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Margaret Morgan Grasselli, *Renaissance to Revolution: French Drawings from the National Gallery of Art, 1500-1800*. Washington: National Gallery of Art in association with Lund Humphries, 2009. x + 310 pp. Figures, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, and list of artists. \$75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-84822-043-0.

Review by David O'Brien, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

This sumptuous volume is the catalogue for an exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 2009-10 to showcase its important collection of French drawings from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Begun only in 1942, the National Gallery's collection has quickly acquired international significance. It contains an impressive group of drawings from the 1500s, particularly in light of the rarity of works on paper from this period. Artists from the seventeenth century who are represented include Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Jacques de Bellange, Laurent de La Hyre, Simon Vouet, and Robert Nanteuil, but the collection is relatively less strong in this area, with some major figures, such as Charles Le Brun and Eustache Le Sueur, unrepresented by firmly attributed drawings. The eighteenth-century holdings are the special strength of the collection, with many major works by prominent artists and numerous works by Antoine Watteau, François Boucher, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and Jean-Baptiste Deshayes, among others. There are stunning works by Hubert Robert, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, and François-André Vincent, and at least three albums of student work from Rome by major artists: Robert, Joseph-Marie Vien, Jacques-Louis David.

The exhibition contained approximately 140 of the most significant and representative works from a collection of over 900 drawings. Each drawing in the show is explicated in an individual catalogue entry and beautifully reproduced in color. Many related works are illustrated as well. Entries for the drawings also contain complete information on medium, provenance, exhibition history, and bibliography. The text is written by Margaret Morgan Grasselli, who has worked at the National Gallery of Art since 1980 and is currently its curator of old master drawings.

Grasselli begins the volume with a brief essay on the history of the collection. The National Gallery has benefited from the generosity of a few key donors. Joseph Widener made a major gift in 1942 that included a large number of French drawings, many of which had come from an earlier French collection of eighteenth-century drawings for book illustrations. The arrival of the Samuel H. Kress collection in 1963 added thirty-one drawings to the eighteenth-century French holdings. Another major gift of French drawings, mainly from the nineteenth century but with some strong sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works, came in 1991 from the daughters of the collector Ian Woodner. There have been donations of other important drawings by a number of individuals, but the strength of the collection owes a great deal to the purchases made by curators, particularly after 1965, when Ailsa Mellon Bruce established a fund for this purpose.

It is interesting to note how many attributions have changed over the years. Still more surprising is the fact that many of the works purchased by curators at the National Gallery, and particularly by Konrad Oberhuber in the 1970s, have been reattributed to other artists,

sometimes of different nationalities, or discovered to be copies or fakes. This seems to reflect a more skeptical, deliberative, and analytical approach to attribution amongst curators today that is certainly shared by Grasselli. Her catalogue entries offer clear, frank evaluations of the arguments for attribution. Still, the language of the catalogue and the selection of works in the exhibition makes clear the extent to which collecting and appreciation of drawings from this period still revolves around the names of a limited number of major artists, with the general cultural, social, and aesthetic aspects of the drawing taking a back seat to this.

The catalogue entries are given over primarily to questions of attribution, dating, and stylistic and technical analysis, though they also provide a basic introduction to the authors and subjects of the drawings. The entries and bibliography will make the catalogue an important scholarly resource. There are also a number of works that, as the author signals, beg for further analysis. In particular, I was struck by Pierre-Adrienne Pâris's peculiar drawing of a circular temple seen through a natural arch, which juxtaposes nature and artifice, and the classical and the contemporary, in intriguing ways.

Renaissance to Revolution is a beautiful book whose stunning illustrations and accessible prose make it attractive to anyone interested in art. The pictures manage to reproduce many of the essential qualities of the drawings, whether it be the dazzling textures and detail in a chalk portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud, or the dizzying effects of scale and perspective in an architectural fantasy by Etienne-Louis Boullée. As I write, the holiday season is coming to a close, but readers may want to keep this volume in mind should they need a gift in near future.

David O'Brien
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
obrien1@illinois.edu

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