2011  
D.2011.XX.3

This is one of three self-portrait drawings Wyndham Lewis made in 1911-12, when he was 29 years old. The angular planes and strong linear structure show the early influence of Cubism on his work. Lewis portrays himself as a defiantly avant-garde artist, using dramatic contrasts of light and dark to convey a sense of menace. His piercing gaze suggests the combative public persona Lewis wished to project, that of an iconoclast determined to break with the old order.

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Helen Saunders (1885-1963)  
**Vorticist Composition with Figures, Black and White**, around 1915

Graphite and black ink on wove paper, squared in graphite, the central circle cut out from a separate sheet of paper and glued down  
Purchased by the Samuel Courtauld Trust, 2016  
D.2016.XX.18

Helen Saunders was one of the first British artists to move toward abstraction. Alongside Wyndham Lewis, she was a member of the Vorticists, a radical London-based modern art movement (1914-15) influenced by Cubism and Futurism. This hard-edged composition, with its sharp geometric forms and dramatic contrast of black and white, is typical of her Vorticist work. The forms in the lower half of the drawing suggest human figures at the mercy of a colossal machine, reflecting the events of the First World War.



Henry Moore (1898-1986)  
**Shelter drawing**, 1942

Wax crayons with wash, pen and black ink and white opaque watercolour  
Lillian Browse gift, 1982  
D.1982.LB.15

A group of people huddle together on the ground in a shadowy, compressed space; their faces, where visible, lack detail. The figures' frail limbs underscore their vulnerability, but their weighty torsos convey the opposite - a sense of monumentality and timelessness. Henry Moore based these figures on drawings he made of Londoners sheltering in Underground stations during World War II air raids. By representing anonymous bodies rather than specific individuals, Moore's 'shelter drawings' express the common experience of the Blitz.