RARELY SEEN ITALIAN DRAWINGS OF THE RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE FEATURED IN
ART INSTITUTE EXHIBITION CAPTURING THE SUBLIME
Inspiring Array of Old Master Drawings from the Anne Searle Bent Collection
Spotlight the Creativity and Craft of Noted Italian Artists
Exhibition On View March 25–July 8, 2012

Italian drawing and painting, like the nation’s food and dialects, stem from a rich and vibrant tradition marked by distinct regional differences. These unique styles and schools—from the Tuscan Renaissance traditions of Michelangelo to the style of Roman Mannerists like Cavaliere d’Arpino—are united by their extensive use of drawings as both tool and standalone work. In the Art Institute of Chicago’s new exhibition Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque, 165 rarely seen works on paper vividly demonstrate the inspiration and process of Italian Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque artists, offering viewers the ability to experience, hundreds of years later, the artists’ initial spark of creativity. Presented from the private collection of Chicagoan Anne Searle Bent, the exhibition will be on view March 25 through July 8, 2012 in the Jean and Steven Goldman Prints and Drawings Galleries in the Richard and Mary L. Gray Wing (Galleries 124–127) of the Art Institute. The works in this collection—including masterpieces by Baccio Bandinelli, Federico Barocci, Guercino, Salvator Rosa, and the Tiepolos—illustrate the many kinds of working drawings and the growing autonomy of the medium from the late 15th through the early 19th century.
The art of drawing assumed an unusually prominent role in Italy during the Renaissance and Baroque eras, not only in the training of artists and the demonstration of inherent genius and ability, but also in the systematic development of projects that were ultimately collected and treasured as works of art in their own right. Although most drawings were undertaken for utilitarian purposes—to master representation or to prepare larger compositions—such sheets also provide intimate insight into artists’ unique temperaments and styles, a fact that led 16th-century artist and author Giorgio Vasari to amass drawings for his famous Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects. Collectors ever since have found the process of interacting with these works on paper as satisfying and creative as the act of drawing itself.

Anne Searle Bent, a devoted and energetic Chicago-based collector, discovered the “sublime beauty” of Italian drawings 30 years ago. Her collection is very much a personal endeavor; she selects works that “invoke a visceral or an emotional response.” A testimony to the immediacy and universal language of drawings, her fascinating collection of Italian works on paper from the late 15th to the cusp of the 19th century was quietly assembled by an untrained but highly responsive individual. It is unusual for such a rich and diverse body of studies to be assembled in this modern era, and it is the collector’s hope that by sharing these works others might be introduced to the magic of drawings.

The many pieces showcased in Capturing the Sublime illustrate the detailed process artists of the Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque traditions used to develop beautifully composed final works: the initial creative spark (primo pensiero), the schematic composition (pentimenti), the drawing presented to the commissioning body (modello), and the final drawing cut-up or overlaid with a grid used to guide the painting process (cartone). Also included in this exhibition are finished drawings made as independent works of art that demonstrate the growing autonomy of drawings during the period. Artists featured include members of Raphael’s group such as Giulio Romano and Perino del Vaga, Michelangelo contemporaries Battista Franco and Giorgio Vasari, Mannerist artists from the Marches including Federico Barocci and Ferrau Fenzoni, and later masters of the Florentine and Bolognese Baroque such as Bernini and Salvator Rosa. Noted drawings by Bibiena in Milan and the Tiepolos in Venice add further depth to the survey.

Accompanying Capturing the Sublime is a handsome 312-page catalogue published by the Art Institute and distributed by Yale University Press. Edited by Suzanne Folds McCullagh, exhibition curator and Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Chair and Curator, Department of Prints and...
Drawings, the gorgeous volume includes contributions from an impressive array of scholars and analyses of 171 Old Master drawings and 26 etchings by such artists as Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Baccio Bandinelli, Pontormo, Perino del Vaga, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Salvator Rosa, Guercino, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Each work is reproduced and accompanied by complete documentation: physical description, provenance, bibliography, and exhibition history, as well as background information on the subjects depicted in the drawings. Capturing the Sublime opens the beauty of these drawings to a broader public and provides important new attributions and scholarship. The catalogue retails for $65 and will be available beginning April 2, 2012 at the Art Institute’s Museum Shop.

About Anne Searle Bent:
Anne Searle Bent is a lifelong philanthropist in Chicago. She is a trained chaplain and earned a master’s degree in child development at Erikson Institute, where she also served as a trustee. Mrs. Bent is the founder and board president of Porchlight Counseling Services. The organization provides counseling, advocacy, and other services to college students, regardless of gender, who were sexually assaulted during college. At the Art Institute, Mrs. Bent has served as a vice chairman of the Board of Trustees since 2005. Mrs. Bent also chairs the Committee on Prints and Drawings and endowed the position of the Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Chair and Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings.

Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago and curated by Suzanne Folds McCullagh, Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Chair and Curator, Department of Prints and Drawings. Lead sponsorship for this exhibition is provided by an anonymous donor.


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10:30 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday
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