

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG SPOTLIGHTS COMPELLING PORTRAITS BY LEADING ARTISTS ACROSS FOUR CENTURES, COMPLEMENTS THE MFA'S OWN COLLECTION

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St. Petersburg, Fla.--*Contemplating Character: Portrait Drawings & Oil Sketches from Jacques-Louis David to Lucian Freud* is the most expansive exhibition of portraits ever presented at the Museum of Fine Arts. It opens on Saturday, February 13, and continues through Sunday, May 29.

This fascinating exhibition features 152 rare portrait drawings and oil sketches from the late eighteenth into the twenty-first century, with most from the nineteenth. Artists from 15 countries are represented, with a large number from France and England.

Lucian Freud, one of our time's most provocative portrait painters and the grandson of the pioneering psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, once noted: "I've always wanted to create drama in my pictures, which is why I paint people. It's people who have brought drama to pictures from the beginning. The simplest human gestures tell stories."

The works are drawn from the remarkable collection of Robert Flynn Johnson, Curator Emeritus, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. He has written: "I am fervently drawn to the vast variety of depictions of human beings in their grandeur, helplessness, pride, and vulnerability. Every drawing in this exhibition has moved me deeply in some way, and it is both my conviction and hope that individuals who view this exhibition will make a similar connection and feel the presence of the personalities represented who have been drawn and painted over the last two centuries."

In addition to David and Freud, Mr. Johnson has selected such noted artists as Théodore Rousseau, Edgar Degas, Édouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Elie Nadelman, Frank Stella, and George Bellows, to name a few. Four drawings are by Adolf von Menzel, whose name may be unfamiliar to many Americans. He was one of Germany's most admired artists working in the nineteenth century. Degas called him "the greatest living master."

In an expressive drawing, Menzel treats his right hand as a portrait, which he drew with his left. Maximilien Luce, imprisoned for his anarchist political views, depicts his hand pressing against the wall of Mazas Prison. Brassai focuses on *The Hands of Matilda, Paris 5 April 1949*.

All challenge our conception of the portrait. So, too, do Henry-Bonaventure Monnier's watercolor, *Self-Portrait Dressed as a Woman* (1869), Aubrey Vincent Beardsley's fanciful caricature of presumably the writer Oscar Wilde (1892), and Charles Henry Sims' modernistic *Self-Portrait in Distress* (about 1928).

Not surprising for a curator, Mr. Johnson was drawn to artist self-portraits and portraits of artists. One of the former is by Dora Maar, a talented artist who shared a decade with Pablo

Picasso. She sliced her self-portrait in two, a strong visual suggesting mental turmoil. Another is Sir Alfred Hitchcock's unmistakable *Self-Portrait Profile* (around 1960), which introduced his popular TV series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* to millions of Americans.

There are two portraits of Jacques-Louis David, one while he was in prison. A supporter of the French Revolution, David was imprisoned after the fall of Robespierre and later found favor with Napoleon. There are others of the English Romantic poet-artist William Blake, American author Washington Irving, influential British critic-artist John Ruskin, French symbolist Odilon Redon, and the great American realist Thomas Eakins in silhouette.

The exhibition has many other gems, including a miniature portrait of George Washington (around 1795) by an anonymous artist and Bonnard's *Crying Woman* (about 1890-1895), created in a flowing, seemingly spontaneous line. There are even drawings by the American cartoonist Robert Crumb, who developed a cult following for his countercultural comic books like *Weirdo* and who later received museum exhibitions.

A host of works capture family members, friends, and lovers in tender moments, and a number resonate with paintings in the Museum's collection. *Contemplating Character* was organized by Mr. Johnson with Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California, in association with Denenberg Fine Arts, West Hollywood, California.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Visit www.fine-arts.org for updates on public programs.

MFA: Make and Take Saturday, February 6 and 20, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. *Contemplating Character* reveals how a simple line can be transformed into an expressive and memorable portrait. With imagination and a good pencil or marker, participants will create their own journal of "characters." Free with MFA admission. No registration is necessary. Activities are designed for ages five and older, but entire families are encouraged to explore art together.

Book Club @ the MFA, Thursday, March 10, at 6:30 p.m. This series, co-sponsored by Keep St. Pete Lit, highlights a book each month relating to the MFA collection or special exhibitions. The portraits in *Contemplating Character* will inspire you to meet the quirky characters in *Running with Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs. Please read the book beforehand. Free with Museum admission, which is only \$5 after 5 p.m. on Thursday.

Gallery Talk by Hazel and William Hough Chief Curator Dr. Jerry N. Smith, Saturday, May 21, at 1 p.m. Free with MFA admission. Dr. Smith, who joined the MFA in October, was formerly Curator of American and European Art to 1950 and Art of the American West at the Phoenix Art Museum. During his tenure, he curated and supervised nearly 40 exhibitions that spanned the art of the Renaissance to American modernism through contemporary art of the American West.

His diverse exhibitions in Phoenix included *Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Leicester and The Power of Observation*, *Cézanne and American Modernism*, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Ingénue to Icon*, and *Andy Warhol: Portraits*.

In addition, he was instrumental in selecting and recommending art for the collection, which numbers more than 18,000 works. He has written a number of catalogues, most recently *Don Coen: The Migrant Series. Cézanne and American Modernism*, for which he wrote an essay on the artist and the American West, was published by Yale University Press. Dr. Smith holds his BA *magna cum laude* and his MA from Arizona State University and his PhD from the University of Kansas, all in art history.

Collectors Circle Lecture, sponsored by Northern Trust, Thursday, April 21, at 6:30 p.m.

Open to the public, Free with MFA admission. **Robert Flynn Johnson**, who developed this extraordinary collection, will discuss "A Journey, not a Destination: Adventures over Four Decades in the Pursuit of Portraiture." He will share the origins of his interest in portraiture, his love of drawings, and his interaction with art historians, dealers, collectors, and even some of the artists themselves in forming his highly personal collection.

Mr. Johnson was Curator in Charge of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for 32 years until his retirement in 2007. At that time, he was named Curator Emeritus. He once said: "When I am asked what it takes to become an accomplished collector, it is not the qualities of knowledge, judgment, or that elusive term 'taste' that comes to mind. Instead, it is the ability to be curious that is the crucial element in the makeup of a true collector—the ability to ask questions, to learn, and to get answers regarding works of art that catch your eye and move your emotions."

His passion for art was sparked at McGill University in Montreal, followed by his first curatorial position at the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts. He then became Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Baltimore Museum of Art and was recruited by the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts where he spent most of his career. He transformed those holdings into one of the premier such collections in the country, now numbering approximately 90,000 works.

Mr. Johnson has curated a wealth of exhibitions and is the author of many books and exhibition catalogues. His publications include: *Lucian Freud: Works on Paper*; *Plant Kingdoms: The Photographs of Charles Jones*; *Leonard Baskin: Monumental Woodcuts, 1952-1963*; and *The Face in the Lens—Anonymous Photographs*, among others.

GENEROUS SPONSORS

Major support for the Museum's exhibitions and educational programs comes from the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; The Margaret Acheson Stuart Society; Duke Energy; City of St. Petersburg Office of Cultural Affairs; and Media Sponsors *Tampa Bay Times* and WUSF.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

The MFA at 255 Beach Drive N.E. has a world-class collection, with works by Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Morisot, Cézanne, Rodin, O’Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, and many other great artists. Also displayed are ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art. The photography collection is one of the largest and finest in the Southeast.

Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. **Admission is only \$5 after 5 p.m. on Thursday.** Regular admission is \$17 for adults, \$15 for those 65 and older, and \$10 for students seven and older, including college students with current I.D. Children under seven and Museum members are admitted free. Groups of 10 or more adults pay only \$12 per person and children \$4 each with prior reservations. The MFA Café is open from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. For more information, please call 727.896.2667 or visit www.fine-arts.org.