

**THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM PRESENTS
EXCEPTIONAL GROUP OF DRAWINGS BY
THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH IN NEW EXHIBITION**

Thomas Gainsborough: Experiments in Drawing
May 11 to August 19, 2018

New York, NY, April 9, 2018 — Renowned for his portraiture and depictions of rural landscapes, the eighteenth-century British artist Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) is best known as a painter. However, he was also a draftsman of rare ability who extended the traditional boundaries of drawing technique, inspiring an entire generation of British artists such as John Constable (1776–1837) and J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851).

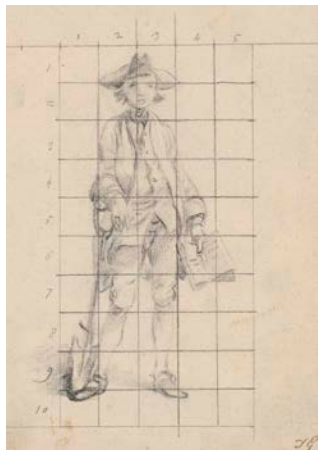
Beginning May 11, the Morgan Library & Museum presents an exhibition solely focused on Gainsborough’s works on paper, bringing together twenty-two outstanding examples in graphite, chalk, oil paint, and other media. Included in the show, which runs through August 19, are preparatory studies, finished works, and exercises made for the artist’s own enjoyment.



Lady Walking in a Garden, ca. 1785, The Morgan Library & Museum, III, 63b. Photography by Steven H. Crossot, 2014.

“As with many artists, Thomas Gainsborough used the medium of drawing to experiment and explore,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “Famous in his day for his paintings of members of the British aristocracy and gentry, he eagerly turned to drawing as a

respite from his portrait work. It allowed him the freedom to pursue his passion for rendering nature and scenes of country life utilizing new stylistic effects in color, line, and material. The Morgan is pleased to present its first exhibition on this important aspect of Gainsborough's art."



THE EXHIBITION

The Career of a Portrait Painter

Thomas Gainsborough trained in London, where he displayed an innate talent for drawing and painting. The artist's earliest figure drawing, *A Boy with a Book and a Spade* (1748), served as a study for the signboard of a village school. Minor commissions such as this were a primary source of income for a novice painter like Gainsborough as he tried to establish his career.



Top: *A Boy with a Book and a Spade*, 1748, The Morgan Library & Museum, III 59b. Photography by Steven H. Crossot, 2014. Bottom: *Study of a Woman Holding a Shawl*, 1765–70, The Morgan Library & Museum, III 57. Photography by Steven H. Crossot, 2014.

In Bath, where he moved in 1759, Gainsborough emerged as the era's most fashionable and successful portraitist. There he became fascinated with the effects of light on fabric, often using black chalk to explore different tonal solutions. His renderings of sitters' expressions and the rich texture of their clothing led to his reputation as the Anthony van Dyck of his time.

Gainsborough would later create figure studies with models in different poses, using inventive techniques intended to capture the viewers' eye in an instant. In *Lady Walking in a Garden* (ca. 1785, see page 1), the woman's translucent silk dress is a technical tour de force: the artist superimposed fine veils of white and yellow chalk, applied both wet and dry, imitating the feathery brushstrokes that characterize his paintings.

Despite his commercial success as a figure painter, later in life Gainsborough wanted to escape from what had become for him the routine of portraiture and business life. "I am sick of Portraits" he complained in a letter to a friend, "and I wish very much to. . . walk off to some sweet village where I can . . . enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness and ease."

A Passion for Creating Landscapes

Gainsborough would come to devote much of his time to creating landscapes of his own invention on paper. Laying out stones, branches, leaves, and soil of various colors on his worktable, he assembled and drew landscapes in his studio.

In his quest for original effects, the artist often looked to rugged terrain, contrasts of light and shade, and the nuances of shadow resulting from the changing seasons. He explored the rolling topography of natural settings and gothic, shadowy atmospheres in his early years. They offered him almost limitless compositional possibilities as he simultaneously conducted his technical experiments: for instance, he immersed his paper in milk and varnished it to give his landscape drawings a transparent tint.

In the mid-1770s, Gainsborough increasingly experimented with drawing by mixing different media and applying varnish to surfaces to produce landscapes that mimicked the visual effects of oil paintings. In the following decade, he would go on to produce variations of similar compositions drawn mainly in black and white chalk: serpentine, asymmetrical landscapes with moving skies, windswept trees, solitary animals, and scenes of agrarian life.



Top: *Landscape with Horse and Cart, and Ruin*, ca. 1770, The Morgan Library & Museum, III 55. Photography by Steven H. Crossot, 2014. Bottom: *Hilly Landscape with Cows on the Road*, ca. 1780, The Morgan Library & Museum, III 62. Photography by Steven H. Crossot, 2014.

Gainsborough also embraced printmaking. By combining different etching techniques, he produced prints in imitation of his drawings, replicating on the surface of the copper plate the same variety of textural and tonal effects that characterize his chalk drawings. He turned to

aquatint to evoke the transparency of the sky and water, as seen in *Wooded Landscape with Cows beside a Pool* (1755-1780), a rare print from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Toward the end of his career, he began favoring concepts rather than depicting a realistic view. In *Figures in a Wooded Landscape*, (1785–88), trees, animals and rocks lose their shape, and parts of the landscape veer toward pure abstraction.



Left: *Wooded Landscape with Cows beside a Pool, Figures and Cottage*, 1755-1780, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937. Right: *Figures in a Wooded Landscape*, 1785–88, black chalk and gray wash, heightened with white, private collection.

Gainsborough’s experiments subverted the academic conventions of drawing—by combining techniques and materials, he called into question the distinction between drawing and painting. His technical achievements became a paradigm for British art for the whole of the eighteenth century, and his later works in particular influenced the near abstract compositions of the next generation of British artists. Always in fierce pursuit of the “new” in drawing, Gainsborough lamented on his deathbed that he was “to leave life just as he was beginning to do something with his art.”

Publication

The accompanying catalogue, *Thomas Gainsborough: Experiments in Drawing*, features full-page reproductions of seventeen works in the exhibition, a foreword by director Colin B. Bailey, and essays by Moore Curatorial Fellow Marco Simone Bolzoni and conservator Reba F. Snyder.

Author: Marco Simone Bolzoni
Publisher: Paul Holberton Publishing
84 pages.

Public Programs

LECTURE **Gainsborough Experiments: Cork, Broccoli, Milk, and Drawing Landscape**
Marco Simone Bolzoni

Celebrated as the most notable portrait and landscape painter of Georgian England, Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) was also a brilliant and experimental draftsman. In this lecture, Marco Simone Bolzoni, Moore Curatorial Fellow and curator of the exhibition *Thomas Gainsborough: Experiments in Drawing*, will investigate the unorthodox means and materials used by the artist in his quest to capture the beauty of the English countryside.

Wednesday, May 16, 12 pm*

Tickets: \$15; free for members and students with a valid ID.

*The exhibition *Thomas Gainsborough: Experiments in Drawing* will be open for program attendees.

ADULT **Sketching in the Gallery**

WORKSHOPS Spend two hours sketching, drawing inspiration from works in the Morgan's current exhibitions. Professional artists and educators will be available to assist you. Open to artists of all levels.

Saturday, May 12, 11 am–1 pm

Saturday, June 9, 11 am–1 pm

Simon Levenson, Artist and National Arts Club instructor

Saturday, July 14, 11 am–1 pm

Susan Stillman, Artist & Parsons The New School for Design faculty member

Tickets: Free with museum admission.

This program is limited to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Stools, boards, a selection of pencils, and drawing paper will be provided. While personal sketchbooks are allowed, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, pastels, folding stools, and easels are not permitted in the galleries.

Organization and Sponsorship

Thomas Gainsborough: Experiments in Drawing is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum, New York. The curator of the exhibition is Marco Bolzoni, Moore Curatorial Fellow of Drawing and Prints, the Morgan Library & Museum.

The exhibition is sponsored by Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd. and generously supported by Mr. and Mrs. Clement C. Moore II and the Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust.

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Council on
the Arts

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

The Morgan Library & Museum

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