

Flemish and Dutch drawings in the Musée du Louvre

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This short presentation aims to provide a survey of the collection of Flemish and Dutch drawings, prints and engraved copper plates in the *Département des Arts graphiques* of the Louvre, as well as discussing current projects concerning that part of the collection.

The *Département des Arts graphiques* consists of three separate but linked collections: the *Cabinet des Dessins*, which was created in the 17th century with the acquisition by the King of Everard Jabach's drawings collection and which has since been considerably enlarged; the *Chalcographie du Louvre*, which administers the engraved plates used for the publications of the *Cabinet du Roi* (from 1671 to the Revolution), as well as those coming from the *Académie de peinture et de sculpture* and other sources; and finally the collection of prints, drawings and rare books donated in 1935 by the heirs of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, the noted collector.

The holdings of these three constituent parts, while differing widely, are to some extent complementary. The *Chalcographie*, as its name implies, is a collection entirely made up of engraved copper plates, now numbering some 13,000 items. The earliest date from the beginning of the 17th century; the collection is still being enlarged through the commissioning of contemporary works. The plates of potential interest to CODART members date mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries. The *Cabinet des Dessins* and the *Collection Edmond de Rothschild* are both made up of works on paper, but the *Cabinet des Dessins* focuses almost exclusively on old master drawings (currently about 140,000) whereas the *Rothschild Collection* is known primarily for its excellent old master prints (Dürer, Lucas van Leyden, Rembrandt, etc.) though it also includes some 3,000 drawings. Finally, the *Département* administers smaller groups of pastels, miniatures and cartoons, including the well-known Jordaens tapestry cartoons.

These holdings of Dutch and Flemish drawings are undoubtedly the richest in France and contain numerous masterpieces. If nonetheless the Louvre cannot offer an entirely balanced panorama of the development of Flemish and Dutch drawing from the early 15th until the mid-19th century, this is largely due to the historically determined taste of the private collectors whose collections, through acquisition or bequest, formed the basis for the national collection: Jabach, Saint-Morys, Orsay, His de la Salle, Bonnat, Gay, etc. The "flavour" of the collection is decidedly 18th- and 19th-century in character.

Serious study of the collection, other than through its classification in terms of the inventory, can be said to begin in 1921 when Frits Lugt was entrusted with the task of cataloguing the Flemish and Dutch drawings. This resulted in a series of volumes, published between 1929 and 1968, which remain to this day the chief publication on the collection. In 1988, Emmanuel Starcky

published a supplement volume incorporating recent acquisitions and the results of new research. As curator, Starcky was in charge of the drawings of the Northern schools; since 1991, when he left the museum, there has not been a curator specialising exclusively in Dutch and Flemish drawings and/or prints on the Louvre staff.

That does not mean that interest in Flemish and Dutch drawings disappeared or that acquisitions in this field were no longer made, but there has undeniably been less emphasis on the works of these schools until very recently. The successful exhibition of Rembrandt drawings in 2006 will, it is hoped, be the first of a series of shows highlighting the Netherlandish works in the collection. Through acquisitions, we hope to fill gaps in the collection and strengthen other areas.

The main projects on which the staff of the department is currently engaged do not focus exclusively upon the Flemish and Dutch schools, but they will result in a higher profile for this part of the collection. For instance, a new version is being prepared of the department's database, in which virtually all the works can be consulted online. This necessitates revising, in so far as it is possible, of the current status or classification of each drawing and bringing up to date the relevant documentation in the department's files (open to visitors). Another instance: work has begun on a *catalogue raisonné* of the "enluminures", the small but fine collection of illuminated pages and fragments of pages in the Département; this contains several fine Netherlandish works. The catalogue is due to be published in 2009.

There are many other projects that could, and will, be taken up. We will need to rely on outside help to carry them out, the more so as there is still no "specialist" curator. Which is why we are so pleased to have so many colleagues here today for CODART TIEN: colleagues who may wish to help, who may have ideas and advice to offer.