CSU exhibition takes viewers into minds of historical artists

Written by
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A drawing seems like such a temporary form of art, but in the University Art Museum's latest exhibition, "Sure of Hand: Drawings from the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century," the impact is permanent.

The more than 60 images - part of a private collection, which has never been showcased in a museum setting before - explore the complexity of drawing as it was practiced in Europe from the 16th through the 19th centuries. The works range from exquisitely detailed finished works, such as English artist John Hamilton Mortimer's portrait of legendary English actor David Garrick in his role as Richard II, to quick sketches, such as French art Baron Antoine Jean Gros' sketch of Napoleon Bonaparte.

While today, the drawings are highly valued, seen as giving unique insight into the private working worlds of the artists, the majority of the works in this exhibition were not originally intended for public display, said UAM director Linny Frickman.

The drawings were sketches and studies created as a stepping stone to a larger work, such as a painting or a sculpture.

"It was a process," Frickman said of drawings from the 16th and 17th centuries. "Drawing was how an artist worked out the composition, the technical issues, before beginning a work ... Most of these sketches aren't even signed."

By the 18th and 19th centuries, drawing had begun to be seen as more of an art form in and of itself and not just a cog in the wheel. Several of the portraits in "Sure of Hand" are so detailed that, from a distance, they almost look like photographs.

"It's like a window into the artist's private process," Frickman said of the works, which vary in media - including chalk, charcoal and ink wash - and subject matter. As the centuries went on, the focus of images changed from historical, mythological and biblical subject matters to portraits, landscapes and scenes from daily life.
'Sure of Hand: Drawings from the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century'

When: On display through June 10; hours are 11 a.m. through 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays
Where: University Art Museum (inside the University Center for the Arts), 1400 Remington St., Fort Collins
Cost: Free
Information: www.ArtMuseum.ColoState.edu