

DAVID to CÉZANNE

MASTER DRAWINGS FROM THE PRAT COLLECTION, PARIS



The finest collection of French drawings in the world

22 SEPTEMBER – 5 DECEMBER 2010

ART
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Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
Portrait of Pierre Baillet 1829



Pierre-Paul Prud'hon
Fortune c1800



Edgar Degas
A young girl standing – portrait of Giovanni Bellelli 1858/59

The Prat Collection is the foremost collection of its kind outside of museums. It is devoted entirely to artists of the French school from the 17th century to the 19th century and features many of the towering names in the history of art.

The collection is, according to Pierre Rosenberg, former director of the Louvre:

a top-rank ensemble ... [striking for the] invariably perfect quality of each drawing Rarely has there been such a manifest, coherent determination to conceive a collection as a creation; in isolation each sheet delights and enchants; all together these drawings ... are a lesson in the history of art, a non-verbal lesson, and all the more enjoyable for that ...

This exhibition offers a tightly focused, in-depth exploration of the development of French drawing over the course of the 19th century, a period of rapid and profound change – social, political, economic and artistic. Indeed this was a century when France, more than any other country, produced the finest succession of great artists: **David, Ingres, Delacroix, Géricault, Millet, Daumier, Manet, Degas, Redon, Moreau, Seurat, Cézanne** – all represented in this exhibition through drawings of superlative quality.

Exactly 101 drawings have been selected from the Prat Collection to travel to Sydney. These tell the unfolding story of the evolution of French art in the period spanning the momentous decades following the French Revolution up to the eve of the 20th century and the birth of Modernism. Through works of outstanding quality by many of the greatest draughtsmen the exhibition takes us through the defining movements of Neo-classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism and Symbolism.

Since the Renaissance, drawing has been seen as a fundamental activity and the basis of the visual arts. For each artist in this exhibition the act of drawing meant invention from scratch.

As well as fulfilling the roles of recording and observing, drawing was a means of searching and problem solving. More than any other medium, drawing brings us close to the mind and the hand of the artist, offering an insight into the mysteries of the artistic process.

For the collector, Louis-Antoine Prat, the lure and appeal of drawings stems from *'the feeling of finding oneself face to face with something intact and immediate, having sprung forth straight from the artist's brain, ... Drawings are the first draft of genius, the first emotions. That appeals to me. They are so fragile'*.

The exhibition highlights the extraordinary diversity of drawing styles and techniques employed during the 19th century as well as the varied purposes that drawings served for artists in this period. Meticulously finished drawings made as works of art in their own right will be seen alongside preparatory studies for major paintings and quick, spontaneous sketches. The exhibition comprises portrait drawings, figure studies, landscapes and compositional studies, all bearing witness to the vitality and richness of the French school of drawing.

Louis-Antoine Prat has been collecting French drawings since 1974. As well as a collector, Louis-Antoine Prat has written five novels. He is a distinguished art historian who, since 1976, has been in charge of special projects in the Graphic Arts department at the Louvre. He is the author, with Pierre Rosenberg, of catalogues raisonnés of the drawings of Poussin, Watteau and David. Among exhibitions he has co-curated, the most recent were the large retrospectives devoted to Théodore Chassériau (2002) and Ingres (Louvre 2006). He is also vice-president of the Société des Amis du Louvre.

The exhibition not only offers an opportunity to see some of the most beautiful examples of 19th-century drawing, it provides an insight into the fascinating world of the collector:

Obviously, collecting art is much more gratifying than checking stock prices everyday. Moreover, the works are there, on your walls. You need no longer be concerned about their value; you can simply look at them. A collector who reasoned otherwise would be ruined. The only happy collector is the one who considers money merely a means. And the less money he has, the prouder he can be of the collection that he has assembled.

During several months of being on display, a collection such as this one will be seen by more people than during a century of storage in the boxes of a public drawing cabinet whose access rules impose drastic restrictions ... We possess only that which we share, be it knowledge or an object. – Louis-Antoine Prat

On Wednesday 22 September the Gallery celebrates the opening of David to Cézanne with two guest talks during Art After Hours:

6.30pm **Louis-Antoine Prat** in conversation with **Edmund Capon**

7.15pm **Laurence Lhinares**, department of graphic arts, Musée du Louvre, with a lecture entitled *Making their mark: The shared tastes of two great collectors, the Marquis de Chennevières (1820–1899) and Louis-Antoine Prat.*

A film series, *Romance and revolution*, screening in conjunction with the exhibition portrays events of the French Revolution and subsequent decades introducing places, characters and atmospheres that strike a cord with the works of art in the exhibition. Highlights include:

- *Beaumarchais, the Scoundrel* (Dir: Edouard Molinaro 1996).

A portrait of the complex life of the 18th century gadfly who was author of two of the great plays of world literature *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Barber of Seville*.

- *Danton* (Dir: Andrzej Wajda 1982). Portraying the power struggles between revolutionary leaders, Danton and Robespierre in the second year of the French Republic.

- *Marie Antoinette* (Dir: Sophia Coppola 2006).

An impressionistic retelling of Marie Antoinette's life as a young queen in the opulent and eccentric court at Versailles.

- *Les enfants du paradis (Children of paradise)* (Dir: Marcel Carné 1945). Classic French cinema evoking the Parisian theatrical world of the early 19th century.

For full program see www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/events/films

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue together with a series of public programs including drawing workshops, lectures, celebrity and exhibition talks and children's programs. For full details see www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au.

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Théodore Géricault
The murder of Fualdès, after 1817



Jean-François Millet
Landscape near Vichy, 1866/68

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On view: 22 September – 5 December 2010
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery Road, The Domain, Sydney
Open daily 10am to 5pm, Wednesdays until 9pm
Tel (02) 9225 1744, Information line 1800 679 278
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

Admission: Adult \$10 conc \$8

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cover: **Georges Seurat** *Woman on a parapet* c1881