

Patrons of Old Master Drawings

The Patrons of Old Master Drawings is a specialist support group for the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, and was formed in the Spring of 1999.

We were encouraged to form the group by some members of the 'Friends of Prints and Drawings', who receive at no cost our annual Newsletter, an invitation to the annual Prints and Drawings Lecture, and for whom we organize a ticketed event (at around £25) in the Print Room each Autumn. They indicated that they would like to support acquisitions and help raise funds for Old Master drawings. We went ahead in 1999, and soon established a membership of around 20 (35 including spouses and partners) whose contributions help towards the purchase of European drawings that are more than 200 years old

Members contribute, on a regular basis, at least £3,000/\$5,000 per annum (net), although some have been giving significantly more. For those domiciled in the United States, these gifts can be made through the American Friends of the British Museum, based in New York, which offers them tax relief on charitable giving.

As well as being invited to the two existing 'Friends of Prints and Drawings' events in the spring and autumn, members meet on three or more other occasions each year. We meet for special displays of material in the Department and for out-of-hours visits to exhibitions both here and elsewhere. At least once a year, we usually gather in the Department in order to see what we have acquired with the funds provided by our members.

While some museums prefer to ask their supporters for money towards particular items, we believe that in return for contributions in cash we can provide the best value both to the B.M. and to our donors: with the flexibility to act quickly as opportunities arise, we hope to secure drawings that will broaden the scope and usefulness of the collection, while maintaining or enhancing its aesthetic quality. As a rule we would not use the money towards major 'heritage' acquisitions, which could easily consume all the funds very quickly (and for which the Trustees have a particular responsibility). Each year, we hope that by displaying and discussing the resulting acquisitions, we can persuade you that this is the right approach.

The need for such support is certainly acute. Since the 1970s, there has been a steady erosion in the level of funds provided to the British Museum by the government. Our purchase funds have been reduced to £8,000 per year for the Department of Prints and Drawings. So we have to turn increasingly to our Friends. It is of course possible to make donations without actually joining the group, or donations towards other activities undertaken by the Department or by the British Museum as a whole.

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