

PRESS RELEASE

STÄDEL'S LEGACY MASTER DRAWINGS FROM THE FOUNDER'S COLLECTION

13 MAY TO 16 AUGUST 2020

Städel Museum, Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings

Frankfurt, 13 May 2020. With the bequest of his private art collection, the businessman and banker Johann Friedrich Städel (1728–1816) founded a public art museum of international stature, accessible to all – the Städel Museum. The collector left behind an art treasure encompassing not only paintings and prints but also more than 4,600 drawings. For a long time, it was not possible to determine which of the drawings in the museum's present-day holdings were originally in his collection. At the time of the bequest, no complete inventory was compiled. Furthermore, in the course the collection's reorganization in the 1860s, many drawings were sorted out and sold. For the first time, the Städel Museum has now succeeded in reconstructing the founder's drawing collection to a large extent, and identifying the roughly 3,000 works still in the collection today. From 13 May to 16 August 2020, the Städel Museum is presenting a selection of 95 master drawings providing a representative impression of the character, organization and artistic significance of the former drawing collection of Johann Friedrich Städel. Following the founder's tradition, the outstanding works by Raphael, Correggio and Primaticcio, Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard, Dürer, Roos and Reinhart, Goltzius, Rembrandt, De Wit and many others are here arranged according to "European schools". They are moreover discussed in detail in an accompanying catalogue. A portion of these drawings are already known among scholars; others are here being published for the first time.

The research and exhibition project have been supported by the Stiftung Gabriele Busch-Hauck, the Wolfgang Ratjen Stiftung, Liechtenstein, the Tavolozza Foundation and the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

The reconstruction of the Johann Friedrich Städel's drawing collection provides insights into his collecting activities and concepts, but also into the collecting of drawings in the eighteenth century in general. It sheds light on the routes the

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drawings took to Frankfurt and Städel's lively exchange with the major European art trading centres – Paris, Amsterdam and London – as it does on the encyclopaedic, art-historical standards of his collecting activities. It also provides an impression of the contacts cultivated by the art-loving citizens of Frankfurt in Städel's day, offers important insights into collecting at the Städel Museum in the nineteenth century, and explains how decisions were made on which works were “museum-worthy” and which were not.

“For the museums’ founders, Städel's collection was a treasure, and that it has remained to the very present. The holdings themselves have proven to be an important source for a multitude of stories. A comprehensive research project now brings light into the darkness of Städel's drawing collection. Never before systematically catalogued, the drawings have meanwhile been identified in their near entirety. In the process, the project has reappraised the collection's vibrant history and detected the founder's contacts all over Europe, giving us intimate insights into his way of thinking and, accordingly, into the core of our museum's self-conception. The latter also encompasses the foundation's commitment to safeguard a collection that, on the one hand, concentrates on the highest quality, while on the other hand remaining subject to ongoing critical review”, states Philipp Demandt, the director of the Städel Museum.

“Alongside paintings, prints and ‘art objects’, drawings made up a significant portion of Städel's collection. Their variety and quality, but also their great quantity permit us to regard this category as representative of Städel's self-conception as a collector. The drawing holdings encompassed works from the prominent European art schools and ranged in date from the Renaissance around 1500 to Städel's own lifetime. Only gradually, in the course of a research project carried out over several years, has it become apparent that he amassed his drawings according to an encyclopaedic collecting concept”, explains Joachim Jacoby, the exhibition's curator.

The Städel Drawing Collection

Works in the drawing medium accounted for a substantial portion of Johann Friedrich Städel's art collection. In the eighteenth century – the century of the Enlightenment – drawings were considered unique testimonies to individual artistic invention and the creativity of their makers. Arranged chronologically and by school, they provided an overview of the history of art as well as the lives of the artists. Städel's intensive collecting activities offer evidence that he shared these ideas. It is not possible to determine exactly when he began collecting drawings. According to Städel himself, he had been interested in art from the time of his earliest youth, and he continued to

develop his drawing collection until the final years of his life. He organized his collection by region of origin, thus adhering to the French system prevalent in the eighteenth century, which classified the art of Europe according to so-called schools: Italy, France, Holland/Flanders and Germany. Moreover, Städel strove to collect encyclopaedically. He wanted each of these schools represented in his collection from the sixteenth century to his own time.

For lack of sources documenting his purchases, the circumstances surrounding the works' acquisition can be determined only by indirect means. In many cases, the reconstruction of the individual drawings' provenances and the routes by which they found their way into Städel's collection proved possible with the aid of identifying stamps or markings. And it revealed that, presumably with assistance from art agents, he bought them primarily in Paris, Amsterdam and London, but also in Basel, Hamburg, Mannheim and Frankfurt. Städel's widespread purchases give a clear picture of the organizational and conceptual efforts he invested in this area of his collection. It cannot be said with certainty whether he engaged in direct contact with dealers or regularly had drawings sent to him for approval, or auction catalogues for perusal – that is, how he arrived at his purchase decisions. Another aspect that has remained obscure is how he filtered the available works, but it is conceivable that he took a certain amount of orientation from the local art-dealing activities. Städel followed the goings-on on the European art market closely over a period of two or three decades. Within that context, his personal contacts to like-minded contemporaries was important. The joint contemplation of art and the decision, taken early on, to make his collection accessible to interested persons in his house on Frankfurt's Rossmarkt square proved to provide impulses for his collecting activities as well as for the evaluative examination of his drawings.

In his will, Städel arranged for the establishment of a philanthropic foundation in the form of a civic institution – the Städel'sches Kunstinstitut – that would serve “the best for this town and its citizens”. The way he envisaged it, his drawing collection was not only to be further enhanced by new acquisitions, but its standard of quality was moreover to be raised through the sale of unsuitable and less important works. By stipulating the highest possible quality for the collection, the founder was striving not only to preserve it, but also, with a farsighted approach, to open it for further development and ensure that it would serve the edification of the public. Already when the first director of the Städel'sches Kunstinstitut, Carl Friedrich Wendelstadt (1786–1840), set about drawing up the first inventory catalogue of the drawings in around 1825, he proceeded according to this principle: of the 4,631 drawings, a selection of only 1,878 were included in the publication.

It was in 1842, on the initiative of then director Johann David Passavant (1787–1861), that the process of organizing and cataloguing the holdings according to museological standards got underway, not to be carried to completion until 1862/63, by which time Passavant's successor Gerhard Maß (1819–1885) was in office. Between 1860 and 1867, more than 2,200 drawings were sold, having been selected, and their sale approved, by a committee of several persons. Apart from the assessment of a drawing's quality, condition and format, another decisive factor in this procedure seems to have been the amount of works by the respective artist that had been in the holdings.

Master Drawings from the Collection

The exhibition showcases Städel's drawing collection with a representative selection of 95 master drawings that have remained in the Städel Museum holdings to this day. The founding collection was distinguished by an uncommonly broad spectrum: it mirrored both regional idiosyncrasies and influential artistic figures, shed light on stylistic differences in historical succession and moreover encompassed an abundance of different drawing mediums, each with its own particular purpose.

The Italian drawings, originally numbering 1,300, ranged from the Florentine masters of the late fifteenth century and exponents of the High Renaissance to those of the founder's own lifetime. Among the great Italian Renaissance artists in Städel's collection was Raphael (1483–1520), originally represented by 24 works attributed to him. One of those works is the *Caryatid* of 1519/20 – the last years of the artist's life – in which he gently 'modelled' a marble sculpture in black chalk. An example of an Italian work by a contemporary of Städel's is *Design for stage set with Indian temple*, executed by Giorgio Fuentes (1756–1821) around 1796/1800. In those years, Fuentes exerted a formative and lasting influence on the theatre of the city of Frankfurt with his overwhelmingly large and richly detailed stage sceneries. It is not known what play this design was for, but the fancifully exotic details of the architecture suggest a sacred structure in India.

The collection of French drawings comprised some 450 works. The earliest, dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century, were by such influential artists as Claude Lorraine (1600–1682) and Sébastien Bourdon (1616–1671). Examples by chief exponents of the eighteenth century, among them Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), Antoine Watteau (1683–1721) and François Boucher (1703–1770) provided an overview of the stylistic upheavals of that period. Here playful Rococo creations by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) contrasted with drawings distinguished by

classicist clarity. The scene *Travelers Find Two Bodies in an Egyptian Burial Chamber* by Augustin Félix Fortin (1763–1832) testifies to the fact that rigorous form does not have to go hand in hand with lack of drama. It was a contemporary of Städel's who rounded out the French school as well: thanks to the substantial number of drawings by Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736–1810), landscape depiction took on especial prominence among the holdings in this medium – possibly owing to a personal preference on the part of the collector.

German art in the drawing collection spans the period from 1500 to the Enlightenment. Two eighteenth-century artists were particularly well represented. The holdings comprised 950 drawings by Franz Kobell (1749–1822) and Friedrich Wilhelm Hirt (1721–1772) alone – not only small-scale sketches but also composition designs and drawings so fully developed as to rank as artworks in their own right. The share accounted for by other German artists did not even number 300. Among them, however, were masters such as Hans Baldung Grien (1484–1545) and Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). The unconventional *Man with lion*, carried out by Dürer in 1517, shows a seated nude man with a lion approaching him from the right. Both protagonists are clearly sizing each other up; the scene's meaning, however, remains a mystery. The view that Dürer was among the most 'collection-worthy' German artists was uncontested by Städel's contemporaries. Even if Städel himself did not have a painting by Dürer to call his own, by means of print and drawing purchases he succeeded in bringing together various phases of the artist's oeuvre in his collection.

With 1,500 drawings, the Dutch/Flemish school accounted for about one third of the collection; approximately half of that number were verifiably sold in the 1860s. This section covered the period from the sixteenth century to Städel's own time, while also encompassing all genres, with landscapes making up the largest share.

Accomplished studies such as *Four Studies of a Right Hand*, by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) are an impressive demonstration of the special qualities of drawing, not least of all because they reveal the processual character of artistic creation. Once again, recognized masters and their workshops are represented, first and foremost Rembrandt (1606–1669) – for example with *Seated Old Man (The Drunken Lot)* of 1633 – and his successors as well as Jacob de Wit (1695–1754) and the van de Velde family.

STÄDEL'S LEGACY: MASTER DRAWINGS FROM THE FOUNDER'S COLLECTION

Exhibition dates: 13 May to 16 August 2020

Curator: Dr. Joachim Jacoby



Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

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Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun + holidays 10.00am–6.00pm, Thu + Fri 10.00am–9.00pm

Admission: 14 EUR; free for children under 12

Catalogue: In conjunction with the exhibition, a comprehensive catalogue edited by Joachim Jacoby and published by Sandstein Verlag, Dresden. With a foreword by Philipp Demandt. In German. 336 pages, 39.90 EUR (museum edition), 49 EUR (bookshop edition)

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