

Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum
Busch-Reisinger Museum
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

PRESS RELEASE

Harvard Art Museums to Receive Transformative Gift of Dutch, Flemish, and Netherlandish Drawings

George S. Abrams to give premier collection of 330 master drawings from the Dutch Golden Age, including works by Rembrandt and his pupils



Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Four Studies of Male Heads*, c. 1636. Brown ink and brown wash on cream antique laid paper. The Maida and George Abrams Collection, Boston, Massachusetts.

Cambridge, MA
November 4, 2017

The Harvard Art Museums announce the extraordinary gift of 330 16th- to 18th-century Dutch, Flemish, and Netherlandish drawings from the esteemed collection of Maida and George S. Abrams (Harvard A.B. '54, LL.B. '57), considered the best collection of such material in private hands. The gift further establishes the museums as the major site for the appreciation, research, and study of works on paper from the Dutch Golden Age in North America. This newest promised gift from the Abrams family brings tremendous depth and breadth to the museums' holdings; the works represent over 125 artists and include extremely fine examples by major masters such as Rembrandt, Jacques de Gheyn II, Hendrick Goltzius, and Adriaen van Ostade, as well as a remarkable range of drawings by lesser-known masters who worked in a wide range of subjects and media. Impressive drawings by artists Nicolaes Berchem,

Jacob Marrel, and Cornelis Visscher will help fill gaps in the museums' collections. Taken as a whole, the Abrams Collection at the Harvard Art Museums reveals the critical role of drawing in the art world of the Dutch Golden Age.

"George has generously supported the Harvard Art Museums over many decades and in countless ways; we are incredibly thankful for the role that he and Maida have played in galvanizing the study of drawings at Harvard and particularly for their commitment to telling the rich story of draftsmanship from the Low Countries," said Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. "The latest gift from the Abrams family is truly transformative for our museums—indeed, for the entire Boston area, especially as the city strives to become a major destination for the study and presentation of Dutch, Flemish, and Netherlandish art. Together with the newly founded Center for Netherlandish Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, we now can pursue institutional collaborations that will serve visitors and scholars from around the world."

Mr. Abrams and his late wife Maida made earlier gifts that brought more than 140 drawings to the Harvard Art Museums over the course of several decades. With their collective gifts, the museums now have the most comprehensive holding of 17th-century Dutch drawings outside Europe.

"When the collection grows in quality and quantity in such a major way, suddenly there are stories you can tell with greater force and depth, with fewer gaps in the narrative," said Edouard Kopp, the Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings at the Harvard Art Museums. "Since its creation, the Fogg Museum has been a key U.S. institution for the study and appreciation of drawings, and this gift will enable us to be an even more vibrant center, particularly for Dutch drawings."

News of the promised gift was shared on November 3, just a day before the museums hosted the symposium [Dutch Drawings on the Horizon: A Day of Talks in Honor of George S. Abrams](#). The event brought together international experts on 17th-century Dutch drawings to discuss the exceptional draftsmanship of the Dutch Golden Age, from Goltzius to Rembrandt. Speakers and chairs at the event included George Abrams's longtime friends and associates Arthur Wheelock, Peter Schatborn, Peter C. Sutton, Jane Turner, and William W. Robinson.

In 1999, the Abrams gave an initial landmark gift of 110 drawings to the Harvard Art Museums. Many of those works had been included in the 1991–92 exhibition *Seventeenth-Century Dutch Drawings: A Selection from the Maida and George Abrams Collection*, which was on view at the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam, the Graphische Sammlung Albertina in Vienna, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, and the Fogg Museum. William W. Robinson, former Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings at the Harvard Art Museums, wrote the accompanying catalogue. The 2002–03 traveling [exhibition](#) and accompanying [catalogue](#) for *Bruegel to Rembrandt: Dutch and Flemish Drawings from the Maida and George Abrams Collection*, also written by Robinson, complemented (and supplemented) the previous catalogue by presenting the most significant acquisitions of the Abrams Collection since the 1991–92 show. *Bruegel to Rembrandt* was shown at the British Museum in London, the Institut Néerlandais in Paris, and the Fogg Museum. The 1999 gift led the museums to publish *Drawings from the Age of Bruegel, Rubens, and Rembrandt* (William W. Robinson, with Susan Anderson; 2016), a [catalogue](#) of 100 of the museums' best drawings from this period; almost half of the drawings chosen were part of the Abrams gift. An [exhibition](#) of the same title was on display at the Harvard Art Museums from May 21 through August 14, 2016.

"The Harvard Art Museums' support of original scholarship and their dedication to training tomorrow's leaders in the field have long been important to me and my late wife Maida," said George Abrams. "As a result, I am delighted that our collection will now be housed at the museums and available to a range of audiences. With leadership from director Martha Tedeschi, who deeply understands the importance of works on paper, the museums now stand to have the leading Dutch drawings collection in the United

States, with more excellent examples by Rembrandt and wonderful drawings by top draftsmen Hendrick Goltzius and Jacques de Gheyn II.”

The Abrams Collection at the Harvard Art Museums has particular depth and strength in the following areas:

- High and low genre subjects, especially sheets by Adriaen van Ostade, Isaack van Ostade, and Cornelis Dusart
- Natural history watercolors (birds, plants, flowers, insects, etc.) by artists such as Jacob Marrel, Maria Sibylla Merian, Johannes Bronkhorst, Pieter Holsteyn II, Gerardus and Rochus van Veen, Margareta de Heer, and Pieter Withoos
- Rembrandt and his school, with a particularly impressive range of artists represented who studied directly under Rembrandt or contemporaries who came under the spell of his influential style

“George’s generosity to the Harvard Art Museums never ceases to amaze me. He has supported us for decades: through gifts of art, steadfast advocacy, and advice,” said William W. Robinson, the former Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings at the Harvard Art Museums. “Now, with the commitment of his collection, the museums are able to carry on Harvard’s great tradition of drawings scholarship, taking it to an even higher level.”

At a dinner held in his honor on November 3, Abrams was appointed Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The royal decoration was given by Dutch Consul General Dolph Hogewoning for Abrams’s significant contribution to the study and international promotion of Dutch art. The order bears the hyphenated name used by the royal family of the Netherlands since the 16th century and is a chivalric order open for those who have earned special merits for society: people who deserve appreciation and recognition from society for the special way in which they have carried out their activities.

Mr. Abrams has served for years as head of the Drawings Committee at the Harvard Art Museums and was instrumental in securing funds for the Drawings Department at the museums from the Stanley H. Durwood Foundation. These funds support a wide range of events, including the November 4 [symposium](#) Dutch Drawings on the Horizon: A Day of Talks in Honor of George S. Abrams. The Durwood Foundation also endowed a fellowship in Dutch art, currently held by Austėja Mackelaitė, who curated an [exhibition](#) of drawings from the Abrams Collection now on view, *The Art of Drawing in the Early Dutch Golden Age, 1590–1630: Selected Works from the Abrams Collection*.

Said Edouard Kopp: “Without George’s help, we wouldn’t be able to engage Harvard students with our drawings collection nearly as much as we do.” For example, Kopp [brings museum curatorial fellows and Harvard students](#) to Paris each year for the Salon du Dessin, a major event in the field, for a practicum in acquisitions.

Related Exhibition

The Art of Drawing in the Early Dutch Golden Age, 1590–1630: Selected Works from the Abrams Collection is currently on view through January 14, 2018; it is installed on Level 2, in the museums’ galleries dedicated to 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art. The installation of 31 drawings explores the extraordinary developments in Dutch art in the period between 1590 and 1630. The works on view present some of the major themes in Dutch art, including the development of high and low genres, the study of landscape, and the interest in the nude; many of these subjects initially emerged in the medium of drawing. The works on display celebrate the role of drawing as a catalyst of creativity during the early Golden Age.

About the Harvard Art Museums' Drawings Collection

The Harvard Art Museums' collection of European and American drawings from the 14th century to today numbers over 24,000 works and includes major masterpieces. Among the strengths are 17th- and early 19th-century French works, including the most extensive holdings of drawings by Ingres outside of France, as well as significant groups of works by Géricault and David. The collection also excels in Italian Renaissance works by Parmigianino, Michelangelo, and Pontormo, among others. Works by German and Netherlandish masters such as Dürer, Holbein, Bruegel, and Rembrandt are well represented, as are 19th-century British works by Blake, Beardsley, and the Pre-Raphaelites. In the American school, the collection includes more than 20 Homer watercolors; drawings and pastels by Whistler; and an incomparable grouping of about 400 drawings by Sargent. The collection also includes important holdings of works by 20th-century artists such as Edward Hopper, Henry Moore, David Smith, and Eva Hesse. Notable strengths in the Busch-Reisinger's drawings collection include works by Lovis Corinth, George Grosz, and the Bauhaus, as well as extensive holdings of drawings and watercolors by Lyonel Feininger, and postwar figures such as Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Joseph Beuys, and Hanne Darboven.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, and are comprised of three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on Asian art, Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern art, and Islamic and later Indian art. Together, the collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies.

The Harvard Art Museums' 2014 renovation and expansion carried on the legacies of the three museums and united their remarkable collections under one roof for the first time. Renzo Piano Building Workshop preserved the Fogg Museum's landmark 1927 facility, while transforming the space to accommodate 21st-century needs. The museums now feature 40 percent more gallery space, an expanded Art Study Center, conservation labs, and classrooms, and a striking glass roof that bridges the facility's historic and contemporary architecture. The three constituent museums retain their distinct identities in the facility, yet their close proximity provides exciting opportunities to experience works of art in a broader context. harvardartmuseums.org

Hours and Admission

Daily, 10am–5pm. Closed major holidays. Admission: \$15 adults, \$13 seniors (65+), \$10 non-Harvard students (18+). Free for members; youth under 18; Cambridge residents (proof of residency required); and Harvard students, faculty, and staff (plus one guest). On Saturdays, from 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, see harvardartmuseums.org/plan-your-visit.

Exhibitions, Events, and News

Our Special Exhibitions Gallery presents important new research on artists and artistic practice, and our University Galleries are programmed in consultation with Harvard faculty to support coursework.

harvardartmuseums.org/visit/exhibitions

Lectures, workshops, films, performances, special events, and other programs are held throughout the year at the museums. harvardartmuseums.org/visit/calendar

Check out *Index*, our multimedia magazine, to keep up with what's happening at the Harvard Art Museums. harvardartmuseums.org/index-magazine

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