

Old Masters and the Body

Professor James Anthony Betts began collecting drawings for the University of Reading School of Art in June 1953. He believed in access to art and that drawings were one of the best ways to introduce students to great artists. The first drawings that Betts purchased were all Old Masters (1500s – 1800s). He looked for drawings that would teach his students about different historical movements and schools. As had been the case for centuries, Betts saw learning to draw the human body as the focus of art education. The first studies he collected all feature the human figure. They also showcase the flexibility of drawing as a medium. Examples range from independent works of art, to sketchbook pages, to studies for multi-figure paintings. They each use different drawing materials and techniques.



Jost Amman, *Lucretia*, ink, UAC/10548.

Among the most prolific book illustrators of the 16th century, the Swiss Amman's pen and ink drawings use fine parallel and intersecting lines in a technique known as crosshatching. One of Amman's pupils claimed that, over four years, he produced more drawings than could be carted away in a hay-wagon. This intricate study of Lucretia, a Roman heroine who committed suicide to defend her honour after being raped, may have been part of a larger series.

[Return to the top](#)



Jacopo Zanguidi, called Bertoia, *Sheet of Studies with Seated Male Nude and Two Arms*, ink and chalk on blue paper, UAC/10545.

Bertoia was a talented and fluent draughtsman influenced by some of the most famous artists of the High Renaissance. This sheet of drawings is a working brainstorm that brings together different subjects and styles. In the arm studies, which appear to be drawn from life, soft chalk conveys volume and shadow. Precise pen and ink articulate the exaggerated forms of the central twisted figure. The pose echoes Michelangelo's [Libyan Sibyl](#) in the celebrated Sistine Chapel Ceiling.

[Return to the top](#)



16th century Italian School, *Seated Roman soldier*, chalk, UAC/10576.

Red chalk was a popular drawing material in the 16th century, admired for its rich colour and range of possible effects. As in this elegant drawing, it could make narrow lines or be smoothed to create painterly areas of light and shadow. Most likely a figure study for a painting, the soldier's Roman dress reflects the popularity of classical subjects in the Renaissance period. The bent-over pose is based on the ancient sculpture, the [Belvedere Torso](#).

[Return to the top](#)



Flaminio Allegri (attributed to) or Francesco Allegri (attributed to), *St Catherine and the Philosophers*, ink and wash, UAC/10540.

Areas of red wash are accentuated by brown ink and graceful penmanship in this lively scene - a study for a complex multi-figure composition. As their styles are so similar, it is hard to identify the drawing as the work of father or son Allegri.

The subject is also unclear. It appears to be the prophetess St Catherine arguing against the pagan philosophers, but the presence of women and children in the crowd is unorthodox.

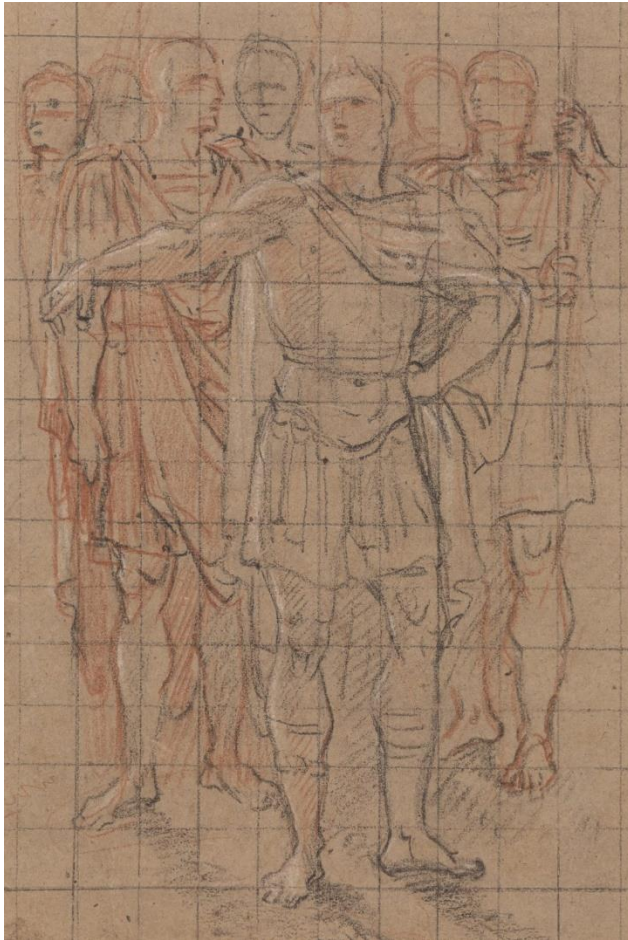
[Return to the top](#)



16th century Italian School, *Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl*, chalk, UAC/10541.

This dynamic study, lightly and loosely sketched in black chalk, depicts the Tiburtine Sibyl revealing a vision of the Virgin and Child to the Roman Emperor Augustus. To the left are Antony Abbot with his piglet and staff and a seated Dominican martyr. To create this composition, the unknown artist has combined motifs from a print of the same subject by [Parmigianino](#) (1503-1540) and a fresco painting in the [Santa Maria di Fontegiusta](#) church, Siena.

[Return to the top](#)



Antoine Coypel, *Study of Silvius Aeneas for 'Aeneas in the Underworld'*, chalk with white heightening on brown paper, UAC/10549.

This study of Aeneas's son, Silvius Aeneas, flanked by heroes is gridded to make it easier to scale and transfer to canvas. The design formed part of the largest painting for a vast gallery decoration scheme illustrating Virgil's (70-19 BC) epic poem the *Aeneid*. The commission for the Palais Royal, Paris was awarded to Coypel – France's foremost history painter – in 1701. Here, he uses thick parallel hatching and a three-coloured chalk technique to accentuate areas of light and shadow.

[Return to the top](#)



19th century French School, *Study of a Head and Bandaged Arm*, chalk and pencil, UAC/10543.

Betts purchased this drawing as a sketchbook page by the French Romantic painter, Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Whilst this attribution has been rejected, the sheet demonstrates a Delacroix-like use of drawing as an investigative space. The disembodied head in profile is overshadowed by an angular, bandaged arm. The handling of line is expressive. Defined contours and frenetic crosshatchings of different densities and lengths give the body parts a feeling of solidity.

[Return to the top](#)



16th century Italian School, *Sheet of Studies with a Rider on Horseback*, ink and wash, UAC/10577.

Figures overlap and almost merge into one another in this sheet of rapidly drawn, lightly washed, pen and ink studies. A muscular rider on horseback protects his head beneath his arms, bookended at the top and bottom of the page by a grounded warrior and an upside-down putto. Not a highly accomplished study, the wavy, bubble-like contour lines evoke 16th century Venetian drawing. However, the antique attribution to Tintoretto (1518-1594) is easily rejected. The figures may have been copied from a battle painting.

[Return to the top](#)



Giovanni Baglione, *Conversion of Mary Magdalene*, ink and wash, UAC/10578.

Newly attributed to the Roman painter Baglione, this sheet is a compositional sketch for an unknown painting. It shows the moment Mary Magdalene, taken to the chapel by her sister Martha, sinks to her knees as she hears Jesus preach. Fluidly sketched in ink, with long parallel lines and loosely repeated contours drawn over broad areas of wash, the study shows Baglione experimenting with poses and gestures. He punctuates the scene with several oval heads, adding onlookers to the crowd to achieve a balanced composition.

[Return to the top](#)



Giuseppe Bazzani, *Allegory of Liberty (Study for a Ceiling Panel with Alexander the Great and Diogenes)*, ink and wash, c.1740, UAC/10542.

This vigorous theatrical design for an illusionistic ceiling painting is by Mantua's most important painter of the mid-18th century. It shows the meeting of the cynic philosopher Diogenes (lying down on the left) and Alexander the Great (the mounted figure wearing a helmet). Offered a favour by the great king, Diogenes simply asked him to "stand out of my light" - underlining his contempt for power and prestige.

[Return to the top](#)

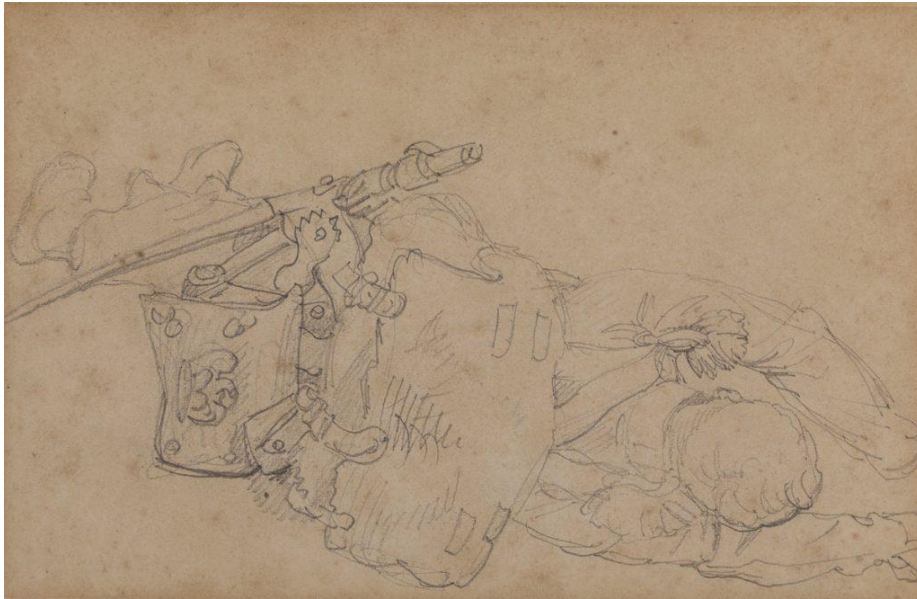


18th century French School, possibly circle of François Boucher, *Aurora and Pegasus attended by Putti*, chalk, UAC/10579.

In Greek mythology, the goddess Aurora brought the light of dawn to the world each morning, lifting the veil of night. In this charming study she hovers aboard the clouds, looking back towards the rising sun. She is attended by Pegasus and three putti whose rounded shapes merge with the rolling clouds. Soft, closely hatched parallel lines distinguish areas of shade.

Red chalk was widely used by French artists of the Rococo period to produce decorative and elegant drawings.

[Return to the top](#)



Jean-Louis André
Théodore Géricault,
*Study of a Dead
Soldier I*, pencil,
UAC/10556.

This pair of drawings bear testament to turbulent times at the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Briefly and economically sketched in

pencil, they appear to be spontaneous studies drawn from life or memory. The Imperial Eagle is visible on the cartridge box of the prone figure, who is seen from behind and was felled whilst still wearing his knapsack – the insignia and uniform identifies the subject as a French infantry soldier.

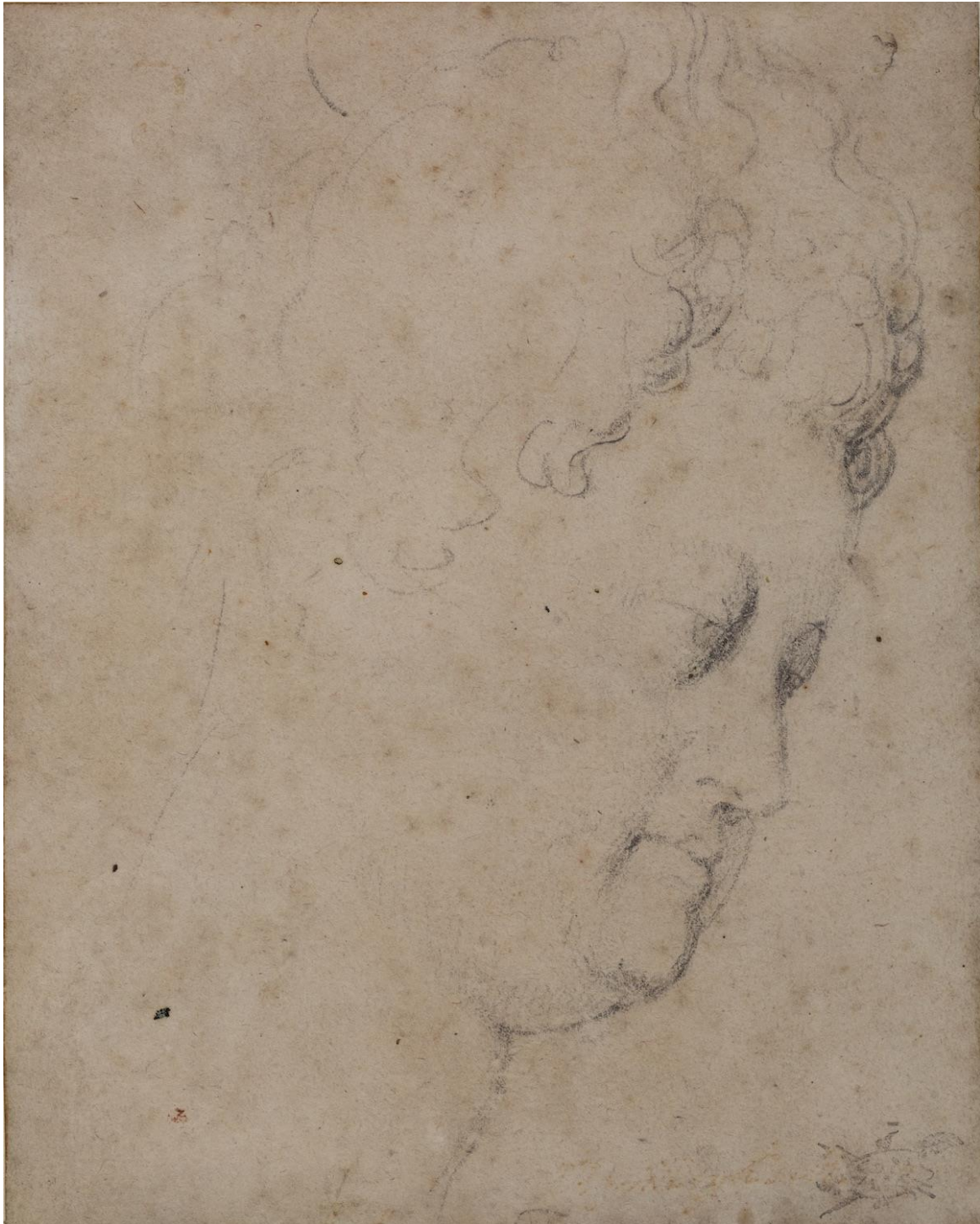
[Return to the top](#)



Jean-Louis André Théodore Géricault, *Study of a Dead Soldier II*, pencil, UAC/10559.

Unlike many other artists, Gericault portrayed a realistic image of the misery and horrors of combat. Here, detail is focused on the haunting, empty features of this tensely linear, awkwardly foreshortened, figure – his lower body cut off at the ankles. Together with its pair, the drawing is most likely a leaf from a sketchbook. These were often mined as a source of poses to use in larger painted compositions.

[Return to the top](#)



Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait Sketch of Marie de' Medici*, chalk, c.1622. UAC/10539.

A subtle drawing which appears to be a work from life, Rubens captures the Queen in a soft expression with detail focused around the eyes and mouth. It is an unusually intimate, informal, and even unflattering, study of a royal. It was probably intended for Rubens' personal use. A similar expression and pose (though with more idealised features) are found in the painting [The Meeting of Marie de' Medici and Henri IV at Lyon](#).

[Return to the top](#)